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Exploring the Academic and Social Challenges of Students with Limited And Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Ontario

Hawa Yusuf Osman
Faculty of Education, osmanb@uwindsor.ca

Exploring the Academic and Social Challenges of Students with Limited And

Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Ontario

By

Hawa Osman

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Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Ontario

By

Hawa Osman

APPROVED BY:

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S. Holloway

Faculty of Education

_____

C. Greig, Advisor

Faculty of Education

April 7, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Since 2010, Ontario's education system has taken in an increasing number of students from refugee families, many of whom have limited literacy and numeracy skills and are classified as students with limited and interrupted formal education (SLIFE). To ensure the success of these students, it is important to identify the most effective ways to address their unique learning needs. However, there is currently limited research on this subpopulation in Ontario. Therefore, in order to understand the academic challenges this subpopulation faces, a comprehensive literature review has been conducted with the purpose of establishing the issues that influence this phenomenon. Findings from the literature explored indicate that these students have unique social and emotional needs that are compounded by language barriers, all of which inhibit their academic success. Moreover, their ways of knowing are seldom recognized in schools. These issues collectively lead to higher dropout rates. In order to effectively support SLIFE, educators must adopt multiliteracy pedagogies and provide mentorship programs and counselling services. It is also recommended that future research explore the different multiliteracies approaches teachers can utilize to determine which are most effective in supporting this population.

Keywords: SLIFE, literacy, numeracy, refugee, multiliteracy pedagogies.

DEDICATION

To my family

To my friends

and to all the people who supported me

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to the Government of Canada (2019), approximately 70,000 refugee asylum claims were filed in Canada between 2011-2014, of which 48,500 were made in the province of Ontario. Of those refugees, 20% were school-aged youth (Statistics Canada, 2019a). This is of particular concern because teachers in Ontario are increasingly meeting new challenges in the classroom as many of these students, as well as other immigrant students, are considered students with limited or interrupted formal education. This population is often referred to as students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) or students with limited, or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Most studies employ the term SLIFE because it is inclusive to both students who have interrupted schooling and those who have no prior or limited schooling (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2010). They are characterized as English language learners (ELLs), however they experience greater difficulty because they have limited literacy and numeracy skills, which compounds the barriers associated with learning in English as a second language (ESL) programs. In addition, they often lack grade level competency and schooling, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to other ELLs and ESL learners.

Background of Global Refugee Crisis and Canada's Role

Before addressing the challenges that SLIFE experience in Canada, it is first important to define what a refugee is, understand the global refugee crisis, Canada's response to it, and how Canada's refugee policy has impacted Ontario and its schools.

Definition

Before discussing Canada's refugee resettlement programs, it is first important to define who is considered a refugee and to understand the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) commitment in assisting refugees. The UNCHR (2019) offers a clear definition of what constitutes a refugee:

> A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries (para.1).

This definition highlights that refugees have left their homes under duress, have fled to secure safety, and are typically unable to return to their native countries.

Global Crisis

Globally, the numbers of refugees has increased drastically between 2007 and 2017. For example, according to the United Nations Global Trends study, 64.5 million people were displaced worldwide in 2017, and 25.4 million of them were refugees who were forcibly expelled from their homes (UNCHR, 2018a). The majority of these refugees temporarily settled in refugee camps that the UNHCR founded in neighbouring countries because they did not have anywhere else to go. Consequently, they wait to migrate to one of the countries that provide resettlement programs for refugees (UNHCR,

2018b). This process is defined as "the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State that has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status" (UNHCR, 2018b). There are 44 countries that offer refugee resettlement programs, Canada being one of them (UNHCR, 2018b).

The UNHCR (2018b) asserts that the countries who offer refugee resettlement programs protect refugees against *refoulement,* which means that these countries must ensure the refugees they admit to their country have access to the essential human rights provided to nationals, such as civil liberties, and political, economic, and cultural rights. To that end Canada has taken a leading role in supporting refugees, taking in about 10% of the 80,000 refugee claimants from abroad annually (Government Canada, 2015). This number is projected to increase by 2020 as the Trudeau government took actions in 2018 to increase the recent government assisted refugees from 7,500 to 10, 000 yearly (Hutchins, 2018).

Canada's Refugee Resettlement Programs

Canada has three refugee resettlement programs: the Government Assisted Refugee Program (GAR), the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, and the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (Immigrant Service Society of British Columbia [ISS of BC], 2015, p.9). Refugees who enter Canada through GAR are supported by the federal government's resettlement assistance program for the first year of arrival. The government covers their basic needs, and some receive supplemental support, such as medical disability or support for trauma from torture (ISS of BC, 2015). Through the

Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, organizations and private individuals can sponsor a refugee to be considered for resettlement. If approved, the sponsor must temporally support the individual financially and help them to integrate into the Canadian society (ISS of BC, 2015). The Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugee Program is the third program, which was established in 2013. It consists of individuals who are referred by the UNCHR to Canada, who then accepts them as Convention Refugees and matches them with a private sponsor. Both the government and private sponsor are responsible for supporting these individuals for the first six months of their arrival (ISS of BC, 2015). After they are admitted into Canada, they may resettle in different provinces and territories. Ontario has the highest number of resettled refugees from all three categories when compared to other provinces, with 52, 605 of refugees resettling from January 2015 to March 2019 (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2019).

Ontario's Current Education Policies and Programs

The province of Ontario funds different organizations that provide programs and services that help refugees settle in Canadian society (Government of Ontario, 2019b). These programs and services include language training programs, employment services, housing assistance, and childcare services to name a few. The language training programs are usually for adult newcomers and teach simple English skills such as reading, writing, and speaking (Government of Ontario, 2019a). However, since a significant number of the refugees had no, limited, or interrupted prior schooling, they encounter challenges when attending schools. Therefore, for school-age and adolescent refugees, the Ontario

Ministry of Education (OEM) has created a support document for educators titled *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling* (2008) *A practical guide for Ontario Educators: Grade 3 to 12.*

This document discusses this subpopulation and how educators can help them transition into Ontario classrooms and adjust to Ontario's school environment, routines, and expectations. It also presents cases of students with limited prior education and addresses some of their specific needs. The document likewise lists different challenges that teachers may encounter while teaching such students and offers strategies that may be effective address these scenarios. The OME also designed English Literacy Development (ELD) to support ELLs with limited schooling. ELD is geared towards individuals who have limited literacy skills both in their native language and English. This program is specifically designed for students from grades 3 to 12 who did not have formal schooling or a gap in their education and as a result did not develop age appropriate literacy skills.

<center>**Statement of the Problem**</center>

Refugees encounter significant difficulties and risk their lives to find a safe haven for themselves and their families (Stewart et al., 2015). However, when and if they reach a peaceful country to settle in, they often encounter new challenges, such as adapting to a new language, culture, and society (McBrien, 2010). Refugee children also encounter additional challenges in their host country's education system. These young students must strive to learn a new language and acclimatize to a new system of instructions,

which yields inequitable education outcomes for this population. Cummins and Early (2015) note that it takes a minimum of five years for newcomers to reach native academic fluency (p. 12). This gap is even more significant for older refugee students, as there is a broader knowledge gap in addition to the language gap (DeCapua et. al., 2007; Montero, Newmaster &Ledger, 2014). To that end, refugee students are at greater risk of academic underachievement as a result of having no or limited prior schooling before resettling in their host country (Ross & Ziemke, 2016, p. 49).

Importance of the Study

The current study is important to educators and others for three key reasons. First, the demographics of Canadian schools are shifting and becoming more diverse. Current projections suggest the number of immigrants, migrants, refugees, and international students may rise from 20% in 2006 to nearly 30% by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2018). This diversity is particularly prevalent in Ontario, where over 3.8 million people identify as members of a visible minority (Ministry of Finance, 2016). These statistics demonstrate Canada's diversity and accentuate the need for inclusive pedagogical models in Canadian classrooms. Second, there is a gap in the literature on SLIFE experiences and the support they need to integrate in the school community. A number of Canadian studies have explored the experiences and academic outcomes of immigrant and migrant ELLs from kindergarten through to grade 12; however, they have not explored refugee students' experiences (Ratkovic et. al., 2017). Third, teachers and school administrators are not fully aware of the socio-psychological challenges this subpopulation has

experienced and how it sometimes affects their school performance (Stewart, 2014). This is supported by Montero (2018) who asserts that teachers feel 'ill equipped' to support this population academically (p.123). Therefore, in order to better understand the challenges SLIFE face in their host country education system, a comprehensive literature review will be conducted with the purpose of establishing the issues that influence this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Trends suggest that the current refugee crisis will not be abating any time soon. Given Canada's refugee policy and Ontario's engagement with it, teachers in Ontario can expect SLIFE to be a continued fixture within their classrooms. Since SLIFE face a number of barriers when transitioning to their new culture, in large part due to their limited or interrupted education, it is critical to identify what barriers impact their learning outcomes, how to address them, and what proposed future research could help to bring critical insights into this phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Methods

To fulfill the purpose of the study, a comprehensive search of scholarly articles was carried out. Four research strategies were used: a database search with key words, a search terms strategy, selection criteria, and index hunting. The results provided a range of articles that explored challenges encountered by SLIFE.

Database Search

In order to understand the challenges faced by SLIFE and to gather information on SLIFE, the University of Windsor's Leddy Library electronic inquiries was utilized to locate peer- reviewed journals. To ensure that only articles relevant to education and social sciences were included, only published studies from education and social science journals were selected. The databases included Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Social Sciences, Google Scholar, and Taylor & Francis Journals Complete.

Search Terms

There were several key terms that were utilized to ensure a variety of articles and perspectives were explored. The initial search terms that were used included, "students with limited interrupted formal education," "refugee students," and "ELLs with limited education." The key terms were then entered into the search engine in conjunction with terms related to cultural aspects such as "culture," "adaptation," and "acculturation." To further narrow the scope, three terms "educational experience," "socio-economic

barriers," and "language barriers" were used. The main search terms were also combined with possible outcomes such as "academic experience," "social experience," "challenges," "socio-emotional health," and "available support system." Lastly, a combination of several key terms was used. Various combinations of these key terms produced results that included in excess of a thousand articles.

Selection Criteria

The articles were further selected based on studies that were relevant to the current study. The literature had to meet certain criteria to be in included in the review. The research had to focus on SLIFE in Canada and America and had to report on educational and social experiences. It had to be published after 2000 to ensure the studies selected were current. After narrowing down the articles to 33 studies, major themes and key findings were identified. The articles were then grouped into similar themes such as academic, social and emotional challenges, which were then used to make connections within the literature.

Index Hunting

Furthermore, 'index hunting' was also utilized to find appropriate sources. This process entails reviewing the reference lists of scholarly journal articles that have already been selecting to find other related studies.

Categorization

The findings were then categorized into four larger common themes: the definition of SLIFE, educational challenges, the adaptation and acculturation processes, and the lack of proper support for SLIFE.

Definition

To define SLIFE, it is first important to highlight the most common terminology used when exploring this population in the literature. Windle and Miller (2012) use the term 'low literacy refugee-background students,' while Freeman and Freeman (2001) refer to SLIFE as 'bilinguals with limited formal schooling'. In contrast, Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) and the New York Department of Education refer to them as 'students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education' (SIFE). However, the most commonly used terminology is adopted by DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009): 'students with limited and interrupted formal education' (SLIFE).

While there are various terminologies used to refer to these ELL subpopulations, the definition in the literature is consistent. As such, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) provides a comprehensive definition of these students. According to the OME (2008), there are several criteria required to meet the definition of ELL with limited, interrupted formal education. First, they must be "English language learners with limited prior schooling" and must "come to Ontario schools from a variety of life situations and experiences" (p. 6). The OME (2008) notes that though their personal contexts are unique, none have attended "school on a regular and consistent basis or may have had no

schooling at all" (p. 6). As a result, these "students have significant gaps in their learning and have had limited opportunities to develop age-appropriate language and literacy skills even in their first language" (p.6).

The OME definition provides clarity to educators about SLIFE, such as who this unique population is, what their challenges are, and why they have such challenges. In doing so, educators and school administrations can understand their challenges so that they can support them more effectively. Additionally, while most of the students who are classified as SLIFE were/are refugees, there are other students who fall into this category. For example, SLIFE students may also include those who did not have access to stable education due to low attendance, poverty, employment conflicts necessitated by socioeconomic needs, lack of transportation, and or a lack of access to schools due to geographic restrictions (WIDA, 2015).

One of the reasons why these subpopulations may be unidentified in the education system is because Ontario schools do not seek school records; consequently, such schools do not have past school records for them. Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) note that American schools have difficulty identifying SLIFE because the students do not have school records from their home country and because schools are not equipped to identify SLIFE's literacy level in their native language. Likewise, when schools do ask for prior school records, parents often do not want to disclose such information as they are ashamed and/or afraid to be blamed for their child's lack of schooling (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et. al., 2009). In addition, when parents do disclose such

information, they may not address the fact that the child lacks age appropriate literacy/numeracy skills may be due to a variety of intersecting issues, such as unqualified teachers, a lack of resources, and poor/limited school infrastructure/facilities (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Therefore, schools struggle to identify this population, which is necessary to anticipate their academic trajectory in their host country.

Educational Experiences

To provide a thorough representation of their experiences, it is critical to identify the role of education in the lives of SLIFE, outline the challenges they face in the education system, discuss the methods they use to acclimatize to the culture of the school, and address the high rate of school dropout.

Role of Education in the Lives of SLIFE

Education plays a major role in supporting SLIFE as they integrate into Canadian society. Montero (2018) explains that, educational institutes serve as a community space and have the greatest potential to positively impact the academic, cultural, and socio-emotional welfare of refugee students. Refugee parents and their children concur that education is crucial to resettlement in the host country (Montero, 2018; Stewart 2014). Refugee youths in Canada were interviewed by Stewart (2014), who reports that education was their top priority and that they were grateful for the access they had to public education in Canada. Likewise, Gunderson (2000) found that 60% of the refugee students she interviewed in British Columbia said they desired to continue

their education and attend post-secondary institutions, whereas 30% of the interviewees expressed a desire to directly enter the workforce. Based on the data, refugee youths have ambitions in becoming physicians, engineers and attorneys; however, these aspirations maybe difficult to attain as they had limited time to meet graduation requirements (Montero, 2018; Stewart, 2014). Their aspirations were inhibited by their age and their lack of formal schooling in their native country where many did not have the opportunity to develop their literacy skills and the foundational academic knowledge needed to succeed in the schooling system.

Despite these challenges, refugee students strive to complete their education. For example, Davila (2012) found that adolescent refugees in America are eager to graduate so that they can seek employment or more educational opportunities. Similarly, research conducted in Canada on refugee students highlight that educational achievement is migrant youth's only hope for a brighter future and serves as an agent of change (Stewart (2014). To that end, education is considered the gateway to securing employment because it provides citizens with the skills and trainings required to enter the workforce. As such, educational institutions play a critical role in providing refugee youths with the skills and career training required in finding future employment (Gahungu, Gahungu, & Luseno, 2011). Thus, it is imperative that stakeholders provide SLIFE with the academic support they need to succeed in school and in the workforce.

Challenges in the Education System

Stewart (2014) found that refugees have an "insatiable appetite for education" (p. 67). However, since organizational and "structural hierarchies most benefit the dominant class, gender and racial groups in our society" (Clandfield et. al., 2014, p.33), SLIFE encounter challenges in the education system. These hierarchical structures, Davila (2012) notes, are shaped by the power relations that exist between those within the structure, such as students, educators, and school administrators. In addition, Davila (2012) argues that educational institutions replicate dominant academic, socio-linguistic norms, thereby allowing students who have similar customs to be more likely to succeed in the schooling system. Since refugee students lack social capital, they consequently rank in the lower end of this hierarchical system and face more barriers to success (Davila, 2012). Thus, the system can inadvertently create systemic marginalization. Moreover, due to the cultural biases in the education system, schools may not be able to identify what resources and support systems refugees are in dire need of and in turn fail to provide refugee students with the support they need to succeed. This can lead to serious consequences as adolescent refugees in Canada are more likely to drop out of school and are more vulnerable to poverty, delinquencies, and the lure of gangs and drugs (Kanu, 2008, Montero, 2018; Stewart, 2014, Tavares & Isle, 2013).

Acclimatizing to Formal Education

Another challenge that SLIFE encounter in their host country's education system is adapting to formal schooling, which can be challenging since most of their knowledge was acquired informally. DeCapua (2016) notes that SLIFE receive most of

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their knowledge through "mentoring and apprenticeship models" (p. 227), through which family and community members did most of the mentoring. Similarly, Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2012) explain that for most SLIFE, informal learning occurred through socio-interactive practice in that the tasks were practical, purposeful, and straightforward. They go on to explain that this subpopulation's traditional way of learning is not appreciated in the education system in the United States (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). Consequently, they struggle to adjust to the education system in their host country because their way of knowing, learning, and understanding conflicts with the formal education system (DeCapua & Marshal, 2010; 2011). The education system in host countries such as Canada and America are based on problem-solving, and theoretical and scientific models of knowing, which accentuates literacy and critical thinking abilities (DeCapua & Marshal, 2010; 2011; Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). This creates confusion and feelings of isolation for SLIFE as they must adjust to the socio-cultural elements of the education system—such as the structure, routines, and the rules of the school community—while simultaneously learning the language (DeCapua & Marshal, 2010; 2011).

Additionally, SLIFE struggle to keep up with the academic expectations in the classroom because of their limited print knowledge and academic foundation. Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2012) observed that students who lacked formal education had difficulties with classroom tasks when teachers incorporated written language. They also found that students with limited education struggled with simple tasks, such as the progression of assigned work, which they noted was a result of their lack of prior formal schooling and

literacy skills (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). In addition, they noticed that a simple oral language assignment became difficult when the teacher included literacy tasks (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). This puts SLIFE at a disadvantage when they enter Canadian classrooms because they lack the prior learning schema that is necessary for formal schooling. This is supported by DeCapua and Marshal (2011), who add that SLIFE's prior learning is simultaneously invalidated in this process. For example, though SLIFE "may know the medicinal properties of plants," they may struggle to classify them "on the basis of phyla or reproductive characteristics" because these concepts and terms are foreign to them (p. 36). Their comprehension and interpretation abilities are different than the abilities of students with formal schooling and as a result struggle to meet the curriculum expectations of Western education system.

High Rate of School Dropout

Numerous studies report that there is a high dropout rate amongst SLIFE (DeCapua, 2016; Fry, 2005; Gahungu et al., 2011; Gunderson, 2007; Stewart, 2014). For example, DeCapua (2016) explains that ELLs have the highest school dropout rate in United States, but that this number is highest among ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education. Likewise, Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) note that adolescents who enter schools at the age of 16 or older encounter greater difficulties because they lack the content knowledge that is required for complex courses such as algebra and sciences in conjunction with learning English, which may lead to dropping out of school. In addition, Davila (2012) found that, "graduation requirements and tests are a continual source of

anxiety" for SLIFE and are often attributed as the reason for dropping out (p. 145). Similarly, Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) found that one of the reasons for the high dropout rate is the disparity between expectations put on students and their actual skill set, which induces high levels of stress and causes them to give up.

One of the reasons SLIFE struggle to close that gap between their skills and academic expectations is that the education system in Ontario relies on a scaffolding model. This means that students build on the knowledge they have acquired throughout their schooling years. Therefore, when adolescent SLIFE enter the classroom, they have to learn basic skills before they can learn the academics. Because many SLIFE are in their mid-late teens, there is a significant gap that must be closed in a short time. The difficulty associated with this may inhibit motivation and thereby lead to higher dropout out rates.

Another challenge SLIFE encounter in the education system is having to take mandated high-stakes tests (Menken, 2008). This adds to the pressure that this population has to cope with. For example, in Ontario all students must take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) in order to receive their high school diploma (EQAO, 2017). Although certain students may receive some accommodation, they are nonetheless required to take the test under the Education Quality and Accountability Act (EQAO, 2017). Such standardized test can create barriers for racialized and minoritized students (Eizadirad, 2019), especially adolescent students with limited literacy and numeracy skills (Rabiner, Godwin, & Dodge, 2016).

SLIFE encounter numerous challenges in the education system because of structural, cultural and academic disparities (Kanu, 2008). Therefore, when they enter the school system, they are already at a disadvantage, which in most cases leads to leaving the school system (DeCapua, 2016; Kanu, 2008). SLIFE are eager to learn (Gunderson, 2000; Stewart, 2014); however, barriers that are beyond their control cause them to become marginalized and unsupported (Davila, 2012, p.139). Most of the literature stresses importance of establishing suitable support systems, language programs, and vocational trainings for these migrant youths who have lost everything and came to Canada for a better life and a brighter future. This responsibility is on policy makers, school administrators, government officials, educators, and community leaders because Canada made a commitment to support these refugees in the resettling process.

Adaptation and Acculturation Challenges

Many refugees struggle with adaptation and the acculturation process in their host country due to different sociocultural barriers (Montero, 2018, p.123). To better understand what inhibits the acculturation process, it is essential to understand the process of acculturation. Berry (2005) states that the acculturation process occurs through cultural and psychological change when different ethnic members come into contact with each other. Berry (2005) differentiates between the group level and individual level of the acculturation process. He notes that changes at the group level occur in "social structures, institutions and in cultural practices" (p. 699), and at the individual level, persons'

behaviours, morals, and beliefs may change. The acculturation process can be emotionally challenging since newcomers may feel overwhelmed by the expectation to assimilate to the mainstream society (Berry, 2005; McBrien, 2005). Newcomers who are coping with the acculturation process may develop acculturation strategies in that they navigate the ways in which they can integrate into the dominant community while simultaneously maintaining their own cultural values (Berry, 1997). Although refugees may employ acculturation strategies, they still encounter linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural barriers that may inhibit the integration process.

Linguistic Barriers

Language is pivotal in the integration of a society, and it is one of the most significant challenges refugees have to overcome (Jia, Gottardo, Chen, Koh, & Pasquarella, 2016). In Canada, being able to speak English or French is paramount to obtaining employment and education (Stewart, 2014). As such, refugees, especially adolescents and young adults, face significant stress when learning the language of their host country (Stewart, 2014). One reason is that learning a language is a complex process in that it is not only based on learning grammar, syntax, and vocabulary but also because it is connected to shared values, culture, and identity (Schmidt de Carranza, 2017). Since, many newcomers are ethnically, racially, and culturally different than their host country's citizens, becoming proficient in the language may take a long period of time. In addition, due to their lack of print awareness, they have to initially learn through oral language instructions as opposed to written text and reading tasks. Thus, they must first familiarize

themselves with the Roman letter names and sounds before they can start to learn how to read or write (Montero et. al., 2014), which may delay language proficiency. Despite these challenges, most refugees aspire to learn English, even older refugees. McBrien (2010) found that one of the major themes that emerged when she interviewed Somali and Vietnamese refugee mothers was the desire to learn English because they stated that language and culture skills were critical in surviving in their host country. They declared that the language barrier was not only one of the first obstacles they had encountered but also one of the most critical because it was necessary for securing employment (McBrien, 2010). Therefore, they strove to learn the language so that they could navigate their immediate environment and the job market while integrating into the host country's society.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Similar to linguistic barriers that may impede adaptation and acculturation process, refugees also experience socio-economic barriers as a result of financial hardship when they resettle in Canada. Many refugees arrive to Canada with little to no savings and are at high risk of living in poverty. According to the 2016 Canadian Census 31.4% of newly arrived (from 2011 to 2016) immigrants and 42.9 % of non-permanent residents, which includes refugee claimants are of low-income status (Statistics Canada, 2019b). In addition, students from lower socio-economic status are at a higher risk of academic underachievement because they have limited resources available to them

(Edgerton, Peter & Roberts, 2009). Therefore, schools that are in low-income neighbourhoods lack funds needed to support refugee students.

The People for Education (2013) assert that newcomers to Canada make up 12% of the demographics in low-income schools and 3% of high-income schools. Schools in high income neighbourhoods are able to fundraise fives times more than low incomes schools and those students are much more likely to be part of extra curricular activities such as choir, orchestra or band (People for Education, 2013). Compared to students from low-income households who cannot afford healthy meals let alone extra curricular activities (Family Service Toronto, 2017). Consequently, refugee students are at disadvantage even before the resettle in their host country because they lack social capital, educational skills that are necessary for gainful employment and are of minority background. These factors may impede the acculturation process when resettling in the Canadian society.

Cultural Barriers

Along with linguistic, socio-economic barriers, refugees also face cultural barriers that may inhibit the adaptation and acculturation process. Kanu (2008) explains that in the past, the waves of immigrants and refugees who resettled in Canada were of Eastern European origin. They did not face as many challenges because they presented culturally and ethnically similar values to many of the groups in Canada and were well educated. In contrast, recent waves of refugees and immigrants in Canada come from conflict zones such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan and Middle Eastern countries

who are linguistically, culturally and religiously different than the mainstream population (Kanu, 2008). When they resettle in the host country they have to reestablish their lives and learn a new way of living, which can be challenging. McBrien (2011) notes that "Refugees can be disadvantaged when they are unfamiliar with the practices and when their own cultural beliefs conflict with expectations in their new communities, or when they are consumed by other pressing needs" (p.1). They may become alienated due to the fear of losing their cultural values when trying to adapt to the Canadian culture. In addition, refugee children experience identity crisis because there is a dichotomy between their heritage culture and the mainstream culture (McBrien, 2005; Naji, 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Their native culture is rooted in collectivistic values, in that group relationship and responsibilities are greater than the individual's goals (DeCapua & Marshal, 2010). Likewise, parents and elders make most of the decisions and have the final say. Whereas, the Western culture is based on individualistic values, whereby, individual's goals and self-interests are more important. These dissimilarities cause intergenerational gaps between refugee parents and their children (Naji, 2012; Zhou & Bankston III, 2014). Consequently, making the adaptation and acculturation process difficult. Educators can support refugee students navigate these crises by practicing cultural pedagogies and creating an inclusive space in the class. Ayoub and Zhou (2016) emphasize that teachers who are culturally responsive get to know their students, create an inclusive classroom and welcome different perspectives. In doing so, students are not

pressured to assimilate to the dominant culture, which may make the integration process easier.

Lack of Sufficient Support

Most of the literature highlights the lack of academic and social support for SLIFE in Canadian schools, because their needs are unique and diverse. Therefore, it is important to address the lack of academic, psychological and emotional support that SLIFE encounter in the school system.

Lack of Differentiated Pedagogical Practices

There is a lack of specialized instructions that support SLIFE academically in Canadian schools. Usually, SLIFE are placed in ESL classrooms, however they need more support than ESL students because in the traditional ESL classroom most of the students have already auxiliary literacy background in their native language, thus learning English is not as challenging as it would be for a SLIFE. This is supported by Montero et. al., (2014) who explain that high school ESL teachers are generally trained in conventional ESL practices, however such pedagogical practices are geared towards students with strong literacy abilities, which focuses more on language development and content knowledge. They also highlight that such pedagogical practices are not meeting the educational prerequisites of students with limited print awareness (Montero et. al., 2014). They need more support with the foundational print awareness and language proficiency. Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) note that "most schools do not offer a clear support structure with teachers, guidance counselors, parent coordinators, social workers,

and the families all involved" (p.11). Because SLIFE needs are unique and diverse, they require substantial support systems that collaborate in providing adequate support. As such, Custodio and O'Loughlin, (2017) note that it is important that school boards, administrators, and educators are aware that SLIFE are able to succeed if they receive proper support, despite their academic challenges.

Lack of Socio-Emotional Support

Since most of SLIFE are refugees, they may come from war zones and may have experienced tragedies. Upon resettling in their host country, they suffer from various mental illnesses, which may inhibit their anticipated academic trajectory. Consequently, literature asserts that there is lack of socio-emotional support in the school system for these subpopulations. For example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2018) note that, "Canadian schools are ill prepared to support refugee students coming to terms with war, violence, trauma, and interrupted schooling" (p.1). This is because some of them may have experienced pre-migration trauma, thus when they enter the school system they have to cope with psychological and emotional distress in conjunction with limited print awareness. Stewart (2014) reported that several refugee students she interviewed conveyed stories of mental health issues, as a result of trauma experienced during pre-migration. One participant reported that she still had nightmares about her experiences and was hearing voices of dead relatives in her head, which in turn was affecting her day-to-day activities (Stewart, 2014). Unfortunately, Stewart (2014) reported that such stories were the norm amongst refugee

students and not the exception. Stewart (2014) also notes that schools and teachers reported they lack the training and professional knowledge to support refugee students. This puts a lot of pressure on the teachers because they not only have to support them academically, but also psychologically and emotionally. This is supported by Gahungu et al. (2011) who note that educators have to help fulfill huge academic gaps of SLIFE while simultaneously caring for their sociocultural and emotional needs. This suggests that teachers may not have the capacity to support these subpopulations and that other stakeholders must also contribute to providing support for migrant adolescents. Stewart (2014) notes that, "The psychosocial needs and challenges for war-affected children living in Canada appear to be difficult to identify, complicated to understand and even more troubling to address" (p.108). Evidently, this subpopulation needs a great deal of support that is beyond the classroom and as such school administrations must advocate for adequate support to help SLIFE effectively integrate in the schools systems and in society.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before interpreting the data and trends from the literature review, it is important to first establish which theoretical lens would be most appropriate to analyze the literature review. Since, the literature asserted that SLIFE encounter educational challenges in conjunction with cultural barriers and language barriers, it is critical that teachers focus on and include students' prior knowledge and life experiences. They must also incorporate an inclusive multicultural approach that recognizes the value of different learning modalities and utilizes different modes of learning. These are all core elements of multiliteracies pedagogy, a framework that seeks to understand language learning in globalized environments (Boche, 2014, p.116). Therefore, a multiliteracies framework will serve as a theoretical lens for the current study because it has the potential to provide insights into how to support the development of refugee newcomers' literacy and numeracy skills.

To understand how multiliteracies framework can be implemented in the context of supporting refugee students in Ontario schools, it is essential to outline the core components of multiliteracies framework. It is also important to discuss why educators should adapt multiliteracies pedagogy to support students with limited or interrupted formal education.

Multiliteracies Pedagogy

In the early 1990s, a group of scholars who were later referred to as the New London Group met to discuss how the increase in technology and rapid globalization are reshaping the future of literacy in Western educational institutes. During their meeting they addressed three fundamental questions of literacy education: 'why', 'what' and 'how' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p.2). To better understand how the New London Group analyzed these questions it is important to discuss them separately.

The Purpose of Multiliteracies

When the New London Group first met**,** they discussed the role of education in society. They highlighted that the purpose of education is to facilitate and promote personal development, social and civil engagement, and students' capacity to secure material resources and cultural capital, such as employment (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Therefore, they considered literacy education to have the potential to ensure that mission is accomplished and capacity in creating learning conditions that may lead to equitable social contribution (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). However, the New London group noticed that there was disconnect between traditional literacy curriculum and the needs of the students. Consequently, they outlined two major concerns. First, they noted that while classrooms are becoming more multicultural, schools were still using traditional pedagogical practices that were designed for more heterogenous classrooms. Second, the proliferation in technological advancement means that students are engaging in multiple forms of literacy; however, schools were only focusing on reading and writing of printed text. They argued that literacy education has been limited and "restricted to formalized,

monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (The New London Group, 2000, p. 9). Therefore, they proposed two 'multi'dimension of literacies: multilingual and multimodal (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p.2). This means that literacy pedagogy must be inclusive in that it should account for the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity present in many classrooms and that language learning approaches must adapt to the proliferation of technology through multimodal teaching practices (The New London Group, 2000). To that end, they coined the word multiliteracies and designed a multiliteracy manifesto that encompasses social and cultural representation of literacy, and different modes of literacy. In addition, they outlined approached in creating multicultural classroom where students can build on pre-existing knowledge and multimodal learning strategies.

Appropriate Literacy Pedagogy

The New London Group also sought to determine what literacy pedagogy teaches and what students require from language learning (The New London Group, 2000). In answering that question, they noted that the traditional literacy approaches expected students to be passive recipients who used rote learning to memorize and reproduce the forms of language endorsed by the dominant culture (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In this context, teachers were considered the only source of literacy knowledge, and students were taught only print literacy and did not have role in designing meaning.

In contrast, the New London Group (2000) argue that literacy pedagogy should be more than skills and competence. For example, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argue that the

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purpose of literacy teaching should be encouraging students to become open to and sensible about differences and innovation in language while simultaneously being able to create meaning. For instance, while traditional modes of language learning might expect student to rigidly adhere to strict rules enforced by the dominant culture, a multiliteracies approaches would recognize the fluidity of language. Thus, vernaculars of English such as Spanglish, Chinglish, and Ebonics would be seen as legitimate modes of expressions.

According to Cole and Pullen (2010), multiliteracies pedagogy differences from traditional modes of teaching in that students are required to think critically about text rather than simply answer basic, short-answer questions about a reading. In multiliteracies, simple reading comprehension tasks are insufficient and should be expanded to incorporate critical literacy and visual literacy (Cole & Pullen, 2010). This means that students would be asked to critically reflect on content and questioned the prejudice or silences present in a work so as to understand the political and social implications of the work. For instance, upon reading books by Dr. Seuss, simply asking students to restate the narrative or catalog the items in the story would not be sufficient. Instead, students might be asked how the narrative might be different if there were a more diverse range of characters. Likewise, while reading *Huckleberry Finn*, student might be asked about the different accents used in the novel. Thus, multiliteracies pedagogy requires teachers to instill students with more agency with regard to meaning making to create an emancipatory pedagogy that produces critical, creative, and innovative learning spaces (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

Multimodal learning strategies. When determining what students need to learn, the New London Group further highlights different modalities of learning. Prior to discussion multimodal learning and pedagogical benefits in a classroom setting, it is important to understand its functions.

Multimodal models recognize that a multiplicity of semiotic modes coexist within texts that draw of different modes of meaning making (Ajayi, 2009). Thus, these models seek to define the intersecting elements of these modes to enhance the properties of multimodal texts and limit their constraints to facilitate communication (Ajayi, 2009). These semiotic modes consist of "written language, oral language, visual representation, audio representation, tactile representation, and gestural representation" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 12). When combined they form multimodal text. For example, the text and pictures of a website uses written language and visual representation, while audio clips that feature dialogue, music, and sound effects use oral language and audio representation. Adopting this perspective, Sanders and Albers (2010) argue that literacy is not limited to communication through writing and reading of traditional printed text anymore. Instead, they suggest that texts are now produced, inscribed, sent, and received through multimodal methods. Likewise, Sanders and Albers (2010) argue that literacy cannot be implemented by just adding a communicative mode to traditional print literacy and referring to it as 'multimodal' because all modalities are interconnected with other modes, be they different forms of media or even language systems. These modes comprise the message that are sent through them and shape how they are read/interpreted

(Sanders & Albers, 2010). Moreover, modes, media, and language systems provide individuals with numerous ways, forms, and combinations of media through which they can to express themselves. Therefore, in order to be literate in the 21st century, individuals must be able to understand, interpret, and create content using multimodal text. Therefore, it is important to incorporate multimodal learning strategies in the classroom, especially for SLIFE as developing multiple literacies facilitates students' engagement and enhances their learning motivation.

Application

According to the New London Group (2000), in order for a theory to be successful, it must reflect the nature of teaching and learning, and it must also be based on understandings of how the human brain works in society and the classroom. They argue that cognition is shaped by social, cultural, and material frameworks. This means that humans acquire knowledge through similar practices, which are based on a domain of knowledge that is socially and historically constructed (New London Group, 2000). This is relevant in the context of SLIFE because they have acquired most their learning informally as they learned from family and community members and through mentorship and socio-interactive practices (DeCapua, 2016; Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). To better understand these domains of knowledge, the New London Group formulated four pedagogical orientations during their first meeting in 1996: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. This was later reformulated by, Cope and Kalantzis (2009)—two of the pioneers of multiliteracies pedagogy—in their

Learning by Design framework as four knowledge processes: experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying. They note that when they developed the core concepts of multiliteracies pedagogy, they wanted to change the "representation of grammar and the literary canon" with a more active depiction of "design" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 175). They go on to explain that design in this sense is the formation "of something you do in the process of representing meanings (Cope & Kalantzis, p. 175).

According to Cope and Kalantzis (2009) there are three core components of Design—Available Design, the Designing and the Redesigned. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) note that the Available Designs refers to "the available meaning-making resources, and patterns and conventions of meaning Multiliteracies in a particular cultural context" while Designing refers to "the process of shaping emergent meaning which involves re-presentation and recontextualization" (p. 204). They go onto state that the Designing is not simply a repetition of the Designed. Instead, they suggest, "every moment of meaning involves the transformation of the Available Designs of meaning" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 204). The Redesigned is "the outcome of designing, something through which the meaning-maker has remade themselves and created a new meaning-making resource," and this process that teachers are "designers of our social futures" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p. 204).

Furthermore, it is important to note that these different dimensions are not in a linear order, nor do they signify different stages. Rather, they are components that are interconnected in multifaceted ways (New London Group, 2000). Likewise, Kalantzis and Cope (2000) highlight that these pedagogical orientations are not meant to replace existing literacy practices; rather, its purpose is to give teachers a different perspective and supplement literacy teaching.

Situated Practice and experiencing the known/new. The New London group argue that knowledge is "situated and conceptual" and that "learning is a process of weaving" back and forth between "school experiences and out of practice out of school experiences" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, p. 4). Learning in this context occurs through individual's real-life experiences. Therefore, in situated practice students are given the opportunity to connect their prior knowledge and lived experiences to their learning. This way they learn unfamiliar concepts in a meaningful way. Likewise, in situated practice students are immersed within a community of learners that are constructed by their backgrounds and experiences (New London Group, 2000). This is supported with Seglem and Garcia (2018), who state that when teachers situate students them as members of a community of learners, students become confident to and comfortable with participating in class and taking the risks required to engage with and contribute to their learning community. Therefore, in situated practice, students are not dependent only on the teacher to provide them with the knowledge: they become part of a larger community of learners, where they have the agency to access resources independently (Seglem &

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Garcia, 2018). This approach likewise instills students with the knowledge and skills needed to independently access resources, rather than passively learning by sitting and listening at their desks while teachers transfer knowledge through rote learning (Seglem & Garcia, 2018).

Furthermore, within the reformulation of knowledge processes, the New London Group, discuss 'experiencing the known and new' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 20). Similar to situated practice, learners lived experiences is taken into account, as learners are encouraged to reflect and build upon their prior knowledge and experiences in a meaningful way. When experiencing the known within literacy education, Rowland et al. (2014) note students engaged in literacy learning should be encouraged to interpret text through their experiences and social identities. This is important as it allows students to use higher order thinking and draw parallels between their life experiences and lesson content, providing them with the opportunity to take ownership of their learning.

Cope and Kalantzis (2015) likewise explain when experiencing the new, learners are submersed into a foreign contexts that are either concrete spaces, such as locations and communities, or conceptual spaces, such as texts and images. In this context, what is new is what is unfamiliar to learners in terms of their life experiences. In order to make the unfamiliar, familiar, educators must use scaffolding to teach the students new information and so that they can expand their knowledge (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015).

Situated practice/experiencing the known provides students with the opportunities to engage in the learning through their life-world experiences. Students' prior knowledge

is valued and validated, which makes learning more meaningful. Likewise, when experiencing the new, student's build on what they know to learn about what they do not know. For instance, when experiencing the known, a reading exercise may include pre-reading activities where student brainstorm ideas using their prior knowledge about a topic. When experiencing the new, students may analyze materials from unfamiliar genres through oral and written text while being asked to reflect and discuss it (Rowland et al., 2014). To that end, incorporating these knowledge processes into literacy education is crucial when teaching SLIFE because this pedagogical aspect takes into consideration the "identities and sociocultural needs of all learners" (The New London Group, 2000, p. 33). In addition, their extensive life experiences, which are often ignored in traditional classrooms, are valued through this pedagogical aspect. Thus, they can benefit from situated practice/experiencing the new as they can draw on their prior knowledge to understand, interpret, and engage while they are learning.

Overt instruction and conceptualizing by naming/ with theory. Yelland, Cope, and Kalantzis (2008) state that "overt instruction is defined by understandings that are systematic, analytical, and conscious in nature. In this dimension, students learn to be conscious of the concepts they are learning while being in control of their thought processes. Within this pedagogical aspect, the teacher's role is to provide instructional scaffolding for students so that they can support them to master concepts. The New London Group (2000) explains that in overt instructions, teachers and students work collaboratively, and in this process, teachers provide students with the support that they

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need to achieve complex tasks on their own. In doing so, the students become consciously aware of the relationship between the teacher's representation and interpretation of what is being learned, which in turn facilitates their critical literacy skills.

Like overt instructions, 'conceptualizing by naming' teach students to become active in the process of conceptualization, allowing them to make explicit meaning from tacit concepts and generalize from particulars (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009). Through this knowledge process, students learn to use mental models to draw distinctions, identify similarities and differences, categorize concepts, and ultimately become active concept makers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Moreover, 'conceptualizing with theory' goes a step further in that students are both concept creators and theory makers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Thus, students learn to link theory with concepts. Yelland et al. (2008) exemplify how students are able to conceptualize with theory by noting that students learn to identify a river, name it, and learn parts it. They use a theory to explain what a river is and create a model diagram of the fundamental parts of the river (Yelland et al., 2008).

Through overt instructions and conceptualizing by naming/with theory, students develop metacognitive strategies where they learn to understand complex concepts. This is supported by Yelland et al. (2008), who state that students learn to make meaning of their lived experiences, construct concepts about their surroundings, and create ideas about how the world functions. This aspect of the knowledge process is important when teaching SLIFE as they lack content knowledge. Through overt instructions and

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conceptualizing by naming/with theory, SLIFE learn to create meaning from their prior experiences and apply it to learn about complex concepts. Thus, they learn to categorize, classify concepts and theories that are foreign to them with the support of the teacher.

      Critical framing and analyzing functionally/critically. The purpose of this pedagogical practice, the New London (2000) argue, is to help students develop two key skills. First, it gives them the tools to put the literacy skills they are developing in. Second, it allows them to be conscious of and therefore control the meaning making process. This means they are able to frame knowledge within its broader social context, which includes consideration of historic, political, and ideological systems of knowledge. Within this context, students learn to interpret and critically reflect on the sociocultural context of concepts (The New London, 2000).

      To better understand this pedagogy, Kalantzis and Cope (2000) provide examples how educators can support students to develop critical thinking processes. They explain that students may be asked questions about how the visual and linguistic design of heavy metal music is portrayed in different kind of magazines and what its implication is on the kinds of people that read such magazines. Likewise, students may be asked to think about the contextual meanings of a design and whose interests it serves (Kalantzis & Cope, p. 246). Therefore, within this knowledge practice, teachers make the familiar strange again by separating theory from what they have learned (New London Group, 2000). Further, students learn to apply divergent thinking skills when analyzing concepts of design. In

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doing so, they learn to question social norms and their influence on the way individuals view the world.

Furthermore, analyzing functionally is similar to critical framing as students learn to reflect on concepts and the meanings they carry and influence they have on society and themselves (Yelland et. al., 2008). Thus, students learn to employ critically thinking strategies in which they evaluate the information they are consuming. In addition, they understand the meaning it carries from social, cultural, political, and historical perspective. This higher order thinking is an important skill that SLIFE must develop as it teaches them to be aware of and examine their intersecting identities in a complex, multicultural society. By using critical framing and analyzing knowledge functionally and critically, SLIFE learn to understand their social location in education and society. As Davila (2012) notes, Western education systems replicate dominate academic and socio-linguistic norms, which allows students from the dominant culture to excel more easily. Thus, SLIFE understand that their challenge in the education system is not entirely due to their limited literacy and numeracy; rather, the education system is designed to reify and re-inscribe hegemonic structures.

Transformed practice and applying appropriately/ creatively. Within this practice, students take what they have learned and apply it to real-world context. This allows them to go through a process of transformation where they become a new person who is able to do new things (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000). Thus, they are able to engage in reflective learning and transfer their learning in different contexts. For example, a student

Seglem and Garcia (2018) interviewed stated that she engaged in transformative learning by developing an "understanding of how to be a learner, rather than a passive student who simply went through the motions of school" (p. 61).

Applying meaning making practices appropriately relates to transformed practice because it requires students to take what they have learned and apply it in real world settings (Copen & Kalantzis, 2009). In other words, students take the abstract knowledge they have acquired and apply it to concrete situations. By applying their critical literacy skills creatively, students learn to employ new approaches to solve problems. In the context of literacy teaching, Rowland et al. (2014) note that within the knowledge process of applying their skills creatively, students use their knowledge in a transformative way and create mixed text. For instances, students may be asked to rewire a narrative whose protagonist is a member of the dominant culture and reframe it by inserting a protagonist who is a member of their own culture. This process of applying meaning making appropriately allows students to take what they have learned and utilize it creatively in a different context. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) state that this amalgamation of knowledge can take a multiplicity of forms and has the potential to reshape students' understanding of the experiential world by viewing it through different conceptual or critical perspectives.

Conclusion

Although SLIFE may lack formal schooling, they have extensive life experiences (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et al., 2007) that are often overlooked when they

enter schools in Ontario. Multiliteracies pedagogy is appropriate in supporting this unique

population because it looks beyond their limited schooling and social class by

challenging what Giampapa (2010) describes as dominant discourses that value selective

literacy practices in education. Such biases can delegitimize SLIFE's prior knowledge

and life experience through exclusion, but multiliteracies pedagogy corrects these biases

by offering equitable educational opportunities for all groups, including socio-linguistic

minorities who are from marginalized social classes (Newton, 2012), such as refugee

students. Through multiliteracies pedagogy, SLIFE are given more equitable educational

opportunities through which their lived experiences and educational background are

valued. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) assert that multiliteracies pedagogy offers more varied

and powerful learning approaches that provide a broader range of students with access to

positive learning outcomes, which is critical in an increasingly diverse and globalized

world. This is particularly important for refugee students because it offers them agency

over their education and encourages teaches to become critically conscious. Likewise, in

multiliteracies pedagogical practices, students are not passive learners. Rather, they are

challenged to become active learners by utilizing their existing knowledge and

experience to create their own meaning while employing critical thinking. Cope and

Kalantzis (2009) outline how multiliteracies support the goals of education:

> "Literacy teaching is not about skills and competence; it is aimed at creating a
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> kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to
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> differences, change and innovation. The logic of multiliteracies is one that

recognizes that meaning making is an active, transformative process, and a

pedagogy based on that recognition is more likely to open up viable life courses

for a world of change and diversity" (p.175).

This means that the goal of literacy learning is not simply learning a language: It should

provide students with the skills needed to be successful academically and socially. This

goal is vital to SLIFE as they transition into their new social context.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the academic and social experiences of

SLIFE in the education system. A critical review of the current literature illustrates that

SLIFE encounter cultural, linguistic, and academic challenges in their host country's

education system due to their limited literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, recent

studies suggest that there is a lack of proper support for the complex needs of this

subpopulation. Therefore, it is important to examine the key findings of the literature

through a multiliteracies framework to develop recommendations and offer direction for

future research.

Educational Challenges

The literature states that one of the main challenges SLIFE encounter in the

Western education system is adapting to the culture of the school as their knowledge is

acquired informally (DeCapua, 2016). Traditional Western education systems are based

on theoretical and scientific models of knowing, which therefore invalidate SLIFE's way

of knowing, learning and understanding (DeCapua & Marshal, 2010, 2011; Ramirez-

Esparza et al., 2012). For that reason, they struggle in the education system as their prior

knowledge and life experiences are not acknowledged. Such findings imply that current

pedagogical practices in the education system are not designed to support this population.

This is also supported by the New London Group, who argue that traditional literacy

pedagogies are based on 'monolingual and monocultural forms of language" (New

London Group, 2000, p. 9). In this context, teachers often focus on print text and

linguistic abilities, which consequently inhibit the academic success of SLIFE, who often have limited literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, in order to support SLIFE, schools must incorporate multiliteracy pedagogies because they offer equitable opportunities for all students. This framework also provides a holistic approach to teaching students because it accounts for learners' personal growth, social and civil engagement, and cultural capital (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

Similarly, multiliteracy pedagogies designed four knowledge processes—such as situated practice, overt instructions, critical framing, and transformed practice—that educators can use to help students become engaged in literacy learning. These four knowledge processes encourage all learners to use higher thinking skills to analyze literature in a meaningful context. In addition, multiliteracy pedagogies incorporate student's prior knowledge, lived experiences, interests, identities, and personalities (Burke & Hardware, 2015). In doing so, multiliteracy frameworks accentuate the use of multimodal approaches when teaching students to critically examine information and become effective meaning makers (Burke & Hardware, 2015). These aspects are important when supporting SLIFE as they acclimatize to the culture of the school and strive to become academically successful. Through multiliteracy framework, SLIFE have an equitable opportunity to develop their literacy skills, which is necessary when learning content knowledge of other subjects. This allows SLIFE to improve their literacy abilities and become competent in other academic disciplines. Moreover, within the multiliteracy

framework and in transformed practice, students learn to take what they have learned and apply it to different contexts.

Acclimation and Adaptation Challenges

Furthermore, the findings from the literature also include acclimation and adaptation challenges that SLIFE encounter when they resettle in their host country. This is due to many overlapping factors—such as cultural, linguist, and socio-economic barriers—which is exacerbated by the lack of proper sufficient support. These findings indicate that refugees do not have enough time to go to school, learn the language, find a job, and support themselves since Canada's refugee programs such as GAR and Blended Visa Offered-Referred Program are designed to support refugees only for the first year of their arrival (ISS of BS, 2015). After the first year, refugees must be able to support their family and themselves, which often creates financial difficulties.

Moreover, such findings indicate that these intersecting factors prevent refugee students, especially adolescents, from attaining proper education as it inhibits their abilities to focus in school and as a result drop out of school. This is supported by multiple studies as it states that older adolescents are not able to meet the demands of school because of their limited literacy and numeracy skills, which are prerequisites for other subjects (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et. al., 2009).

Mental Health Issues

In addition to socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers, findings in the literature indicate that numerous refugees suffer from mental health issues (Stewart,

2014). Many refugees come from war torn countries and have witnessed horrific war crimes. This affects students' psychological wellbeing, which adversely impacts their academic trajectory. The literature demonstrates that the SLIFE who were interviewed were not able to focus in school because they suffered from emotional stress (Stewart, 2014,). This influences their ability to learn as schools do not have trained counselors to offer them socio-emotional support.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the literature, the current study proposes recommendations with respect to adopting multiliteracies/multimodal approaches, mentorship, and counseling.

Multiliteracies Pedagogy

When teaching SLIFE, it is important that educators adopt a multiliteracies pedagogy because it integrates different strategies and approaches when teaching students from a diverse background. For example, through multimodal approaches teachers can use the song "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" to teach body parts. This song combines visual, auditory, gestural, and linguistic meanings to teach students body parts. In addition, the song has a melody that rhymes and is easy to learn and remember. Thus, it is recommended that educators incorporate multimodal learning strategies that do not require extensive language skills to teach SLIFE. As SLIFE develop their literacy skills, teachers can include more complex instructions to build their language abilities.

In addition to multimodal learning strategies, it is recommended that educators incorporate students' lived experiences and prior knowledge in the classroom. This is crucial because "it offers minority students more points of reference since it uses their lifeworlds as teaching resources considerably more than traditional forms" (Burke & Hardware, 2015, p. 146). Therefore, educators must be familiar with students' background so that they can relate to the course content. They can do so by having students engage in role-playing or creating menus or infographic to teach about concepts.

Mentorship

Since SLIFE struggle to acclimatize to the education system, it is recommended that schools offer mentorship programs to ease their transition into formal schooling. School administrators must establish a school-wide mentorship program where students volunteer to assist refugee students with learning the routines and rules of the school. This kind of mentorship program would provide SLIFE with the opportunity to build relationships with their peers, develop their language skills, learn about cultural norms, and ease their integration into the school system. Similarly, this program would also be beneficial to student mentors as they can learn about new cultures and develop empathy for individuals who are new to the country and have lost everything.

Moreover, for older SLIFE, it is recommended that mentorship programs be established to create career opportunities. Since SLIFE lack cultural capital, they need guidance in determining which educational path they need to qualify for certain careers.

For example, a mentor can provide them with information about apprenticeships or about experiential learning. This way adolescent SLIFE know what is available to them.

Counseling

Numerous refugees suffer from mental health issues due to pre- and post-migration challenges. Therefore, it is recommended that the school boards establish school-based counseling services. This way counselors can work directly with teachers to support SLIFE mental wellness. It is important that SLIFE have access to such services on a daily basis and, if possible, in their first language. This service should also be available to parents of SLIFE so that they can learn how to support their children's mental and emotional wellness at home.

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Recommendations for Future Research

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Since the number of refugees resettling in Canada is growing, it is important that school administrators and educators understand the support they need to succeed academically. Therefore, a comparative study of refugee students from different ethnic backgrounds could outline similarities and differences of the challenges they encounter pre and post settlement in their host country. Furthermore, it may be useful in providing students, parents and educators with different strategies to support them. This in turn would make the integration process less stressful.

Moreover, a qualitative research with a narrative inquiry design has the potential to provide more insight into the academic and social experiences of SLIFE. This is

important because understanding SLIFE's challenges from their perspectives will enable educators to create an individualized-learning plan that meets their specific needs.

Additionally, previous studies have indicated that teachers feel ill equipped when supporting SLIFE. Therefore, a mixed-method research design that consists of surveys and interviews has the potential to offer insight into teacher's self-efficacy and attitudes when supporting SLIFE, which are important factors to consider when school administrators develop teacher preparation programs and trainings. This way, educators will be well equipped when teaching this unique subpopulation.

Conclusion

Through a comprehensive literature review, the current study demonstrates that the challenges SLIFE encounter are multifaceted. Since most SLIFE come from war torn countries, they have endured a lot of obstacles before migrating to Canada. Many were forced to flee their homes, witness violence at a young age, and live in refugee camps for many years. In addition, many did not have the opportunity to attend formal schooling, and those who did often attended schools with inadequate infrastructure and resources. Thus, when SILFE resettle in Canada, they have to adapt to a new way of life, go to school, and learn a new language. Consequently, education systems, institutes, and educators have a responsibility to support SLIFE and must be aware of the social contexts these students come from so as to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Therefore, it is important that educators adopt multiliteracies pedagogies as it employs the different linguistic and cultural differences that exist within society to

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facilitate students' learning outcomes and social integration. In addition, it incorporates multimodal-learning strategies that use various modes of communication and symbol systems to create interactive classrooms that promote dynamic and integrative communication. This plasticity of the dynamic modes of communication promotes inclusive social and cultural practices that can increase learning motivation and student engagement, which is crucial when teaching refugee students such as SLIFE.

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VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Hawa Yusuf Osman

PLACE OF BIRTH: Mogadishu, Somalia

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1984

EDUCATION: Vincent Massey High School, Windsor, ON, 2001

University of Windsor, B.A., Windsor, ON, 2012

University of Windsor, B.Ed., Windsor, ON, 2013

University of Windsor, M.Ed., Windsor, ON, 2020