

LITERACY NARRATIVES OF PRE-LITERATE AND NON-LITERATE ADULT REFUGEE
WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the Literacy Narratives of Pre-Literate and Non-Literate Adult Refugee Women in the Fargo-Moorhead community. Personal interviews were conducted to gather data. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using three predetermined categories. Findings from the categories: motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials are presented in the results section. Through analysis, five main motivators have emerged in the findings of the four literacy narratives: being committed to learning, being a role model for their kids, getting better employment opportunities for supporting the family, getting a GED, and being competent in English. The participants' literacy narratives show that the commitment, energy, and effort to develop one's literacy plays a vital role in the lives of pre- and non-literate learners once they arrive in the United States. This study's participants are largely motivated to increase their literacy skills to be more self-sufficient and become independent individuals in their community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Working with pre-literate and non-literate adult refugee learners has been an ongoing learning experience for me. This study of pre-literate and non-literate adult English language learners started in 1999 when I was ten years old, but I just didn't realize that until 2016. As my mother's interpreter, I didn't have the academic vocabulary as a child to know that my mother would be labeled by the academic system as a "pre-literate" English learner. However, through my course work, and working with adult refugees in the Fargo-Moorhead community, I learned that my mother was a pre-literate learner.

Pre-literate learners are defined by Shaughnessy (2006), as learners "who speak a language whose written form is rare or does not exist." Unlike my mother being a pre-literate learner, the term non-literate and semi-literate are other terminologies used to describe adult refugees within dominant literacy programs. Non-literate learners are defined as learners who are "formerly illiterate) speaks a language that has a written form but they have not learned to read or write it." Semi-literate learners are defined as having some "formal education and are able to read and write at an elementary level" (13). The above terms are words I will be using in this paper to signify the different types of learners who took part in this study.

Being a pre-literate learner, my mother depended on me to help her all the time as her interpreter. While I was happy to help my mother with anything she needed, it was a big responsibility for a ten-year-old like me to try and figure out what nurses and doctors were saying to us, and then interpreting all that information back to my mother and vice versa. At times, I did not know how to explain to doctors what my mother was trying to say because I was not knowledgeable or fluent enough in English myself. As time went by however, and I learned more through school my role as an interpreter became easier each day because I was

understanding English much better. Through my exposure with refugee in the community, I started to realize how important it is to be an interpreter for my mom, and what it would be like if she did not have any of her kids to help her understand information. As I became older and moved into high school and college, my mother was always on my mind, but not just her alone. Seeing my mother struggle with English made me realized that there are many refugee like her who are also facing the same struggle and something needed to be done. However, I did not know who to talk to or where to begin.

In 2009, after enrolling in North Dakota State University (NDSU), I still didn't know how to reach out to other adult refugees in the community, aside from helping my own mother. However, during my sophomore year at NDSU, my advisor introduced me to a volunteer program called Project English. Project English helps newcomers to the United States learn to speak English through computer-based learning and volunteer assistance. After working with Project English for one year, I was encouraged to use Project English as a site for a possible topic for my senior capstone project. During my junior year, after working with Project English for a year and a half, and gathering field notes on the participants, I was able to come up with a project. I focused on "The Effectiveness of using Rosetta Stone Program to teach Adult Refugee English," which allowed me to get a glimpse into the lives of adult refugees and their struggles to learn the English language with the Rosetta Stone Software.

After graduation, and taking a year off from school, the decision to attend graduate school came up. During my second semester as an MA student, I started working with refugee adults at Giving + Learning (G+L). G+L is a one-on-one tutoring community literacy program that I have been working at as a participant observer for one and half years. Although G+L is different in its one- on-one set up from most classroom based literacy programs in the nation, it

shares the same goal: to work on improving adult refugees' literacy. G+L is based at two different sites: in-home tutoring and, weekend tutoring. For the first few months, I worked as a tutor. I enjoyed helping learners because I saw them facing the same struggle to learn English that I also encountered when my family first moved to Fargo. As a child, I struggled to learn the English alphabet, hold a pencil to write properly, and read and write in English, which are the same challenges refugees are facing.

Since last summer, I have been coordinating the weekend program. I facilitate weekend sessions by asking volunteers and learners to sign in, providing them with the appropriate books or materials needed, and answering any questions the tutors may have. When new tutors come in, I guide them through approaches that they should use with our learners. When new learners come in, I use our books to test their communication and speaking, reading, and then writing levels. Additionally, I take notes about learners' strengths and weakness during sessions and keep track of the books they use.

This research aims to understand how adult refugees in the Fargo-Moorhead area, who are non-literate in their native languages, learn English. My study will identify participants' English fluencies and experiences with English before they came to the U.S. and how they have changed since moving to the U.S. In addition, the research will also identify refugees learning experiences. Motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning will be considered as part of the refugees learning experiences.

I aim this study to gather the literacy narratives of adult refugee women, taking into consideration their previous educational backgrounds and their motivations to continue learning English for so many years. The participants in this study are four women who have resided in the U.S. for varying numbers of years. All women are adult refugees from different countries and are

all pre-or non-literate in their languages at the time of the study. It is worth noting the participants gender because it was not only relevant in their home countries or refugee camps (where many refugees call home), but it is also relevant in the U.S. In their article “Adult English language learners with limited literacy,” Biglow and Schwartz (2010) discuss available research on pre-literate and non-literate adult English learners. They consider gender to be a major factor for limited or no literacy or education for many refugees, claiming that, “gender may influence opportunities for formal schooling and literacy development...schooling for girls is not a family or societal priority” (2). Indeed, many adult refugee women come to the U.S. with no or very limited formal education, and literacy levels are mostly due to societal gender roles. Furthermore, once the participants came to the U.S., their gender still largely defined their experiences. As mothers, they felt pressure to place highest priority in taking care of their children and keeping their own education secondary at most. Some of the women joined literacy programs shortly after they arrived in the U.S. and some joined later, but in all of their cases, they didn’t take English language classes full time. As a result, years later, sometimes decades, the adult refugee women in this study have limited acquisition of the English language.

1.1. Research Question

To understand the journey and struggle of pre-literate and non-literate adult refugees in literacy programs, who are working very hard to improve their English skills, one research question will be used to guide this study: What do the literacy narratives of four adult refugee women tell us about non-literate learners’ motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning?

1.2. Methodology

I am using literacy narrative as my methodology because pre-literate learners tend to communicate best through storytelling. According to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives web site, “A literacy narrative is a personal story about *reading* or *composing* (or teaching reading and composing) in any form or context.” Pre-literate learners might prefer storytelling over a more analytical interview because in storytelling the “interaction is personal, engaging, and immediate” (Miller and Pennycuff 37). In addition, the participants in my study come from oral culture traditions, which means that their main means of communication is story telling.

I helped the learners co-construct their literacy narratives as a specific approach within qualitative, interview research. Our collaborative question-response built a story about their experiences. This format helped them talk about their literacy experiences in a new way that worked well for them and for the purposes of this study.

Pre-literate learners are often studied in the context of a single class or short period of time (e.g. Benseman, Biglow, and Perry), but I am trying to understand their lifetime relationship to literacy. Having four literacy narratives is the appropriate number for my study because having one story alone is too small and has limited analytical context. Conversely, five or more stories could hinder the depth that these four stories convey. Four literacy narratives from two different East African countries provide a reasonable range of experiences, and will also allow me to provide richer analysis of my participants. Due to the rich content of the stories and the targeted questions I have for the participants, my study can help clarify the motivations, strategies, and material needs for adult learners.

1.3. Study Overview

This paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two is the literature review, which provides an overview of scholarship that deals with pre-literate adult refugees. The literature covers learners who have lived in the U.S. for 5-7 years and 10-17 years. Chapter Three present the methodology of this study including design, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four is a synthesis of the findings around motivation, preferred materials for learning, and learning strategies adult refugees apply while learning to read and write. Chapter Five includes the conclusion and discussion of the limitations of having one-on-one weekend tutoring at the G+L literacy program in Fargo, North Dakota.

To fully understand the phases adult refugees, go through as they seek literacy education within literacy programs, understanding the literature regarding working with this population or their needs is vital. An overview of the literature will serve as a base for finding the appropriate answers about learners' struggles and finding the best practices to assist them in their quest for learning English.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review regarding adult refugees' literacy covers learners who have lived in the U.S. for several years. However, what I find interesting is that there is no scholarship on adult refugees who have been in the U.S. for 20 years. It is intriguing that adult refugee learners who have been here for 20 years are still seeking English learning services to develop their language ability, yet the scholarship ignores that fact. In this literature review, I highlight points in the scholarship that help us understand the learners. I also point out gaps in research that I address in this current work. There appears to be a reasonable amount of research on working with pre-literate adult refugee learners. However, much of this research is limited solely to classroom teaching techniques and methods. Although this work is helpful in that context, it doesn't carry over to community work with adults. The fact remains that research on community literacy practices amongst pre-literate adult refugees is lacking, possibly due to the limited resources available to the refugee populations. This is not to say that this kind of work is absent. I was able to identify four categories of research relating to pre-literate and non-literate adult learners: print literacy awareness, learners' motivation, tutor training, and learners' responses and needs. A good amount of research has been done on each one of these categories.

2.1. Print Awareness: Why is It Important to Adult English Language Learners

The first category of literature discusses the importance of print literacy awareness. Kurvers et al. defines print awareness as one's understanding that print has a purpose. The authors argue that when adult ELLs develop print awareness, so they can start to understand the links between spoken and written language. Developing print awareness is essential because it allows people to recognize that print "carries meaning, is organized in a specific way, and that there are rules for how one reads and writes" (865). Adult ELLs should be able to learn why

acquiring print awareness is vital as it can act as a qualification for learning to read, and it can be viewed as an essential foundational skill that individuals must possess to become proficient readers. Without print awareness, developing other literacy skills such as “letter sound correspondence, spelling, and comprehension” can be a difficult process especially for adult ELLs (864-867). It is, thus, much more difficult for adult learners to acquire reading, writing, or any other skill if the learners do not understand the value of print literacy.

While Kurvers et al. talk about the importance of print awareness and becoming print literate, Biglow and Schwarz focus on the lack of print literacy and some of the reasons behind it. Biglow and Schwarz, like Kurvers et al., point out that adults with limited print literacy or proper schooling confront various challenges in their daily lives and their determinations to learn English. Some of the reasons for the lack of print literacy among adult English learners include “political circumstance, poverty and cultural expectation” (2). Political circumstances can range from authoritative policies to more extreme circumstances such as a civil war, genocide, and famine, which can trigger the shutting down of schools and forced relocation of adults, therefore reducing and interrupting proper education.

Biglow and Vinogradov, similar to Biglow and Schwarz and Kurvers et al., advise that using terminologies such as *illiterate*, *nonliterate*, and *pre-literate* by instructors to describe adults without print literacy “delimit individuals according to something they lack” (121). The authors argue that people lacking print literacy bring with them variety of characteristics that may better describe them than single characteristic that they don’t possess. Adult emergent readers come to the classroom with “rich oral traditions from their past” (122) that can be applied by educators as they work with ELLs especially as teaching activities. Individual narratives and “folktales” can be implemented to increase adults’ literacy abilities as they learn English (122).

In my research, most of the scholarship refers to the learners as illiterate, nonliterate, and pre-literate. I use this terminology because I do not consider it a permanent label on the learners but a phase in their learning process.

When working with adult refugee learners who do not have formal education, it is highly important to find the appropriate materials to support these learners. Providing the right learning materials will not only make their learning process efficient, reliable, and effective, but will allow tutors and teachers to assist them easily with information. However, when it comes to understanding what to use when teaching adult refugee learners, there is very little attention to materials learners use in the scholarship. Two articles I found highlight materials that can be implemented when working with pre-literate learners. Biglow and Schwarz, suggested “commercial materials,” when teaching pre-literate adults (13). However, they argue that commercial materials are very limited and “teacher materials” are essentially the best to be applied in the classroom with pre-literate learners. Perry recommends using homemade materials such as flashcards, but does not specify what the other homemade materials could include.

Teaching materials form an important part of English literacy programs. Different educators rely extensively on a wide range of resources to support their students’ learning. Because having the right materials can enhance the learning ability of adult learners, I focus a section of this thesis on discussing materials used by pre-literate learners. Looking through the scholarship above, it is important to learn something about pre-literate students’ past experience with literacy. Some pre-literate learners have never lived in a world surrounded by print. Students who come from non-literate settings may not realize the way print functions, or they may not recognize its essential importance for their survival in print cultures. I am interested in finding out when, how, and through which materials the four participants developed their print

orientation. This body of scholarship is helpful as I work with my participants during the one-on-one interview because I would have some basic knowledge regarding their encounters or lack of encounters with print and what impact that could have on them.

2.2. Preparing, Supporting, and Becoming Qualified to Teach Refugee Adult Learners

Due to the issue with print literacy, training tutors and teachers effectively is important in order for both learners and tutors to work together. Becoming educated for adult refugees is a crucial attainment, since literacy being one of the most important empowerment tools for becoming an American and living in the U.S. However, working with non-literate adult refugees who lack formal education within adult educational programs (AEP) provides educators and practitioners with many challenges.

Perry and Hart contend that tutors/teachers working with adult ELLs in ESL or AEP programs might not be well outfitted to address the particular needs of adult refugees (120). AEP recruiting often relies on volunteers with minimal qualifications, experience or preparation in “language acquisition theories, effective methods for teaching language and literacy or other pedagogical content knowledge” (111). This in turn can affect adult refugee’s learning processes within literacy programs. Although training for volunteers working with adult ELLs can be provided by an individual AEP, the authors point out that such training “may have limited effectiveness in part because it is so short, 15-20 hours,” and sometimes no training is offered (111). Besides this training, more preparation on how to work with adult refugee learners who are pre-or non-literate is an essential improvement.

The work of Perry and Hart is helpful in this study because it allows me to emphasize the importance of knowing the students’ educational backgrounds. Pre-literate students often come from societies that are used to learning through folktales, fables, and other oral stories that

contain morals. We need to be respectful to them as they share their literacy narrative within whatever fashion works for them. Additionally, we should pay attention and slow down during the interviews with participants because pre-literate learners progress slowly in literacy and other language instruction.

2.3. Adult Refugees Need and Effective Responses

As literacy tutors and teachers eagerly reach out to find the appropriate means of working with adult refugees, the battle for finding best practices that can be implemented toward the teaching of these adults continues. In “Adult Refugee Learners with Limited Literacy: Needs and Effective Responses,” Benseman found that adult learners often lack “reading and writing skills in their first language” (94). Due to the lack of skills, progress for pre-literate adults is gradual and “painstaking,” requiring the teacher to, “carefully scaffold skills, build on small steps previously achieved, and constantly revise in order to consolidate the initial gains” (101). By revisiting tasks over and over, adult learners are able to not only retain missed concepts previously taught, but also have the opportunity to apply as much as they have understood in the classroom with their teacher and other students.

When teaching non-literate adults English, Benseman suggests working with tutors who speak the learners’ mother tongue or Bilingual Tutors (BLT). BLTs were found to be effective in working with refugee adults because they were able to “[help] identify and resolve issues in learners’ wider lives, providing instant clarification of language-related difficulties, acting as an intermediary generally between the tutor and learners, picking up subtle cultural signals from learners and motivating and affirming individual learners” (99). Despite the fact that BLTs are important figures in shaping adult refugee literacy skills and development, they also experience moments of frustration in their role as a result of learners’ “difficulties in achieving their goals”

(100). Benseman argues that when pre-literate adult learners do not know how to read and write in their first language, so learning a second language can be a complex task to accomplish. This is true because adult refugees lack skills from their L1 to apply to the new language being learned.

It is important to note that most scholarship such as Benseman, Perry, and Biglow looks at a single point in time or a single program over a short period of time, and I am not aware of any scholarship that investigates the whole life of pre-literate learners. In this study, I focus on the literacy narratives of the learners throughout their lives rather than only a particular point in time. I also encourage them to talk about different literacy experiences they had, whether those experiences were formal education or otherwise.

Due to the challenges of working with adult refugees and the importance of being literate in one's native language, Krashen and Meenakshi each support Benseman's claim by implying that skills learned in one's mother tongue can be "transferred" to the second language. This is particularly true when an individual has established good reading or writing skills in his or her first language. Meenakshi furthers this claim by pointing out that there are two types of "cross-linguistic influence-positive/negative" which he defined as "the influence of the mother tongue on the learner's performance in and/or development of a given target language" (2). It also includes the influence of any language the learner knows prior to learning the new language. According to Menakshi,

Positive transfer occurs when a native form is used in the production of an L2 utterance, and it is also a part of the L2 norm. Here the role of transfer is facilitative. Negative transfer occurs when the L1 form used in L2 production is not a part of the L2 norm, and the resultant utterance is erroneous. Negative transfer... is inhibitive (2).

Positive/negative transfers play a vital role in English learning because if a person who is learning another language already understands their native language, they will “make an attempt to transfer the mother tongue” (2). The transmission may be “justified” because the construction of the two languages are alike (2). However, in many cases, the adult refugees do not have access to their mother language and are also not literate in any other language. In turn, this is not about positive or negative transfers but the absence of any transfers.

Pre-literate adult refugees and their teachers encounter some important challenges during the learning process. Adult refugees come to literacy programs with very little or low English proficiency, and they barely possess any skills in reading and writing in their L1. Making advancement for them is slow and requires lots of time and effort. Volunteers working with pre-literate adults need to build up on small steps as much as possible to help learners retain past information. One way to provide further assistance to pre-literate adults is by working with BLTs who interpret and clarify information as well as activities for learners. In addition to the mechanics of learning, the emotional strength that is needed to persevere is sometimes exhausting.

Krashen, Meenakshi, and Benseman are all vital to my research. The work of first two authors emphasized the importance of being literate in one’s first language and using the skill from the native language to succeed in the second language. I use Krashen and Meenakshi’s scholarship to understand skills or lack of skills pre-literate adults apply to the target language. Furthermore, Benseman’s scholarship urges me to listen for the role of BLTs in the literacy narratives of my subjects. His article will allow me to understand the importance of BLTs. Understanding the challenges BLTs go through will encourage me to find ways to prevent these obstacles so that BLTs and learners will be able to work together in a less stressful manner.

2.4. Motivation to Seek Literacy Education Programs

Adult refugees' motivation to learn the English language has a big impact in their life. Dornyei describes motivation as “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, [and] how hard they are going to pursue it” (2). Adult refugees in most cases have strong willingness and motivation to pursue English education so that they can be contributing members of their communities. Gardner and Masgoret and Gardner discuss “integrative motivation,” as it serves as an inspiration for individuals to study a language so that he/she can “identify” with the society that uses it (2). Oxford and Shearin further this claim by pointing out that English language learners may also possess, “instrumental motivation –the desire to learn the language to meet their needs and goal, such as getting a job or talking to their children’s teachers” (2). Instrumental motivation plays an important role in the lives of adult refugees because it provides them with a quick access to Survival English. Survival English is highly important because it allows learners to acquire the language quickly and helps them with common, everyday circumstances, such as taking the bus, going shopping, or going to the doctor.

Beder and Valentine building on Dornyei and Oxford and Shearin’s notion of integrative and instrumental motivation, identify and discuss 62 different categories of motivations refugee adults to attend literacy programs. In their study, “self-improvement” was rated highest and considered a significant motivator by learners (85). Ziegahn further points out that “the strongest motivation for learning [occurs] when adults successfully learned what they valued, and wanted to learn in an enjoyable manner” (34). Beder and Valentine concluded that adult refugees’ motivation to seek literacy programs calls our attention to recognize not only their inspiration but also their goals for learning the target language. By realizing and responding to the “expressed motivations” of the learners, one can hope to make literacy programs “congruent” with the social

interpretation these adult learners connect to literacy and literacy teaching (94). Aligning learner's motivation and administrator's or teacher's expectations of the literacy program serves the goals and needs of all participating parties.

Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation play a vital role for adult refugees while they seek literacy programs and as they develop their English skills. Through motivation, pre-literate learners are able to learn skills that furthers their self-improvement and reach their personal goals for learning the second language. Pre-literate adult's motivation for seeking literacy programs also drives them to aim for higher self-improvement. Due to pre-literate learners' eagerness to seek literacy programs, educators need to not only pay attention to learners' motivation, but most importantly, help them reach their goals for learning English. Learners' motivation to learn doesn't always stem from survival, although that is an essential part of their transition. However, learners' motivation doesn't stop at survival; it goes beyond to self-improvement. Literacy, then, becomes a personal goal.

Literacy for personal purposes, according to Perry and Homan, includes literacy activities "related to personal expression, self-understanding and/or identity" (424). Reading or writing for personal purposes is "often overlooked in favor of examining literacy practices related to work or family obligations" (425). This finding is important because "understanding what real people do with texts. . . is essential" to understanding literacy (426). Additionally, in the original data study, Perry and Homan looked for literacy activities that participants did in the "social activity" realm (434). They found areas such as entertainment and spirituality. Purposes for engaging in literacy included: "(a) literacy-related purposes (e.g. "to help children read"), (b) spirituality (e.g. to thank God"), (c) entertainment (e.g. "to imagine cooking different dishes"), (d) personal/artist expression (e.g. "to reflect on life and personal relationships"), and (e) community participation

(e.g. “to organize a social event”) (435). These findings are important to take notice of because the common assumption is usually that learners are motivated by survival. However, as seen with Perry and Homan as well as other bodies of research, including my own, learners have broader goals and a strong motivation to better themselves and express themselves that goes way beyond being motivated by survival when seeking literacy programs.

The scholarship on motivation is very useful to my study. Because one of the themes for my research is learners’ “motivation” to seek literacy programs, I use the scholarship to understand pre-literate learners’ motives for continuously seeking literacy services. Understanding the motivation of a pre-literate learner allows me to illustrate that adult learners’ motivation goes beyond attending literacy programs to merely gain survival skills in English. Additionally, the literature helps to fully understand the different types of motivation learners possess as they come to literacy programs. Using the scholarship on motivation to highlight some of the inspiration these pre-literate learners allows me to provide ways to further support refugee learners so that they can pursue their goals easily.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, I collected literacy narratives from four pre-literate learners. My methodology was informed by interviewing approaches that helped me gather literacy narratives of the participants. The qualitative approach was chosen because it puts emphasis on categories and concepts rather than incidents and frequency (McCracken). It was important in this study that the focus remained on the three main categories of this research: non-literate learners' motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning. Literacy narratives are a specific method that fits the case of pre-literate adult women perfectly. It is even more fitting as the participants are from backgrounds that favor storytelling as a communication method. Selfe, Hawisher, and Berry's "Narrative as a Way of Knowing," was used in this study to provide a rationale and model for collecting literacy narratives from refugees. Their chapter focuses on tracing and understanding the literacy narrative of four students from Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sydney, Australia. By gathering the literacy narratives of students, the authors were able to "provide rich glimpses into individuals' localized literacy practices within particular cultures and their circulation within global contexts." Similarly, my study focuses on understanding the literacy narratives of pre-literate women, and what their stories tell us about non-literate learners' motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning.

Lieblich (as cited in Selfe, Hawisher and Berry) points out that "people create stories out of the building blocks of their life histories and culture, and at the same time, these stories construct their lives, provide them with meanings and goals, and tie them to their culture." Having the literacy narrative of one's own life is of high value because it is rich with personal insight about literacy experiences. Literacy narratives are the appropriate methodology for this study's subjects because 1) adult pre-literate learners are from oral cultures where narratives are

dominant forms and highly valued, 2) rather than ask highly analytical questions, I want to help them tell their stories and have them talk with me in ways that would be comfortable for them, and 3) I want to contribute some of their stories to the Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives (DALN).

Connelly and Clandinin describe a variety of narrative data sources and ways of collecting narrative data. These authors tell the reader that stories can allow individuals to reflect upon life and explain themselves to others—in order to study ‘life narratives’ as a context for making meaning. The narrative method, according Marshall and Rossman “seeks to collect data to describe...lives” (86) and narrative analysis “can be applied to...an in-depth interview” (86). Analyzing the literacy narratives of pre-literate learners allowed me to actively find the voice of the participants. The literacy narratives of participants were transcribed and included in Appendix A. The narrative process enabled learners to begin restoring and reconstructing their lives in a setting of literacy and formal education.

Angrosino’s compilation of essays titled *Conducting a Life History Interview* looks at how to gather data for life history interview. He points out that “a life history interview yields an extraordinary rich body of information that allows us to view social problems as part of a normal flow of life and not as isolated events amenable to single, quick-fix solutions” (36). I used the literacy narrative method to find out what the literacy narratives of four women tell us about non-literate learners’ motivation, learning strategies and preferred materials for learning. This method offered multiple perspectives about pre-literate learners. Additionally, using the narrative approach gave meaning to the learners’ own lives as they share their literacy stories.

Collecting the literacy narratives of pre-literate learners and sharing them through DALN gives the participants the opportunity to share their stories. Most importantly, as Angrosino notes

in “Conducting a Life History Interview,” “reflecting on one’s life can be personally very satisfying, particularly when it can be shared with a sympathetic audience,” like DALN (38). By sharing these stories with scholars and students around the world, participants would be able to add to the ongoing conversation about adult refugees and their struggle to learn English. The individual stories would help others learn about the experiences and struggles of adult refugees as they learn English in the U.S. Collecting the literacy narratives of adult refugees also gave me the opportunity to contribute to the DALN, which aims to support future research in the area.

In addition to the literacy narrative collection, I used other qualitative approaches to supplement my methodology such as interviews. According to Denzin and Lincoln, the qualitative methods are inductive, interpretative, and natural. This approach seeks deeper meaning and understanding of specific situations. As my research questions led me to focus on stories of literacy, the qualitative approach was a good fit. It places emphasis on process and meanings rather than on measures of quantity, intensity or frequency. The strength of this method lies in that the approach is more flexible and reflective. Applying a qualitative methodology to my study allowed me to obtain a deeper understanding about my topic and participants’ responses during and after the interview. According to Creswell, qualitative research methods “have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs” (183). I implemented this approach for my results. In the following section, I discuss participation recruitment, data analysis, and data interpretation methods.

3.1. Recruiting Participants

I interviewed four adult refugees who attend weekend tutoring at the New American Consortium for Wellness and Empowerment (as well as adult learners who get in-home tutoring in the F-M area). Participants’ ages were between 39 to 64. They were housewives and stay-at-

home mothers who hardly had the chance to seek education. Today in the U.S., some of them are hardworking individuals with full-time jobs. As soon as they came to the U.S., they needed to find jobs to support themselves and their families, so they had to join the workforce even though they did not have English competency. Usually, after their children learn enough English in school or at work, they took different paths and paces as far as acquiring the language. In this study, they share their journeys of acquiring English.

All the participants for this study were women because they are more likely to be pre-literate learners for various reasons. Some reasons why women might be pre-literate learners is because of their gender. Biglow and Schwartz consider gender to be one of the factors for limited or no literacy (or education) for many refugees. They claim that, “gender may influence opportunities for formal schooling and literacy development ...schooling for girls is not a family or societal priority” (2). Another factor contributing to women refugees being more likely to be pre-literate is that refugee women are the primary caregivers of the children while their husbands take on full-time employment to support the family. From the participant pool, three women are widowed and one woman is still married. All of the women in this study have children either living with them or residing in the same state. In Brach’s news article, “Women-only English program in Metro Vancouver hopes to expand: Privately funded program addresses trauma and loss, allows women to bring children to class,” he reports on the value of having a women-only program. Brach suggests that, “Metro Vancouver is hoping to expand after finding success with women-only classes where participants can also bring their children...It’s very helpful — especially for the women who have small kids. They have daycare for the small babies, which the other classes didn’t have.” The opportunity to attend classes with children will therefore allow refugee parents to continue with their study.

In “Refugee Moms Learn English along with Kids,” the International Rescue Committee (IRC) opened English class for mothers and their children. Due to this approach, the women’s English class:

Promotes a sense of community for the women...[to] get out of their homes and they’re not isolated, they get in touch with other women who also don’t speak English and they exchange ideas.... The Women’s English class empowers women and provides them with the means to become self-sufficient.

Through programs such as the above, women are able to increase their literacy ability. In turn, by having the opportunity to seek literacy education programs, the women are able to join a community and be able to participate in their children’s lives by attending parent-teacher conferences and generally being able to be more active parents in school.

3.2. Gathering Data

Assessing Information Needs: Tools, Techniques and Concepts for the Internet Age by Nicholas David offers a “systematic method of identifying, evaluating and comparing information needs.” I focused on David’s discussion of in-depth interviews as it offers a step-by-step process for working with primary data. I found in-depth interviews appropriate for collecting qualitative data such as literacy narratives. As open-ended in-depth interviews have the open, wide-ranging questions and flexible and unstructured format, interviewees may get the feeling it is something informal. This is always positive to obtain spontaneous answers from them. David calls this kind of interview a “methodological mine” where the researcher “mines” for answers in each interview (114).

At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants for permission to use their name and share their story through DALN. The interviews permitted me to gather individual literacy

stories of each of the participants. My interview questions (Appendix B) focused on their literacy history and how they learned English. Furthermore, participants were interviewed at their homes or at the Consortium, whichever they were more comfortable with. During the interviews, participants were permitted to choose the language they wanted to express themselves in, either Swahili, English, or a mix.

To capture the data from these interviews, a cell phone recorder was used. The research participants were informed that I will be recording the interviews in the consent form. David advises to take notes even if the interview is being recorded “as a back-up in case of poor-quality recording and to add a degree of authority to the respondent’s answers” (123). Taking this into account, I also took notes during each interview while I set the recorder on my phone. Once the interviews were conducted, I listened to the recordings to identify responses that discussed what the literacy narratives of four women tell us about learners’ motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning. The following section detail my data analysis approaches.

3.3. Interpreting and Analyzing Data

Once participants were recruited and data was gathered, I organized the data for analysis. I identified three main categories: Motivation, strategies, and preferred material.

Learner’s motivation- Participants’ motivation was identified by looking for key terminology that emphasize their inspiration for seeking literacy programs. For example, I particularly focused on the way learners describe their aim for attending literacy programs. If they stopped at some point, I tried to find out what kept them from going back to a literacy program.

Learning strategies- I looked into what learning strategies work best for each individual person. I also paid close attention to when they talk about what methods and approaches they think are most helpful and which ones are least helpful.

Preferred materials for learning- I looked for names of specific learning materials that participants indicated aided them while learning to read and write. Specifically, I took notes of recurring names of resources that learners continuously came back to or resources that they want to get access to.

All the methods: recruiting participants, gathering data, and analyzing and interpreting data demonstrated the step-by-step process that I took in carrying out the research. All the tools and approaches introduced above worked together to make meaning of the transcripts I gathered from each interviewee.

In order to analyze the learners' stories, the study used a narrative background. More significantly, this also became a way for a learner to critically reflect on earlier or current viewpoints in order to build or rebuild meaning in one's literacy ability. The narrative analysis of the learners used terms from literary study (as noted in Connelly and Clandinin). The term "story" was used interchangeably with "narrative" throughout the study. The stories of the adult learners are not works of art, rather they reflected a kind of literacy experience which allows us to study "how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves" (14). By having adult refugees share their literacy narratives, they are therefore, allowing others to understand their literacy experience.

In conclusion, this chapter laid out my research approach to answering the question: What can literacy narratives from four pre-literate learners tell us about motivation, strategies and materials? Additionally, data collected from face-to-face, one-on-one personal interviews

with refugees supported this research extensively. Through the use of the qualitative approach, the research provides answers regarding the literacy narratives of four women and what their literacy experiences tell us about non-literate learners' motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning. Finally, by applying Brandt's lens of literacy sponsors to this study, my research aimed to inspire other researchers to collect more literacy narratives from pre-literate learners perhaps of different national and ethnic backgrounds. More narratives should develop our understanding of pre-literate learners and help us find or develop better materials, and support a range of motivations.

As it is the case with all qualitative approaches, objectivity of researcher and research must be asserted. This research study relies on my interpretations in that I gathered the literacy narratives through interviews, but these interpretations are not made from what I personally see convenient, but through pre-determined categories. Therefore, the results I received did not shape my choice of categorization. Through observation during tutoring sessions, I noticed that learners kept coming back even though it was hard. I saw that they chose materials and exchanged them after a period of time, and they learned at different paces with different tutors. All these factors put together ignited my curiosity of why these learners were making these choices and left me wondering about their stories.

4. FINDINGS

This study's three main categories: motivation, learning strategies, and preferred materials for learning the English language emerged from careful review of the participants' literacy narratives, which will be discussed in this section. First, we find out that adult refugees' motivation to improve their literacy shows how dedicated refugee learners are when it comes to learning the English language. Second, we learn that adult learners use different learning strategies to guide them through the learning cycle as they attended literacy programs. These were approaches the participants developed on their own because they work for them. Third, throughout the participants' literacy narratives, it was clear that finding and having the appropriate materials for learning had an impact into the learning process of participants.

Table 1 provides a demographic profile of all pre-literate participants who participated in this study. The profile is organized based on number of years lived in the United States, number of years attending or attended adult literacy program, age, country of birth, and pseudonyms.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Years Lived in the U.S.	# of Years in Literacy Program	Age	Country of Birth	Literate Category	Schooling	Languages Prior (Oral Language Skills)
Shammim	17	5	64	South Sudan	Nonliterate	0	Nubee, Swahili, and Acholie
Aisha	8	5	52	Somalia	Preliterate	0	Somali and Swahili
Lila	5	2	39	Somalia	Semiliterate	7 th grade	Somali and Swahili
Haawa	3	2.5	39	South Sudan	Preliterate	0	Arabic, Swahili and Masalit

Looking at the table above, two participants are Sudanese and two are Somali. Shammim and Aisha are 64 and 52 years old, while two participants are 39. Age seems to be an important factor for participant’s literacy experience because it could limit motivation to develop one’s literacy. On the other hand, access to formal schooling might influence one’s learning strategies like in Lila’s case. This range of demographics in participant’s length of stay in the US, their ages, and literacy levels all impact their unique experiences and narratives.

4.1. Data Analysis, Results, and Findings

4.1.1. Motivation

The motivation to learn reading and writing by adult refugee women in this study far exceeded goals such as learning to merely “fit into the American culture” or learning to say “hello” to one’s neighbor. The individual literacy narratives of adult refugee women allowed

participants to share their inspiration regarding literacy learning in the United States. For all participants of this study, the motivation to develop one's literacy played a vital role in the lives of these adults. Five main motivators have emerged in the findings of the four literacy narratives: being committed to learning, being a role model for their kids, getting better employment opportunities for supporting the family, getting a GED, and being competent in English.

4.1.1.1. Being Committed to Learning

Shammim, Aisha, Lila and Haawa all have been attending literacy English programs since moving to the U.S. These participants have committed to their learning and do whatever it takes to get to the learning site. Aisha, who did not drive, had to rely on rides from her son and daughter, friends, and sometimes tutors at G+L. She was able to attend G+L for one year straight. Haawa, like Aisha, did not have her driver's license in the beginning, but managed to come to G+L for six months. At times, when her brothers were not home to give her a ride to the program, Haawa would walk even if she just came straight from work. After working hard to get her driver's license, Haawa drove herself to G+L and continued with her study. Lila, on the other hand, who is a mother to six young kids and was pregnant when she started coming to G+L, came to the program up to the completing of this study. Shammim, who moved to the U.S. in 1999, started going to a literacy program a few months after living in Fargo. After studying at Woodrow Wilson adult center for four years, Shammim started to receive tutoring lessons at home for an additional two years. However, once Shammim was diagnosed with type two diabetes and other health problems, her English learning stopped.

As can be noted above, the four participant's effort to learn once in the U.S. is incredible. Haawa and Aisha were able to come to G+L for a great amount of time but, for both participants, their limitation to continue with learning was due to their busy work schedule. Even though

participants in this study work hard to show up at G+L, and their learning experiences have all been limited by factors such as taking care of their children alone (or primarily alone), work, and transportation, they still found ways to stay connected as much as they could.

4.1.1.2. Being a Role Model for Their Children

For the four participants, being a role model for their kids seemed to be an important motivator to learn English. All four women mentioned that they want to be a good example for their kids so that their children can value education and not give up with learning. None of the four women had much opportunity to seek formal education in their countries; these parents worried that the same thing might happen to their sons and daughters. Aisha said “if I give up, my kids will not understand that education is important. They have the opportunity to get good education here in America. They can get better paying jobs when they graduate from college.” Shammim and Lila also want their kids to value education and eventually graduate from high school and college. Lila shared during the interview that when she found out that her son was going to take a year off from school after his first semester, to just work, she became very stressed and harsh with her son. Lila said “if my son takes out time away from school, he is will not return back. I am not going to let him take one year away from school because he needs to work hard and graduate. Without education, what job is he going to do?” Lila, who struggles with learning in the U.S., takes education very seriously. Seeing her own struggle with education as a mother currently, Lila is fighting hard both for herself and her kids when it comes to being educated. Thus, to these participants, having education in America is not just an empowerment tool for getting a prestigious occupation, but graduating from a college will open the door to many opportunities in life.

4.1.1.3. Better Employment Opportunities

For most participants, improving their literacy skills correlates to getting better employment opportunities to support their families. Three participants in this study were working full time jobs while also attending G+L. Haawa has been working at Holiday Inn in Fargo for the last three years with a wage of \$8.50 per hour. During the interview, she said:

My job is very hard, heavy and pays small money. I work very hard and come home tired every day. I don't like my job anymore so I am looking for a better job. Many job I try to apply for ask for my level of education. Because I have no education, it is hard to get a good job that pays good money.

Relying on a wage of \$8.50 per hour is hard for Haawa because she is the only one who works to support her two brothers and son who are still in school. Although she continuously searches for a better employment opportunity, many jobs she finds with a decent wage require some level of education, such as a high school diploma or a college degree. Because Haawa does not have any degree, she never applied for these jobs although hours and pays would look good.

Like Haawa, Aisha also shares the same struggle when it comes to finding a good paying job to help her family. Aisha works night shifts at a turkey packaging company six times a week for the last one and a half years. When Aisha got a job at the company, although she used to work six times a week, she would try to come to G+L on her days off. I observed during tutoring sessions that there were times when Aisha had a very bad cold or headache, yet, she attended the weekend tutoring. Although Aisha is happy that she has a job to support the family, the long night hours and weekend schedule put a lot of stress on her body. Aisha said:

My friends take me to my job and we have to drive one hour every day to get there from where I live. The job is difficult because I have to work fast to pack turkey slices which comes

out of a machine. With my knee problem, it is not easy to stand. I have applied to different jobs but they have not call me for interview. All the money I get goes to paying bills. I am still looking for a good job.

Being the only one who works to support the family is not easy for Aisha. Since both her son and daughter go to college and live at home, she works hard to support the family so that the kids can concentrate on their education. They don't work because their schedules are busy in college. In addition, Aisha encourages her son and daughter to focus on school because she knows how difficult it is to study in the US. Therefore, her commitment to push herself to learn even when she was tired allows her to improve her literacy skills and in return find a better job and other opportunities eventually.

Lila, similarly to Aisha and Haawa, also worked in the same company as Aisha and encountered the same struggles like the other two participants. Being a mother to seven young children and supporting her parents and siblings back home in Somalia is a big responsibility on her shoulders. After going back and forth between job, family, and learning, Lila had to quit her three-year long occupation. Although she was sad quitting her job in the beginning, she is very happy with the decision she made because now she has more time to take care of her kids and work harder on her learning at G+L. Lila says, "if I focus more on my learning, improve my speaking, reading and writing in English, I will get a good job later. Now I want to work hard and learn a lot because I have no more job." Being a stay at home mother, Lila now has the time to study for her U.S. citizenship test. Becoming a U.S. citizen is very important to her and she is making all the effort possible to memorize the questions and answers in the US citizenship test preparation book.

4.1.1.4. Getting a GED

The third motivator is earning a GED. Three participants in this study, Aisha, Haawa and Lila, all emphasized wanting to get some kind of diploma like a GED. Haawa says that getting a GED is important to her because it will “distinguish her from other candidates when applying for a job.”

Similarly, Lila agrees with Aisha and Haawa regarding getting education in the U.S. She said, “I know I am never going to college, but I want to get my GED. My friend study hard and has her GED. She applied to many different jobs and a lot of them call her for interview. In United States, any level of education is good for you.” Lila sees and understands the importance of having some education in the U.S. Although she believes that college is out of the picture for her, she is willing to get her GED once her young children are all at school. Aisha plans to get her GED later on in her life; obtaining a GED will definitely be an asset for Aisha. She said:

I am old, but I will not give up my dream of going far with my education. My children and friends tell me if I have my GED, it will help me a lot. It will take me long to get my GED maybe but I will have it someday. I don’t want to live in America without any education or certificate.

The three participants in this study all showed how significant it is once in the U.S. to further one’s education. All three participants mentioned how getting a GED will impact their employment opportunity and beyond. For this group of women, whether they get their GED now or later, it is a matter of having some kind of educational credential under one’s fingertips to succeed in America. Moreover, for these participants, obtaining a GED plays a key role in what it means to be in America and to always aim higher and find better opportunities.

4.1.1.5. Being Competent in English

All four participants discussed English as the vehicle for adjusting to life in the U.S.; language had a profound impact on participants' lives. Lila said "I want to learn English 100%. Use English correctly so that people don't fool me when I have to sign papers or report information at work." For Lila, gaining proficiency in English will provide her with the necessary tool to communicate and understand her surroundings without any assistance from anyone. Lila agrees that furthering one's learning particularly in English is highly significant in the U.S. Both participants value seeking knowledge in English as Lila said "Knowing how to write and read English is very important. When my son asked me to help him with school work and I did not know how, I knew from that day that I need to increase my knowledge of English." Seeing that she could not help her son with his homework, Lila knew something needed to be done regarding her understanding of English and she jumped into action right away by enrolling in the tutoring program. Similarly, Aisha valued being proficient in English, as she said:

I am very sad because I don't have time to learn anymore and reading is important. I love to read. When I used to go to school, I read, read, read a lot at home. I am forgetting how to read a book and write well. I am mad at my manager because they schedule me to always work on the weekend. I am still trying to find another job and when I have a good schedule, I will come and continue learning. I love reading English, and I want to not forget everything my teacher [taught] me at G+L.

Aisha simply values learning and does not want to forget information she learned if she does not come back to G+L. Her enthusiasm shows that she is serious about improving her literacy skills, and becoming an individual who is able to communicate independently in English. She understands that one should not give up with learning, especially when it comes to learning

how to read, write and speak English well in America. For Aisha, having the ability to apply the English language well will give her the opportunity to interact with others easily and become successful.

Unlike Lila, Haawa, and Aisha, Shammim focused more on developing her English ability than focusing on getting a job or a GED because her home situation was different. Shammim was receiving financial help because she would not be able to hold a job due to her diabetes and chronic nerve pain. Due to this circumstance, she had assistance from her older children. In addition, government programs such as food stamps and Medicaid help her financially. Even though she was helped at home and could not get a job, she still felt a need to develop her English skills. She wanted to communicate without the assistance of her children or translators. She saw the need to develop her English proficiency so that she can communicate with others better. She said:

I am old, and struggle to remember many things in English. Understanding English words are very hard for me. If I go to school, it is going to take me very long because I learn very slow. I want to learn enough English so that I can use it around people and that will make me happy.

Shammim is lucky enough to not worry about working outside the home because of the help she was getting from her family and the government. Her health issues would not have allowed her to work outside in any case, so it was fortunate that she received assistance and she always contributes in other ways. Like the other participants, she highly values developing her English so that she can become more independent.

The participants consider the above motivators an empowerment tool. These adults have not had much opportunity to attend school in their home countries. Making an attempt to learn and gain knowledge at their particular age shows that the participants are willing to go far with

their learning. Additionally, seeing these participants express the interest when it comes to becoming proficient English learners illustrates that they want to express a general sense of being part of the American culture. Therefore, it is a big advantage to have access to knowledge in the United States today as they never had such an opportunity back in their native countries and they want to take full control of such a chance.

4.1.2. Preferred Materials for Learning

The second category I was looking for was preferred materials for learning. Teaching materials form an important part of English literacy programs. From textbooks to videotapes, and pictures, different instructors rely extensively on a wide range of materials to support their students' learning. In this study, all participants had some kind of resources that they used on a daily basis when working on their literacy skills. According to the literacy narratives, four types of learning materials were popular among pre-literate learners. Children's Books, ABC English books One and Two, the Oxford Picture Dictionary (OPD) and magazines were materials that carried a lot of value to these adult learners and guided them to become successful learners. Pictures of the covers of these materials can all be found in Appendix C.

Although there are studies that have rejected the use of children's materials with language learners, through the literacy narratives of adults, children's books seemed to be a big literacy resource for learners such as Haawa and Lila. Lila, who started to immerse herself in books after listening to her kids read, could not stop reading children's books. Although Lila could not really remember the specific books she read during the interview, she seemed deeply connected to children's books. Lila said "The kids' books were fun to read and easy to follow. When I read kids' books, I find myself laughing at the stories many times. Sometimes, the storybooks [make] me sad and I feel like crying, reading them." For Lila, children's books really

helped her increase her reading fluency. She did not just find comfort reading children's books, but found herself emotionally attached to the various books she was reading. Due to the fact that Lila was always busy as a mother of seven, whenever she had the time to read children's books, she always felt like going on an adventure with the characters of the books. By reading children's books for four months, Lila "expanded her vocabulary, learned how to understand sentences, punctuations and paragraphs." Most importantly, reading children's books prepared Lila to read larger books such as the Civic and Literacy Naturalization citizenship book.

Haawa, who has been living in the United States for three years, also embraced children's books while trying to improve her literacy skills. Haawa struggled in reading books in English during her second year in the U.S, and thought she would not find a book that fit her level of learning. After being introduced to *Go, Dog. Go!* by P.D. Eastman, this book soon became one of Haawa's favorite books. Haawa said, "I loved the short sentences and the pictures of dogs were funny. Before, I never know I can read a book." Being able to read simple sentences and understand books for the first time was a big change for Haawa. What Haawa found most relatable when reading children's books was the fact that word choice within the book was very selective and easy to understand. For example, after reading *Go, Dog. Go!*, Haawa could easily distinguish different colors such as red and blue from each other as well as telling someone the difference between big and small.

Aside from the children's books, Haawa enjoyed reading other materials that significantly developed her literacy. She read magazines, flyers and brochures found in her mail box. Even though a lot of people might not look at items one finds in the mail as something that another person would use to improve their literacy, for Haawa, a trip to get the mail was full of surprises for this adult refugee. Haawa used the materials from the mail by cutting letters out

from them and then used the letters to spell out words and form sentences. Haawa's use of mail box materials allowed her not just to pay attention to what things are going on around her community but helped increase her literacy ability extensively. For many of us, we ignore many of the things we find in our mailbox. But for Haawa, she utilized the magazines, flyers and brochure to create a learning opportunity. One might have said why not just buy the ready-made ABC letters at the store to use? However, we would miss that she did not have to spend any money on this. In addition, that she repurposed something so common and unused for her literacy mission.

Since Aisha started attending G+L, she made one of the biggest improvements in regards to increasing her literacy ability over the course of one year. Aisha's improvement could not have been possible if she did not find the right material that guided her through her literacy journey. Aisha, who never had any means of formal schooling before, wanted a learning material that will not just be easy to read, but would allow her to make progress over time. Once she found ABC English book One, Aisha found her perfect match.

ABC English book One is a textbook designed for adult refugees and immigrants who are learning English with a focus on basic reading skills. The book is for adult learners with little or no formal schooling in their first language. When Aisha started reading book one, she focused on learning the alphabet and the book gave her multiple ways to not just memorize the letters, but practice the sound of letters. The book also provided black and white pictures that allow learners to relate to the letters given. After focusing on the alphabet for one month, Aisha was able to recall the letters correctly and give the sounds of many consonants. Over time, Aisha eventually learned numbers 1-100 and understood money amounts. Aisha said "I love, love ABC book One. If I did not find this book I don't think I can read today." Indeed, book One is made with pre-

literate learners in mind. The large font size for words and sentences, plenty of white space, and amount of words per page allow learners to focus on what they are learning and be less overwhelmed by the crowdedness of words, or difficult vocabulary.

Having Book One be a successful material for Aisha, she repetitively read the book four times before moving on to version two of the same book. Aisha said “because of ABC book One and Two, I still love reading today. Now I can read anything. I still have the books today.” Having found the appropriate books that brought her from zero reading level to reading words, sentences and paragraphs on her own really changed Aisha’s mode of thinking from knowing nothing to something. The excitement and energy she exerted during class as she read showed how important it was for her to have the right study resources under her fingertips.

Unlike Aisha, Haawa, and Lila, the fourth participant did not go after magazines, brochures, children’s books or ABC books one and two. For Shammim, OPD was what made a difference to her life as an adult learner. Struggling to master the English language as well as reading and writing it, Shammim relied on pictures to understand her world, and she became attached to the book from her first glance. Not being able to speak English, OPD allowed Shammim to share many of her struggles that she could not express through words. For instance, Shammim shared during the interview that after studying the picture of the human body from the book, she was able to tell her doctor where she was experiencing discomfort by using the book to point to her left foot from the picture. Relying on pictures did not just allow Shammim to connect with her surroundings but it gave her the opportunity to learn a lot of different things. Her use of visuals illustrates how as an adult refugee, even though she could not have a full conversation with individuals, the use of pictures gave her a way to communicate with others.

Furthermore, Shammim's connection to her book did not just stop when talking to doctors. When shopping for food, she made sure her book was by her side. Shammim said "I try to find the different vegetables shown in my book in the vegetable aisle. I mostly look for the types of vegetables I like to eat like lettuce, peas, and spinach." For Shammim, pictures allowed her to release some of the pressure and stress she was experiencing due to her lack of English proficiency.

Whether participants depended on a book or magazine, the resources participants pointed out in their literacy narratives illustrated that it is important for adult refugee learners to have the right resources by their sides through their literacy journey. The four participants in the study were inspired to continue with their learning, once they found materials that were helping them reach their learning goals. Aisha said in her literacy narrative that she felt that she was not learning as she wanted at Moorhead adult school, and one of the reasons had to do with not finding the right resources. Although, Aisha does not remember names of the books she was using, to her surprise, once she found books at G+L that she could relate to, she was motivated to continue learning. Finding materials that can meet the expectation of refugee adults is important. Without the right types of materials to support adult refugees' learning, furthering their learning can be a difficult process.

4.1.3. Learning Strategies

The strategies that were most helpful for the four adult refugees in this study included: reading twice a day for 30 or 60 minutes; cutting out characters from magazines; reading a text multiple times; making flashcards with words newly learned; engaging in open discussion over information learned at school; writing passages, sentences and vocabularies down; memorizing; and verbalizing information.

All four participants mentioned that working on their literacy skills twice a day for 30 or 60 minutes was an important commitment to fulfill every day. For most of these participants, the learning time was divided between learning “in the morning and in the evening.” Haawa, who liked to study in the early morning hours, was committed to “cutting letters and words from magazine and uses the letters to create new words or sentences.” Once Haawa has collected all the letters she cut out, in the evening, she would write down the new words she came up with on a notebook and use it to practice her vocabulary.

On the other hand, Aisha and Shammim enjoyed “reading a text 2-3 times and making flashcards with words newly learned from their reading,” to increase their understanding of the information being learned. For these two participants, reading a text twice gave them the opportunity to “catch mistakes made, and pronounce a word or sentence correctly.” Because both Shammim and Aisha are low level readers, they valued rereading passages more than once because it helps them “clarify misunderstanding” with words and passages. Additionally, both participants treasured “making flashcards with words newly learned.” Shammim, especially, relied heavily on flashcards to learn “confusing or new words,” she was introduced to. She shared the following:

[I] ask my kids to [make] flashcards with the vocabulary [I] was taught at school. Writing the terminologies on a flashcard gave [me] the opportunity to practice words [I] struggled with everywhere [I] went, especially in the car or just before [I] went to bed at night. When going out, [I] always made sure that [my] cards were in [my] purse.

Shammim’s attachment to using flashcards allowed her to continue with her learning even when she was not at home. After carrying flashcards for one year, Shammim was able to read short sentences and connect words with their meaning by herself.

The final strategies participants used to increase their literacy skill are: writing passages and sentences, memorizing and verbalizing information. Clearly, participants liked copying information they were taught at school over and over again once they reached home. Three participants, Shammim, Aisha, and Haawa, would rewrite sentences and paragraphs their teacher taught at school into a new page and try to read the writing out loud. This type of strategy allows these three participants to practice their writing skills, but most importantly, by rewriting passages, they were able to retain information better the second time.

The fourth participant, Lila, preferred a memorization approach while working to improve her literacy skill. For Lila, she recalled information easily if she memorized it. As she studied for her citizenship test, she worked hard to memorize the answers to the citizenship questions. She says “memorization helps me remember information better. Once I have memorized 20 citizenship answers, I was very happy and I wanted to memorize more answers.” Having found the right strategies to help her study for her citizenship test, Lila was not just thrilled but was more motivated to push herself to memorize more answers.

The strategies participants used to develop their literacy skills showed how important it is for this group of learners to have some kind of method that works best for them. Even though each participant preferred some approaches over others, the most important thing to remember is that the various approaches guided participants toward their studies and they each valued them in their own ways. While some strategies, such as memorization, seemed to require a lot of time and effort, participants who felt comfortable with this kind of approach appreciated it very much. It is also important to note that, of the many strategies used by participants in this study, there is no one correct answer as to which strategies work the best. Finally, participant’s willingness to come up with their own strategies that guided them through their quest of learning shows that no

matter what types of approach we adopt to suit our learning, as long as it works for each individual, they will be able to accomplish their learning goals. In this study, therefore, the four participants all had unique approaches that made a big impact on their learning.

5. CONCLUSION

Working with pre-literate and non-literate students, although challenging, can be a very rewarding experience. Research on working with pre-literate adult refugees appears to be reasonable but limited to classroom techniques and methods as noted by Benseman, Perry, and Biglow. There is a lack of research on the learning process of the students themselves.

Many refugee students come from oral cultures and teaching methods should be incorporated into the curriculum to support that. Learners in pre-literate classrooms come from a wide variety of backgrounds and do not fit into any single mold, so each class and every student needs to be approached on an individual level that meets that student's needs.

Adult learners studying English for the first time need to be familiar with the concept of print awareness, as it will open the door toward becoming print literate. With the large number of pre-literate learners seeking literacy programs in many parts of the U.S., educators working with adult learners need to be prepared and supported extensively in becoming qualified to work with the growing population of pre-literate and non-literate learners.

Collecting the literacy narratives of pre-literate learners and sharing them through the Digital Archive of Literacy Narrative (DALN) is a very important step towards these learners' experiences. Adding these narratives to DALN will give the participants the opportunity to have their stories heard. By sharing these narratives with scholars and students around the world, participants would add to the ongoing conversation about adult refugees, literacy and their struggle to learn English. The individual stories would help others learn about the experiences and struggles of adult refugees as they learn English in the U.S. Collecting the literacy narratives of adult refugees gave me the opportunity to contribute to DALN, which aims to support future research in the area. Constructing a story based on literacy background and experiences for adult

refugee learners allows them, teachers, tutors and administrators or literacy community programs to be well informed before and while working with these populations.

Pre-literate adult refugees are often women, mothers, and wives who have been deprived of educational opportunity in their home countries. Limited schooling—if any at all—makes their transition into literacy programs challenging. However, because of their high motivation to seek literacy programs for the first time, these adults work extensively to increase their self-improvement skills as they acquire a second language. Refugee learners are able to acquire a certain level of English, which allows them to practice common everyday experiences like taking a bus or going shopping.

This study's participants are largely motivated to increase their literacy skills to be more self-sufficient. Haawa expressed interest to further her English skills so that she can be independent and understand documents without her brothers or friends assisting her. Aisha expressed that she would like to be able to communicate with individuals in her community and at work clearly and “correctly.” For her, the notion of relying on people all the time to translate information is embarrassing and it takes time. Shammim on the other hand, wants to efficiently communicate with her doctors and physician about her medication and her health. Lila, spoke of her goal to improve literacy so that she can help her children with their schoolwork. Three of the four participants emphasized that they are strongly motivated to improve their English because they would like to attain better employment opportunities, set a good example for their kids, and be able to obtain a GED.

Thus, aside from the motivation participants had for becoming better English speakers, all participants revealed a strong desire to find the appropriate materials for learning. Based on the fact that some of the participants really valued children's books, researchers need to study

children's books more closely in order to understand why these books are impacting the reading ability of adult learners. To investigate their use and value more thoroughly, researchers will need to carry out a study in which adult refugees are assigned children's books in a literacy class for reading. By following adults reading children's books, it gives the researcher ways to see how using children books are useful.

Overall, the current research allows us to have an in-depth look into the literacy experiences of four pre-and non-literate adult refugee women. Their literacy narratives provide us with ways to understand how pre-and non-literate learners struggle to not just fit into the American culture but their struggle with learning English as well. Due to the fact that pre-and non-literate learners are individuals who have not had many encounters with formal education growing up in their countries, it is important that literacy programs find materials to guide these adult learners. These materials will make their learning easy and enjoyable.

Finally, to further make the learning of pre-and non-literate learners effective, studying a one-on-one literacy program is important. For most of the participants in this study, they felt their success with literacy improvement comes from having a one-on-one tutor at G+L. Aisha demonstrated within her narrative that she enjoyed G+L because it allowed her to have her own teacher, and the class was not packed with students. Having the opportunity for learners to have access to their own teachers gave them the chance to focus on what they want and need to learn.

Although G+L weekend tutoring is only twice a week and only two hours per session, learners who come to the program value the learning time, teachers and atmosphere. Future research could look into the interaction between learners and tutors. This is an important aspect of one-on-one tutoring programs. The relationship between tutor and learner is very important because it is the one that determines the experience that each learner takes home. In contrast to a

traditional classroom, the learner can change their tutor every session if they want to explore different styles of instruction.

An interesting research area would be analyzing the interaction of tutors and learners in one-on-one programs by looking into the pace of conversation, the instructions and feedback, techniques that tutors use to supplement the books, how they simplify words, which examples they provide, and how they explain idioms. First, the pace of the conversation would determine if the tutor is moving too fast or too slow depending on how well the learner is responding and whether they can remain engaged. Second, what instructions and feedback the tutors choose to provide and analyze as well as the phrasing they use to convey it. Third, an analysis of how they modify language and use different media to convey different messages as needed in order to illustrate meaning. All of these areas of tutor and learner interaction can yield very helpful data that will enable us to learn how to run a one-on-one tutoring session, how to serve adult refugees seeking literacy knowledge, learn what tutoring techniques work and what don't work, in addition to how it can apply to other non-literate or pre-literate populations.

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APPENDIX A. LITERACY NARRATIVES

A.1. Picture Books Makes Me Happy

For Shammim, learning to read and write has always been very important. When Shammim got the opportunity to attend school in the U.S., she never missed a day to practice reading and writing both on her own and with the assistance of her kids. Books made Shammim very happy. Books with colorful pictures were all Shammim needed to make her day bright. Every time, Shammim came across a good book, her eyes would be filled with excitement. Looking at pictures, the feeling of opening a book page and the opportunity to own a personal book for the first time, all added the finishing touch to Shammim's love toward reading.

Before Shammim started attending adult school, she already began reading English at home with the help of her children. However, focusing on words and sentences never made sense to her. The words were too dry and never seemed to connect to the pictures. At times, pictures within books were not colorful enough to understand. However, because Shammim loved books so much, it didn't matter whether she was understanding the words being taught or not; as long as there are pictures to look at. Shammim had a strong mind-set in which she believed she did not need words to understand what was going on in a book, because to her, a picture is indeed worth a thousand words. When Shammim was given her first book at school, due to her over excitement with it, she could not stop flipping through the different pages. She was so excited that she didn't realize she was holding her book upside-down, until after the teacher and her classmates moved on to a different section of the book. Seeing that Shammim was overwhelmed by the Oxford English Picture Dictionary; the teacher gave her the book to take home.

Once Shammim started to take her book home, her life was changed. Owning a book for the first time was an experience Shammim never had before and she was so excited. At home,

Shammim would spend a great amount of time trying to teach herself how to read the ABC alphabet even, when there was nobody around to help her. Alone, she practiced how to write A-Z by either rewriting the letters down in her notebook or cutting letters she knew well from magazines and keeping them in a safe place for her study. Sometimes, she would say the ABC letters loudly even if she was not pronouncing them correctly. Because some letters were difficult to read and remember, Shammim would focus more on understanding images in books and magazine or identify numbers 1-10 in a story because they seemed easier to understand. One time after studying the portrait of the human body in the Oxford Picture English Dictionary, Shammim was able to tell her doctor where she was experiencing discomfort by using the picture in her book to point to her left foot from the picture.

As time went by, Shammim's attachment toward her book only increased. Besides taking the book to her doctor's appointments, Shammim now made sure to take her book when she goes shopping with her family. In the grocery store, Shammim tries to find the different vegetables shown in her book in the vegetable aisle. Over a course of time, Shammim was able to memorize and distinguish "lettuce, peas, broccoli, celery, spinach, and asparagus" easily from other vegetables. To this day, when Shammim goes to the store, she is able to pick the kinds of vegetables she wants on her own and does not need her book by her side anymore for that task.

Even though Shammim loved to use visuals to understand things, she realized that pictures alone would not help her to master certain areas in English. After six months of using pictures to understand her world, it was time to learn reading in English. The day Shammim's teacher started to teach the class how to read words and sentences were perhaps one of the most memorable days in her life, as it was the first-time Shammim was able to focus on just reading comprehension. As Shammim started to repeat basic words in class, this practice drifted home,

where she would spend hours doing chores and repeating the words she wrote down from school and trying to memorize smaller sentences she learned while getting her housework done. Of the many words, she learned how to read at school, “black shoes, cheese pizza, coca cola, vegetable and United Nation” became Shammim’s favorite English words because to her, they sounded funny when she tried to pronounce them and simply because “pizza and coca cola are among her favorite American foods.” For example, when Shammim first heard the term black shoes, she automatically thought that her teacher was saying “black shoes are for black people.” When she shared this story later on with her kids, they could not stop laughing. Additionally, the words “cheese pizza and United Nation” are two words that Shammim struggled reading the most. When she first learned how to read “United Nation,” she was saying “your nation, nation.” Cheese pizza was “piece pizza” and coca cola was “cola-cola.”

Although Shammim struggled with these words, she never gave up practicing reading them at home. On days when she could not go to school, she asked her kids to help her pronounce and read the words correctly. There were even times when she asked her kids to make her flashcards with the vocabularies she was taught at school. Writing the terminologies on a flashcard gave Shammim the opportunity to practice words she struggled with everywhere she went, especially when she was in the car or just before she went to bed at night. When going out, she always made sure that her cards were in her purse. The result of carrying flashcards was that after one year, Shammim was able to read short sentences and connect vocabularies with their meaning. The first sentences she put together on her own was “I eat pizza good” and “I take cola-cola.” Shammim was so proud to write sentences and understand what they meant on her own even if their meaning was not quite clear. After learning how to formulate brief sentences, Shammim was overtaken by emotions. After not attending schooling for half of her life, she was

able to write and formulate sentences for the first time and this was something she never imagines she will do at the age of 39.

Shammim's passion for reading English continued to grow, and when she cannot attend adult school, she was busy using the TV to increase her reading and vocabulary comprehension. The TV was a perfect match because through kids shows such as Word Girl, Word World and BBC news hours on PBS, she learned how to spell many short vocabularies, and how to read out five to seven-word sentences without help. At one point, she memorized all of the English vowels and over half of the consonants by watching Word World for five months. Memorizing the vowels and consonants opened the door for one thing Shammim wanted to learn to do: spelling her name correctly. The day she wrote her name all by herself on her Social Security card was a day Shammim will never forget. She said "remembering all the letters for my name was just amazing. I did not really know the pronunciation of each letter, but I memorized what each letter is and the order they come in when writing my name."

Although watching Word Girl and Word World really improved Shammim's literacy skills, she said that watching BBC news channel helped her perhaps the most. As Shammim became more and more sick with other health conditions, she started to drift away from more writing and reading practices. However, she did not stop watching the news every day. BBC news helped Shammim remember and connect to worldly issues. Through BBC news, she memorized famous world figures, and much more.

Currently, Shammim is not engaging in any personal reading or writing practices. However, when her grandkids come with storybooks and ask her to read it for them, she will look at the pictures and start a story of her own rather than what is written down. She always encourages her grandchildren to read books a lot and not so much TV watching. To Shammim,

great books can make you always want to read more, especially when they have good pictures to look at.

A.2. Every Day the Same Thing

Haawa is a widow and a mother to an eight-year-old boy. Prior to moving to the United States, she was living in a refugee camp in Kenya for six years with her two young brothers and her son. Like many refugees, Haawa and her brothers left their home country of Sudan because of a civil war. In 2014, Haawa and her family immigrated to the United States and came right to Fargo, North Dakota.

Although the United States is a home now for Haawa and her family, life is not always easy for newcomers and one reason is the language barrier. Haawa speaks low-level English, but mostly she speaks her native language Masalit and sometimes Arabic with her brothers and son. Although Arabic and English are the two official languages spoken in Sudan, Masalit is a language that is spoken by the ethnic group inhabiting western Sudan and eastern Chad, but it does not have a written form. Because Haawa never attended formal schooling in her country, she never learned how to read and write in either of the official languages or her native tongue. Even though Haawa never heard or spoke any English before coming to the United States, she was always thinking about attending school. She mentioned during the interview that “education is very important and in my country, I never got the chance or have the money to go to school.”

The opportunity to work on reading and writing in English has always been a dream for Haawa ever since stepping on American soil. When asked to tell the story about when she learned how to read and write in English, Haawa started laughing. Her first response was that “English is very hard” and “I always work hard to practice English.” After speaking English for about one year, Haawa was bothered by the notion that she cannot read English like her friends

at work, even though she knew the English alphabet. One day, after Haawa went to grab her mail, she found flyers, a brochure, and a magazine in her mailbox. At her kitchen table, Haawa picked up the magazine, and started to look through it. After a while, she started to call the letters of the alphabet from the magazine out loud. As time went by, Haawa started to cut out the various letters and used them to spell her name and her brother's name. Even though Haawa could only read and spell her name and her brother's name, cutting the different letters to spell her family's names was a fun task to engage in. As days, weeks, and months went by, it became a routine for Haawa to look through brochures and flyers and after a while, she was able to cut out all of the alphabet letters A-Z. Cutting the letters of the entire alphabet and keeping them in a safe place helped Haawa to begin making the transition into reading English for the first time.

As Haawa started to focus more on English materials at work, a co-worker noticed her transition to reading or looking through magazines during lunch time. After paying attention to Haawa for a while, Allison began to bring Haawa magazines she had at home and the two became good friends. Haawa said, "My friend Allison is a very good friend and help me a lot with English." Once Allison started coming to Haawa's house to help her with reading English, Haawa shared the magazine letters cut out with her. Impressed with Haawa's collections of letters, Allison asked Haawa if she would like to use the letters to spell out more words together. Haawa was very excited with the idea. As they used her letters to form words, she wrote the new words down in a notebook. After meeting with Allison for two months, once a week for an hour, Haawa wrote down a total of 96 new words in her book from the alphabet letters she cut out. On the days Allison was not helping Haawa, she rewrote the words again and worked with her brothers or son to read them. After meeting with Allison for six months, Haawa started to read basic sentences such as "I am fine, and how are you," from the list of words she wrote down.

After using the words in her book to form sentences for a while, Haawa started to make the transition into reading children's chapter books. *Go, Dog. Go!* by P.D. Eastman would later become the first book Haawa read on her own. With *Go, Dog. Go!*, Haawa was able to read and distinguish the differences between big and small and understand colors. Haawa said, "I loved the short sentences and the pictures of dogs were funny. Before, I never know I can read a book." Even though Haawa loved reading books with Allison, she found it very hard to understand vowels and consonants such as "ck" or "ch," when reading. Haawa said that every time she came across vowels, she would try to pronounce the word by ignoring the vowel sound or applying a different sound for it. Haawa said "all vowels sound the same to me and I don't know when to tell difference. When a word has an 'i' or 'e,' I don't know how to give the right sounds for them." Despite her struggle, Haawa was able to learn by reading a few of the words and sentences from *Go, Dog. Go!*

As time went by, Allison got busier with work, and she could no longer work with Haawa. Once Haawa was on her own, she turned to the television to increase her reading abilities. Watching some of the children's shows was fun once in a while. However, Haawa found it very difficult to focus because the information on TV seemed to move very fast, especially when both reading words and listening to people speak. Haawa said, "TV did not help me with reading like books and magazine, but it helped me with speaking a little bit." Learning through the TV was definitely not the same as the books Haawa enjoyed while learning reading. However, once Haawa started to attend adult school at Agassiz, she was introduced to many reading books and great teachers just like Allison.

During the interview, Haawa said, "school was good because I not go to school in my country and not know how a school is." The excitement of being at school for the first time was

overwhelming for Haawa. School was a very special place for her because it was the first time she was able to be in a classroom with students, learn how to read a long book, write on the board, talk in front of students, and get access to many new books, some of which she was able to borrow and use at home. Haawa said:

Having my own book to take home made me very happy. After losing my favorite book when moving, I do not have any other books at my home. When I take the book home I practice reading, but I not very good because of English very hard and I am old.

Being able to own a book was a powerful thing for Haawa. Even though she couldn't keep all of the books she borrowed from school, she used them to practice some of the words and sentences she learned at school. Every time Haawa brought a new book at home, she read chapters from it for at least an hour before work. After work, she wrote some passages from the book that she understood in her notebook. Writing passages down, according to Haawa "help [her] remember better because English is hard and [she] need the practice to read well." By practicing every day, Haawa started to improve her reading fluency and retain information piece by piece.

Although Haawa exerted endless effort practicing reading and writing in English, she struggled to remember most information she read. Haawa says, "I was very angry because I cannot remember things after learning them." Instead of giving up learning, Haawa increased her book reading time by 30 minutes. After reading and writing for three months, Haawa could remember three and four letter words, but not sentences. At times, after reading the same book for a week or more, Haawa could try to tell a person what the story was about, but for the most part, she struggled to remember what exactly was happening in a story if asked by someone. Even though Haawa was only able to read basic words and minimal sentences with Allison and

at her school, it did not stop her from applying the smallest reading skills gained when she was out shopping. Haawa said:

When I go shopping, I can read some food labels but I don't know a lot of them. Most of the time, I buy things that I know from my countries like milk, eggs, flour, sugar, salt, onion, or tomatoes because they are food I used a lot in my country. But my brothers buy other things I don't know like soap and other house things.

After attending Agassiz adult school for about five months, Haawa's learning opportunity soon came to an end as she took a full-time job position at her work. Due to her schedule change, Haawa was no longer practicing reading twice a day as she used to, but would engage in reading books once a week. However, it wasn't long before a Somali friend at work introduced Haawa to Giving + Learning (G+L). When Haawa came to G+L, she focused on reading the driver's license book. After studying at G+L for four months, Haawa stopped attending because she did not have a ride anymore and with snow, the cold was too much to bear. With the support of her brothers, Haawa continued studying her permit book at home. Although the book was very challenging for Haawa's level, she never gave up. As she studied, she would write down difficult vocabularies to use for the flash card, or look up words on her phone to help with understanding the book. Haawa said, "I know I cannot remember or read English well, but I know if I have my driver license, I will go to a lot of places." As Haawa studied the permit book, she kept herself busy by memorizing the different signposts or asking questions about confusing parts of the book. Once Haawa started to feel comfortable enough with the information from the book, she started to ride in the car with her brothers. While in the car, Haawa would try to identify signposts or street marks she studied from her book as they drive. Sometimes, she would work on the permit practice test online. As she worked on the test, she would write down the questions

and answers and try to find the questions in her study book. Haawa said, “every time I study the book and take the quiz, I was getting one more question corrects and it I was understanding the signpost more.”

After eleven months of studying the permit book, Haawa passed both her permit test and driving test. Today, she drives herself to G+L and is working on improving her reading comprehension every day. Even though Haawa is very proud to have her license, she still does not see any improvement with herself when it comes to reading in English. Haawa says:

I am old and I want to learn English 100%. I still need more study and I want to get my CAN. But I am happy I can read something in English now because before I can't. I go to my son conference; I can talk to the teacher and ask how my son is doing. I want to learn writing English next because writing too hard for me. I try before but I still not doing it well. Sometimes I take a book and copy sentences and words from the book, but I want to know how to write in my head and not look at a book.

Haawa continues to study hard and comes to G+L a lot more. On her own, at home, she keeps herself busy with literacy activities such as working on word puzzles, looking at a magazine, or reading interesting sections of short stories. According to Haawa, “English is one of the hardest languages to learn both speaking and writing it.” However, she is not giving up and continues to improve her reading and writing. During our conversation, she said, “once I can read and write good, I want to get my GED, use English correctly so that people don't fool me when I have to sign papers or report information at work and find a good job that pays well so I can support my family.” However, before taking further steps to reach her dreams, Haawa wants to read, write and speak English without the help of others.

A.3. One Book is All She Needed

Aisha is a 52 years old women from Somalia and is a mother of five kids. Growing up in her country Somalia, she was the only girl with seven brothers. Being the only girl, she was never given the opportunity to attend school. According to Aisha “my father never let me go to school because I was the only girl for him. My father said he did not want boys to play with me or hurt me. I was safe to be home and near him.” As Aisha’s brothers went to school, she stayed at her father’s business shop with him. By staying near her father, Aisha learned how to run a business very well. She said “my father trusted me so much because I was good at running our family business when he was away. My brothers never did a good job like I did and my father said to me one day, “I wish I did send you to school instead of your brothers.”” After Aisha was married and moved to her own home, she became a stay at home mom and could not help her father as before. However, soon enough, the war in Somalia erupted and she had to escape to Uganda with her family.

When Aisha and her family arrived in Uganda, they went to Nakivale refugee settlement camp located in Southwest Uganda with her five kids. Being a refugee to a new country in Uganda was not easy for a mother of five children with no father. Even though Aisha was thankful to be in a camp with her kids and away from the war, there were many challenges, such as hunger, diseases, and making sure that her kids were nearby so they were not to be raped. After living in the camp for 20 years, Aisha got the opportunity to come to the United States. However, because they stayed at the camp for a long time, two of her oldest kids got married and had children of their own, and so they decided to remain in Uganda. In 2009, Aisha came to the U.S. with her two youngest children, a son, and a daughter.

Today, even though Aisha is very happy to be in the United States, life is still a challenge every day. As a refugee, Aisha struggles to not just to speak English, but to read and write the English language fluently. At home, with her kids, she speaks her mother tongue, Somali, but mostly, she speaks Swahili. Once in a while, she codeswitches between Somali, Swahili, and English. Unfortunately, even though Aisha can speak three languages, she can neither read nor write in her mother tongue or Swahili. Aisha loves English, even though it is her third language, and she believes that without reading and writing English, life in America is impossible.

According to Aisha, the first English words she learned were "how are you?". She learned them from her kids, who attended school for a little while during their time at Nakivale camp. When I asked Aisha how she felt when she heard English words for the first time, she said: "I told my kids this Mzungus (white peoples) language is what I need to speak in America..." Aisha's first reaction was that she was not ready to learn another language aside from her mother tongue. But in reality, she knew that someday, in America, she would need to learn the language of the Mzungus in order to survive as a refugee.

Once Aisha's kids started school, she decided to look for a job. However, because she lacked the level of literacy skills required for employment, many of the jobs she applied to could not offer her a job. After filing endless job applications, Aisha decided it was time to improve her reading, writing and speaking ability in English. Soon, after she joined Moorhead Adult School (MAS), she found herself in a classroom full of students from Somalia, Sudan, and other countries. Having not been in a classroom or school before, Aisha was nervous of all the interaction and reporting back to the teacher during class discussions. Although Aisha could speak a bit of English, reading and writing was a major struggle every time she attended class because she did not know how to write or read at all. After attending MAS for about three

months Aisha stopped attending the program as she said “I was not learning like I want. The class had a lot of students and I was not getting more help with reading and writing. Sometimes I don’t know how to talk to my teacher or tell her what I am not understanding.” Seeing that she was not making any progress, moving forward was hard for Aisha. However, three weeks after staying at home, a friend of Aisha’s introduced her to Giving + Learning (G+L).

As soon as Aisha came to G+L, she was so excited as she looked through different books and did not know which one to start reading. Aisha says “at G+L, I have a lot of teachers, many books to choose from, and few students in the class.” Out of the many books available to learners for practicing reading, Aisha was able to find one that has impacted her reading ability up to this day.

No other books offered to Aisha could match her love for ABC Book One. For Aisha, learning to read in English always referenced back to ABC Book One. She said, “I love, love the ABC book so much.” Book One was a perfect match for Aisha because she could not read a single word or sentence, but instead needed practice with letters. As Aisha took the book, she said: “I want to learn ABC letters.” So, Aisha’s first month at G+L was spent learning all the letters of the alphabet, as well as being able to put letters together to make a word and pronounce it. The learning process of the alphabet took a lot of time and effort. But Aisha would not give up, even when, at times, she could not remember the next letter in the alphabet. To speed her learning process, Aisha decided she wanted to purchase her own book so that she could continue with her learning at home when she did have a ride to the program. As Aisha traveled, back and forth with her book, she kept a notebook where she would write new words she learned every time she attended class. Other times, she would write down a group of words she struggled pronouncing or understanding. During weekdays, she would work on studying these words and

try to memorize them or get their pronunciation correct for half an hour a day on her own mostly. At times, when her kids were at home, she would ask them for help.

Even though Aisha worked endlessly to learn the alphabet, the letter sounds were always very difficult for her. Aisha says “I don’t know how to give the right sounds for o, a, I, and e.” knowing that she struggled with the letter sounds, Aisha’s daughter helps Aisha with the sounds by finding videos on YouTube that focus on correct English pronunciation with the alphabet letters. From watching the video, Aisha was able to learn consonant pronunciation but the vowels remain difficult for her tongue.

After five months of attending G+L every weekend, Aisha started to read short sentences and was able to read four-six letter words with very little assistance. However, Aisha never acquired the ability to spell words due to her struggle with the sounds of the letters. When asked how much she can remember from reading, Aisha smiled but then looked very sad. She said, “I try very hard to read a lot in English, but I remember very little from what I read. I remember numbers one-ten, people’s names, small words like ‘at, off, on, he, or she’ but not long information or, numbers. Sometimes I try very hard but I still can’t remember many things I read in a book. When I read, I don’t know what the sentence or words mean.” Not being able to tell someone what a word or sentence is saying made Aisha unhappy. But not remembering did not stop Aisha from working harder to improve her reading and writing ability. When Aisha finished Book One, she was very happy, not caring that she could not pronounce everything correctly, but overjoyed because it was the first book she ever read and finished. Finishing Book One inspired Aisha so much that she challenged herself to move on to ABC Book Two on the same day she finished her first book.

Reading Book Two was a bit easier for Aisha because her speaking and reading were much stronger after finishing the first book. With Book Two, Aisha's focus was mainly on understanding passages through open discussion with her tutors after reading paragraphs. At the end of a page, Aisha would ask questions about things she was not understanding on that page and reread every page twice before moving on. Rereading a page twice as Aisha approached new pages became a daily practice that impacted her reading at G+L and at home. Every time she reread the same page, she was catching all the mistakes she was making before being corrected. Her pronunciation of many words became more fluent. Once Aisha was halfway through the book, she became stricter on herself as to how many mistakes she could make on a page. If she made more mistakes reading a sentence or words on a single page, she would reread it three or more times until she was getting all the information on the page correctly with no help. As time went by, Aisha's love for reading only increased. As soon as she would walk in the classroom, she would take out her book right away and start reading on her own as she waited for a tutor to work with her. Because Aisha was taking her book between school and home, she was able to finish Book Two in less than two months. After finishing Book Two, Aisha decided to go back and read books one and two again. The second time around, she was deeply confident with her pronunciation, reading fluency and paying attention to punctuation like periods or question marks.

After attending G+L for eleven months, Aisha stopped coming to the program because of a job offer. Due to her work schedule and not attending the program, Aisha was nowhere to be seen. During the interview, she said:

I am very sad because I don't have time to learn anymore and reading is important. I love to read. Now I can read anything in English, understand where I am going, and count up

to one hundred. ABC Book One and Two helped me a lot with reading and writing. I still have these books, but no time anymore for reading or going to school because I work night and weekend. When I used to go to school, I read, read, read a lot at home. I am forgetting how to read a book and write well. Sometimes I go shopping with my kids and I try to read food labels in English. If I am by myself, I go to Somali store because I know the food there well. Food like meat, tomatoes, onion, and rice I know them. I miss reading and going to school to see my teachers.

Once Aisha became busy with work, school was out of the picture. Even though she used to practice reading every day at home, she no longer does that because the one day she gets off, she is tired and tries to rest. Her only time to read words and sentences in English is when she is shopping for food with her family. Her sadness for not attending literacy programs is understandable. It is also hard to continue going to school because she has no ride. She said:

I am mad at my manager because they schedule me to always work on the weekend. I am still trying to find another job and when I have a good schedule, I will come and continue learning. I love reading English, and I want to not forget everything my teacher show me at G+L. On the phone, I talk to my daughter in Africa in English. I tell her, I am going to be a doctor someday and she laughs. I am also going to work hard so that I can file for her to come to America and study to get my driver license someday. Speaking, reading and writing are very important. I am not good with writing, but someday if I go back to G+L, I want to work on my writing.

Today, Aisha is no longer afraid or shy of speaking English with people at work. When she gets documents, she can read them and try to make sense of what is being said. She now can write checks and drop them to her landlord without her kids helping her when a rent is due. As far as

not going to G+L, she still has hopes and plans to continue learning at the site because she does not want to forget all the information she once learned. To Aisha, learning to speak, read and write well in America is important because it will open the door to many opportunities. She said “if I give up, my kids will not understand that education is important. They have the opportunity to get a good education here in America. I never had the chance when I was young. They can get a better job when they graduate and I have to be a good example for them.”

A.4. I Didn't Know I Could Read in English For Three Years

Lila, a mother of seven, is from Somalia. Prior to coming to the U.S., she was living with her kids in Nakivale refugee camp in Kampala Uganda for four years. It was at the camp where Lila first heard English being spoken by workers of humanitarian organizations from the U.S and other countries. In 2012, Lila came to the U.S. with her kids. As soon as she moved to the U.S., she was soon faced with the struggle to learn English. To Lila's surprise, learning to speak English (her third language) wasn't easy like her native language Somali, which is the official language spoken in her country or Swahili her second language.

When Lila started going to Moorhead adult literacy school, she soon realized that being at school was not easy. Even though she had finished up to seventh grade in Somalia, and can write and read a little bit in her language, being in an American adult literacy school was quite challenging for her. Back in Somalia, Lila did not learn any English at the schools. When she had to learn everything in English in the U.S. classroom, it was always moments of frustration without seeing any progression on a daily basis, especially when learning the alphabet. Lila had difficulty learning the ABC alphabet because she says, “Somali alphabet is different from the American English alphabet but the same as Arabic alphabet, it took me a long time to memorize all of the English letters because of the different pronunciation and the direction of reading a text

in English.” Because Lila was not used to reading a text from left to right, it was challenging to read information both at home and at school. After going to adult school for two years, at the age of 36, Lila began reading words at school. When Lila was asked to tell her story about how she learned to read in English, she said:

I did not know that I could read in English because English is very hard. During my third year of going to school, one day, I took a paper that had a story, and I started reading it. I was very surprised and happy but I was making a lot of mistakes. I did not know all the information I was reading, but since that day at school, I worked hard to practice my reading.

After, noticing that she could read paragraphs in English for the first time, Lila was very inspired to expand her reading comprehension. Whenever Lila was home, she turned to reading books her younger kids bring home from school. As Lila continued reading the book chapters, she started to notice how much she was getting into the books. Lila says:

The kids’ books were fun to read and easy to follow. When I read kids’ books, I find myself laughing at the stories many times. Sometimes, the storybooks my kids brought were sad and I feel like crying, reading them. When I made mistake while reading, my daughters would correct me always. My kids also started to bring more books from school so I can read them. Sometimes, I sit down and read together with my kids.

As Lila mentioned above, she was enjoying books but at the same time, she found herself emotionally attached to books. During the interview, Lila mentioned that she was always busy as a mother of seven, but when she has time to sit down and read, it was like going into an adventure, where she was not bothered by kids or housework but having a time of her own. After

reading children books for about four months, Lila did not just expand her vocabulary but learned how to understand sentences, paragraphs, and difficult text, like the citizenship book.

Once Lila saw that her reading level has improved, she wanted to challenge herself to another book, and that was when she started studying for the citizenship test by reading the citizenship book. When Lila started reading the citizenship book, she soon realized that the textbook is not like the children's chapter books she read for pleasure. As Lila started to look at the citizenship book closely, she realized that words and sentences in the book were very hard to pronounce and spell. After reading the citizenship book for about two weeks, Lila gave up and turned back to chapter books. When Lila was asked about what she found difficult about reading in English, she said:

Reading in English is difficult because you need to understand words and everything when you read. In English, you can't just read but you have to understand the meaning of words, sentences, and paragraphs well to know what is going on or to tell someone what a book is about. I find the citizenship book very hard. The sentences have hard words that I don't understand sometimes. Names like New Hampshire or a name of a governor are hard to say.

As Lila saw her own struggle with reading the citizenship book, she started to read the book every day for one hour. While reading, Lila would rewrite the questions and answers down on a notebook because to her, it helped her remember better when writing things down. When Lila memorized seven citizenship questions and answers on her own at home, the excitement pushed her to continue memorizing more questions. Once she memorized twenty questions and answers, Lila was determined that she has the potential to study and memorized all the questions in the book. With the help of her kids, the adult school, and Giving + Learning, nothing seems to stop

Lila from reading and mastering the questions. At home, Lila would ask her children to quiz her with the questions to help her continue studying. As she continues with her memorization, Lila said:

I started to realize that if I push myself more hard, I would be able to memorize and understand other things in English beside the citizenship book. I am studying the book very hard because I want to be an American citizen. When I have my citizenship, I want to go visit Africa. I miss home. Here in America, life is hard. I work part-time so that I can help my parents, sisters, and brothers back home. But if I don't have my citizenship, going home is going to be hard for me.

Lila understands that she needs to work hard so that she can get her citizenship. Although her goal is to become a U.S. citizen, she enjoys reading and learning English in general. She says:

I want to work hard to learn because I want to be a good example for my kids. I don't want them to end up doing a hard job like me with little money. Knowing how to write and read English is very important. Before speaking, reading, and writing English my son comes home with homework and ask me to help him. When I tell, him I don't know, he asks why, so I started to work hard so I can help him. Now I can speak and understand English a little bit. I tell my kids how important school is and they need to work hard to graduate. Sometimes, we do homework together or have reading time together. I am learning every day from my kids.

As Lila continues to improve her literacy level in English, she eventually wants to get her GED. However, she is waiting for her kids to enroll in school, before taking this step. Today, Lila reads in English mostly when she is at home or when going shopping because to her, any time to practice English is important to her improvement. Currently, Lila has developed a way to

improve her reading and speaking ability. This includes reading texts on the computer from websites. She enjoys reading on the computer because it gives her the opportunity to use the computer and understand how a computer works. When she is not working on reading, she practices speaking English conversation on the computer by using websites that provides conversation. To this day, learning is a continuous goal for Lila, and she hopes to learn writing English, just like speaking and reading it.

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

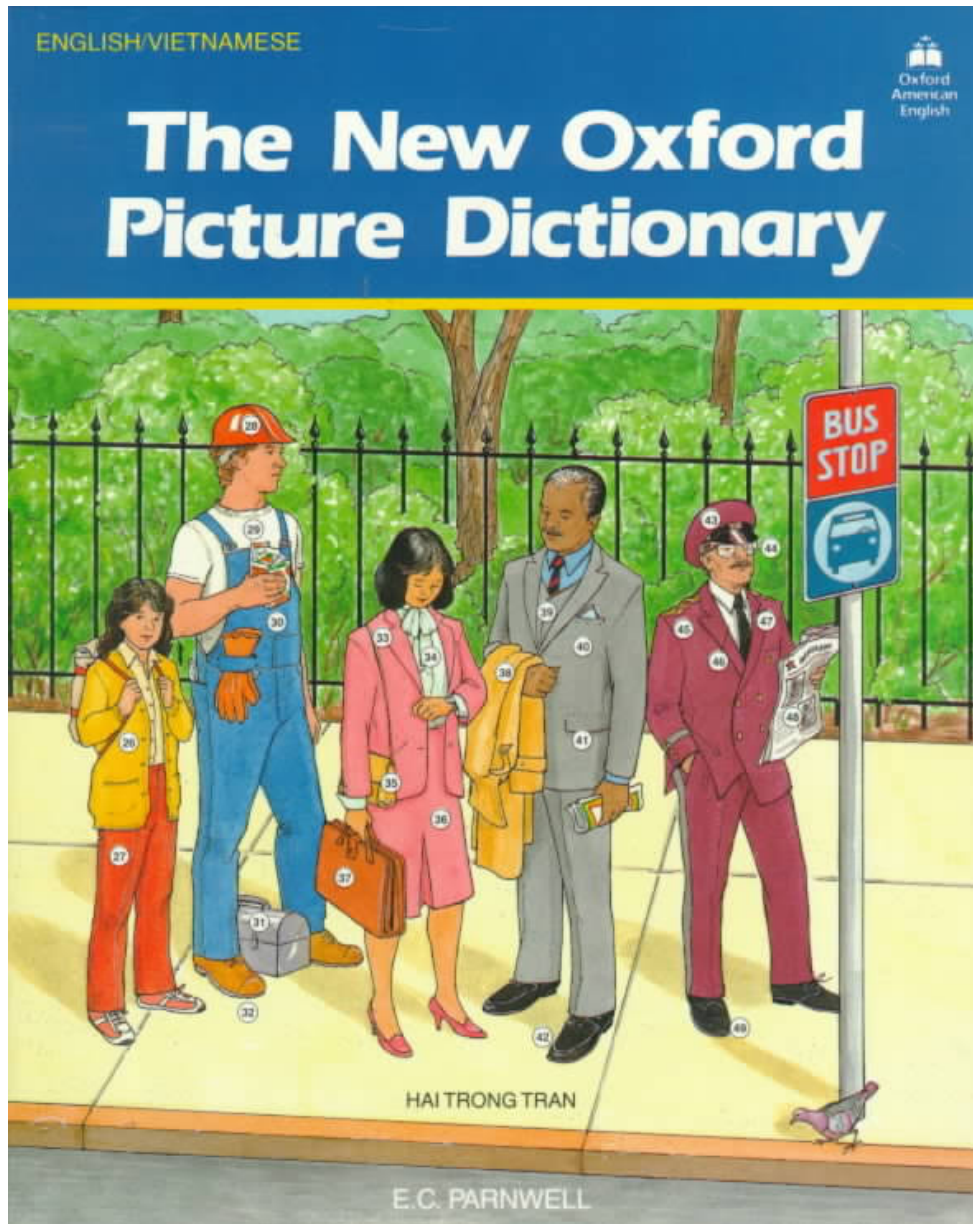
- What is your country of origin?
- What is the official language?
- What is your native language?
- Did you go to school in your country of origin?
- Did you learn the official language and/or your native language in school?

- Did you learn English there?
- If you went to a refugee camp before coming to the USA, did you go to school in the refugee camp? Did you learn English there?
- How many languages do you know?
- Do you know how to read in other languages?
- What alphabet does it have?
- How is it different from English?

- Is English your 1st, 2nd, (or more) language?
- At what age, did you start learning Reading English?
- Can you tell me the story about how you learned to read in English?
- Where did you learn to read (school, home, TV, cultural center)?
- How much English did you learn? (Words, sentences, paragraphs, texts)
- What books and other materials did you use to learn to read?
- Did you self-teach? If no, who was your teacher? Who else helped you practice? Tell me about him/her.

- How often did you learn to read? (Hourly, daily, Weekly, Monthly)
- How much were you able to remember from what you read every time?
- Was the direction of reading words and sentences the opposite of the languages you learned before? (ie English is left to right, are the languages you know the same of from right to left?)
- If this was new for you, tell me the story of when you learned that it was left to right?
- When you go shopping, do you read the labels on food in English or your language?
- What was the first book you read in English? What do you remember about it?
- What did you find most difficult about reading in English? Tell me some stories about that.
- How would you rate your reading in English now? High-Medium-Low
- In what language(s) do you read now?
- How much do you read in English (in school and outside of school)?

APPENDIX C. PREFERRED MATERIALS BY ENGLISH LEARNERS: THE NEW
OXFORD PICTURE DICTIONARY



APPENDIX D. PREFERRED MATERIALS BY ENGLISH LEARNERS: GO, DOG, GO!



APPENDIX E. PREFERRED MATERIALS BY ENGLISH LEARNERS: ABC ENGLISH

BOOKS ONE AND TWO

