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**An Investigation of the Challenges Experienced by Somali Refugee Students in  
Canadian Elementary Schools**

By

**Mohamad Ayoub**

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Faculty of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Education  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2014

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**An Investigation of the Challenges Experienced by Somali Refugee Students in  
Canadian Elementary Schools**

by

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May 30, 2014

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate the challenges and experiences of Somali refugee students as they integrate into Canadian English elementary public schools. The method of data collection in this study was one-on-one interviews. A total of seven Somali refugee students were interviewed. The exploration into the participants' experiences revealed that they faced many pre-migration challenges in refugee camps before resettling in Canada, as well as post-migration challenges with settlement and integration into Canadian culture and school systems. Members of the school community, including educators, administrators, and students, have a major role to play in supporting Somali refugee students with their integration into the school system. As a result of this investigation, I recommend eight practical low to no-cost strategies and approaches that are useful for schools and educators to support the integration of Somali refugee students into Canadian English elementary public schools.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to all my former and future students. My hope is for all students to experience an education program that supports their emotional, social, and academic domains. All students deserve an education program that is meaningful for them and reflective of their real life experiences.

And to all my teachers for always supporting me, believing in me, and helping me grow as a student, person, and a professional.

I am also honoured to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Najib and Aziza Ayoub, who never had the opportunity to receive formal education when they were younger, but dedicated their entire life to help me achieve my dream of education and a successful career. Although they were not able to provide me with educational support, they installed the love for education in me, and taught me how to be dedicated and resilient.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to all the children in the world who were displaced as a result of war and conflicts and were unable to achieve their dream of going to school and receiving formal education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel honoured to have Dr. George Zhou as my advisor. Dr. Zhou was my professor for the graduate course “Learning in Science”. During that course, I was inspired by Dr. Zhou’s passion for science education and his commitment to improving students’ experiences in school. Dr. Zhou is very kind; he is always calm and treats all his students with respect. Through classroom discussions and interactions, I learned that Dr. Zhou is interested in researching immigrant students’ experiences and cultural issues in school education. Dr. Zhou, the conversations we had about immigrant and refugee students’ experiences and challenges in school motivated me to pursue this study. I have benefited a lot from your wealth of knowledge, experience, and strong research capabilities. I am inspired by your dedication, professionalism, and caring character. Thank you for all your support.

I also want to sincerely thank Dr. Jonathan Bayley, the internal reader. Dr. Bayley was my professor for the graduate course “Survey Design and Research”. During this course, Dr. Bayley taught me a lot about research methods and designs. He also encouraged me to perform educational research and pursue further graduate studies. Dr. Bayley, your deep knowledge and vast experience in qualitative research were instrumental throughout all phases of this research. Thank you for all your encouragement, support, and dedication.

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***“All Students Can Learn”***

(Greater Essex County District School Board, 2014)

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background and Context**

The Federal Republic of Somalia is a country located in the northeast region of the African continent. Somalia is bordered by Ethiopia, Djibouti, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and Kenya. The capital of Somalia is Mogadishu. The total population in Somalia was last recorded at 10.2 million people by the World Bank in 2012 (Trading Economics, 2013). Most people in Somalia are Muslim (Middle East Policy Council, 2005).

Somalia has two official languages; the Somali language and the Arabic language. Although different provinces have different dialects, they can all understand each other (Canadian Friends of Somalia [CFS], 2014). The Arabic language is widely used in Somalia because of the Islamic religion. Other languages, such as English, French, and Italian are also used by some Somalis (CFS, 2014).

In 1991, a civil war between Somali factions broke out and turned Somalia into a war torn country. Unfortunately, efforts by the international community and the United Nations to end this conflict have faced many obstacles. The war has affected the lives of millions of Somalis. Many areas are unsafe, human rights are violated, and civilians receive inadequate protection from violence. Somali children are mainly affected by these hardships and violent situations. There is a major concern for their safety, health, and emotional well-being. In addition, Somali children's education suffers from the lack of adequate school facilities, academic resources, and frequent family moves to safer locations.

Today, the Somali Civil War is still ongoing and continues to force thousands of Somalis to flee their country and seek refuge in safer locations. According to Nilsson, Barazanji, Heintzelman, Siddiqi, and Shilla (2012), “citizens originating from Somalia compose the third largest group of refugees under the United Nations’ responsibility” (p. 240). Many people who escape the war live in refugee camps within Somalia or in refugee camps that are set up in neighbouring countries. They live in these refugee camps and hope to be selected or sponsored one day by one of the world’s countries that hold humanitarian traditions. If selected for resettlement, refugee families have little time to prepare for the move and do not have the opportunity to choose to resettle in the country of their choice.

Since the civil war broke out in Somalia, Canada has been very supportive to Somalis who were displaced or affected by the violence and sponsored many Somali refugee families to resettle on Canadian land. According to the Government of Canada (2013), “Refugees and persons in need of protection are people within or outside Canada who fear persecution and going back to their home country” (para. 1). The Government of Canada continues to sponsor Somali refugee families to resettle in different Canadian cities. By doing so, Canada provides many Somali refugees with safety and protection on Canadian land, after they were forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or conflict.

By protecting thousands of Somalis each year, Canada maintains its “humanitarian tradition and international obligations” (Government of Canada, 2013, para. 1). The large numbers of Somali refugees living in Canada are recognized by the Government of Canada (2013) under two types of refugees:

1. Resettled Refugees: Persons who have been sponsored by the government of Canada or a private group before their arrival to Canada. They wait in one of the world's emergency refugee camps until they are selected for resettlement in Canada. This type of refugee receives permanent residency (landed status) when they arrive to Canada.
2. Pending Refugees: Persons who make their own way to Canada out of the situation or country they are escaping. After they arrive to Canada by land, sea or air, they apply for asylum through an in-land refugee determination system. Then they go through a hearing to determine their refugee status and after which they might be granted permanent resident status.

There is a significant Somali presence in Canada. Currently, "Canada hosts one of the largest Somali populations in the Western world and Somalis have been identified as the largest African community in Canada" (CFS, 2014, para. 1). The majority of Somalis have arrived and settled in the province of Ontario; "it is estimated that there are around 140,000 Somalis living in Toronto, followed by Ottawa (20,000), and Edmonton (18,000)" (CFS, 2014, para. 1). Other Somali communities have also developed in Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg, and others are starting to form in other Canadian cities.

A Somali community is starting to form in Windsor, Ontario, one of Canada's most ethnically diverse cities, due to the large number of Somali families who have settled in this area. They arrived to Windsor either from Somalia, refugee camps, or neighbouring countries to Somalia where they took shelter in safer locations. Since arriving to Windsor, the Somali community has been very active in establishing programs

and organizing events, especially for the youth. Windsor Somalis have formed the Somali Community of Windsor (SCW) organization. The SCW offers various programs for Somalis living in the city of Windsor, including an after school Homework/Tutoring program to assist Somali students in the community with their school work. The SCW runs a Quran (Islam's central religious text) teaching program for Somali children on the weekend. In addition, they currently have a men's soccer team that competes against other local teams.

Due to this big influx of Somali families, the Somali student population in elementary and secondary public schools in Windsor is on the rise. Many of these students are refugees who have resettled in the Windsor area with their families after escaping the dangers of war and conflict in Somalia. The Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) has welcomed many Somali refugee students in recent years to its elementary schools. Many of these newcomers attend elementary schools in the board that offer an English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The ESL program helps new students in Canada develop their English language skills, and eventually, when they are ready, they are transitioned to a regular English classroom with other mainstream students.

Once in Canada, Somali refugees are relieved to escape the dangers of war. However, the parents and their children begin a new chapter of challenges with settlement and integration into Canadian society. The parents find it very difficult to find jobs and provide financial support to the family. They lack the work experience, academic background, and language skills that are necessary qualifications required for many Canadian jobs. The beginning stage for many of these parents is to attend an adult



school to learn the English language. Through school and community centers, they try to develop communication and computer based skills that are essential for most jobs in Canada. These parents also experience social challenges as they try to make new friends and build a social network as part of their new life in Canada.

As a result of traumatic experiences and hardships of war, Somali refugee parents hope for a brighter future for their children in Canada. They particularly hold high hopes on their children's educational career. They view school as a very important component to improve their living conditions and move towards a successful future. However, it is very difficult for these parents to deal with their own challenges of settlement and integration while trying to meet the many unique needs of their children.

Somali children, who also experienced the trauma of war in Somalia or difficult living conditions in refugee camp, now find themselves in Canadian schools and quickly feel isolated in an unfamiliar environment. Their first, and most important task, is to learn the English language in order for them to do well in school and integrate into Canadian society. They have to adapt to different values and ways of doing things in Canada which they are not accustomed to. As they integrate into Canadian society and the school system, they try to make friends and establish healthy relationships with their teachers and other students in the school. It is difficult for Somali refugee students to go through these major hurdles in life, especially when they do not have any prior experience or the coping strategies to deal with such changes.

### **Statement of Problem**

The process of settlement and integration presents many challenges for Somali refugee children that they are not familiar with. In addition to the traumatic experiences

refugee children faced in their country of origin or in refugee camp, they also face difficulties with integration in their host country (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006). Firstly, they are trying to learn a new language, integrate into the school system, and establish healthy relationships within the school community. Secondly, they are expected to assimilate into the Canadian mainstream culture at school, while at the same time maintain the Somali culture and traditional values at home. Thirdly, they have lots of pressure from parents and family members to do well in school and establish successful careers as they grow up in Canada. All these expectations and changes create a difficult situation for refugee children, and they are not ready to deal with such challenges on their own.

Although Somali refugee students face many challenges in Canadian elementary schools, the main three sources of challenges are social, emotional, and academic. The social challenges for Somali refugee students stem from trying to integrate into Canadian society and a new school system. They have to make new friends and start establishing relationships within the school. Making friends is difficult since they are not able to effectively communicate in English with other students. They are also not familiar with Canadian cultural values, ways of communicating, listening, and interacting with others. Roxas and Roy (2012) note in their study on recently arrived refugee students that the newcomers faced challenges in making friends with US-born students. In addition, Somali refugee students do not know many of the activities or games that other students in the school participate in, and therefore, it is difficult for them to become involved in extra-curricular activities. Perhaps, one of the major social challenges for refugee students is dealing with conflict. They lack the problem solving skills to resolve conflicts

on their own. When dealing with issues that arise with other students, they need their teachers support, and are often in trouble since they lack the conflict resolution skills.

The emotional challenges Somali refugee students deal with are caused by the difficult situations and hardships they experienced in Somalia or in refugee camps. Refugees are admitted and allowed to resettle in their host country because of a fear of violence and persecution in their country of origin (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Somali refugee students and their families lived in conflict zones or have spent most of their life in a refugee camp after escaping the violence. Their human rights were not protected, and as a result of war, some children may have experienced bereavement, or a separation from family members. There is a fear that these students might develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a severe condition caused by exposure to traumatic events, such as the loss of family members or threat of death. There are also additional emotional challenges due to stressful situations and circumstances that develop when refugee children arrive to Canada. For example, adapting to a new culture and school system, bad financial situations at home, conflict between refugee children and their families, all lead to emotional challenges and cause distress for refugee children.

There are many academic challenges that Somali refugee students deal with in Canadian schools. Many of these children lived in places where schools have limited resources, and education is interrupted due to conflicts and ongoing battles. Many Somali refugees have also lived in refugee camps in Somalia or in neighbouring countries for years before arriving to Canada. Children living in these camps receive very little education, raising concerns for academic underachievement in Canadian schools because of their weak literacy and numeracy skills. Refugees who are fortunate to resettle in a

host country experience educational challenges as a result of receiving limited or no formal education during the long time spent in refugee camp (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). In order for these children to develop the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to perform well in school, they need major support and specific programs that meet their unique academic needs. Many refugee parents are not able to provide their children with learning support since they often lack the English language skills, academic background, and are not familiar with the Canadian school system.

The challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in elementary school, and their unique needs, are not understood enough by educators and the school community. Educators are often not aware of their socio-cultural, learning, and emotional challenges, which have a detrimental effect on mental health and academic achievement. Teachers working with refugee students are also not familiar with existing support systems and how they function. In addition, school systems and educators are in need of strategies for orientation, to better serve and support the settlement and successful integration of Somali refugee students into the school community.

There is no evidence of research that has explored the experiences and challenges of Somali refugee students in the Windsor area. In addition, much of the available research on the experiences of refugee students does not include the children's voices and stories. As expressed by Guerrero and Tinkler (2010), although there is an ongoing concern by governments and human rights groups about the effects of war on children, the children's voices are rarely heard. The voices of the large number of Somali refugee students in Windsor have yet to be heard, and their experiences have not been explored.

They continue to experience difficulties in settlement and integration into Canadian society and the school system without receiving adequate support.

The significance of this study is that it provides a deep understanding of the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in Canadian public elementary schools. This qualitative research, as explained by Creswell (1998), allows the participants' voices to be heard and explores their experiences by giving them an opportunity to share their stories and perspectives. Since this study focuses on a specific cultural group of students, it provides more focus, and offers a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. The findings from this research will help educators understand the challenges and unique needs of refugee students. This research also presents strategies and approaches that will support the successful settlement and integration of refugee students into the school system.

Although this study benefits multiple audiences in the education community, it is mainly directed towards educators working with Somali refugee students. The research findings provide a deep understanding of the various challenges experienced by this culture-sharing group of refugee students. Educators, who are struggling in meeting the unique needs of refugee students in their classes, and specifically from Somali background, may find the research findings very informative. The final report was shared with the SCW; educators or community volunteers who are supporting Somali students in the Homework/Tutoring program offered by SCW may benefit from the results.

Administrators, school support staff, and the board of education (GECDSB) will also find the learning from this research very beneficial and informative. The findings

will help them increase their knowledge and understanding of the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in their schools. With this knowledge base, they could develop programs to better assist this group of newcomers as they settle and integrate into a new Canadian culture and school system. Such programs will not only benefit Somali refugee students, but all newcomers in general who might be experiencing similar challenges.

Scholars, authors, and researchers in the field of education will also find this study useful. For example, this research could lead to an analysis of the study findings and productive discussions around the challenges experienced by refugee students. As a result of this study, other graduate students may develop an interest in investigating the challenges of refugee students from other cultures, or even the same culture but in different locations for comparison purposes. The study results will also benefit the scholarly community since it will add to the body of knowledge, and could generate more ideas for research around this topic.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences and challenges of a group of Somali refugee students during their efforts to settle and integrate into elementary public schools in Windsor. This qualitative study employs research methods from multiple-case study and ethnographic approaches. The intent of this investigation is to describe, analyze, and interpret, the socio-cultural, emotional, and learning challenges experienced by this group of newcomers. This study also aims to identify existing support systems that the participants find helpful and supportive at school.

I chose Somali refugee students as my study target because I noticed the challenges they experience with settlement and integration when they arrive to the school where I teach. My teaching colleagues working with Somali refugee students in ESL classes often expressed difficulty in understanding their various needs and how to best support them. During informal conversations with me, ESL teachers shared that Somali refugee students often came to their classrooms with little or no formal education experience and needed lots of social and emotional support. The teachers noticed challenges in three areas: social, emotional, and academic. Some of the social challenges included difficulty making friends, communicating with others, and resolving conflict. Emotional challenges stemmed from the effects of traumatic experiences and hardships that these students experienced in their home country or refugee camp before arrival in Canada. The academic challenges included having limited formal school experiences and difficulty developing the literacy and numeracy skills that are foundational to academic success in Canadian schools.

The findings from this study shed light on the unique experiences and challenges of this group of Somali refugee students. The study results provide very useful information for educators working with these students, as well as the school administration and the board of education. The suggested strategies and approaches could lead to the appropriate services and successful integration of refugee students into the school system.

Parental involvement plays a key role in supporting student success and academic achievement. The importance of parental engagement is emphasized by the GECDSB (2014) slogan “Building Tomorrow Together”. To help the participants’ parents in

understanding their children's challenges and needs, they were provided with a study summary report written in simple English easy for them to understand. The information in the summary report gives them a better understanding of the challenges experienced by their children in school, and sheds light on existing support systems that could help them in dealing with those challenges.

### **Research Questions**

In order to determine the best course of action to facilitate the educational growth of Somali refugee students and meet their specific needs, this research aims to investigate three questions that need to be addressed:

1. What socio-cultural, emotional, and learning challenges do Somali refugee students face during their elementary education?
2. What, if any, are the existing support systems and how do they function?
3. How might Somali refugee students be better served with respect to their settlement and successful integration into a Canadian English elementary public school system?

The first question investigates the various challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in elementary schools in the GECDSB. Although this group of newcomers deals with many challenges at school, the focus of this research is on exploring the socio-cultural, emotional, and learning challenges. The second question aims to find any existing support systems that assist refugee students in the process of settlement and integration. The third question leads to a discussion around the strategies



and approaches that might be successful in integrating Somali refugee students into the school system more effectively.

This study has benefited the students who participated in the research directly and indirectly. One direct benefit to the participants was giving them an opportunity to share their experiences and challenges with someone. These experiences often go unnoticed since refugee students usually do not feel comfortable sharing their challenges with their teachers, parents, or friends. It was very important and necessary for this group of Somali refugee students, who often experience loneliness and isolation, to be heard by someone. By discussing these challenges and experiences with me, they might have felt better and more relieved.

This study has the potential to lead to many indirect benefits for the students who participated and shared their experiences. The participants' challenges and experiences will be understood by educators working directly with them. The findings could also lead to additional approaches and strategies developed by teachers to meet the individual needs of refugee students in their classes. Educators, administrators, and the board of education (GECD SB) could use the study findings to develop programs.

An example of such programs could be to provide teachers with professional development opportunities. These opportunities will help educators become more familiar and develop a deep understanding of the challenges experienced by refugee students. Such professional development sessions could also aim to present teachers with the most successful strategies and approaches for supporting newcomers. If educators are trained on the most effective strategies, they will develop the necessary skills and become more competent in supporting refugee students in their classes. These and other

programs could lead to better support for refugee students with respect to their settlement and successful integration into elementary, as well as secondary, English public school systems in Canada.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on refugee students' experiences covers a wide range of topics; however, the voices of young refugees are rarely heard by researchers. Less research explores refugee children's experiences from their own stories and perspectives as they adapt to a new culture and school system in their host country (Prior & Niesz, 2013). It is important to note that literature pertaining to Somali refugees is short, and to understand the experiences and challenges faced by refugee students, I have included the literature on refugee and immigrant students from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities.

The wide range of findings and information from the literature review are presented in this section in eight themes that emerged from the extant literature: (1) Difference Between Refugee and Immigrant, (2) Pre-migration Experiences in Country of Origin, (3) Post-migration Experiences in Canada, (4) Challenges for Children at School, (5) Conflict Between Children and Parents, (6) Children Need Emotional, Social, and Academic Support, (7) Educators are not Familiar with the Needs of Refugee Students, and (8) Education is a Source of Frustration.

#### **Difference Between Refugee and Immigrant**

Both immigrant and refugee students are similar in the way that they are both new arrivals to the country and are in the process of settling and integrating into a new culture and school system. Both groups have to learn a new language and adapt to a new education system with unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches. Both immigrant and refugee students also try to establish healthy relationships in school with their peers and their teachers as part of their social life in the school environment. Although there are

some similarities, the challenges experienced by refugee students may differ from immigrant students.

Refugee students usually arrive from countries affected by war and severe conflicts and are forced to flee with their families to safer locations. They seek refuge in places that protect their safety and well-being. Upon arrival to the host country, refugee status protects a person from being returned to his or her home country (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006). Although immigrant students arrive from countries with challenging living conditions, those challenges are usually non-life threatening and their safety is not in immediate danger. While refugee families are forced to escape dangerous situations for their safety, immigrant families choose to immigrate to other countries in search of better living conditions and a more promising future for the children.

Immigrant families intend to leave their country and plan for the move to another location. Refugee families usually do not intend to leave their country; however, conflicts and dangerous situations force them to leave their homeland to protect themselves from danger. As explained by Kirova (2010), “unlike most immigrants who had given the decision due consideration, and who had time to physically and emotionally prepare themselves for the resettlement process, refugees had not intended to leave their country of origin” (p. 75). Refugee families do not have time to prepare themselves for the move and do not pick a specific location they wish to resettle in. Instead, when their life is in danger or their safety is threatened, they flee their country or region in search of safe places. Most often, they make their way to refugee camps in their own country, or in neighbouring countries, and live there until an opportunity becomes available for them to resettle as refugees in a different country.

There are important differences in the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students in their home country. Immigrant children's education usually continues uninterrupted, while refugee children's education may be interrupted or postponed due to strife in their home country or a wait in a refugee camp (Ministry of Education: British Columbia, 2009). Due to learning interruptions and missing structured school time in their country of origin or refugee camps, refugee students do not develop the necessary academic foundation and learning skills needed to perform well in school in the host country. After resettlement, immigrant students usually have a stronger education background than refugee students when they attend school, and as a result, the risk of academic underachievement with immigrant students is likely to be lower than refugee students.

The experiences of war and conflict may have psychological affects that are profound in refugee students, and not necessarily present with immigrant students. Refugees flee their home country as a result of conflict, war, or violence, and as a result of spending years in refugee camps without proper nutrition, shelter, and medical assistance, many experience psychological challenges and physical problems (McBrien, 2011). There is a sense of loss and trauma that exists with refugee students as a result of difficult situations in conflict zones that caused sufferings and hardships. The severe clashes and battles during war may cause refugee families to lose personal property, relatives, and family members. Pre-migration challenges refugees faced in the home country or in refugee camp may include separation from family, loss of relatives or close family members, and experiences of violence and persecution (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). These losses that may have psychological impacts on refugee students are not often

experienced by immigrant students. The sense of loss and trauma does not go away immediately and remains with refugee students for a long period of time after they resettle or relocate in safer locations.

While immigrant families are usually intact when they immigrate to another country, refugee families may resettle in safer locations without some of their family members who went missing or were unable to escape the dangerous situations.

According to the Ministry of Education: British Columbia (2009), immigrant families are often intact, including parents and children, or other family members who are also caregivers. Contrarily, refugee children may arrive to their host country without parents or some of their siblings. This presents an additional challenge for refugee students who may be living without some of their family members when they resettle in the host country. These children are usually worried about the safety and well-being of the missing family members who are still living in conflict zones. Unlike refugee students who often need emotional support in dealing with concerns for family members or relatives left behind, immigrant families are usually intact when they immigrate and all family members live safely together in their new location.

### **Pre-migration Experiences in Country of Origin**

Children living in countries that are involved in war or conflict deal with many pre-migration experiences and challenges. The families who escape the war may live in refugee camps for months or years and face further challenges while awaiting resettlement in a host country (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Although the poor living conditions in the home country, or in refugee camp, are difficult for the entire family, children are usually affected and impacted the most. The children may be exposed to

torture or sexual abuse. They may also endure loss of family members and friends. Also, among the many challenges are issues associated with receiving proper education and nutrition, as well as concerns for children's physical and mental health. Due to difficult financial situations, parents struggle in meeting the needs of their children. To support their family, refugee children may be required to engage in hard labour to secure the basic necessities of life. These pre-migration experiences have a direct impact on the children's health and mental well-being, and eventually affect the post-migration adjustment process. After resettlement in safer locations, these children continue to suffer from symptoms and long lasting effects of being exposed to these difficult conditions.

Due to conflict and lack of resources, refugee children receive little education in their home country before resettling in their host country. It is also possible that "many resettled refugee students have no past experience with schools" (McBrien, 2011, p. 76). These students might have little or no formal school experience, which that results in innumeracy and illiteracy in their first language, as well as in English. If schools exist in the camps where these children reside before coming to their host country, they are poorly constructed and lack resources. In describing schools in refugee camps, Mareng (2010) notes that due to the lack of a conventional school building, students are often sent home due to heavy wind, dust or rain, and the shortage of resources results in poor performance and stalls students' education progress.

Children living in countries with war or in refugee camps may also be deprived of healthy foods and proper nutrition. The conflicts disrupt the production of food and farming becomes difficult, forcing many farmers to abandon their lands due to safety

concerns. Among African countries, “the ongoing conflict in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo has contributed significantly to the level of hunger in the two countries” (World Food Programme, 2014, para. 13). Children in Somalia suffer from shortage of food, while the water they drink is often contaminated, which raises major concerns with respect to their health and proper nutrition. The ongoing fighting also “forces millions of people to flee their homes, leading to hunger emergencies as the displaced find themselves without the means to feed themselves” (para. 11).

Natural disasters and long periods of drought, both on the increase in recent years, also have major consequences on poor people. Such disasters have a major impact on millions of people, particularly those living in developing countries since they lack the resources and do not receive adequate support in dealing with the crisis. In 2011, Somalia was affected by major droughts which caused significant losses in crops and livestock, leading to food shortages around the country (World Food Programme, 2014). This situation triggered a severe food crisis which claimed the lives of many Somalis who died from hunger, and led to the displacement of thousands of people who fled their regions in search of food and water.

Refugee students might also have arrived from war-torn countries or refugee camps, and as a result of violence and/or torture, they may have serious physical concerns. Some children may have been injured or physically hurt as a result of living in conflict zones. Due to a lack of transportation, some families, including elders and children, escaped the war by walking on foot. At times during their journey to a safer place or a refugee camp, they would run out of food and water and they would have to squeeze whatever moisture they could from the muddy ground to keep from dying of



thirst (Vongkhamphra, Davis, & Adem, 2011). Due to ongoing conflicts, medical facilities and hospitals are often short on resources, and adequate service is not available for patients or children who need medical assistance.

Students who are refugees may have experienced violence as a result of the war in their country, which often leads to emotional and psychological challenges. Refugee children who have experienced severe traumatic experiences such as the loss of a family member or their home will experience emotional difficulties (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006). Some of the children who escape the war live in refugee camps for years. Life in these camps is difficult; living conditions are unhealthy, and there is little chance or opportunity for young children to receive formal education. When families escape the war and live in refugee camp, they often separate from close relatives they have lived with for many years; these relatives remain behind in their home country. After resettlement in the host country, refugees remain worried about family members or relatives still living in conflict zones or in refugee camps. These difficult traumatic experiences, and losses that include family members, relatives, and personal belongings, lead to deep emotional challenges with refugee children. Many of these children are at risk of developing mental health problems and PTSD that have a major impact on their health and well-being.

It is important to note that war and conflict generates a bad economy leading to high unemployment rates and difficult financial situations for families living in those countries. Often, an entire family, including children, struggle to survive with very low income. Due to financial struggles, many parents are unable to provide their children with fundamental needs such as healthy food, clothing, medical treatment, school

resources, and proper education. People living in countries affected by war and under poverty cannot afford nutritious food, and as a result, they become weaker and less able to make money to escape hunger (World Food Programme, 2014). Many fathers who are unable to find jobs look for work in other locations and are sometimes forced to move away from their family if a job opportunity becomes available somewhere else. At a very young age, children may have to take on adult responsibilities and work to support their family.

In response to the violence and dangerous living conditions, many people across the world are forced to flee their countries of origin in search of safety (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006). When people escape, they seek shelter and protection in safer locations. Some of them make it to refugee camps, where they live for a period of time and wait to be sponsored by a host country. Others cross the borders of their country by land, water, or air, and try to resettle in another country. As described by Ehnholt and Yule (2006), an individual who has crossed an international border in search of protection from violence and is in the process of trying to obtain refugee status in another country is called an 'asylum seeker'.

### **Post-migration Experiences in Canada**

When refugee families arrive to Canada, they experience many post-migration challenges with settlement and integration. As explained by Pine and Drachman (2005), there are many issues that may emerge, which include concern for those left behind, depression associated with multiple losses, adjusting to a new way of life in the new land, and post-traumatic stress for people who experienced or witnessed violence and the loss of others. The children struggle with integrating into the school community and

mainstream Canadian culture. Refugee families also experience challenges with limited income since the parents or adults in the family find it difficult to find jobs. This results in children's poor nutrition and health.

Although refugee families escape the violence when they resettle in Canada, they remain concerned about the safety and well-being of other family members or relatives left behind (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). They worry that close family members who still live in dangerous areas might get hurt or displaced. There is a fear that they may never see their relatives, neighbours, or close family friends again. As McBrien (2011) explains, sometimes families are separated as they flee from their homelands or through resettlement procedures, and as a result, they worry about family members who remain in the home country or in refugee camp, and may feel obligated to help them and send them money. The children who witnessed or experienced violence in their home country may show or express deep concern for the safety of relatives, friends they played with, and students they attended school with. Refugee families usually try to keep in contact with people they are concerned about in their home country to check on their living conditions and make sure they are safe.

The process of resettlement is difficult for refugee families and results in major losses that may cause depression. When people escape countries with war or conflict, they usually leave everything behind and seek safety and protection in safer locations. They do not have enough time to think or plan for their move. Often, refugees come to the United States with nothing more than the clothes they are carrying on their backs (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2011). One of the major losses for refugees when they resettle in a host country is close family members and relatives who

are left behind in the country of origin or in refugee camp. After resettlement, it is unlikely that refugee families will travel back to reunite or reconnect with close family members left behind.

Another major loss is the family home; refugee families give up the home they have built and lived in their entire life without knowing what will happen to it when they leave their home country. As noted by Segal and Mayadas (2005), refugees usually leave their homes unwillingly and they have little or no time to plan for the move. Typically, during the escape journey, the members of a refugee family are unable to carry their personal belongings, clothes, and other important materials with them, and they have no choice but to leave it behind. These multiple losses may cause feelings of distress and could lead refugees to a depression when they resettle in new lands.

A major challenge for refugee families is adjusting to a new way of life in the new land. Many refugees spend long periods of time in refugee camps before settling in a host country. When they move and resettle, they do not have any previous experience in renting a home or managing their budget, and may be unfamiliar with urban environments and the western way of life (Australian Government: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2013). Once in the new land, refugee families need a lot of support in finding a home to rent, and managing their financial situation. Adjusting to a new way of living and new culture takes time and presents a challenge for refugee families when they resettle.

People who experienced or witnessed violence during the war may develop mental health issues, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress in the host country. A PTSD, as explained by Ehntholt and Yule (2006), is characterized by experiencing or the

exposure to an extremely stressful or violent event or situation. The psychological distress experienced by many refugees may lead to aggressive behaviours, eating disorders, and difficulties with concentration and sleeping. There is a major concern that refugees who witnessed the loss of others may experience mental health challenges for a long time after resettlement. If refugee families lost family members or close relatives due to violence, the situation becomes more difficult and painful.

Refugee families also face challenges with low income and financial support. Many Somali refugee families face economic hardships in their host country (Nilsson et al., 2012). It is difficult for the parents or adults to provide financial support to the family since it is difficult for them to find jobs. The lack of English language skills, work experience, and other necessary skills such as computer knowledge and customer service, makes it very difficult for Somali refugees to find jobs in Canada.

The financial struggles lead to various problems and challenges for refugee parents and their children. According to Ehntholt and Yule (2006), in some cases, refugee children struggle with depressive symptoms as a result of severe financial difficulties. In addition to struggling with low income, refugee parents struggle with transportation and reaching their destinations. It is difficult for the parents to provide their children with proper nutritious food and clothing. This results in children's poor nutrition and health, especially during the cold weather conditions in the winter. It is also hard for refugee parents to provide their children with many necessary resources and materials that are needed for school. Some children feel obligated to work and support their parents financially. In their study on refugee students, Roxas and Roy (2012) found that a recently arrived young refugee man had been working late hours in a part time job

while attending school during the day, which helped him support his family in paying bills.

### **Challenges for Children at School**

Upon arrival in Canada, refugee students begin a complicated and challenging process of settlement and integration into Canadian society and the school system. During this process, they experience many challenges and obstacles which require major attention and support. They struggle with establishing healthy relationships, conflict resolution, communicating with teachers, academic achievement, and emotional challenges. Discussing the issues refugee students experience, Anisef and Kilbride (2001) emphasize that programs need to be developed to help newcomers deal with their own frustration and stress associated with cultural adjustment.

In school and the community, refugee students struggle with establishing healthy relationships. This could be attributed to the lack of English language skills and limited social interaction in Canadian culture. It is difficult for refugee children to make friends at school or in the community, and as Loerke (2009) explains, they experience feelings of isolation which result in negative feelings about themselves and others. They struggle integrating into groups with a similar background, as well as groups from different cultural backgrounds. This leads to their isolation and exclusion from peer groups, which has a detrimental effect on their well-being, mental health, and behaviour.

Although refugee students experience many challenges in their classes during structured school time, research often overlooks important challenges and difficulties refugee youth face during unstructured times in school, including recess, play time, extra-curricular activities, and sports teams (Loerke, 2009). During those times or activities,

refugee students are required to interact, play, and communicate with a larger group of students, teachers, and coaches who may look different, only speak English, and hold different cultural values. This puts refugee students in many challenging situations since they have to engage in communication, social interactions, making friends, and independent conflict resolution without their homeroom teacher's support.

Refugee students often find themselves in conflict situations outside the classroom that they are not ready to deal with on their own. These conflicts may be a result of cultural differences, social isolation, and misunderstandings with other students that may arise due to lack of English language skills. Arguments, disagreements, or altercations with other children often escalate to physical confrontations, resulting in disciplinary actions by the school administration, which may include a suspension. According to Roxas and Roy (2012), a refugee student in their study was suspended twice in the same school year because he was involved in fighting, and because he was unable to make up the work he missed, he failed two courses.

Another challenge for refugee students is communicating their issues, concerns, and problems to their teachers, school administrators, or other school personnel who may provide them with assistance. The teacher population in Canada is made up primarily of English speaking white teachers who may look different than many refugee students in their classrooms. According to Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli (2009):

The proportion of the general population of colour in Canada is much greater than the proportion of racialized elementary and secondary educators and educational counsellors. In other words, there are proportionally many more students of colour than there are educators of colour. (p. 599)

These teachers are more familiar with Canadian or Western culture and ways of thinking. They do not have the experience or proper training to understand the challenges of refugee students and meet their unique needs.

Refugee children will only provide information and share their experiences when teachers establish credibility, trust, and rapport with them (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). If teachers do not establish this rapport, refugee students may feel that their teachers do not understand their problems or cannot relate to their experiences. Since many newcomers do not open up to their teachers about their problems and concerns, their problems go unnoticed by educators who could support them. The students usually end up solving problems on their own, and teachers often find themselves in situations trying to solve those problems rather than prevent them from happening.

Due to the war and ongoing conflicts, Somali refugee students receive little education in their home country. Many children who escape the violence with their families live in refugee camps for long periods of time, sometimes ranging from 5-10 years. In refugee camps, the education provided is very limited and is often interrupted. This lack of formal education presents future challenges for refugee students when they attend school in their host country. The small minority of refugees, who are fortunate enough to resettle with their families in Western countries, suffer educational disadvantage due to the protracted time spent in refugee camps (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Somali refugee students arrive to Canada with little or no formal school experiences and weak educational backgrounds. Since refugee students have had limited experiences in formal schooling, one issue they face in their host country is “having to adapt to the expectations and culture of formal education” (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010, p.



152). In addition, they have to learn the English language, which may be a difficult task since they lack literacy skills even in their mother tongue/native language. As emphasized by Taylor and Sidhu (2012), it is very important for refugee students with limited or no basic education to receive English language support in school to enable them to access the mainstream curriculum.

When refugee students arrive with their families to their host country, they are safe from the danger and violence that forced them to escape their country of origin. However, due to the traumatic experiences in their home country or in refugee camp and the challenges of settlement and integration, they begin to experience emotional challenges in their host country. As explained by Ehntholt and Yule (2006), when refugee students resettle in their host country, they are frequently subjected to multiple traumatic events and severe losses, as well as ongoing stressors that present emotional challenges. This leads to many problems including anger management issues, low self-esteem, and lack of concentration in school, factors that are all associated with academic underachievement.

### **Conflict Between Children and Parents**

In addition to the many challenges experienced at school, refugee students are usually dealing with conflict at home within their own families. The findings of Nilsson et al. (2012) showed that immigration and exposure to a new culture can cause conflict between children and their family. Refugee parents usually want their children to maintain their cultural values, while the children assimilate into the mainstream culture of the host country. Also, many refugee parents worry that their children will start losing

respect for elders as they integrate into Western culture. As a result of such conflicts, refugee students experience more feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Studies show that refugee parents hold high expectations and hopes that their children will be successful in their host country. The parents expect their children to achieve well academically and establish a professional career. According to Nilsson et al. (2012), Somali women in their study expressed that their greatest hope for their children was getting an education. Many refugee parents did not receive proper education themselves as a result of the conflicts in their home country, and therefore, they realize the great opportunity their children have to receive good education in their host country. Since many refugee students are at risk of academic underachievement, they are often in conflicts and arguments with their parents. It is very difficult for the newcomers to deal with their own challenges with integration and at the same time fulfill their parents' high expectations.

Although refugee parents hold high hopes and expectations for their children in the host country, they are unable to provide their children with academic support for a number of reasons. Since the parents are dealing with their own challenges with settlement and integration, they are often overwhelmed with the obstacles and problems they face, and as a result, they struggle with providing their children adequate support with their school work. Many parents/caregivers are “unable to provide educational assistance to their children as they possess limited or no English, and parental illiteracy in the mother tongue is common” (Ferfolja, 2009, p. 398). These parents are not familiar with the school system and do not possess the language skills and experience to engage effectively in their child's academic program. For most of the parents who report being

literate, “the only education they had was at the primary school level” (Gahungu, Gahungu, & Luseno, 2011, p. 5).

In some cases, as explained by Prior and Niesz (2013), when parents become involved in schooling it provides encouragement for their children and helps them bridge the cultural gap between school and home. Although refugee parents understand that their engagement in their child’s education program is important, they are unable to provide support at home and their children continue to experience challenges in developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Developing English literacy skills, which are foundational for all learning in English Canadian schools, can be a challenge for children raised by parents with limited English proficiency (Dodds et al., 2010). Refugee students are expected to do well by their parents; however, most often their parents are unable to provide any educational support, creating a situation characterized by frustration and conflict between the parents and the child.

Refugee parents also want their children to maintain their cultural values, family traditions, and mother tongue. However, the parents often experience tension in dealing with such concerns since the refugee youth eventually adapt to the mainstream culture at school and in the community. As described by Oikonomidou (2007), “the worldviews and cultural ways of being for individuals are often threatened when they come into contact with the dominant culture in their host country” (p. 15). With time, the more refugee children adapt to the mainstream culture at school in their host country, the further challenges and conflicts they experience with their parents at home. As noted by Segal and Mayadas (2005), a growing concern is that, most often, immigrant and refugee parents do not seek proper help for their children until the problems become so

significant and someone outside the family recognizes the danger and indicates concern for the situation.

As refugee students gradually shift away from their home culture towards the mainstream culture of their host country, their behaviours and new ways of thinking result in more conflicts with their parents. According to Nilsson et al. (2012), one example of this shift in culture was discussed by Somali women in their study, where they reported that their children began to demonstrate a loss of respect for elders, parents, and teachers, as they shifted away from the Somali culture towards a Western culture. The traditional ways of treating others, expected behaviour, and proper ways of communicating with adults that refugee students have learned from their parents slowly begin to fade away in the host country. For example, Nilsson et al. (2012) discussed that Somali women in their study expressed how traditional forms of discipline, including respect for adults and the use of eye contact by their children, seemed to lose their effectiveness in the host country.

As a result of the many ongoing conflicts between refugee parents and their children, the parents begin to feel hopeless and lack the capability to improve the situation on their own. The children start to distance themselves from the parents and the family bond becomes at risk. The study on Somali women's reflections by Nilsson et al. (2012) found that many parents felt at a loss for how to best help their children succeed and how to restore a strong family bond.

Due to conflicts with their own families and exclusion from peer groups at school and in the community, Somali refugee students start to feel lonely and isolated. Social isolation is one of the post-migration factors that place refugee children at risk of

psychological distress in the host country (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006). The feeling of not belonging, in addition to the troubles experienced at home with their parents, is central to putting these students at risk. One major concern is that educators working with refugee students are not aware of many of these challenges experienced by the students at home.

### **Children Need Emotional, Social, and Academic Support**

Refugee children must work through many pre-migration and post-migration challenges. As a result of these challenges, the newcomers experience feelings of isolation, develop mental health difficulties, and are at risk of academic underachievement. This has an effect on their behaviour, well-being, and learning in school. When helping refugee students in dealing with these challenges, Oikonomidou (2007) suggests that listening to the students' voices could provide educators with valuable insights into the children's experiences and ways of thinking.

The pre-migration experiences of war, violence, loss of family members or relatives, and life in a refugee camp, increases the risk for developing mental health problems and emotional distress. These issues need immediate attention when refugee students arrive in their host country. Although refugee children show signs of resilience, Ehnholt and Yule (2006) assert that many of them experience mental health difficulties, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. In order for young refugees to overcome these complicated challenges and succeed in school, they need adequate support and guidance from their teachers and parents.

Educators, parents, and people supporting young refugees are advised to look for signs in their actions, behaviours, and attitudes. These signs can indicate if immediate intervention is needed. The psychological distress experienced by refugee children can

be exhibited by aggressive behaviours, concentration difficulties, sleep disturbances, and eating disorders (Nilsson et al., 2012). It is also common for young refugees who suffered from war trauma and violence, or the loss of a family member or relatives, to experience reliving of the traumatic events through images or dreams.

Providing social support to refugee students is central to their feeling of belonging as they settle and integrate into a new culture and school system. When they enter school in their host country, they have a difficult time developing peer relationships. They also do not feel comfortable discussing their issues with their teachers. As a result, refugee students experience feelings of loneliness and isolation that need urgent attention. As noted by Mareng (2010), educators have the moral obligation to teach refugee students the necessary social skills to participate in social interaction, make friends, and enhance their life. Refugee children need friends from different cultural backgrounds, as well as friends from the same cultural background. Having friends from different cultures helps them to adapt to the mainstream culture of the host country, while friends from the same cultural background help them to maintain their own cultural values and traditions.

Developing social connections is a fundamental need for all children, and it is very important for newcomers to establish healthy social relationships as part of their learning experience in their new country. According to Ferfolja and Vickers (2010), acculturation to the social expectations of the school is necessary before refugee students can work in the classroom and become engaged with learning. The refugee youth need school programs that promote multicultural tolerance and respect, as well as counseling to assist them with building social connections and coping with the stress associated with this new environment.

Young refugees need major academic support when they arrive to their host country. Due to the ongoing conflicts or troubles in their country of origin, or long periods of stay in refugee camps, they arrive with little or no formal education experiences. As suggested by Ferfolja and Vickers (2010), educational institutions in the host country need to find effective ways to support the learning of refugee students who come to school with limited or no formal education and many challenges. Refugee students also need guidance to understand the school procedures, schedules, rules, behaviour plans, and expectations. They also need to be familiar with the school staff, and members of the school community who could provide them with support.

After resettlement, refugee students face difficulties in learning the dominant language of their host country, however, for the newcomers to experience success and perform well in school, they need to learn the new language (Oikonomidou, 2007). Since many young refugees struggle with literacy and numeracy skills, they are at risk of academic underachievement and need extensive support in developing their English language skills. As stressed by Taylor and Sidhu (2012), it is important to provide refugee students with extensive English language support especially if they had limited or no formal education in their home country or in refugee camp. It is also imperative that they receive proper assessment to determine their academic levels, so they could be placed in the appropriate programs and classes.

### **Educators are not Familiar with the Needs of Refugee Students**

While refugee students face their own challenges with settlement and integration, educators working with them also experience challenges in understanding the needs of refugee youth when they first arrive at school. Teachers are often not aware of all the

pre-migration and post-migration challenges that refugee students are dealing with when they arrive to school in their host country. Since many teachers are not familiar with the various challenges experienced by refugee students, they are not able to provide them with an academic program that meets their specific needs. In addition to meeting the specific needs of refugee students who have had limited formal schooling experiences, teachers have to find the best ways to still effectively teach native English speakers in the same classroom (Roxas, 2008).

Teachers receive newcomers into their classes who are different than themselves, and are not experienced or prepared to deal with them. Therefore, when working with refugee students, they often rely on stereotypes and fail to capitalize on the children's areas of strength. As emphasized by Taylor and Sidhu (2012), understanding the reasons why people are forced to escape their country of origin, and the barriers to social inclusion for young refugees, is crucial for educators.

The student population in Canadian and U.S. public schools continues to increase in diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, and language. As stressed by Roxas (2011), an important priority for teachers today is to provide an education program that is responsive to the different cultures represented in their class. This is a challenging task for teachers since refugee students enter their classrooms with many learning needs and are at varying degrees of English language proficiency.

Often, educators are not comfortable and ready to support refugee students in coping with frustration and stress. As Szente, Hoot, and Taylor (2006) explain, "one of the major outcomes of our interviews with teachers was that they did not feel prepared to address the emotional stress experienced by refugee children" (p. 16). Teachers may not



have all the tools or necessary training to meet the needs of refugee children and help them deal with their traumatic experiences.

As Loerke (2009) suggests, it is essential for teachers to receive mentoring and in-service training on the best education practices to ensure newcomers are integrated successfully into school. Training teachers will increase their knowledge and understanding of the challenges experienced by refugee students. In discussing the lessons learned from their study, Adams and Kirova (2007) reflect on the need for providing teachers with continued learning opportunities in order to better understand and support immigrant and refugee youth in their classroom.

Realizing the challenges refugee students face in school and the lack of teachers experience in dealing with those challenges, some ministries of education are stressing the importance of providing educators with mentoring and professional learning opportunities. Recognizing the importance of teacher training, the Ministry of Education of British Columbia (2009) emphasizes that school staff needs to be presented with professional development opportunities geared toward understanding and meeting the unique needs of refugee students.

Educators are also faced with the challenge to be conscious of their own personal biases and to effectively address issues in the classroom concerning discrimination, racism, prejudice, and exclusion. It is important for teacher education programs to ensure that pre-service teachers are aware of these challenges and receive proper education and training for dealing with them effectively. As emphasized by McCall and Vang (2012), “the constant influx of refugee children in to our schools necessitates that teacher

educators prepare pre-service teachers for teaching about the histories of our newest students and to promote understanding of their cultures” (p. 33).

Refugee students might work and learn with different educators during the school day, presenting an additional challenge for these staff members since they have to collaborate together to best support these children. As suggested by Roxas and Roy (2012), there is a need for more communication between relocation agencies, family support staff, school administration, teachers, and parents. School professionals, including the principal, vice-principal, teachers, counselors, student support staff, and settlement workers are required to work together as a team to meet the needs of refugee students.

### **Education is a Source of Frustration**

Since refugee students and their teachers both face challenges in the process of settlement and integration, the education program offered to the refugee youth might create an additional challenge. According to Prior and Niesz (2013), the large population of refugee students around the world creates challenges for educators as they determine the most effective ways to teach young refugees and adapt their classroom practices to provide an education program that meets the unique needs of all their students.

Schools receiving refugee students face major challenges in supporting the successful transition of the newcomers into the school system in their host country (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). For some schools, education becomes a source of frustration for many reasons: refugee students are often seen as a problem; young refugees are at high risk of academic underachievement; teachers struggle to create a welcoming classroom environment; educators experience difficulties in delivering an inclusive teaching

approach; and teachers face many challenges in dealing with the emotional and social needs of refugee children.

As highlighted by Anisef and Kilbride (2001), education becomes a source of frustration if refugee students are not successfully integrated into the school system in their host country. It is common for refugee students to become frustrated as they struggle with mental health difficulties, academic challenges, and experience feelings of isolation and not belonging. The frustrations that develop from the education system directly affect the refugee students' perceptions and views about school, since it is “assumed that the students’ experiences in school have a central role in shaping their thoughts about education” (Oikonomidou, 2009, p. 26).

Although refugee students come to school with many challenges, many of them are resilient and work hard to be successful in school. However, Taylor and Sidhu (2012) found that refugee children were often seen as problems, rather than having unique and positive elements to bring to the classroom. Therefore, even though young refugees could bring different ideas, ways of knowing, and unique cultural perspectives to class, they are often seen as a problem by educators.

Evidence from research shows an academic underachievement with refugee students. As noted by Loerke (2009), past remedial efforts to improve the achievement of these students have not been very successful and only resulted in small improvements. Refugee students are consistently at a high risk of academic failure and underachievement. This issue was also recognized by Nykiel-Herbert (2010), who adds that ethnic minority students who arrive at schools bursting with cultural diversity are

consistently at a higher risk of academic failure compared to “regular” American students.

In addition to providing meaningful learning opportunities, educators have the responsibility to provide care for refugee children and create a welcoming classroom environment. A welcoming approach and positive attitudes towards young refugees are essential if schools wish to ensure a successful settlement and integration process for the newcomers (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Successful education programs that meet the needs of refugee students have ESL classes that are multicultural, and provide a learning environment that celebrates diversity.

Another source of frustration is the challenge educators face in delivering an inclusive teaching approach so that all their students, including the ones from different cultural backgrounds, feel included and valued. An inclusive education program engages all students in learning and ensures that adequate support is provided to meet the unique needs of the diverse student population. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) found that school ethos and an inclusive approach to education were important features to support the schooling of refugee children. For young refugees to experience feelings of belonging and care, it is important for other students in their class to understand refugee students’ experiences, which adds another challenge for educators trying to implement an inclusive approach.

Teachers working with refugee students experience frustrations in dealing with the emotional and social needs of young refugees, while trying to meet their academic needs at the same. If refugee students have had experiences of violence or traumatic events, it is crucial for teachers to understand their emotional needs and provide adequate support. However, educators must establish trust and rapport before refugee students

share their experiences and accept assistance (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Teachers are also expected to meet the social needs of young refugees so they do not experience feelings of loneliness and isolation.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter of the report explains all the methods and procedures that were applied in conducting this investigation of the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in school. This chapter is organized into 12 sections: (1) Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Research Design, (2) The Type of Qualitative Design, (3) The Role of the Researcher, (4) Access, (5) Participants, (6) Sampling Method and Sample Size, (7) Consent Process, (8) Data Collection Procedures, (9) Methods for Verification, (10) Data Analysis, (11) Ethical Considerations, and (12) Confidentiality of Information.

#### **Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Research Design**

This research investigated the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in elementary school during their settlement and integration process. My role as a researcher was to investigate and understand those challenges from the perspectives and stories told by the Somali refugee students who participated in this study. As explained by Creswell (1998), this type of research should be conducted using a qualitative research design since it aims to understand the experiences of individuals from their own perspectives and using their own words. A qualitative approach was more suitable than a quantitative approach for this study; the open-ended questions gave the participants the freedom to use their own words in sharing their experiences and stories, as opposed to closed-ended questions, which provide only pre-determined answer options set by the researcher.

The data for this study was collected in the participants' natural setting at the SCW using one-on-one interviews. As emphasized by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011),

the researcher in qualitative research acts as the primary data collection instrument. All of the one-on-one data collection interviews were conducted by me. As stated by Creswell (1998), “writers agree that one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (p. 14). Therefore, my role in the study was to be an active learner and describe the participants’ experiences from their own perspectives, rather than to pass my own perspective and judgment on them.

In addition, since this study investigated a human or social problem (the challenges of Somali refugee students in school), the process of inquiry into the participants’ experiences provided another rationale for employing a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (1998), a researcher chooses a qualitative study because the topic needs to be explored and theories need to be developed to explain the behaviour of participants or their population of study. Unlike studies that explore topics with a wide-angle lens, this research aimed to provide a close-up detailed view of the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in Canadian elementary English public schools.

### **The Type of Qualitative Design**

The design used in this qualitative study employed methods from the multiple-case study and ethnographic research approaches. The rationale for an ethnographic approach relied on three main characteristics of the research. Firstly, the study participants were a group of young Somali refugee students who attend various elementary schools in the GECDsB. As Creswell (1998) explains, when qualitative researchers wish to study the behaviours of a culture-sharing group, they should employ

an ethnographic design. Secondly, the research was conducted in the SCW, a site that is familiar to the participants. A key characteristic of ethnographic research is conducting the study in a natural setting, not a laboratory (Gay et al., 2011). Thirdly, by volunteering in the Homework/Tutoring program offered by the SCW, I was able to meet the participants in person, help them with their school work, and develop a positive rapport with them. After becoming part of their environment, I identified students who fit the selection criteria and recruited them to participate. As noted by Gay et al. (2011), a key characteristic of ethnographic research is that it involves intimate, face-to-face interaction with participants.

The rationale for using a multiple-case study approach is explained by Gay et al. (2011), who show that researchers employ a multiple-case study approach to focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system (e.g., individual students, individual teachers, a school, or a board of education). The students who participated are bounded by a system since they attend schools in the same school board (GECDSB). Also, as described by Creswell (1998), the focus of a multiple-case study is to study a bounded system such as multiple individuals, and develop an in-depth analysis of the multiple cases. The study cases in this investigation were the Somali refugee students who participated in the research.

To understand the experiences of this culture-sharing group of students, a one-on-one interview was performed with each participant. A one-on-one interview is a data collection method employed by both ethnographic and multiple-case study approaches (Creswell, 1998). The one-on-one interviews were conducted in the SCW. The



interview gave the Somali refugee students who participated an opportunity to share their stories and the challenges they experience at school from their own perspectives.

After the data collected was transcribed and organized, I explored themes and patterns that emerged as part of the data analysis process. As highlighted by Creswell (1998), both ethnographic and multiple-case study researchers should be prepared to perform interviews and explore cultural themes that emerge from studying human behaviours and experiences. The themes and patterns that emerged from the data provided a deep understanding of the challenges experienced by this group of Somali refugee students in Canadian elementary English public schools.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

My role as a researcher involved four main stages: volunteering and building connections, recruiting participants, performing one-on-one interviews, and exiting the setting.

**Volunteering and building connections.** My first role in the research setting, the SCW, was to volunteer in the Homework/Tutoring program and build connections with the students. The Homework/Tutoring program provides learning support to Somali students in Windsor. After I presented my research proposal to the SCW organization, access to the two programs (Homework/Tutoring program and Quran program) provided by the organization was granted by its president. I then started volunteering in the Homework/Tutoring program after school. By volunteering and supporting Somali refugee students with their learning, I was able to establish a positive rapport with all the students who attend the program and some of the parents who regularly attend with their children. As my volunteering in the Homework/Tutoring program continued, I

established positive relationships based on trust and respect with the students and the parents who attended.

**Recruiting participants.** Once a connection was established with the children, I identified students who fit the selection criteria for the study and began the recruiting process. The potential participants were given three letters to share with their parents: Letter of Information (LOI); Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Consent form; and Consent for Audio Recording form. The LOI explained the purpose and procedures of the study, while the other two forms asked for the parents' consent to allow their child to participate in the one-on-one interview and for the interview to be audio recorded.

Most of the participants' parents attended the Homework/Tutoring program and I was able to explain the research in person. Those parents provided their consent for their children to participate, and believed this study has the potential to benefit Somali children in schools because they need additional support. Other parents contacted me by telephone to inquire more about the study and I was able to answer all their questions. Those parents provided the consent for their child to participate in the research after their questions were answered. All interested students who assented to participate in the study, and had their parents' consent, were selected to participate in the one-on-one interview. Every student received \$20 in cash as an incentive and appreciation for participating in the study. I provided all the funding for this research using my personal money.

**Performing one-on-one interviews.** Before performing the one-on-one interview with each participant and collecting data, it was important for me to make sure the study participants understood that I respected their feelings and experiences. Before each interview, I shared with the participants that I also immigrated to Canada with my

family and experienced challenges in school when I first came. I expressed clearly that my intentions were to understand the participants' challenges in order for the school and educators to better support them. I also assured them that all the information they shared with me would remain confidential.

I then performed a one-on-one interview with each participant, either during the Homework/Tutoring program or Quran program. All the one-on-one interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The interviews aimed to understand the social, emotional, and academic challenges experienced by Somali refugee students at school, as well as to identify any existing support systems and how these systems function. All the data that was collected from interviews was transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted. As described by Creswell (1998), to establish patterns, the ethnographer engages in gathering information through interviews helpful in developing a portrait and establishing "cultural rules" of the culture-sharing group. My goal was to identify these patterns and themes that emerge from the answers and stories shared by the participants.

**Exiting the setting.** After the interviews were performed, and the process of member checking to ensure credibility of the data was completed, I continued to volunteer in the Homework/Tutoring program for a short period of time. It was important to keep supporting the participants after the data was collected, and not walk away from them immediately. This ethical procedure was necessary to prevent any feelings by the participants that they were just used for a study. The participants needed to feel and know that they were important and valued, and that their participation was greatly appreciated.

## **Access**

The first step in gaining access to the participants was for the research to be cleared by the organizations involved. The first clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Windsor. The research then needed to be cleared by the SCW. The Homework/Tutoring program offered by the SCW runs in two Windsor community centers: Windsor Water World; and Sandwich Teen Action Group (STAG). The SCW also offers a Quran program for Somali students during the weekend. After presenting the research proposal to the SCW, the president of the organization provided the clearance for the study to be conducted during the programs.

With clearance given to conduct the study from all the organizations and committees involved, I began to identify potential participants in the SCW in order to recruit them to participate in the study. This task required me to locate key informants: individuals who could help me identify students who fit the selection criteria for the study. My key informant was the president of the SCW who works with most Somali refugee youth. In describing the process of access, Creswell (1998) explains that the ethnographer has to gain access to the group through gatekeepers (individuals who can provide entrance to a research site), and has to locate key informants (individuals who provide useful insights and information about the group and contacts). In this study, the president of the SCW played the role of both the gatekeeper and key informant, by providing entrance to the research site and helping to identify research participants.

## **Participants**

To select the study participants, I set selection criteria based on culture, gender, age, and language proficiency. My target population was Somali refugee students who

attend English elementary schools in the GECDsB and form a culture-sharing group. The goal was to have a mix of boys and girls to ensure the voices and experiences of both genders were heard. Since the challenges of the youth vary by age, it was also important to maintain a similar age group to better explore and understand the participants' specific struggles. I was interested in recruiting students from Junior-Intermediate classes, Grades 6-8, ranging in age from 12-14 years old. Lastly, the participants had to be competent enough in English to perform the one-on-one interview.

The total number of participants selected for the study was seven: four girls, and three boys. All the children were Somali refugee students attending English elementary public schools in the GECDsB. All the participants were Junior-Intermediate students; four participants were in Grade 8, one participant in Grade 7, and two participants in Grade 6. The students' ages ranged from 12-14 years old. Most of the children lived in a refugee camp before their arrival in Canada; three came from refugee camps in Kenya, and three from refugee camps in Eritrea. Three participants had been in Canada for seven years, three for five years, and one for three years. Four students reported that they spoke Somali and a little bit of Arabic when they came to Canada, while three participants only spoke Somali when they came.

### **Sampling Method and Sample Size**

My goal was to use the selection criteria to identify Somali refugee students within the SCW who may be good participants and informants for the study. According to Gay et al. (2011), when sampling in a qualitative study, the researcher almost always follows a purposive sampling approach. This means that the people who are selected for the study fit the descriptions and characteristics set in the selection criteria by the

researcher. The specific purposive sampling technique used in this study was criterion sampling. The sample strategy was to “identify participants who meet the defined criterion and select a group of five or so participants to collect data from” (Gay et al., 2011, p. 143).

In selecting participants for the study, I relied on my experience, insight, and knowledge about the children to select students who met the defined criteria. The SCW president working with Somali refugee students was my key informant; she provided additional support in identifying children in the Homework/Tutoring program who fit the selection criteria. The goal was to make sure all eligible students were correctly identified and given a chance to participate in the study.

All the students who fit the selection criteria and were interested were invited to participate. The total number of Somali refugee students who participated in the study was 7. As stated by Gay et al. (2011), “qualitative sampling is the process of selecting a small number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals chosen will be good key informants who will contribute to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon” (p. 142). Therefore, having 7 participants is not considered a low number in a qualitative study, and this number was sufficient enough for the purpose of this research.

### **Consent Process**

Once all the students who fit the selection criteria were identified, they were given a Letter of Information (LOI), Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Consent form, and Consent for Audio Recording form to share with their parents. The LOI form explained the purpose and procedures of the research, concepts of confidentiality and privacy, and the

participants' rights. My contact information was included in the LOI form so parents could contact me if they had any questions or concerns about the study. As mentioned earlier in the "Recruit participants" subsection, I was able to meet most of the parents during the Homework/Tutoring program and explained the research in person. Those parents signed the consent forms and gave permission for their child to participate in the study right away. Other parents contacted me by telephone and I answered the questions they had about the research. Eventually, all the consent forms were submitted.

It is important to note that the children's assent as well as their parents' consent was necessary for them to participate in this research. The participants' assent was required since they were too young to give informed consent. However, they were old enough to understand the purpose of the research, its benefits and risks, and what they were expected to do as participants. Therefore, all the children were required to sign an "Assent for Elementary School Children" form to be able to participate in the study. In order to be valid, both the assent by the children and consent by the parents had to be voluntary and informed. The parents and the children were fully informed and had knowledge about all aspects of the research before they provided the consent to participate. Also, the children and the parents had the choice to accept or reject participation anytime during the research without any consequences.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The method of data collection used in this study was one-on-one interviews with the participants. The objective of the one-on-one interview was to identify the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in elementary school from their own stories and perspectives. During the one-on-one interview, the participants were asked to answer

open-ended questions to collect qualitative data. An interview protocol, with a set of questions which I created, was used to guide the interview process. All one-on-one interviews were audio recorded in order for the data to be transcribed and analyzed. The participants and their parents were asked to sign a “Consent for Audio Recording” form to allow the interview to be recorded.

The students were informed before the interview that they could skip any question(s) that made them feel uncomfortable. The participants were also informed that they could stop the entire interview process anytime without any consequences. The goal was to make the students feel comfortable. When any question caused the participant(s) to feel distressed, I skipped to the next topic.

The one-on-one interviews were performed during the Homework/Tutoring program and the Quran program offered by the SCW. Each participant was interviewed in the location they attend, either Windsor Water World or STAG. Conducting the one-on-one interviews during the Homework/Tutoring program and Quran program allowed enough time for each interview to be completed. On average, each interview took about 40 minutes to complete.

**Interview protocol.** The interview protocol I developed consisted of open-ended questions that were used to guide the one-on-one interview. The questions focused on demographic information, socio-cultural experiences, emotional feelings, learning challenges, and existing supports at school. Since most participants were in their early stages of English Language development, the words used in the questions were student friendly, very simple, and easy for them to understand. With sensitive topics that might cause feelings of distress or trigger painful memories for the children, the questions were



carefully developed and worded to avoid unnecessary discomfort to the participants. The answers provided by the students and the stories they shared provided qualitative data. After each interview, the data was transcribed and analyzed.

### **Methods for Verification**

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected from each participant, I employed the process of member checking. After the data was collected and transcribed, I met with each participant to ensure they were comfortable with all the information they had provided. This process also gave them an opportunity to reflect on the content of their interview, to make changes, or elaborate on a specific topic. When they asked for any data to be changed, modified, or removed, I carried out the requests and made the necessary changes.

### **Data Analysis**

After the one-on-one interviews, the data collected was transcribed, organized, and analyzed through a content analysis approach. As described by Gay et al. (2011), the qualitative researcher constructs meaning by identifying patterns and themes that emerge from the data during the data analysis phase. Therefore, the data analysis process started with open coding, then marking units of text with codes, which led to identifying the themes and patterns that emerged.

The first step in open coding was to examine the entire data collected from each participant and begin coding units of text (e.g., sentences, paragraphs, and quotations). Gay et al. (2011) explain that “one of the most frequent data analysis activities undertaken by qualitative researchers is coding, the process of categorically marking or referencing units of text with codes and labels as a way to indicate patterns and meaning”

(p. 469). With an abundance of available codes (e.g., no formal education, social isolation, no help with homework, difficulty making friends, etc.), I grouped similar codes together to form themes (e.g., pre-migration experiences, family challenges with integration, school socialization, etc.). Each theme was then divided into subcategories.

I continued the process of coding and recoding by asking questions, looking for similarities and differences, and making comparisons, to further examine and narrow the themes that emerged from the data. This process assisted in reducing the large amount of data to a small set of themes that described the challenges and experiences of Somali refugee students in school. The data analysis phase generated a deep understanding of the socio-cultural, emotional, and learning challenges experienced by the participants. It is important to note that during the data analysis phase, my goal was to analyze the data by focusing on the perspectives of and stories told by the participants, rather than use my personal lens or feelings to make judgments about their situations.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This section discusses all the ethical concerns that needed to be addressed before conducting this research. It was important to ensure that the children benefitted from participating in this research, and that they were not harmed in anyway. There were five ethical concerns that needed to be addressed: informed and voluntary consent, no harm to participants, reciprocity and beneficence, teacher conducting research, and dual relationships.

**Informed and voluntary consent.** A main ethical consideration in this study was the process of informed and voluntary consent. It was important for the assent provided by the participants and the consent provided by their parents/guardians to be a

process and not a single event; the participants and their parents/guardians were always fully informed throughout the study about procedures and their rights. They were also made aware on a continuous basis that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences.

**No harm to participants.** Another important ethical consideration was to ensure that the participants are not harmed in any way. This research posed no physical, social, or emotional harm to the participants; it did not involve any physical contact with them and did not ask them to perform any tasks they were not comfortable with. During the one-on-one interview, some questions used to explore the children's experiences sometimes caused them to feel uncomfortable for a moment. I took every measure to ensure that the participants' feelings and emotions were respected, and skipped any question(s) that caused distress during the one-on-one interview.

**Reciprocity and beneficence.** The process of reciprocity and beneficence to participants was another ethical issue that needed to be addressed. By participating in this study, Somali refugee students benefited directly and indirectly. Direct benefits include giving the participants who were experiencing loneliness an opportunity to be heard; they shared what was on their mind, and talked about their challenges and experiences to someone. The findings from this research have the potential to benefit the participants indirectly in a number of ways. For example, their challenges will be understood better by educators working with them, which could lead to new teaching approaches and strategies that meet the specific needs of refugee students. For school administrators and the board of education, insights from this research could lead to

developing additional programs that provide support to refugee students with respect to their settlement and successful integration into the school system.

**Teacher conducting research.** Being a teacher in the GECDSD and conducting research with students at the same time presented an additional ethical concern. Some people may feel that educators should not perform research within the schools in which they work. In the field of education, however, scholars always suggest for teachers to conduct research for the purpose of creating new knowledge, and improving teaching practice. As a teacher, I understand how important reflective practice is. Conducting this research has helped me develop a deep understanding of the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students and their unique needs.

**Dual relationships.** Lastly, the aspect of dual relationships needs to be discussed. Since I am a teacher in the GECDSD, it is important to note that I never taught any of the study participants and will never be their teacher in the future. The participants came from different schools in the GECDSD. In addition, I teach primary Grades 1 and 2, and the participants were from the Junior-Intermediate division, Grades 6-8. Therefore, they will never have me as a classroom teacher for any subject, and I will never grade them. Since I do not teach or grade the participants, and they volunteered to participate in the study with knowledge that they can withdraw any time, any concerns associated with power dynamics and dual relationships were eliminated.

The participants were recruited voluntarily; I did not pressure or force them to participate. Whether they participated or not, and whatever information they shared with me, did not influence their school records in any way. Participants had total freedom to act in their comfort zone; they had the right to skip any question(s) that made them feel

uncomfortable and were free to withdraw anytime during the research without any consequences. The raw data I collected was not released to other teachers, administrators, or third parties.

### **Confidentiality of Information**

The participants' identities and the information they provided remained confidential and were not released to anyone. Although the participants were known to me (researcher), their identification information was removed in the transcription of interview data. The data collected from interviews was reported in an aggregate format and the final report did not use any identifying information. This ensured that the final report does not include any information or data that could be traced back to any one of the participants.

All the one-on-one interviews were audio recorded in a digital format and the files were stored in my personal computer which is password protected. All transcribed data and data analysis files were also stored in my personal computer. Once the project was complete, all computer files and audio digital recordings were deleted from my personal computer.

When conducting research involving human participants, strict confidentiality can only be maintained within the extent permitted by law and ethical principles. Therefore, it is important to mention that, as a teacher carrying out research, it was my duty to report any serious concerns or events that threatened the health, life, or safety of any participant or a third party. However, there were no serious incidents to report, and I maintained strict confidentiality of all the data collected from the participants.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

The results of the one-on-one interviews performed with Somali refugee students with regards to their experiences in school are categorized into six themes that emerged from the data they provided: (1) Pre-migration Experiences, (2) Family Challenges with Integration, (3) School Socialization, (4) Learning Challenges, (5) Behavioural Challenges, and (6) Resilience and Passion for Learning. Each theme consisted of subcategories.

#### **Pre-migration Experiences**

The first theme, pre-migration experiences, focuses on the challenges experienced by the children in refugee camps before arriving to Canada. This theme consists of four subcategories: Lack of basic necessities of life; No formal education; Violence and abuse; and Refugee camp memories.

**Lack of basic necessities of life.** The children reported that they had a very difficult life in refugee camps before arriving to Canada. The stories they shared suggest that children living in these camps struggle in receiving the basic necessities of life. The participants had limited access to food, clean water, clothes, shelter, and medical assistance.

All of the children said that they only ate once in the morning and once at night in the refugee camp due to shortage of food. One participant shared, “my Mom used to buy few food and we used to eat in the morning and at night only because the food is a lot of money and you can’t buy that much, and we didn’t have much money.” According to

the children, the mothers did their best in dividing the available food equally between all family members so they could all share the food. However, at times, when the children became very hungry, it placed mothers in difficult situations forcing them to beg for food. One child described this situation as follows:

Whenever I cry for food, my Mom says: 'We don't have enough', she yells at me, like: 'I can't do nothing, are you guys gonna eat me now? I am human' ... I said: NO, I don't wanna eat you, I just want food, I'm gonna die if I don't eat. So she says: 'OKAY, I'm gonna go and beg for food', all the people beg for food.

Dealing with hunger was very difficult for the young children; some of them said they had no other option but to steal food in order to survive. In the words of one child, "sometimes I had to steal because I was hungry, my Mom didn't know, if I see someone eating, I say: Can I have some?, if they say: 'No sorry it's little', I had to steal their food and run." Unsurprisingly, this child was well aware that stealing is bad and inappropriate, as he added, "I only stole because I had to survive, I had to make it, I didn't want to die, I never wanna go back to that, I never wanna have to steal food again."

Some of the children shared sad stories relating to hunger and shortage of food. One participant recounted the following event: "My great great uncle died because of hunger, he used to live with us in the tent, and then I was worried for my life because I always used to be hungry, not enough food, I was scared." Another participant reflected on having to clean some of the food that was made available to his family; he mentioned, "The food they used to give us used to have stuff in it sometimes, like little insects or bugs, it wasn't always clean and you have to take it out." Having limited food, the

children did their best to survive and were well aware that they had to share whatever food that was available to them with the rest of their family members.

The children expressed that people living in refugee camps have to walk to a well and wait in line to get water. One student remembered the following event: “We gotta go to this place and pour water and take turns, we had to wait in a big line, it was like a well ... and we had to carry the water, it was heavy bringing it back.” At times, water was not available in the camp and it was the responsibility of the men to bring water to everyone. One child described this as, “sometimes there’s no water, the well runs out, people will beg each other for water, and like 10 men that are strong they have to go to the city and get water and then give it to everyone.” Some of the participants said it was difficult to get water and sometimes they had to dig their own water. One participant said when he was thirsty, he drank whatever water was available, he explained, “the water was right from the ground, we just pick it up and there’s dirt in it, and we drink it because we need to drink, that’s why Somali people are not healthy, and they need more medical stuff.” Going to the well to get water for the family was the responsibility of the boys and the girls; they both had to wait in line and carry the water back home, and at times, it was very heavy.

The children shared that their families had difficult financial situations and that their parents only had a small amount of money. One participant reported, “My Mom didn’t have that much money to put us in school, she used all the money for food, and so we did not go anymore”, and another added, “My sister got kicked out of school because of not being able to pay the money.” When discussing toys and games that were available for children in the refugee camp, the participants said there were some toys, but



they were too expensive and a lot of people could not afford them. One child remembered when his Mother bought him a toy, “My Mom only bought me a toy once in Eid (Muslim holiday) because she had money that time, she was happy, and then I was happy.” Most of the participants were worried that their relatives still living in refugee camps or Somalia might not have enough money; one of them shared, “my relatives called my Mom and they said: ‘We need money, because there’s no food and we live in a refugee camp’.” Struggling with money in the refugee camp has influenced the way some refugee parents manage their money when they first arrive to Canada; one participant discussed how his mother was careful in spending the money when they first came to Canada because she was afraid it will all be gone, he explained:

My Mom now thinks it is safe to spend money, but first time when she came here she used to keep this money, she says: ‘If I buy this thing this whole money will be like gone’, and she thinks it is still the same like in refugee camp, because it takes time to relax and learn and to say: Here [in Canada] it is safe.

Participants talked about having to wear clothes that were in bad condition and not being able to buy new clothes. One of the children shared: “In refugee camp, no one had nice clothes ... The clothes we have is like ripped or like they’re half ripped.” A number of the students said they never went shopping for new clothes; one child added, “Over there [refugee camp] we wouldn’t go buy like clothes and stuff we need.” Although the children had to wear clothes that were sometimes ripped, they did not raise this issue as much as they did for the problem they had with hunger; it was evident that they were much more worried about having enough food to eat than having new clothes.

All seven participants who lived in refugee camp reported that they lived with their family in a tent: “You know how in Canada houses are from bricks, it wasn’t like that, our house was made with sticks, wood, rocks, and things like that. It wasn’t comfortable because when it rains hard the rain goes in my house.” The children expressed that they didn’t feel safe sleeping in the tents; one student said: “It wasn’t safe back then because we used to sleep outside at the refugee camp on the ground and were scared spiders might eat us or something or snakes and the weather was hot.” The same student added, “my brother was hurt back home; he got eaten by a tarantula spider or something when he was sleeping ... my Dad picked him up on his shoulder and ran with him to the hospital because there wasn’t ambulances.” One child expressed how he never wants to sleep on the ground again in a refugee camp by saying: “I don’t wanna go back to sleeping on the ground, that hurts, the ground is bumpy there’s rocks.”

Lastly, some participants voiced their dissatisfaction with the medical service provided for refugees living in the refugee camp. They have noticed a big difference between the medical service provided to them here in Canada and the medical service in refugee camp. One participant described how hospitals in the refugee camp do not emphasize on the patient’s records as much as Canada does by saying: “there [refugee camp] you don’t have to go to the hospital and if you go to hospital they don’t ask too much about stuff like your birthday, all they have is needles, all pills, that’s it.” All the children reported full satisfaction and happiness with the medical service they are receiving in Canada.

**No formal education.** Although all the participants expressed a passion for education, they all reported that they had limited or no formal school experiences in the

refugee camp before arriving to Canada. One participant shared, “I never went to school in Kenya [refugee camp], I never learning math, English, and other subjects.” Some of the children did not go to school because they did not meet the age requirement; you had to be older than 10 years old to attend school. One girl stated, “I didn’t go to school in refugee camp, school isn’t like here ... If you’re 10 years old or younger you don’t go to school, you stay home ... if you’re older than 10 years you go to school”, and she added, “when we came here I was 7 years old [Grade 1] and that was the first time I went to school.” Some of the children shared that they had to pay to attend school but their parents could not afford it: “I didn’t go to school there [refugee camp], my Mom couldn’t afford school, so we just stayed home.” Others shared that there was no school building in their location in the refugee camp and instead they attended Somali language classes or Quran (Islam’s central religious text) classes that were offered in a tent. One girl explained, “I didn’t go to school there [refugee camp] because they didn’t really start school there, they didn’t start building the school, so little kids were just learning Quran in this tent place.” One boy said he went to school for a bit, but the learning was often interrupted, “the school used to close a lot, and sometimes open only on Saturday and Sundays.”

The few participants who experienced going to school in the refugee camp reported that hitting was used as a form of discipline in the school: “The school that we go to in the camp used to whip us, they hit us if you couldn’t read ... and they don’t bring you to a hospital if you’re hurt, all they do is send you home.” One student explained that in refugee camp students had to be quiet in school during eating time; he said: “When it is time to eat you have to be quiet and stuff, if you don’t, they’re gonna rock

you, they're gonna take a stick and rock you with it." One participant admitted that when he first attended school in Canada, he was scared the teachers might hit him; he did not know that teachers in Canadian schools do not hit students: "I was afraid of the teachers, I thought they would hit me, I just couldn't believe that these teachers wouldn't hit me." Due to his past experiences in the refugee camp, it took this student a long time to finally believe that teachers in Canada will not hit him; he added:

Until like I was here [in Canada] 4 years, and then I stopped thinking about the teachers gonna hit me, and I'm like: Now I know Canada is safe, now I know the teachers will not hit me, and I can tell them about my problems.

Another student pointed out that when Somali refugee students come to Canada and attend school, they have to learn that teachers in Canada do not hit students. He stated, "when new Somali kids come to my school [in Canada], they are scared, they ask me: 'Is the teacher gonna beat me up?', and I'm like: NO, there's no such thing as getting beat up here, you're okay."

**Violence and abuse.** Most participants recalled sad stories or events of family members or relatives being hurt in the refugee camp or during the war in Somalia. One girl shared that her Mom was hurt: "My Mom was like hurt because of the problems that happened in Somalia, she had a bad injury, I don't know what happened." A boy reported that some of his relatives died in the Somali War, and he added, "my Mom's brother, there was the war, and some bad people gave him food, but it is actually not food it has something that makes your stomach fat fat and your stomach explodes, and that's how he died." Another girl stated that her Dad was hurt and shared the following event: "My

Dad was hurt back home, I think he was getting food for our family or something, and these men, he got shot in his leg, and you can see like he has this scar in his leg.”

One of the participants reported issues relating to rape; he recalled the following incident from the refugee camp:

If you're a girl the military boys might rape you ... I know this because it happened to my sister, she almost got raped, and my brother was there with her, my sister and my brother start running and he ran after them, and they came back to the refugee camp and were safe.

The same boy added: “Sometimes they [military boys] might try to come in the refugee camp and rape people in the camp, even though the government said you can't do that.” For the participants, the refugee camp was not a safe place, and one child described it by saying “everything that happens there [refugee camp] is all about violence, there's like never peace.”

**Refugee camp memories.** The participants repeatedly referred back to events that took place in the refugee camp. Although most of their memories were revolved around events that made them sad, some participants brought up few memories that made them happy. One boy reported how his Mom and baby sister were separated when his Mom escaped Somalia to a refugee camp; he explained, “When my Mom escaped from Somalia to Eritrea [refugee camp] she left my baby sister in Somalia with my grandma because she was worried in the camp there is no food ... we talk to her by phone sometimes.” Another participant said: “Most of the time I used to feel alone”, and he continued to say, “I remember when I got sick because there was no water, I was crying

and like if you were there you would get sick often everytime because there is no one that cares about your health.” One participant shared how he got in trouble once for stealing bread to feed his hungry siblings:

They put me in jail [in refugee camp] because I stole a piece of bread, okay okay a whole bag of bread [smiled], and I gave it to my brothers because like even our stomachs, our bones were showing and all that, and my Mom paid to get me out.

It is important to mention that this child went on to express his regret for stealing and said “I would never do that again, I just had to do that because my brothers were very hungry and I wanted to get them food.” Some of the students talked about how the refugee place was a sad place to be in. One participant described the refugee camp by saying, “in refugee camp, no one, no one was happy, no one had a smile, no one had money or nice clothes.” Another child shared the following thoughts on the camp: “There [refugee camp] there’s no peace, I don’t wanna go back to getting hurt almost everyday and sleeping on the ground that hurts ... I don’t wanna go back to my Mom crying, I never saw her happy there.” One student pointed out one aspect of the refugee camp that he felt was positive; he explained:

Something that I liked very much and some people have it here [in Canada] is all of us all the people that were in the camp they used to help each other, they used to be one ... When one person needs help they gather around, everyone pays money and tries to get them food, that’s what I liked.

## **Family Challenges with Integration**

The second theme, family challenges with integration, discusses the various challenges the children's families experienced during their efforts to settle and integrate into Canadian society and culture. This theme consists of three subcategories: Adapting to Canadian culture and system; Fear of the system; and Feeling unsafe.

**Adapting to Canadian culture and system.** The participants talked about how their families experienced many challenges with translations, finding places, transportation, and managing money. One participant shared that a woman used to come help them with translations and other needs, however, he was not happy that she left too early: "A lady came and helped us translate, I liked her, she teach us a lot, but we needed her to stay a little bit more, she thought we knew everything, but we still needed lots of help." One girl discussed how after learning a little bit of English, she tried to play the role of translator to help her Mom: "First it was hard to get to places and translate; I used to help my Mom with translating and going to places." The children reported that their parents had a difficult time finding places; one participant brought up how his mother struggled to make it to doctors' appointments by saying:

When we had to go to the doctor, let's say like Ouellette [street], we don't know the number and all that, it was hard to get it ... Like I remember my Mom missed so much appointments because the time went past so fast because she was looking for the places and couldn't find them.

The children also pointed out how their families had a difficult time with transportation and getting from place to place; most of them declared that their parents

relied heavily on taxi and the bus for transportation. One participant said: “We didn’t have a car, we had to take taxi, my Mom had to pay a lot back and forth, and that’s a waste of money ... Now the Somali community is nice, they give us free taxi ride.”

Another child discussed how he was not happy with having to pay for graduation pictures and field trips because that puts additional financial pressure on his mother; he stated, “I have to pay for grad pictures and field trips, and my Mom worries we won’t have enough money to feed the family.”

**Fear of the system.** Some of the participants explained how they were not happy with Children’s Aid Society (CAS) because they take the children away. It was clear that those participants and possibly their parents had a misconception about the role of CAS. Rather than viewing CAS as a society that helps and supports children and their families, they expressed fears from CAS taking kids away from their families. One participant stated: “My Mom doesn’t want children’s aid [CAS] to take us away from her, she did everything for us, she doesn’t want these people to take her children away from her ... I don’t like how children’s aid takes children.” Another student added that when he came to Canada, his Somali friends told him: “You’re safe here, and if your Mom does not give you that much lunch, tell her to give you more because they will take you away from your Mom.” In one boy’s opinion, most of the children that come from refugee camp end up in a foster home; he said: “This might be a little racist but most of the people that came from refugee camp they get their kids taken away, they get their kids like in a foster home, and I say that’s not safe.” To support his opinion, he continued by sharing the following story:



My friend went in a foster home like right when he came to Canada. His Mom all the money she kept it, she give them lunch and breakfast like only peanut butter and then the school started like: 'What's going on?' And children's aid [CAS] came after them.

The same student passionately continued and proposed a solution to this problem; he suggested the following approach: "I say instead of taking them [refugee children] away so fast, wait until they learn their stuff, wait until their mother learns Canada is safe and like she could pay."

**Feeling unsafe.** Some of the students expressed their worries and fears from being robbed or kidnapped in Canada, something they said they never worried about in refugee camp. According to one child, "it is different to live in refugee camp; there you can just walk around and no one will steal you ... Here in Canada, they steal your house, and if you walk around by yourself you might get robbed." One child talked about an incident with his little brother when they came to Canada: "My little brother was about to get kidnapped here [Canada] ... In refugee camp there's no kidnapping, there they don't take your kid away, they only take your kid away when they want more military." Something else that made some of the students feel unsafe was finding their way home. One boy shared how he always used to get lost when he was walking home: "I got lost from the house like 10 times, I couldn't find my way home ... so I went to a little boy, I was afraid, I said: Can you show me my way home? And he showed me."

## **School Socialization**

The third theme, school socialization, focuses on the socio-cultural challenges experienced by the participants as they integrated into the school system. This theme consists of six subcategories: Difficulty making friends; Communicating with teachers; Teased by students; Afraid of embarrassment; Low engagement in extra-curricular activities; and Isolation.

**Difficulty making friends.** All the participants reported that it was difficult for them to make friends at school because they did not know English and they were very shy. One girl said: “It was hard to make friends at school because you don’t know the language, you don’t know what they [students] are talking about, or what they are saying.” Another girl added: “Making friends was a little hard because I was shy I couldn’t speak at all English.” One participant felt that no one liked him because he did not speak to anyone, which made it more difficult for him to make friends; his words were: “When I came, it was hard talking to my friends because first I didn’t know English, and second, nobody liked me because I never even talked to anybody.” Most of the participants pointed out that when they first attended school in Canada, they were only able to make friends who spoke Somali or Arabic. One girl shared how she made friends: “When I first came I wasn’t able to make friends, I then met kids from Arabic countries, and some Somali, because I could speak same language with them.”

Some children expressed how difficult it was not having friends at school. One participant who was not able to make friends was not happy with how some students laughed at him because he did not know English; he explained, “I couldn’t make friends because first they [students] did not understand me ... Second, whenever I tried to speak

English they used to laugh at me because I did not used to know.” One boy shared how he lost his motivation to go to school because no one talked to him: “I didn’t like going to school because nobody talked to me and nobody knew Somalian, it was hard to speak to teachers.” The same boy added that he even lost motivation for learning because he had no friends: “First I was interested in learning English, until I had no friends and stuff, then I didn’t like to go to school and learn.” It is obvious that having no friends at school affected some of the children’s perceptions and views about school and education.

**Communicating with teachers.** For all the participants, talking to teachers was a challenging task mainly because they could not express themselves in English, and because they were nervous and shy. One girl found it hard to talk to her teachers: “It was hard to talk to my teachers about my problems, some teachers talk English, I couldn’t communicate with them.” Another girl preferred to tell her family about problems she was having at school because she was nervous to talk to the teacher; she explained, “when I had a problem I didn’t talk to my teachers about it, I would tell my family and not the teacher, because I don’t know what to say to teachers, and I was shy and nervous to talk.” One boy did not talk to his teachers about his problems because he thought the teachers would tell the other students and the students would laugh at him; he shared the following thoughts:

I didn’t tell the teacher about my problems because most likely she will tell the children. In my home country if you say to the teacher: Sir I don’t know this, and you say it as a secret, he says it loud like: ‘You don’t know this? ... This kid doesn’t know this’, and everyone laughs. I thought that’s what’s gonna happen to me if I tell the teacher here.

For one participant, it took him a while to become comfortable in talking to his teachers about his needs and problems. He said he felt much better and happier when he started communicating his thoughts to his teacher. Here is how he described his experience in finally opening up to his teacher:

I just started talking to the teachers now about my problems and challenges. It took me 5 years, this is my first year actually talking to the teacher and telling her what's my challenges is, what I need, what I don't need, how my learning is, how my learning is not, I'm the kind of people that learn the easy way smooth, you go easy, step by step, and so I told her that.

**Teased by students.** Some of the participants talked about being teased and called names by other students in the school which made them feel sad, and at times, not wanting to be at school. According to one participant, some students teased him because he was skinny and because he had a difficult time with learning: "Kids call me names, kids call me skinny because I can't get fat, that's how I was born ... and kids call me mental because I can't learn, and that's what I don't like, I hate it." One boy mentioned that some students teased him about his dark-skin colour; he said: "I would be bullied because of my colour, some students used to call me the n word [nigger] just because I'm black." For one participant, working in groups was hard because some students teased him when he did not know how to answer simple questions; he recalled the following incident:

It was hard to work in groups, one time they [students] asked me my birthday, and I didn't even know my birthday, and then they all laughed at me, and when I

come outside [recess] they would tease me about it ... and well I don't know my birthday because there [refugee camp] they don't even care about birthdays.

The same boy added that he did not like being at school because he was always teased for not knowing things: "I didn't like being at school when I came, school is like one of the worst fears I used to have."

**Afraid of embarrassment.** Although the students tried their best to participate in learning and school activities, some of them were afraid to be embarrassed if they did not know things. For example, one participant felt embarrassed because he did not know how to read a chapter book: "Something that really embarrassed me in regular class is reading a chapter book to other students and I didn't get one thing out of it ... and students laughed and teased me because I couldn't read." One participant who goes to another classroom to receive learning support, shared how he benefits from this support, however, he did not like how some students make him feel embarrassed about it: "I go to specialist club [Learning Support] now and that works good for me, but what I don't like is that kids tell me: 'You're in the specialist club', they like to embarrass me and call me names." For one student, working in a group and not knowing what is going on, caused a feeling of discomfort and distress: "When I first came, I did not like to do group work because if I did something bad the other kids might laugh or something because I did not know what is going on and because of the language."

**Low engagement in extra-curricular activities.** Most of the children interviewed did not participate in extra-curricular activities at school. Some participants said they played on the Soccer team; however, the majority of them rarely joined any of

the other school sports. Many of the students did not join extra-curricular clubs (e.g., Chess club, Media club, Art club, etc.) because they felt they were not good enough at them. One participant said: “I never joined any clubs at school because I was not good at them, like Media club and all that.” Another student added, “I didn’t like to join clubs because I was scared about what they’re gonna ask me ... like Chess club, sometimes it includes math, or sometimes it includes your mind, and I didn’t know all that.” For one child, he felt that participating in extra-curricular clubs may embarrass him if he did not know what is going on: “I don’t know the stuff they’re doing in the clubs, so what’s the point, am I gonna go there and embarrass myself?.” Although extra-curricular activities play an important role in helping all students develop their social skills and build social connections, most Somali refugee students interviewed are not benefiting from these activities due to their low engagement and participation.

**Isolation.** Since most of the participants had a difficult time making friends and building social connections at school, they often found themselves isolated from the rest of the student population. One student recalled feeling lonely during nutrition break: “I used to always feel lonely at school because no one talked to me, and when it was nutrition break, everybody is eating and sitting with their friends, I used to be sitting by myself ... that bothered me.” One boy who felt lonely at school said that at times he wanted to stay home and not go to school; he described his situation by saying:

I felt lonely when I first came, I felt like I didn’t wanna go to school, whenever someone says a word to me and it hurts my feelings, I wouldn’t wanna go to school ... and my Mom would say: ‘Why are you not going to school?’, I am embarrassed to tell her why, so I say: Because today we have a test.

For some participants, they felt isolated and lonely during unstructured school times (e.g., recess, nutrition break, lunch, etc.). One child who felt isolated during lunch and recess times said: “It was hard outside during recess or lunch time because there weren’t people I could play with and hang out with them.”

### **Learning Challenges**

The fourth theme, learning challenges, addresses the challenges experienced by the participants with learning in school. This theme consists of five subcategories: Difficulty with literacy and numeracy; Group work; Lack of academic support from parents; Fast transition from ESL to regular class; and Happiness leads to learning.

**Difficulty with literacy and numeracy.** All the participants reported that they had learning challenges in school when they first came to Canada, mainly with literacy and numeracy. Most of them said they are still experiencing some challenges with learning English and Math. One participant said: “I came here in Grade 3, I never knew anything, I went to ESL and they gave me English ... I didn’t know any Math or anything else, I had trouble learning Math, I never knew adding or subtracting.” According to one girl, she was having difficulties with Math because she never learned Math before, and she found some questions in the textbook hard to understand: “I did not like Math when I came because it is hard, and I never did Math before ... Some questions in the textbook are hard to read and understand, and you have to answer, write it, and that.” Another participant pointed out that because he was in his early stages of English language development, he did not understand the words in Math questions, and did not understand what the teacher is saying; he shared the following thoughts on learning Math:

I don't understand harder questions in Math, I don't know what words mean ...

Sometimes it is difficult for me, like if the teacher is explaining the things, I don't understand what she means, or when she is reading the sentence for us I don't understand some words in it, and I don't understand what we have to do to solve the problem.

Some children expressed that people in Canada talk too fast and they cannot understand them: "One of the hardest stuff is that people here [Canada] they talk very fast." They said if students and teachers can talk a little slower, they will better understand what is going on. Most participants reported that they had difficulties learning science because it was something new to them; one boy said: "Oh I hate Science (low voice), Science I am not good at it, in refugee camping there is no such a thing as learning, so there's no Science." It is important to note that most participants enjoyed other school subjects (e.g., Social Studies, Art, Drama, Music, Physical Education, Health Education, Computers, Library, etc.); although most of the students said they never learned these subjects before coming to Canada, they did express that they enjoy learning these subjects because they involved more hands-on projects and activities they could engage in.

**Group work.** According to all participants, working with other students in a group was difficult because they did not understand what was going on, and it was hard to engage in academic conversations with other members of the group. One child explained, "when I first came I didn't feel comfortable working in groups because they always speak English and I didn't know anything about it ... and when the teacher says do something I didn't know what she was talking about." Another student added, "It was



hard to work in a group, when they [students] were working on a project, I didn't know what was going on." Most of the participants reported that they enjoy working in groups because they benefit from the ideas of other students in the group, however, only if they understand the activities they are working on, and they are able to engage in the learning with other group members.

**Lack of academic support from parents.** All the students stated that they receive little or no homework support at home from their parent(s). According to the children, many of their parents do not know English and they are currently learning the language. Most participants also mentioned that their parents did not go to school when they were younger or they had very limited school experiences. One boy discussed how his Mom and Dad cannot help him with his school work because they never went to school: "My Mom and Dad can't help me with school work because they don't know English, they never went to school, never saw school." Another participant shared that her parents cannot help her with her homework because their English is weak; she said: "My Dad speaks a little bit of English, my Mom doesn't speak English, so they can't help me with my work." One student reported that his Mom tries to help him with his homework, but she does not know more than him; he provided the following statement: "My Mom at home tries to teach me but she doesn't know more than me, she doesn't go to school, I got no one to teach me." All the participants expressed how they like attending the Homework/Tutoring program offered by the SCW, because they can receive learning support from volunteers in the program. Although the parents are unable to provide academic support, all the children discussed how their parents always

encourage them, support them, and take them to the Homework/Tutoring program to receive learning support.

**Fast transition from ESL to regular class.** According to all participants, they were placed in ESL classes when they first attended school in Canada because they did not know any English. All the students mentioned that they benefited a lot from the ESL program. However, some of the children wished they could have stayed in ESL a little longer; they felt that their transition to a regular class was too fast and they were not ready for it. One boy described how he was sad because he moved from ESL to regular class too quickly: “Something I don’t even like that made me cry is that if you stay here [Canada] for 2 or 3 years, you’re moved from ESL to regular class ... They put me too fast in regular.” The boy added, “Sometimes in regular class the work is too hard for me, and if I don’t understand, I’m not learning, I’m just staying there.” For one participant, working in a group in regular class was difficult because he felt the other students were smarter or knew more than him; he explained, “I’m not good with working in groups in regular class because students think very professional, they think very high levels, they think like Level 4 [A average], they’re gonna talk like high English that I don’t even understand.” The main reason some of the participants did not like the fast transition from ESL to regular class, is that they were doing work in regular class that they felt was too hard for them. To avoid this problem, one of the participants suggested: “They should not put you into regular class too fast.”

**Happiness leads to learning.** Something very interesting that was brought up by some of the participants is that when they felt happy, they wanted to learn, and were able to learn more. One boy said: “If I’m not happy, I can’t learn”, he added, “For me to learn

like I need happiness in my life, if you don't have happiness, if you don't have good thoughts, you can't learn." One child shared how it makes him very happy to show his classmates that he can read: "I'm happy to read easy books to the class, I like to go up there and show them who I am, but if it's a huge hard book I can't show them who I am." It is important for educators to know that some learning activities may trigger painful memories for refugee students, making it difficult for them to focus on the learning. For example, according to one participant, watching a movie about slavery during Black History Month triggered some memories that made him sad; he described how he felt:

I don't like history because you know black something day [Black History Month], it's all about the slavery day, we watched a movie about slavery, I was crying, me and another kid who came from refugee camp in Africa ... that kinda annoys me because it reminded me of my pain, so I feel bad for them, I cry, and it brings my memory back.

### **Behavioural Challenges**

The fifth theme, behavioural challenges, discusses the behavioural issues that were common amongst the participants and the approaches the students used to resolve conflicts. It is important to mention that the boys reported much more behavioural issues than the girls did. The boys were often in conflict situations with other students in the school that occasionally led to fighting or hitting. The girls shared some incidents relating to isolation, teasing, or name calling, however, these incidents never led to fighting or hitting. This theme consists of three subcategories: Boys often in trouble; Conflict resolution; and Voices not heard.

**Boys often in trouble.** Most of the problems the boys were involved in happened during unstructured school time (e.g., recess, lunch, nutrition break, etc.). The boys reported that most of the problems started because other students called them names, made fun of them, or isolated them. One boy explained why he had problems with some students outside: “Most of the problems happened outside during recess because there’s a lot of people, and since I didn’t know English some students used to swear at me.” He added, “Whenever they [students] didn’t let me play Soccer, that bothered me when I went back to class to learn.” Another boy offered an explanation for why Somali refugee students are often in trouble in school when they come to Canada; he said: “If Somali students are in trouble and like hands-on, they don’t really know what’s hands-on ... In Kenya [refugee camp] if people call you names or push you, you just push them back, and a fight starts.”

**Conflict resolution.** Most of the participants reported that they tried to solve their own problems at school, or asked a friend to help them. They expressed that they did not feel comfortable talking to their teachers about their problems because they were shy and they could not explain themselves in English. One girl recalled how some students used to say things about her that bothered her: “People [students] tried to bully me and cause problems, like they talk about you, they say: ‘She’s look ugly, she’s bad, she don’t know how to speak English’ ... I told my Somali friend, she tried to help me”, she continued to explain why she did not tell her teacher, “I didn’t tell the teacher about my problems, I couldn’t, my English was horrible, I couldn’t speak the English, I couldn’t tell her for help.” One boy, who experienced some challenges in solving his

problems at school, said that when he was upset he did not know how to express himself to his teacher, and he tried to run away from school:

When I was upset I tried to run away from school because I wanted to go home, I didn't like them [students] making fun at me, and they used to push me around and stuff ... Whenever I tried to tell the teacher I didn't know how to do that, and whenever they do something to me and a problem happens, I get in trouble, I didn't like it, so I wanted to go home.

One participant reported that in refugee camp kids used to fight a lot, and he tried to explain that when Somali refugee students come to Canada, the only way they know how to solve their problems is by fighting back. He shared the following statement: "Where I came from [refugee camp] little kids fight, the only way to get food, to have respect, is fight back ... the only way to protect your property is fight back ... kids there are used to that", and he added, "that's why when you see Somali kids with scratches all over, it's not their Mom who did that to them or their brothers, it might be their little baby sister, but most likely it's the fights they went into." All the boys who were involved in hands-on problems acknowledged that fighting is not the way to solve problems, and they expressed how they are trying their best to communicate their problems to their teachers.

**Voices not heard.** Some of the participants wanted their voices to be heard more at school. They wanted educators to understand their past experiences, why they get into trouble, and why they resolve conflicts the way they do. One boy discussed why he used to get into trouble; he said: "I used to get in a lot of troubles because the kids used to make fun of me, and I did not like it, and then I used to fight with them", he then added

his thoughts on how he thinks the teachers could help, “the teachers could help by telling the kids to not like bug the kid who don’t know English.” One of the participants thought it is important for educators trying to help Somali refugee students to know that in refugee camp there is no such a thing as: ‘If you hit first, you are in trouble’; he explained, “when I get in a fight I get suspended because I hit first, and in my country there’s no such a thing as you hit first ... Over there, someone calls you name, you have right to hurt him.” Another participant expressed how he does not like when his name goes into the computer when he gets in trouble; he was worried that these records will prevent him from getting a job in the future:

You know how like whenever you fight they put you in the computer, I don’t like that, why do they put it in the computer? That’s what I would ask ... Last time a kid hit me and I hit him, and then they put it in the computer for me, and then like my Mom tells me: ‘Whenever they put it in the computer you can’t get a job’.

One child said that administrators and teachers are always there to help students with their problems; however, he felt that there are many things that they might not know about Somali refugee students. He suggested that Somali refugee students should keep getting opportunities to share what is on their mind, so educators trying to support them could understand them better:

I think the principal and vice principal and Child and Youth Worker (CYW) before they send a Somali student home or suspend him, see what he have in mind, what bothers him ... To help Somali students they should keep giving them a chance to share what’s on their mind.

All of the children shared that other students in the school could play a major role in helping Somali refugee students with their transition to the school system. One boy did not like how some students encouraged other students to fight, instead of helping them end the problem; he suggested, “other students could help by not saying: Fight, fight, fight, because that’s what they say ... even if this person is about to get hurt and they’re choking him they still say: Fight, fight, fight.”

### **Resilience and Passion for Learning**

The sixth theme, resilience and passion for learning, describes how the participants are resilient and have a strong passion for learning, regardless of the many challenges they encounter. This theme consists of five subcategories: Feeling of appreciation; Passion for learning; Perseverance; Feeling of success; and Worry about family.

**Feeling of appreciation.** The participants expressed how they truly appreciate what they have in Canada now. They explained how their families are very happy to be in Canada because there is enough food and water for the entire family, it is much safer than the refugee camp, and they are able to attend school. One boy described an incredible exchange of emotions that took place between his family members when they first arrived to Canada:

I was scared of Canada, and then when I came first time here, I couldn’t even walk, I was shaking, and then like all I see is my Mom, I never saw my Mom happy and laugh for once, and then she laughed, her first time laughing, and then

my Dad was so happy, and then we all cried, and then my Mom said: ‘We’re safe now’, and then I started learning English.

The children discussed how they are very happy because their basic necessities of life are being met in Canada; something they were very thankful for. One girl said: “In Canada we get enough food for our family, and there is nothing to wreck our houses or anything, so we thought it was a good place here.” Another girl added:

Since coming to Canada, my life is a lot better, because over there [refugee camp] there weren’t like enough food for me, we wouldn’t like go buy clothes and stuff like that ... In Windsor [Canada], we could go to Toy Store and get stuff we need, and there’s clean water and everything.

Due to experiences with shortage of food in refugee camp, one participant shared how his Mother always talks to him and his siblings about respecting food and not throwing it away:

My Mom always says: ‘Some people have peace and they throw their food on the ground’ ... She always tells us this: ‘If you go to Canada, if you make it, never throw food, because you will always need it, and if you don’t need it, there’s some people that need it’ ... Even now in Canada she always tells us that.

All the participants reported that they feel much safer since coming to Canada, and they do not worry anymore about not having food, water, clothes, or getting hurt. One boy stated: “I feel my life is better since coming to Canada, because you might get hurt in refugee camp because of the gun shots and that.” One girl explained how her life in Canada is much better than it used to be: “My life is much better in Canada because



now I have friends, I live in a safe place, safe neighbourhood, I have good water, good food, enough money.” Another girl described how she does not worry anymore since coming to Canada: “In Canada everything is safe, there’s no problems that I worry about, I was always worried back home.”

The children also expressed that they are very happy to be able to attend school in Canada because they like to learn and make friends. One girl who never had the opportunity to go to school in refugee camp said: “Since coming to Canada, my life is better because here you can just go to school, I didn’t go to school there [refugee camp].” For one participant, his life has become much better since coming to Canada because he is going to school, making friends, and meeting people that care about him; this is how he feels about being in Canada:

Since coming to Canada my life is way way way better, I got freedom here, I got food to eat, and I got school for free, and I got friends here, and people that care about me, and I am healthy like I take all my shots and all that, and I am very happy to be here.

**Passion for learning.** When discussing learning experiences with the participants, it became apparent that they have a strong passion for learning and being at school. One girl expressed her feelings about school: “I like being at school, you can play with your friends, talk, speak, read, learn, it’s like awesome, that’s what made it fun.” For one participant, being a good reader and capable of doing stuff is his dream in Canada; he explained, “sometimes I’m just sleeping and I’m dreaming about me reading ... when I was back home [refugee camp], my dream was ‘get food’, here [Canada], my

dream is ‘learn’, learn to read, be capable of stuff, get a job”, he added, “I wanna learn and I’m gonna be capable of doing something that I wasn’t capable of doing last time.”

Although the children expressed interest in learning all school subjects, learning English seemed to be a priority that topped their list; an emphasis that came up repeatedly. One participant explained why learning English was a priority for her: “I was interested in learning English when I first came because everyone here [Canada] they talk English and if you don’t know English you don’t understand them.” The participants felt that knowing English was the key to achieve well academically, and to develop social connections at school.

**Perseverance.** Despite all the difficulties the participants experienced, they had a very positive attitude and were determined to do well in school. For example, one boy shared how when he first came to Canada he did not know anything, but he kept trying hard to learn: “When I first came here [Canada] I didn’t know anything, and then I started trying harder and harder to learn, and I started learning better.” One girl who did not know any English when she first came, said that she kept trying her best, “when I first came I didn’t know any English, it was tough, but I was trying my best.” One participant described how sometimes he has to encourage himself: “It was hard to like get back from the dark and to the light, sometimes I even get stuck in the middle, and I have to encourage myself ... Sometimes I had to tell myself: You’re gonna be Okay.”

**Feeling of success.** All the participants believed they are successful students because they made a lot of progress since coming to Canada. They were able to discuss the things they are doing well, and were cognizant of the areas they need to improve in. One boy felt he is a success because his English is getting better: “I think I am a success

at school because I got better in English and other subjects.” Another participant was also proud of the progress she made in learning English; she said: “I feel I am successful at school because I know more English, read, write, do my work, talk to the teacher.” One girl was excited about making lots of progress in Math; she explained, “I feel I am a success in school because now I know Math, like subtract, adding, multiplying, divide, and I know Science ... I have many choices what I wanna be when I’m older.”

One of the participants felt he is successful in school because he now understands what the teachers are trying to tell him, and he is becoming more familiar with his personal ways of learning; he shared the following thoughts:

I feel I’m a success in school, now I understand what the teacher is trying to tell me, I understand here [Canada] is safe, I understand Canada is all about learning, everyone has to learn ... Now I understand that like I’m not crazy or mental, this how I learn, going slow, step-by-step.

Some children felt they are successful in school because they can now communicate with other students and share their ideas and thoughts. One girl described how she is now able to engage in discussion with her friends when they are working in a group: “I feel I am a success in school because now I can talk to my friends, and I get along with them, like when we are working in a group we share our ideas and listen to each other.” One of the participants shared that he is happy because his parents are proud of his progress; he reported: “My parents are happy with how I am doing with school.”

**Worry about family.** Some of the children were worried about the safety and well-being of family members or relatives still living in refugee camp or Somalia. One

participant said: “I worry about the safety of family members and relatives back in Kenya [refugee camp] and Somalia ... I worry about them being safe and stuff.” Another participant added: “I feel bad when I see people wound others and something like that ... I feel bad for the people if a war happens back home.” One girl was worried that her relatives in refugee camp would not have enough food or water: “I am worried about them [relatives] a little bit because I don’t know if they have enough food or water or if they’re good or safe.” One participant who was not happy with life in refugee camp, made a plea to help more people get out of there into safer locations:

What I’m happy about is, if you’re gonna tell something to the government [Canadian] or anyone, I would say: Like thank you and keep getting people out of that place [refugee camp], and it’s not one of the safest places ever ... In refugee camp, no one cares about you, only your Moma and your Dad.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and challenges of Somali refugee students in Canadian English elementary public schools. The exploration into the participants' experiences at school showed that they faced challenges with settlement and integration into the school system and culture. This chapter provides a discussion around the three research questions. First, I discuss the challenges the students experienced with settlement and integration. Then, I discuss how some existing support systems assisted the newcomers in school. I follow by recommending strategies and approaches for helping Somali refugee students achieve their dream of education in Canada. This chapter is organized into seven sections: (1) Experiences and Challenges with Settlement and Integration, (2) Existing Support Systems, (3) Helping Somali Refugee Students Achieve their Dream of Education, (4) Critical Reflection of Qualitative Researcher, (5) Scope and Limitations for the Study, (6) Areas for Future Research, and (7) Conclusion.

#### **Experiences and Challenges with Settlement and Integration**

The results of the one-on-one interviews performed with Somali refugee students with regards to their experiences and challenges in school were categorized into six themes: (1) Pre-migration Experiences, (2) Family Challenges with Integration, (3) School Socialization, (4) Learning Challenges, (5) Behavioural Challenges, and (6) Resilience and Passion for Learning. In this section, each theme is discussed with the intent to provide descriptions and explanations for the challenges and experiences reported by the participants.

**Pre-migration experiences.** Somali refugee students and their families experienced many challenges in refugee camps before arriving to Canada. Life in the refugee camp was very difficult for the children because they had limited or no access to the basic necessities of life; they did not have enough food, water, clothes, or adequate shelter. Most of the students did not attend school in the refugee camp. The few children who did attend school recalled that hitting was used as a form of punishment, and that their education was often interrupted because the school closed a lot. Most of the children remembered incidents where family members or relatives were hurt as a result of the violence that took place either in the refugee camp, or in Somalia. The students had lots of memories from the refugee camp; mostly memories of events or situations that made them feel sad, worried, or scared.

The pre-migration challenges and experiences of Somali refugee students led to issues and problems that emerged when they first attended school in Canada. For example, they came to school with limited or no formal education experience, they experienced challenges in establishing social connections, and they worried about family members or relatives still living in the refugee camp or in Somalia. These discoveries were similar to the findings of Pine and Drachman (2005), who explained that many issues may emerge for refugee students in their host country, which include concern for those left behind, adjusting to a new way of life, and post-traumatic stress for people who witnessed violence. These findings suggest that Somali refugee students need lots of emotional, social, and academic support when they first arrive to school in Canada as a result of their past experiences. Without this type of support, it would be difficult for them to make any academic gains.

**Family challenges with integration.** The children as well as their families experienced difficulties during their efforts to integrate into Canadian society. The participants' families faced challenges in adapting to Canadian cultures and systems; they struggled with translations, transportation, and managing money. Nilsson et al. (2012) found in their study that many Somali refugee families also experience economic hardships in their host country. Some of the children and their parents were worried about CAS. Rather than viewing CAS as a society that helps and supports children, they feared that CAS would take children away from their families. At times, some of the students and their families felt unsafe in Canada; they worried about being robbed or kidnapped, something they were not used to in refugee camp.

It is common for refugee families to experience challenges with integration in their host country. According to the Australian Government: Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2013), when refugee families move and resettle, they may be unfamiliar with urban environments and the western way of life, and they do not have any experience in managing their budget. Such findings indicate that Somali refugee students and their families not only experience pre-migration challenges, but they also experience many post-migration challenges with settlement and integration in their host country. It is important for educators working with refugee students to be aware of and understand the challenges experienced by refugee families in order to meet the unique needs of the children.

**School socialization.** The participants experienced many socio-cultural challenges at school. It was difficult for them to make friends because they did not know any English. This suggests that Somali refugee students need support from educators, or

other students, to make friends at school. It was not easy for the students to communicate with their teachers because they were nervous and shy, and they could not express themselves in English. It is important for teachers to know that when refugee students have problems or experience difficulties, they tend to remain quiet about it because they have a difficult time explaining themselves. Therefore, educators working with refugee students have to initiate conversations with them if they wish to understand their needs and challenges. At times, some of the children did not want to be at school or learn because other students teased them and called them names. Other studies have discussed how such frustrations at school affect refugee students' perceptions and views about education. According to Oikonomidou (2009), the students' thoughts and feelings about education are shaped by their experiences at school.

The children tried their best to participate in learning and other school activities, however, some of them were afraid to be embarrassed if they did not understand what was going on. Most of the participants did not engage or participate in extra-curricular activities at school because they felt they were not good enough. Some of the participants played on the soccer team because they felt they were good at soccer, however, most of them said they never tried to join other sports teams because they are not good at other sports. The children never joined any extra-curricular clubs (e.g., Chess Club, Media Club, Art Club, etc.) at school. As a result of difficulties making friends and very low participation in extra-curricular activities most of the students often found themselves isolated from the rest of the student population. These discoveries were consistent with other studies; for example, Loerke (2009) discussed how refugee children experience feelings of isolation, resulting in negative emotions and feelings about



themselves. These findings advise that Somali refugee students need to be encouraged by their educators to participate in extra-curricular activities in order to help them establish healthy relationships, build social connections, and not feel isolated at school.

**Learning challenges.** As a result of having limited or no formal education in refugee camp, the children experienced many learning challenges when they arrived to school in Canada, mainly with literacy and numeracy. Some of the participants are still experiencing challenges with English and Math, after being in Canada for approximately 5 years. One of the reasons Somali refugee students experience difficulties with learning English and Math is having limited or no formal school experience in those subjects before arrival to Canada. For Somali refugee students to achieve well academically and be successful at school, they need lots of support in developing their English language skills. This is a common finding amongst researchers working with refugee students; Taylor and Sidhu (2012) emphasize the importance of providing refugee students with English language support in school, especially when they arrive to their host country with no educational experiences.

Working with other students in a group was difficult for the children because they did not understand what was going on, and were not capable of engaging in academic conversations with other students. The children felt more comfortable working with students who speak Somali or Arabic because those students were able to translate for them. For Somali refugee students to participate in group activities, it is helpful for them if they are grouped with students who speak their language, Somali or Arabic. In addition to all the challenges with learning at school, the children receive little or no homework support from their parents at home. Most of their parents do not know

English and have never attended school, and lack the knowledge or school experience to provide any academic support. Some of the children are academically more experienced than their parents. Other studies have also noted that many refugee parents/caregivers are unable to provide homework support to their children; for example, Ferfolja (2009) discussed how refugee parents are unable to provide educational support to their children because they possess limited or no English.

All the participants were placed in ESL classes when they first arrived to school in Canada because they did not know any English. Although the students benefited a lot from the ESL program, they thought their transition to a regular class happened too fast, and wished they were able to stay in ESL a little bit longer. The children felt that the learning in regular class was too hard for them and they were not ready for it yet. Some of them did not want to be at school or learn when they were sad, worried, or teased by other students for not knowing things. It is important for educators and school administrators to determine if refugee students are capable of handling the work in a regular class before making the transition from ESL. By placing Somali refugee students in classes and programs that meet their unique needs, they will make greater academic gains.

**Behavioural challenges.** The boys experienced many more behavioural challenges than the girls did at school, and the conflict situations the boys were involved in occasionally led to fighting or hitting. The problems the girls had with other students never led to fighting or hitting; however, the girls were sometimes isolated, teased, or called names by other students during unstructured school times (e.g., recess, lunch, nutrition break, etc.). Most of the problems for the boys also happened during

unstructured school times as a result of other students isolating them, calling them names, or making fun of them. It is important for educators working with Somali refugee students to identify such problems and resolve them before the conflicts escalate to fighting.

One explanation for why the boys often end up in trouble for fighting could be their past experiences; the boys were used to fighting and hitting as a method of resolving conflict in refugee camp. Aggressive behaviours by boys could also be a sign of psychological distress, something important for educators to be aware of. As Nilsson et al. (2012) explain, the psychological distress experienced by refugee children can be exhibited by aggressive behaviours. This suggests that Somali refugee students need guidance and support in resolving their conflicts at school. Other studies have also noted that refugee students need support in dealing with their frustrations. As emphasized by Anisef and Kilbride (2001), programs need to be developed to help newcomers deal with stress and frustration associated with cultural adjustment and challenges experienced at school.

The children wanted their educators to understand them and hear their voices. They felt that their voices were not heard enough at school; for example, they felt educators did not understand their past experiences, and why they were often in trouble. As a result, when resolving conflicts, the children did not seek help from their teachers because they could not express themselves in English, and felt that their teachers might not understand them. Instead, they tried to solve their problems on their own, and sometimes they asked their friends for help.

**Resilience and passion for learning.** Somali refugee children have a strong passion for learning, and are resilient in dealing with the many challenges they face. The children shared stories of resilience, proving they were able to bounce back when they failed, and had the strength to overcome their challenges. Due to struggles in refugee camps, the children truly appreciate what they have in Canada; they are happy because they have enough food for the entire family, they attend school, and they feel safe. Although the students were happy to escape refugee camps and resettle in Canada, some of them were still worried and concerned about the safety and well-being of family members or relatives still living in refugee camps or Somalia. Despite all the challenges they face, the children have a positive attitude, and are determined to do well in school. It is important to note that the Somali refugee students interviewed were self-reflective; they were able to discuss things they did well in as well as the things they needed to improve on. Since coming to Canada, the students have made lots of progress in school, which gives them a feeling of success and self-confidence. This suggests that Somali refugee students need their educators to believe in them, and provide them with encouragement to build their confidence.

### **Existing Support Systems**

Although the participants experienced different types of challenges with integration, they shared that they received support from a number of sources. This section describes the support systems the children relied on when dealing with their challenges, and how these systems function. Educators may find these support systems useful, and could rely on them to help new Somali refugee students in their classes. The students reported that they received support from four sources: students who speak

Somali or Arabic, physical education and hands-on activities, sports teams, and the SCW Homework/Tutoring program.

**Students who speak Somali or Arabic.** The children reported that they received lots of support in school from students who speak the Somali or Arabic languages. It is important to note that the participants expressed that they received support from their teachers whenever they needed help. However, they described how their friends who spoke Somali or Arabic translated for them, explained what the teacher was saying, and helped them understand what they were learning. One girl who received support from a friend who spoke Arabic said: “There was a girl, she was Arabic, she was helping me at school ... something I needed she tell me, something I don’t know, she tells me in Arabic how to say it, how to do it.” Another participant said: “When I had problems or I need help, I ask my friends and they just help me”, and another child added, “I feel more comfortable asking my friends for help.”

**Physical education and hands-on activities.** The participants discussed how they liked to participate in Physical Education (Gym) class, and some of them enjoyed school subjects that involved moving or hands-on activities (e.g., Drama, Art, Dance, and Music classes). One participant, who likes playing sports, said: “I like gym the best because I like running a lot and playing sports.” One boy explained how playing sports in Gym class helped him build a connection with other students in the school; he said: “Gym helped me because I was good at sports and the kids liked that I was good at stuff and I wasn’t just a person who just not play sports and that’s boring.” Another participant added that Drama and Gym classes were important because they kept the students active and healthy: “I like only gym and drama, most of these objects are about

being active, gym you have to be active and healthy.” Teachers working with Somali refugee students should provide them with opportunities to engage in physical education and hands-on learning activities, as a way of helping them build self-confidence and establish social connections.

**Sports teams.** Most of the participants, boys and girls, played on the soccer team for their school. They described playing on the soccer team as one of their best experiences in school because it gave them self-confidence, helped them make friends, and they enjoyed it. One participant explained how being on the soccer team made him feel happy and proud of himself: “It was fun being on the soccer team, it helped me make more friends, and it made me feel like I am good at something because kids used to say: ‘You’re never gonna be good at anything’.” One girl discussed how being on the soccer team gave her the opportunity to exercise: “Being on the soccer team was good, it helped me with exercise.” She added that playing sports helped refugee students to deal with their problems, saying: “it helps refugee students to play sports when they come ... If they have problems, maybe if they play, they will forget, they will see the people, and be happy.” For one boy, playing on the school soccer team was one of the best experiences in his life because he was able to show his talent and his team work abilities; this is how he felt about being on the boys’ soccer team:

It was fun being on the Soccer team, it helped me because I could show my talent, show what I’m good at, show my team work ... and soccer is not about writing, it’s not about how smart you are, it’s all about what can you do, and team work ... and people that were there they were my friends, and we would all gather around and say like: ‘We could do it, We could do it’, we were having fun, I never had

fun that much ... and I would say like keep getting more sports out, keep encouraging kids to try out for sports.

Educators and sports coaches are advised to encourage Somali refugee students to try out for sports teams at school because being on a sports team will help them make friends, feel good about themselves, and develop social skills.

**SCW Homework/Tutoring program.** All the participants attended the Homework/Tutoring program offered by the SCW. The children discussed how they benefited from this program because they received lots of educational support. One participant shared: “One of the biggest programs that helped me was the Somali community homework club.” One boy added, “My Mom brings me to the Somali community homework club that’s what helps me a lot.” Educators and school administrators could inform new Somali refugee families in their school about this program so they may benefit from its services.

### **Helping Somali Refugee Students Achieve their Dream of Education**

The school community, including educators, administrators, and students, has a major role to play in supporting the successful integration of Somali refugee students into the school system. In this section, I recommend eight strategies and approaches for helping Somali refugee students achieve their dream of education in Canadian English elementary public schools: create a welcoming environment, understand the specific needs, extensive literacy and numeracy support, provide emotional and mental support, utilize students and teachers who speak Somali and Arabic, encourage participation in extra-curricular activities, hear their voices, and professional development for teachers.

**Create a welcoming environment.** Since Somali refugee students experienced many difficulties and hardships in refugee camps, they need to feel safe, welcomed, and cared for by educators working with them. In order for these children to successfully integrate into the school system, it is essential for teachers working with them to offer a welcoming approach and have positive attitudes when dealing with their challenges. Teachers working with refugee students should strive towards establishing a classroom environment that promotes multicultural respect and tolerance. Another important priority for teachers is to teach about the different cultures and traditions that represent the students in their class. Educators should promote the different perspectives, ways of knowing, and unique ideas that refugee students can bring to the classroom to enrich the learning process. It is also important for other students to understand the experiences of refugee students in their classes so they could help them experience feelings of belonging and care.

**Understand the specific needs.** Since Somali refugee students come to school with many pre-migration and post-migration challenges, it is best for educators working with them to understand their specific needs as an initial step. With knowledge of the students' needs, teachers could develop comprehensive student profiles that accurately describe the academic, social, and emotional needs or challenges of each child. If student profiles are well developed, teachers could apply specific strategies or approaches to meet the specific needs of each child. Student profiles should be shared with all educators working with Somali refugee students, for the purpose of providing proper support to meet their specific needs.



**Extensive literacy and numeracy support.** As a result of having limited or no formal education in refugee camps, Somali refugee children arrive to Canadian schools with weak or no literacy skills in English, as well as in their mother tongue. For example, some of the participants in this research, who had never been to school in the refugee camp, entered primary grades in Canada without any previous academic experiences. These children need extensive support in literacy and numeracy in order to make academic gains and meet provincial standards. ESL programs are a great way to help Somali refugee students learn English. However, if students undergo a fast transition to regular classes, it might lead to frustration and disengagement from learning. Therefore, it is important for refugee students to keep receiving meaningful support and establish strong literacy and numeracy foundations before they go through a transition to a regular class.

**Provide emotional and mental support.** Due to past experiences in refugee camps and exclusion from peer groups at school, many Somali refugee students start to feel lonely and isolated. The feeling of not belonging is central to putting these students at risk. Educators working with refugee children may not be aware of many of the emotional challenges experienced by the students. In order for Somali refugee children to experience a successful integration into the school system, it is very important for their educators to be aware of their challenges and provide them with adequate support. Educators could provide the children with care and support, and help them with solving their problems and making friends at school.

**Utilize students and teachers who speak Somali and Arabic.** Daily communication with teachers and other students is one of the biggest challenges for

Somali refugee children when they arrive to school in Canada. The participants in this study relied heavily on other students in the school who spoke Somali or Arabic to help them translate and understand what they were learning. Educators should utilize other Somali or Arabic students in the school by asking them to help Somali newcomers with translations, explaining rules and procedures, and helping them make friends at school. Some participants received translation support from teachers who spoke Somali or Arabic. One of the children who received support in translation from a teacher in his school who spoke Somali said: “I think they should bring like a lot of Somali teachers to help Somali refugee students.” Schools with a high population of Somali refugee students could look into hiring teachers who speak Somali or Arabic to help the newcomers with translations and understanding the school culture.

**Encourage participation in extra-curricular activities.** Playing on sports teams and joining extra-curricular clubs at school could be a great way for Somali refugee students to build their self-confidence and integrate into the school culture. With proper monitoring and guidance, extra-curricular activities could provide an excellent opportunity for Somali newcomers to practice their social skills, learn how to build healthy relationships, and use problem solving skills to independently resolve conflict. Somali refugee students may not try out for sports teams on their own, or participate in extra-curricular activities, because they might feel they are not good enough. Educators should encourage them to try out for different sports teams and to participate in extra-curricular activities at school, because it will help them in developing many social skills and building social connections.

**Hear their voices.** Somali refugee students in this study who experienced some behavioural challenges expressed that their voices were not heard enough at school. Since these children went through many challenges in refugee camps and continue to face difficulties with integration, they may be experiencing feelings of distress that are leading to behaviour issues. If these children are given enough chances to share what is on their mind, then educators could understand them better and find out the reasons behind their actions and behaviours. This will help educators provide Somali newcomers with better support. Also, by providing Somali refugee students with opportunities to be heard, the children may feel more relieved because they shared their problems with someone.

**Professional development for teachers.** Due to the unique experiences and needs that Somali refugee students bring with them to Canadian classrooms, it is important for teachers working with them to receive training and professional development on the best education practices to ensure the newcomers are successfully integrated into the school. Teachers may not have the background knowledge or necessary training to meet the emotional, socio-cultural, and academic needs of refugee students. If educators are provided with professional development opportunities geared toward understanding the experiences and unique needs of refugee students, they will be better prepared to support refugee newcomers when they arrive to their classrooms. With the increasing number of refugee students arriving at Canadian schools, it is also imperative for teacher education programs to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching refugee students and understanding the challenges the children come to school with.

## **Critical Reflections as a Qualitative Researcher**

As an educator, this research has helped me understand the experiences of Somali refugee students. As a result of this investigation, I have developed a deep understanding of the pre-migration and post-migration challenges experienced by young refugee students. I have learnt that it is essential to meet the emotional and socio-cultural needs of refugee students before they are able to make any significant academic gains. I now understand how important it is to listen to the voices of refugee students and to give them opportunities to share what is on their mind. By hearing their voices and understanding their experiences, educators can provide them with an educational program geared towards meeting their specific needs. I am also interested in and looking forward to sharing my learning with my teaching colleagues so they can benefit from the findings and use them to support their teaching program.

As a researcher, this study has allowed me to focus on students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges as they integrated into Canadian elementary schools. It allowed me to develop a deep understanding of the challenges Somali refugee students experience by listening to their own perspectives and views. By volunteering in the setting or on site, I was able to support the participants with their learning, and it helped me establish a positive connection with them. I treated the children with respect and care, and valued their feelings. The students trusted me and had a clear understanding that the purpose of this research was to support their school experiences. Therefore, they were comfortable sharing their experiences with me during the one-on-one interviews, and they opened up about their challenges and concerns. This study has encouraged me to perform more research around refugee students and their experiences with settlement

and integration, with the intent to shed light on their challenges so they may receive additional support.

By performing this research I was able to fulfill a long time dream that I had growing up. This dream started when I immigrated to Canada with my family about 20 years ago. I was in Grade 7 at that time, and I was enrolled in an ESL program in the same school where I am currently a full time teacher. My first couple of years in Canada was very difficult; I experienced many challenges at school with settlement and integration. The challenges I experienced were mainly with being bullied, teased, and called names by other students. In addition, it was difficult to integrate into the mainstream school culture while trying to fulfill my parents' expectations of maintaining our home culture. These feelings, memories, and experience, remain with me today. My goal was to become a teacher so I could help all students achieve their dream of education and a successful career. As a result of my past experiences with integration, my dream was to perform research around the challenges of refugee children with the intent of putting those challenges and experiences into an academic perspective. While performing this research, the one-on-one interviews with the participants and the information they provided had a big impact on my thoughts and feelings. For example, during one of the interviews, one of the participants was explaining how he used to always be hungry and looking for food and water in the refugee camp. At that moment I was not able to hold back my tears, so I had to put my face down and cover my eyes with my hands so the child would not see. After that interview, I had conversations with my family about not wasting food or water, and I felt a strong sense of appreciation for having all the basic necessities of life available for everyone here in Canada.

## **Scope and Limitations for the Study**

This study has two limitations. The first one deals with the accuracy of information provided to me by the participants during each one-on-one interview. Due to the sensitivity of some of the topics, there is the possibility that some participants did not provide accurate stories or experiences. They might have been afraid that sharing their stories would have negative consequences, or lead to them being perceived or treated in a different way. They might have felt the need to protect themselves by not sharing their personal stories and experiences. Although I established a positive rapport with all the participants and was able to build a relationship with them based on trust and respect, this is a limitation that I had no control over.

The second limitation deals with the ability to generalize the results beyond the context of this research project. The participants that were selected for the study may have unique cases and differ from the rest of the Somali refugee student population. Therefore, this sample of students might not represent the Somali refugee student population accurately, and it may not be possible to generalize results to all refugee students from a Somali background attending English elementary public schools in the GECDSB.

## **Areas for Future Research**

The findings in this study showed that most participants experienced isolation, loneliness, and frustration with integration into the school system and school culture. There is a need for a study to determine some effective ways of helping refugee students deal with issues of stress, mental health, and frustration associated with settlement and integration into school in their host country.

Although there are currently some programs in place in schools to help refugee students with their settlement, it is not clear how effective these programs are in preparing the newcomers for success over time. Therefore, there is a need for a study to determine the progress refugee students make, and how they develop and grow, over time. This type of research could help determine the effectiveness of current programs, and whether additional programs need to be developed to better support the newcomers.

Educators working with Somali refugee students may have other refugee students in their classroom who have arrived from different countries throughout the world. The experiences, challenges, and needs of all these newcomers may be the same or may be different. One important study is to determine if the integration experiences of Somali refugee students are different from or the same as the integration experiences of refugee students from different countries and backgrounds. This will help educators in understanding and dealing with the specific and unique needs of their refugee students who come from different countries.

This study focused on Somali refugee students' experiences and challenges in elementary schools. Some Somali refugee parents at the Homework/Tutoring program expressed during informal conversations that Somali refugee students in high schools are experiencing some challenges with integration. There is a need for a research to investigate the experiences and challenges of high school Somali refugee students in Canadian schools.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges and experiences of Somali refugee students as they integrate into Canadian English elementary public

schools. The method of data collection in this study was one-on-one interviews. A total of seven Somali refugee students who attend elementary schools in the GECDSB were interviewed. The exploration into the participants' experiences revealed that they faced challenges with integration into the school system.

**Question 1.** With regards to my first research question, Somali refugee students experienced various socio-cultural, emotional, and learning challenges at school. The children and their families experienced many challenges in refugee camps before resettling in Canada. Life in the refugee camp was very difficult for the children because they had limited access to food, water, clothes, and adequate shelter. Most of the students in this study did not attend school in the refugee camp and arrived to Canadian schools with limited or no formal education experience. These pre-migration experiences led to issues and problems that emerged when the children first attended school in Canada.

When the children and their families arrived in Canada, they faced challenges adapting to Canadian cultures and systems; they struggled with translation, transportation, and managing money. When the children started attending school, they experienced many socio-cultural challenges. It was difficult for them to make friends because they did not know any English. The children often felt isolated because they had no one to talk to or play with.

As a result of having limited or no formal education in the refugee camps, the children experienced many learning challenges in school. The main challenges were in developing literacy and numeracy skills which are foundational for all learning in English Canadian schools; some of the participants were still experiencing difficulties learning



English and Math after being in Canada for approximately 5 years. Working with other students in a group was difficult for the children because they were not capable of engaging in academic conversation with other group members. Since the children did not know any English, they were all placed in the ESL program when they first arrived to school. Although this program benefited the students in many ways, some children felt they were transferred to a regular class too quickly and that they needed more time in the ESL program.

The boys experienced more behavioural challenges than the girls did at school, and the conflicts the boys were involved in occasionally led to fighting or hitting. According to the boys, other students used to tease them, make fun of them, and isolate them, causing the problems to happen. The boys wanted their educators to understand them more and hear their voices. They felt educators did not understand their past experiences or why they were often in trouble. The problems the girls encountered with other students never led to fighting or hitting. However, the girls were sometimes isolated, teased, or called names by other students.

Despite the many difficult situations they have been in and the challenges they faced at school, Somali refugee children who participated in this study had a strong passion for learning. They were resilient in dealing with the many challenges they faced. The children shared stories of resilience and showed signs of strength in overcoming their challenges. They wanted to do well in school and had high hopes for their future.

**Question 2.** With regards to my second question, the participants discussed how they sometimes received support to deal with their challenges from a number of sources. They reported that they received lots of support in school from students who speak the

Somali or Arabic languages, mainly with translating and understanding their school work. The children liked to participate in Physical Education (Gym) class, and some of them enjoyed school subjects that involved hands-on activities which allowed them to be active (e.g., Drama, Art, Dance, and Music classes). Most of the participants played on their school soccer team, and they described it as one of their best experiences in school because it gave them self-confidence and helped them make new friends. The students also received lots of educational support from the Homework/Tutoring program offered by the SCW.

**Question 3.** With regards to my third question, members of the school community, including educators, administrators, and students, have a major role to play in supporting Somali refugee students with their integration into the school system, and in helping them achieve their dream of education. Since Somali refugee students experienced many difficulties and hardships in refugee camps, educators working with them need to create a welcoming environment that helps them feel safe, welcomed, and cared for. It is also best for educators to become familiar with their pre-migration and post-migration challenges to understand their specific needs and provide them with adequate support.

As a result of having limited or no formal education in the refugee camps, Somali refugee children need extensive support in literacy and numeracy when they arrive to school in Canada. ESL programs are a great way to help them learn English. However, if students undergo a quick transition to regular class, it might lead to frustration and disengagement from learning.

It is essential for educators to provide Somali refugee students with emotional and mental support to help them deal with their stress and frustrations caused by their past experiences in refugee camps and feelings of loneliness and isolation at school. Teachers could also give support by locating other students and teachers in the school who speak Somali and Arabic and asking them to help Somali newcomers with translations, solving problems, and making friends at school.

Somali refugee students need to be encouraged by their teachers and school coaches to play on sports teams and participate in extra-curricular activities at school, as this will be a great way for them to build self-confidence, make friends, and integrate into the school culture. It is also imperative for educators to hear the children's voices so they can understand what is on their minds and be able to provide them with meaningful support when helping them with their challenges.

Educators working with Somali refugee students may not be familiar with the many pre-migration and post-migration experiences the children bring with them to school. It is essential for educators to be provided with training and professional development opportunities on the best education practices for supporting refugee students with successful integration into the school system.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Student Interview Guide

##### Section 1: Demographic/Background

1. When did you come to Canada?
2. Who did you come to Canada with?
3. What languages do you speak?
4. Did you go to school in your home country?

##### Section 2: Socialization

5. Do you have friends in school? Who are they?
6. Are your friends from Somalia?
7. Are any of your friends not Somali? Where are they from?
8. Is it easy or hard to make friends at school?
9. Does anyone help you make friends at school?
10. Do you feel lonely at school?
11. Who do you work with for school projects?
12. Are you having problems talking with your friends or teachers?

##### Section 3: Emotional Feelings

13. Do you like being at school?
14. Do you miss being back home? What do you miss?
15. Do you think of anything that happened back home that makes you sad?
16. Was anyone from your family hurt or injured back home?
17. Do you worry about the safety of family or relatives back home?
18. Do you feel your life is better or worse since coming to Canada?
19. Is anyone from your family having a hard time in Canada?

##### Section 4: Learning challenges

20. Are you interested in learning English at school?
21. Are you having trouble learning math? science? reading? writing?
22. What school subjects do you like the best? why?
23. What school subjects do you not like? why?
24. Do you like group work in your class?
25. Do you feel that you are a success in school?

##### Section 5: Existing Supports

26. Who helps you with your learning at school when you need help?
27. Does anyone help you with your homework at home?
28. Do your teachers know your challenges at school?
29. Do you talk to any teacher about your problems at school?
30. How do you feel your teachers can help you at school?
31. How do you feel the principal or vice principal can help you?
32. How can the CYW (Child Youth Worker) help you?
33. How can other students in the school help you better?

34. Are you in any extra-curricular clubs or teams at school? (Math club, Chess club, Technology club, Art club, Music club, Sports teams, etc.). Do you like them?
35. Are there any programs at school that you find helpful?
36. Any further comments?

## Appendix B



### **Letter of Information for Consent to Participate in Research (One-on-One Interview)**

Title of Study: An Investigation of the Challenges Experienced by Somali Refugee Students in Canadian Elementary Schools

Your child is asked to participate in a research study conducted by me, Mohamad Ayoub, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The results of this study will be contributed to the thesis I am developing.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me at [ayoub5@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ayoub5@uwindsor.ca), (519) 982-5047.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in elementary public schools in the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB). This study will explore the socio-cultural, psychological, and learning challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in school. This study also aims to identify existing support systems that lead to a successful settlement and integration of refugee newcomers.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If your child volunteers to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will ask questions regarding his/her experiences and challenges at school. It will last about 50 minutes and will be performed during the Homework/Tutoring program or Quran program offered by the Somali Community of Windsor. The one-on-one interview will be audio recorded.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There will be no potential risks to any participants. Your child may skip any question(s) he/she does not feel comfortable answering.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The findings from this study will lead to a better understanding of the experiences and challenges of Somali refugee students. The study results will encourage programs to be developed by individual schools and/or the board of education to support the successful integration of Somali refugee students.

#### **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Your child will be paid \$20 in cash as compensation for participation.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. All data will be kept in a computer that is password protected and will be deleted once the project is finished.

Each participant will be identified by a research participant number and a corresponding pseudonym on all transcripts and recordings. There will be no connection between the interview data and the individual's true identity. The digital audio recordings will be erased at the end of transcription.

## PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose if your child can participate in this study or not. If you allow your child to be a participant in this study, you are free to withdraw your child at any time without any consequences of any kind. Your child can also refuse to answer any question(s) he/she does not feel comfortable with and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw your child from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The feedback of the results to you and your child will be in June 2014. I will contact you during that time and provide you with a print summary of the study findings. I will also provide you with an electronic copy of the study findings if you wish to have one. The GECDSD and the Somali Community of Windsor will also have a copy of the study results.

Date when results are available: June 2014

## SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

## RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent to allow your child to participate in this study at any time and choose for your child to discontinue participation without any penalty or consequences. If you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

## SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C



### Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Information and Consent Form

(One-on-One Interview)

Title of Study: An Investigation of the Challenges Experienced by Somali Refugee Students in Canadian Elementary Schools

Your child is asked to participate in a research study conducted by me, Mohamad Ayoub, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The results of this study will be contributed to the thesis I am developing.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me at [ayoub5@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ayoub5@uwindsor.ca), (519) 982-5047.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in elementary public schools in the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB). This study will explore the socio-cultural, psychological, and learning challenges experienced by Somali refugee students in school. This study also aims to identify existing support systems that lead to a successful settlement and integration of refugee newcomers.

#### PROCEDURES

If your child volunteers to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will ask questions regarding his/her experiences and challenges at school. It will last about 50 minutes and will be performed during the Homework/Tutoring program or Quran program offered by the Somali Community of Windsor. The one-on-one interview will be audio recorded.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There will be no potential risks to any participants. Your child may skip any question(s) he/she does not feel comfortable answering.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The findings from this study will lead to a better understanding of the experiences and challenges of Somali refugee students. The study results will encourage programs to be developed by individual schools and/or the board of education to support the successful integration of Somali refugee students.

#### COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Your child will be paid \$20 in cash as compensation for participation.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. All data will be kept in a computer that is password protected and will be deleted once the project is finished.

Each participant will be identified by a research participant number and a corresponding pseudonym on all transcripts and recordings. There will be no connection between the interview data and the individual's true identity. The digital audio recordings will be erased at the end of transcription.

## PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose if your child can participate in this study or not. If you allow your child to be a participant in this study, you are free to withdraw your child at any time without any consequences of any kind. Your child can also refuse to answer any question(s) he/she does not feel comfortable with and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw your child from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The feedback of the results to you and your child will be in June 2014. I will contact you during that time and provide you with a print summary of the study findings. I will also provide you with an electronic copy of the study findings if you wish to have one. The GECSB and the Somali Community of Windsor will also have a copy of the study results.

Date when results are available: June 2014

## SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

## RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent to allow your child to participate in this study at any time and choose for your child to discontinue participation without any penalty or consequences. If you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

## SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study **An Investigation of the Challenges Experienced by Somali Refugee Students in Canadian Elementary Schools** as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent(s)/Guardians(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix D**



**Assent for Elementary School Children**

I am a student researcher, and I am doing a study on the challenges of Somali refugee students. I would like to ask you some simple questions about the challenges you have at school. My questions are going to be about your learning challenges, making friends at school, and your feelings about coming to Canada.

When I am finished talking with all the kids who agree to be in my study, I will write a report on what I have learned. My teachers will read it, and it might be put in a book or a journal, but no one will know who the kids are that answered my questions.

I want you to know that I will not be telling your teachers/tutors or parents or any other kids what you answer. The only exception is if you tell me that someone has been hurting you. If I think that you are being hurt or abused I will need to tell your parents or someone else who can help you. Otherwise, I promise to keep everything that you tell me private.

Your mom and/or dad have said it is okay for you to answer my questions on the challenges of Somali refugee students. Do you think that you would like to answer them? You won't get into any trouble if you say no. If you decide to answer the questions you can stop answering them at any time, and you don't have to answer any question you do not want to answer. It is entirely up to you. Whether you decide to answer any questions or not, I will give you a small prize of \$20 in cash when you leave. Would you like to try answering the questions?

I understand what I am being asked to do to be in this study, and I agree to be in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

**Appendix E**



**Consent for Audio Recording**

Research Participant Name:

Title of the Project: An Investigation of the Challenges Experienced by Somali Refugee Students in Canadian Elementary Schools

I consent to the audio recording of interviews of my child.

I understand that this is a voluntary procedure and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the audio recording be stopped. I also understand that my child's name will not be revealed to anyone and that audio recording will be kept confidential. Digital Audio recordings are saved by number only in a computer that is password protected.

Digital audio recordings will be deleted after transcription and verification.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the audio recordings will be for professional use only.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Parent or Guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Research Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)



## VITA AUCTORIS

Mohamad Ayoub was born in Kuwait in 1981. He lived in Lebanon, his families' country of origin, until the age of 12, and then immigrated to Canada where he settled with his family in Windsor, Ontario.

Mohamad earned a Bachelor of Applied Science: Honours Electrical Engineering (Co-operative Education) in 2006, and a Bachelor of Education in 2007, from the University of Windsor. In 2014, he earned a Master of Education from the University of Windsor and started his PhD in education at the same university.

Mohamad presented this thesis at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference in 2014 where his thesis was nominated for a prestigious award. This thesis was also nominated for the prestigious 'Governor Medal Award' at the University of Windsor.

His passion for education research comes from his past experiences and challenges with integration and from his daily experiences and observations as an educator. Mohamad has a great interest in performing research that allows the students' 'voices' and 'perspectives' to be heard.

He is currently a full time teacher with the GECDSB and loves to teach children of all ages.