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Literacy and Educational Development Programs for Arab Refugee Women in the Piedmont Area of North Carolina

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Literacy and Educational Development Programs for Arab Refugee Women in the

Piedmont Area of North Carolina

Noor Al-Samraai

North Carolina A&T State University

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department: Leadership Studies and Adult Education

Major: Adult Education

Major Professor: Dr. Sonya R. Draper

Greensboro, North Carolina

2019

The Graduate College
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

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Greensboro, North Carolina
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Biographical Sketch

Noor Al-Samraai is an Iraqi woman who moved to the USA in August 2014 as a refugee who escaped war and post war conditions, seeking to improve her livelihood and in search of better opportunities that life has to offer. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in English Language from University of Al-Maamoun in Baghdad, Iraq. Noor is enrolled in the Master of Science in Adult Education program at North Carolina A&T state University. Her thesis focuses on Literacy and educational program access for Arab refugee women in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. Noor is currently working as a program assistant in the Adult Education department at Guilford Technical Community College's High Point campus. She has two children and enjoys Arabic literature, motivational articles, traveling, and shopping.

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my loving one, who constantly solidifies my soul and my mind. I also dedicated this study to my lovely sister Ruqaya (you always there for me), my loving parents Osama Hassan and Suad Azmi, my daughter Haya and my son Hakam. Thank you for encouraging me to take this “enormous step.” You always believed in my ability to succeed. I love you all!

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this study to God (ALLAH) my creator, my source of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program and on His wings only have I soared. I dedicate this work to my muse, my source of inspiration, my mentor who always says, “Believe in yourself. See yourself as a butterfly, because a butterfly is an example of the kind of transformation we seek.” He encourages me to reflect on experiences, beliefs, and biases, always helping me implement action-oriented solutions to life’s complex questions. He creates the perfect conditions that allows me to be inspired by him. The role that he plays in my life solidifies important concepts in my mind. You are the wind beneath my wings. I also dedicate this great work and accomplishment to my sister, my parents, my daughter Haya, and my son Hakam. Thank you for encouraging me to take this “giant step.” You always believed in my ability to succeed.

Finally, to the Arab refugee woman who has been harassed, marginalized and discriminated against and who has risked everything to find safety for herself and her children from the moment she began this journey and again exposed to violence and exploitation, with little support or protection.

Thank you for your support, understanding, encouragement, and most of all, your love during this extended time of research and study. I love you all dearly.

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List of Abbreviations

CONFINTEA V	The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education
GMDAC	Global Migration Data Analysis Center
IOM	International Organization for Migration
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Abstract

Arab refugee women experience incomprehensible acts of violence and war that drive them out of their homelands. According to Greenwood (2013), among the 4.8 million Arab refugees, women and children comprise approximately three-fourths of those displaced and compound the conditions of gender-based violence, poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and a dire lack of the most basic educational programs. Arab refugee women are more likely to face further violence and marginalization because of economic pressures (UNICEF, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze the factors, barriers, and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low-level language and literacy skills and intended to show how their prior experiences and current life contexts affected their educational participation and future learning experiences. Additionally, the study explored the complexities of living in the host country, where Arab refugee women often endure a perpetuation of the same cultural restrictions as in their home country and assessed the overall programmatic shortfalls and inadequacies of educational provision for Arab refugee women in the Piedmont Area of North Carolina where they now live. The Arab refugee women participants interviewed for this study had been living in the Piedmont Area of North Carolina for at least 3 years. A total of 5 participants were interviewed. They were all between 32 and 50 years old and mostly participated in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and General Educational Development (GED) programs.

This study used one-on-one interviews as a data collection method, each interviewee was asked 6 semi-structured questions in order to gain a better understanding of the social and economic barriers affecting their participation in educational programs, literacy development, and English language proficiency, and was audio recorded for validity. Purposeful sampling and

coding were implemented as various methods of qualitative research. This study was grounded in Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of Self-actualization derived from humanistic psychological theory which states that self-actualizing individuals are able to resolve life's contradictions which ultimately have the potential to generate the manifestation of free will. It is clear that the participants in this study were hindered from exercising free will and were subjected to a series of outside influences such as their spousal controls, marital responsibilities, child rearing, financial dependence, cultural constraints, and religious obligation.

The findings of this study disclose that Arab refugee women need assistance to overcome the academic, sociocultural, and socioeconomic factors to be productive and happy in their new home country. Emanating from this study were the following emerging themes: Theme 1, Language barriers; Theme 2, Early marriage and family responsibilities; and Theme 3, Low literacy and education level in their home country. Low participation rate in educational programs emerged as a subtheme of the study's Theme 2.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

We live in a rapidly changing world in which refugees and forced immigration have a significant impact on the economic, political, and social agendas of sovereign states, intergovernmental agencies, and civil society (Oxford University, 2019). All around the world, people are on the move. They are migrating to escape poverty, improve their livelihood and opportunities, or escape violence and devastation in their own countries (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2016). The challenges we face as a global society can neither be defined nor contained by physical barriers. One of the most significant global developments of the last quarter century, without a doubt, has been the unprecedented explosion of global migration. Women represent almost half of the 244 million migrants and half of the 19.6 million refugees worldwide (UNGA, 2016). They are often the first responders in a crisis, and whether in route or in camps, in home countries, or in destination countries, they play a crucial role in caring for, sustaining, and rebuilding their communities. Yet, refugee and migrant women's needs, priorities, and voices are often missing from policies designed to protect and assist them.

Arab women suffer more discrimination due to the prevalence of prejudiced laws and cultural stereotypes (Jackson, 2016). Arab women contend that they frequently witness mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts in emotional bondage, culturally shackled, and restricted at home or the wider community (Jackson, 2016). Most Arab refugee women from Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, and Syria find themselves confronted by harsh and rigid cultural laws and restrictions masked as religious essentials, especially within the informal sector and left without any social and legal protections (Jackson, 2016).

In the Middle East particularly, more than four out of 10 young Arab women were married before their 18th birthday (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2001). Child marriage often results in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupts schooling, limits educational opportunities, and increases the risk of experiencing domestic violence (UNICEF, 2001). Arab refugee women who have experienced traumas such as physical and psychological torture have also endured these before arrival in their new countries. They have lived in primitive conditions in transit camps for long periods of time, sustained separation from family and friends, are culturally alienated in host societies, and have limited education (Reid & Strong, 1988).

Statement of the Problem

Upon review of the literature, it became evident that a real gap exists in documenting the participation rates of Arab refugee women in educational programs in the Piedmont Area of North Carolina. Refugee families live complicated lives as they adjust to new communities and a new culture in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. Some of these challenges affect health status, education, jobs, housing, emotional isolation, prejudice, and fundamental culture differences (Garrett, 2006). Arab refugee women experience incomprehensible acts of violence and war that drive them out of their homelands and compound the conditions of gender-based violence and poverty faced by women outside of conflict zones every day (Greenwood, 2013). Among the 4.8 million Arab refugees, women and children comprise approximately three-fourths of those displaced (Greenwood, 2013). Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and a dire lack of the most basic educational programs severely impact refugee camps in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon (Renzaho & Dhingra, 2016). Arab refugee women are more likely to face further violence and marginalization because of economic pressures (UNICEF, 2001).

Economic instability leads many families to consider marrying off their daughters, which leads them to drop out of school, experience gender-based violence, suffer in silence, and face stigma and significant health concerns. Moreover, after losing male family members to conflict, more Arab refugee women are becoming heads of households, but without skills and opportunities for employment, they struggle to pay for their families' needs. Irrespective of the actual number of cases that are difficult to document of women raped or sexually assaulted, this general social state of mind has been used by the warring parties to tear apart the fabric of society by detaining women (UNICEF, 2001).

Despite making up a large portion of the refugee and internally displaced communities from Iraq, Syria, and around the world, policymakers largely ignore many of the risks women face. For example, a large percentage of Arab refugee women have reported that they live in daily fear of abuse or aggression and many have faced violence on the way to safety and even in camps (Renzaho & Dhingra, 2016).

Women are pivotal social actors in every society. What we know, or do not know about Arab refugee women influences perspectives and actions towards women at all levels, from family and community to government policy; this is a significant moment in the Arab region, and an understanding of knowledge pertaining to Arab women is a necessary foundation for any social action and is vital to research related to gender equality and social justice issues.

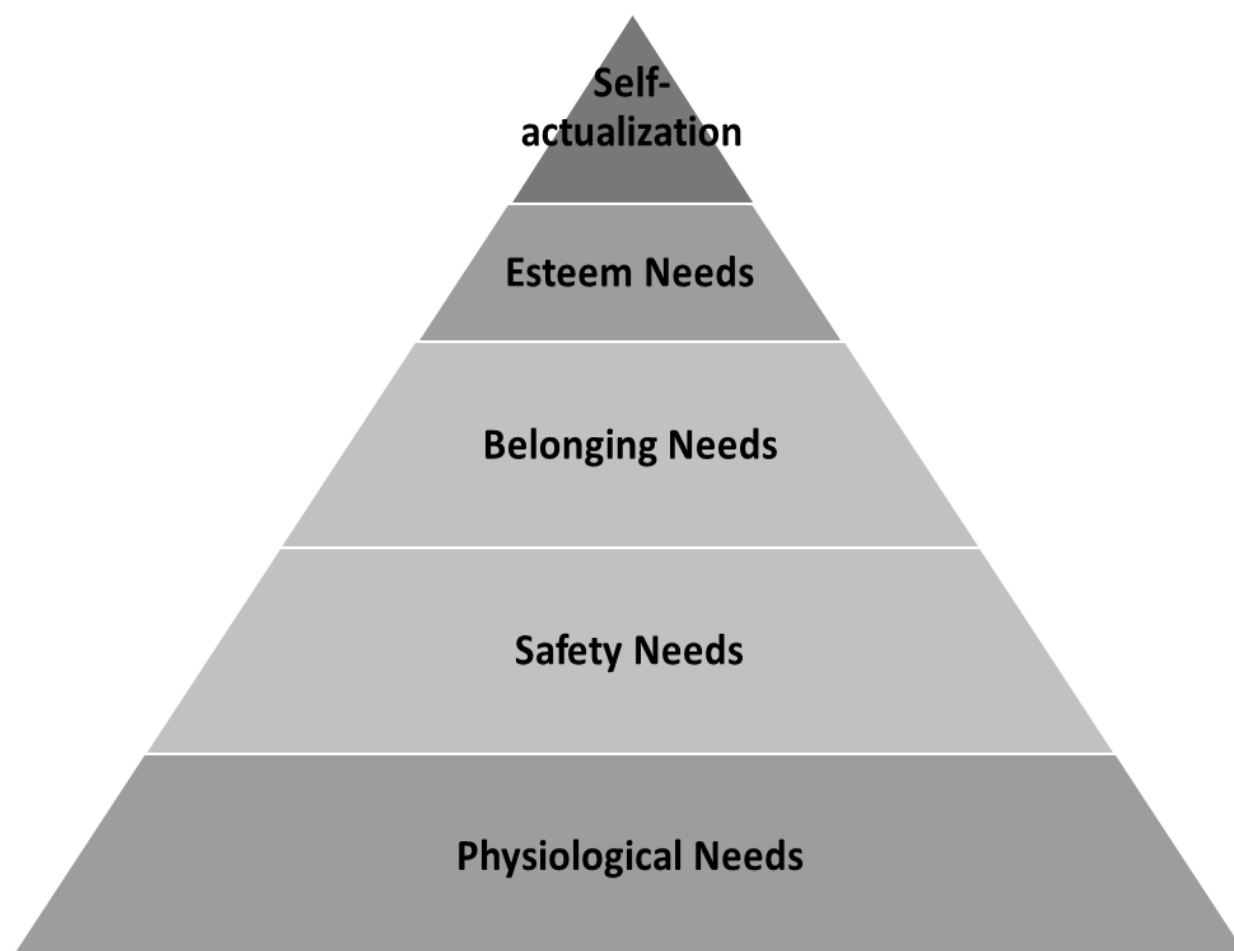
Joseph's (2012) project analyzed scholarly frameworks of gender and women's studies prevailing in the Arab region in last 50 years, highlighted that dominant theoretical frameworks on international development, human rights, gender equality, and the lives of Arab women have failed to integrate critical contexts and histories necessary for researchers, scholars, planners, and

policymakers to respond in a meaningful way to the changing realities, specifically in the Arab region and the diaspora.

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze the factors, barriers, and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills. The study intended to show how their prior experiences and current life contexts affect their educational participation and future learning. Additionally, this study sought to identify best practice instructional strategies for teaching Arab refugee women. This study also serves as a supportive resource guide for the next generation of women's scholars, practitioners, and activists in local Arab communities through research.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Maslow (1954) describes human motivation as a hierarchy of needs. At the base of his triangle of the Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 1) are the basic physiological needs for survival, such as hunger and thirst. One must address these needs before moving to the next level, that of safety needs. Human beings need to feel safe and secure before moving to the following levels of belonging, love, and self-esteem. Finally, Maslow (1943) describes self-actualization as “the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (p. 370). What human beings are capable of becoming is specific to each person's needs. One of Maslow's lasting and most significant contributions to psychology is what Maslow calls the “hierarchy of needs” (p. 203). In Maslow's quest to understand human motivation and the pursuit of happiness, he formulated a list of basic human needs that need to be fulfilled for maximum psychological health. Through Maslow's interviews and studies, he came to categorize a hierarchical list of needs that need to be met for increasing life satisfaction, as represented in Figure 1 (Maslow, 1987).



*Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Triangle. Adapted from *Personality Theories Abraham Maslow*; by Dr. Boeree, C., 1998, (p. 4). Copyright 1998, 2006 C. George Boeree.*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze the factors and barriers that promote or limit the educational participation of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills. The study intended to show how their prior experiences and current life contexts affect their educational engagement and future learning. Also, this study focused on the migration experiences and learning needs in the United States and the impact of low-level language and literacy skills in English and looks at their participation in educational programs with major community-based providers.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What are the factors and barriers that promote or limit Arab women refugee participation in Community Education Programs?
2. What are the primary literacy, education, and cultural restrictions originating in the Arab refugee woman's home country?
3. What are the migration experiences and learning needs, of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skill in the Piedmont area of North Carolina?

Significance of the Study

This study helps the field of higher education and serve as a supportive resource guide for women scholars, practitioners, and activists in Arab communities by adding to our understanding of the factors, barriers, and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills, and identify life's difficulties as they adjust to new communities and a new culture in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. This study also develops an understanding of women refugees' migration experiences and identify learning needs to deal with their challenges effectively. Furthermore, the study addresses the interconnection of the issues facing this population that make solutions challenging; for example, lack of English proficiency, fear of discrimination, and health care issues.

Definition of Terms

Culture—Li and Karakowsky (2001) define culture as the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired

by a group of people in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior; that is, the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted.

Humanism—A paradigm/philosophy/pedagogical approach that believes learning is viewed as a personal act to fulfill one's potential. Humanism, a paradigm that emerged in the 1960s, focuses on human freedom, dignity, and central assumption of humanism. According to Huitt (2009), people act with intentionality and values. Humanists also believe that it is necessary to study the person as a whole, especially as an individual grows and develops over his or her lifespan.

Refugee—According to the definition presented in the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1967 protocol that established the mandate for the United Nations High Council on Refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 1995), a refugee is

Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country. (p. 1)

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, a division of the Office of Homeland Security formerly known as the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, and as stated in the amended Refugee Act of 1980, which governs the present policy admitting refugees into the United States, accepts this definition (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The following limitations are applicable to this study:

1. Unable to fully document the rich experiences of women over the age of 45.

2. Arab refugee women in the sample were unable to freely participate because of issues of patriarchy and cultural restrictions that forbade them from speaking freely and openly in the absence of male family members.
3. The study was limited to the Piedmont area of North Carolina.

The delimitations of this study include:

1. There was no language barrier between the researcher and participants.
2. The researcher is from the same ethnic and cultural background as the study participants, speaks the same language, understands the same cultural cues, and is attentive to the same religious taboos.
3. The researcher was aware of the participants' cultural restrictions and could therefore treat subjects with a degree of sensitivity and honesty.
4. The sample was delimited to a non-random sample.

Organization of the Study

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 of this study served as an introduction, highlighting that Arab refugee women experience a profound sense of loss when confronted with the various challenges of resettling into their new home country. Experiences of relocation from their homeland and separation from community members and friends compound the resettlement process. In Chapter 2, the literature review explores evidence from current books and journal articles on Arab refugee women and their experiences of violence and marginalization that they face in their home country. Chapter 2 outlines migration experiences of ethnically diverse populations and how their views and understandings have affected their integration into Western communities. Chapter 2 also documents and analyzes the learning needs and issues of Arab

women refugees with low language and literacy skills by looking at how their prior experiences and current contexts affect their educational participation and learning.

Chapter 3 examines the study's research methodology and uses interviews as a method to collect data. The study design was qualitative in nature, as qualitative interviews engage study participants in meaningful conversations to share accounts of their experiences related to displacement, conflict, and education. Chapter 4 covers a summary of the study's findings. Chapter 5 serves as a generalized conclusion and proposes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the current literature that relates significantly to the factors and barriers Arab refugee women face in their home country that limit their participation in community education programs. Additionally, this chapter discussed in-depth the learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills and migration experiences in Western countries. This literature review provides a basis for understanding the reasons women continue into forced migration. Implicit in the term refugee is the concept of forced migration. One explanation of forced migration or why people who choose to flee persecution lies in the fact that forced migration is not merely a descriptive term, but it is also an evaluative one involving moral, ethical, and political judgments about the legitimacy of the movement in question.

A United Nations International Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018) Profile on Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa points to violence against women and the issue of early marriage as some of the primary factors that limit Arab refugee women's participation in community education programs. From "honor killings" to legal restrictions, women in the Arab world face challenges foreign to Westerners. Furthermore, a variety of religious misunderstandings including the "guardianship system" that grants male family members authority over their female relatives is mainly responsible for many of the cultural restrictions faced by Arab refugee girls and women (The Associated Press, 2014). Arab refugee women migrated as a result of violent conflict, poverty, inequality, climate change, disasters, and environmental degradation (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

Factors and Barriers Facing Arab Refugee Women

A limited number of researchers have investigated barriers Arab refugee women face in their home country that limit their participation in community education programs (UNICEF, 2005). UNICEF's Innocent Research Centre investigated the significant factors in determining a girl's risk of becoming married while still a child. Also analyzed were the reasons behind the perpetuation of child marriage and its harmful impact poverty, protection of girls, family honor, and the provision of stability during unstable social periods are also identified as significant factors (UNICEF, 2005).

A United Nations Children's Fund Profile on Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa, in key facts about child marriage, mentioned that the Middle East and North Africa is home to nearly 40 million child brides. In the Middle East, Arab girls who live in rural areas, are from poorer households, and have a higher risk of being child brides are found among those with less education. Parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still children in hopes that the marriage will benefit them both financially and socially while relieving financial burdens on the family (UNICEF, 2018).

Women who marry at younger ages more likely to experience domestic violence. Much of what Arab women experience predates the conflict, and their discrimination continues to aggravate them in the post-conflict scenario (Manjoo, 2010). Even in non-conflict scenarios, we can see that acts of violence against women, such as assault and sexual abuse, are part of a more extensive system of gender hierarchy that can only be fully grasped when seen in the broader structural context (Manjoo, 2010). According to Chayn (2015), in Arab society, education for girls is often not a priority. Instead, they are forced to focus on day-to-day survival and housekeeping work. Arab women especially are suffering from men's harsh and cruel behavior.

Arab Refugee Women Literacy Levels in the Home Country

Hammoud (2001) identifies that literacy is a word that is usually associated with the positive aspects of human civilization and of social and economic development. However, the word illiteracy has been and is still currently used to characterize poverty and lack of education in various parts of the world. Adult education in Arab refugee women home countries has begun to take on other characteristics more prevalent in other parts of the world, which include providing people with the skills and knowledge needed to respond effectively to the growing challenges of new technologies and the information age (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2003). It is important to point out that the focus on adult education in the Arab region as a whole has been primarily on literacy as one of the main types of both formal and non-formal education, and is considered the pre-requisite to all development programs and most of the region still deals with adult education as a literacy issue (UNESCO, 2003, p. 5)

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) (1997), which was held in 1997 in Hamburg, and the Regional Preparatory Conference have identified one of the main challenges standing in the way of setting and achieving a comprehensive development agenda in the Middle East is continued armed conflicts, wars, and threats of war that have menaced the region over the past 2 decades. This, more than anything else, underscores the need to make adult education, in all its manifestations, a priority for the Arab world (UNESCO, 2003). In 2003, UNESCO's Bureau for Education in the Arab States prepared a report based on the decisions, commitments, and plans of action emanating from both the International Conference and the Regional Preparatory Conference, and compares and measures the progress made against documents resulting from these two meetings. It also includes the responses from a 15-point

questionnaire that was sent to 18 countries and a number of literacy and adult education organizations, in an attempt to glean information that may not be available or may not yet be documented.

Statistical data assessments from the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (2000) suggest that to state literacy is the most pressing issue on the adult education agenda for the Arab region would be an understatement. Arab region has entered the 21st century burdened with over 70 million illiterates out of a population of 280 million, and that there are approximately 10 million out-of-school children who will soon swell the ranks of the illiterate in the region, then we know we are talking about a potential catastrophe. Literacy rates vary widely in the area from country to country, ranging from 5.5% in Jordan to over 55% in Mauritania.

Internal and External Problems Hindering Literacy Development in the Region

UNESCO (2003), in a Regional Report for the CONFINTEA V mid-term review conference, identified the Internal and External Problems Hindering Literacy Development in the Region. Internal problems included deteriorating economic situation in post-war, post-conflict countries, absence of political will, lack of adequate financing for education, poverty, rapid population increase in some countries unmatched by economic progress, high rate of school dropouts, particularly among young men in some countries, lack of measurable goals and achievable strategies, lack of evaluation mechanisms, lack of reliable statistical data, research and documentation, weakness and cultural barriers to women's education, and weakness of early childhood education. External problems included relentless wars, armed conflicts, and the continuous threat of war, global political unrest affecting the region specifically, rapid technological advances resulting in difficulties in catching up, and lack of international cooperation in the area of education.

At the governmental, organizational, and social levels, there is excellent awareness of the seriousness of the situation. Efforts to deal with it predate CONFINTEA V and most of the previous conferences on education and adult learning. However, although much has been done to reduce illiteracy, results have been mixed, according to the UNESCO (2003) report. These efforts have contributed significantly to lowering illiteracy levels since 1990 in the region as a whole from 48.7% in 1990 to 38.5% in 2000. As for illiteracy reduction among women 15-24 in 17 Arab countries, the numbers are as follows: from 44.9% in 1980 to 29.9% in 1990 to 19.4% in 2005. Also, the special attention given to reducing women's illiteracy levels has paid off in girls and women above the age of 15 in 18 Arab countries, as follows: from 64.9% in 1980 to 51.9% in 1990 to 40.2% in 2006. There have also been some very impressive results recorded among women 15-24 in nine Arab countries where illiteracy has been reduced to less than 10%. Notable among these have been Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, and Qatar. Except for Djibouti and Mauritania, there have been significant advancements made in combating illiteracy in all other Arab countries.

Migration Experiences toward International Destinations

The UNGA (2016), in its Seventieth Session agenda, addressed the large movements of refugees and immigrants, in the absence of sufficient safe, orderly, and regular pathways for moving to other countries. Refugees fleeing persecution or conflict and immigrants escaping hardship are often compelled to undertake perilous and circuitous journeys by sea, land, or air. Given the lack of alternatives, they find themselves forced to turn over their savings and put their lives in the hands of criminal networks to cross international borders. The rising number of children in these movements is of particular concern. Half of the world's refugees are children under 18 years of age, and around half of the total number of refugees are women or girls. The

gradual expansion of refugee protection notwithstanding, many people are compelled to leave their homes for reasons that do not fall within the refugee definition in the United Nations Convention (1951), including disasters or the erosion of livelihoods as a result of the adverse impacts of climate change and food insecurity.

The International Organization for Migration Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) in Berlin tracks incidents involving refugees who have died or gone missing in the process of migration toward international destinations (GMDAC, 2016). The GMDAC has recorded 28% migrant deaths during the first half of 2016 compared with the same period in 2015. This data briefing produced by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) GMDAC (2016) takes an in-depth look at the available global figures for migrant deaths and disappearances during the first half of 2016. In the first 6 months of 2016, more than 3,700 people went missing or lost their lives during migration around the world, a 28% increase compared to the same period in 2015, and a 52% increase for the same period in 2014.

Based on an analysis by the Center for Immigration Studies of data from the Census Bureau, many Arab refugee families naively believed that the only challenge they may face is to flee their home country, the refugee camp, or transit point. However, upon arriving in their host country, they are struck by the cold reality that the migration journey was only the start of their challenges. While many Arab refugee families are well-educated and prosperous in their home countries, a significant proportion sinks into poverty upon arrival in the United States and make use of America's welfare system (GMDAC, 2016).

Social and Economic Factors Facing New Arrivals in the United States

In Garrett's (2006) study portfolio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Vulnerable Populations asked the research firm of Lake Snell Perry Mermin Decision Research (LSPM/DR)

to conduct a focus group study of immigrant and refugee communities in the United States.

LSPM/DR conducted 32 focus groups between May 2004 and March 2005 in 10 cities across the United States, speaking both with immigrants and refugees and with people who work with these populations. The participants in these focus groups described a way of life for new immigrants and refugees replete with hurdles. These result from several social factors, including:

- The type and quality of education available to these new residents and their children desperate to learn English.
- Economic issues: the lack of secure jobs that pay an often-undocumented population, and their resulting poor or crowded housing.
- Isolation in immigrant and refugee communities: isolation from services that could help them, as well as the emotional isolation caused by the stress.
- Prejudice and discrimination that new immigrants and refugees report they face, as well as the cultural differences that may deter them from seeking and receiving services. “Even if they have legal status, many fear they will not be treated fairly due to widespread prejudice and discrimination. This keeps them from lodging legitimate grievances against employers, landlords, or even law enforcement. Many say they feel powerless” (Garrett, 2006, p. 12).

Garrett’s (2006) study portfolio identified a number of the barriers that exist to getting better jobs and make refugees feel stuck in low-level positions. First is the lack of sufficient language skills and education. Even low-paying jobs that historically required little or no English are now demanding some language skills. Moreover, finding appropriate housing can also be challenging. Cost is the most significant barrier since immigrant and refugee families say they usually obtain only low-paying jobs in their first years in America.

Garrett's (2006) study portfolio also highlights that all of the issues mentioned in this report affect access to and use of health care services. Lack of legal status discourages many immigrants and refugees from seeking medical care because they fear they will be turned in. Language barriers are a problem for many immigrants and refugees since they can neither effectively communicate with medical professionals when they do seek care, nor can they learn about available health programs in their community.

The Education System and English Language Proficiency

Academically. UNHCR's (1995) definition of a refugee states that refugees leave their home countries for "fear of being persecuted." Pugh, Every, and Hattam (2012) note in their research on Australian primary schools with high refugee populations that refugee students face additional barriers to schooling, while their classmates may not have violent experiences, extended stays in refugee camps, or limited access to education. They have concluded that unrealistic expectations in a different setting, coupled with a lack of access to prior education, create additional burdens for these students to overcome as they seek educational opportunities. Upon coming to the United States, the most glaring obstacle that refugees face concerning academics is the language barrier. Some refugee students may have had access to education in their home country; however, their language abilities are holding them back here.

The challenge of learning English is another hurdle for refugee students to overcome as they develop the language and one that may not be as clear-cut as it appears. McBrien's (2005) review of the literature found that students may be competent at spoken English yet be considerably behind their classmates in academic English. This divide between spoken and academic English is a grey area that could potentially put refugee students at a more significant disadvantage if not addressed and understood. Teachers must be aware of their students' actual

academic English abilities rather than making assumptions based on what they hear from students' conversations.

By embracing these differences, schools not only allow their refugee students to feel included, but they also increase the cultural awareness of the other students in the class. Kaprielian-Churchill's (1996) work with refugees in Canada found that such students may leave school because they think they are too far behind academically, and they will never be able to catch up. Others may leave school because they must work to help their families survive economically. Others often see refugees as impoverished because of their living conditions, the clothes they wear, or their language abilities, creating a stereotype that follows them into the classroom setting. Kiche (2010) argued that poverty's association with low education aspirations has been discounted, as evidenced by strong educational desires and expectations among immigrant youth who are disproportionately represented in low-income brackets.

According to the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's (LIR's) Immigration Myths vs. Facts sheet (LIR, 2012), more than 11% of foreign-born workers in the United States have advanced degrees but are unable to use them either because the United States does not recognize them or because they have a limited language base that prohibits entry into their fields of study in America. So, to say that refugees are unable to succeed in American schools, or that poverty among refugees is a reason that they fail academically, is an overly broad statement. Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam (1999) found poverty may prevent these students from focusing solely on school if these students may have a more involved role in assisting the family, but it is not a sole factor in their success or failure.

Culturally. As refugees are leaving their home out of fear and not necessarily out of a desire to live in America, the possibility exists that there could be a resistance to the dominant

culture in the United States or a more protracted process of accepting their new lifestyle as part of their own, which is especially true of older students or adults. McBrien (2005) found that cultural crossings among refugee students contributed to identity confusion for adolescents and that this crossing can create tensions between students' academic and social lives as well as their home lives with parents. Schools are often the sites where culture and family traditions of refugees are challenged the most and where refugee children begin to acculturate to American values and customs (Garrett, 2006). As refugee students struggle for acceptance in a foreign country, they adapt to what they see. This adaptation may conflict with their home culture and create conflicts within the family.

Teachers need to keep in mind that there are differences in cultures and potentially other obstacles that hinder a parent from being more involved in the student's academics.

Bhattacharya (2000) in her research on refugees and their access to higher education, found that parents' self-consciousness about their inability to speak "correct" English and conflicting work schedules were the most common reasons for not attending school functions. Garrett (2006) found that refugees value English as a Second Language instruction and see their lack of English proficiency as a barrier to a better life. This report also found that the priority for refugee families when coming to the United States is to find work and to support the family financially, which could mean working multiple jobs and not providing the flexibility for parents to attend school-based meetings.

Language access. One of the biggest hurdles that most refugees have to overcome when coming to the United States is learning English. Most refugees believe they cannot improve their lives and get better employment opportunities until they have a better grasp of the English language (Garrett, 2006). The experiences refugees are entering the country with, and the basic

needs obstacles they face, schools need to be patient and consistent with their instruction. Kaprielian-Churchill's (1996) study on schooling provided in refugee camps found that, depending on the age of immigration, refugee children require 5-6 years in an English as a Second Language setting to reach the level of English language proficiency necessary for academic competence in the classroom. Ogbu and Simons's (1998) minority classification research found that refugees bring preexisting cultural and language differences with them to the United States. Also, they can adopt the "tourist" attitude toward learning the culture and language of their host society; this is different from the immigrant mindset, where they are considered to be voluntary minorities as they choose to come to the United States specifically.

Conclusion

A review of the literature demonstrates that Arab refugee women face significant factors and barriers in their home country that limit their participation in community education programs. Violence against women, early marriage, violent conflict, poverty, inequality, climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation are examples of the primary factors that limit Arab refugee women's participation in community education programs (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). Implicit in the term refugee is the concept of forced migration. A review of the literature provides a basis for understanding the reasons why women will continue into forced migration regardless of the high degree of risk involved. Arab refugee women, therefore, need all the help they can get to overcome the academic, social, and economic factors to be productive and happy in their new home countries. McBrien (2005) found that cultural crossings among refugee populations contribute to a kind of identity confusion, and this crisscross often creates tensions between the academic and social lives of refugees. This study, therefore, harnesses existing literature as a springboard toward highlighting the barriers and challenges

Arab refugee women face in the wake of disruptive and destructive impulses resulting from the harsh tensions between academic and sociocultural crossings.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Research Design

As the research method, this study used critical ethnography, which is a research method central to knowing the world from the standpoint of its social relations. It is a qualitative research method predicated on the diversity of culture at home (wherever that may be) and abroad. Critical ethnography involves hands-on learning, and it is relevant wherever people are relevant.

“Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Looking at an underrepresented population (Arab refugee women), based not only on their ethnicity but also on their language and cultural heritage, the critical ethnographer’s role is to identify these injustices, challenge the status quo, and make recommendations for change. This research aimed to do this by looking at Arab women who fit the refugee demographic in the local education system. For that reason, the study lent itself to a critical ethnographic study of the system’s impact on an identified refugee population.

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address the processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. By “ethical responsibility,” this study suggests a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence compassion for the hardships and suffering of Arab refugee women. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they should be for specific subjects (Arab refugee women); as a result, the researcher felt a moral obligation to contribute to changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. Using critical

ethnography, the researcher directed this study beneath surface appearances that make it easy to gloss over the plight of Arab refugee women, disrupt the status quo, and unsettle both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control that continue to render Arab Refugee women vulnerable and powerless.

Furthermore, this study aimed to document and analyze factors, barriers, and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills. The study shows how their prior experiences and current life contexts affect their educational participation and future learning. The research also focuses on the impact of low-level language and literacy skills in English and looks at their involvement in educational programs with major community-based providers. This study further highlights the role of gendered experiences on migration and considers why an understanding of Arab women's experiences is particularly important in education research. The study identifies the barriers Arab refugee women faced in their new host countries and explores intersecting factors, for example, socioeconomic status, that affect migration.

This study used interviews as a data collection method that allowed refugee women's voices to be heard, especially those who are at times silenced or those who have not been allowed to voice their perspectives. Through qualitative interviews, the researcher was able to engage in meaningful conversations with study participants, providing them an opportunity to share accounts of their lived experiences, particularly experiences related to displacement, conflict, and education. It also allowed the researcher to capture the moments in which women opened up and shared personal narratives that sometimes went beyond the questions posed. Qualitative data can be systematically utilized to address pressing personal and social problems (Tracy, 2013).

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The underlying rationale of educational research is the acquisition of new knowledge (Borg & Gall, 1989). The motive of this research study was to contribute to the elimination of a gap in the literature specific to Arab Refugee women. This was accomplished in three key areas: (a) the factors and barriers that promote or limit their participation in Community Education Programs, (b) the primary literacy, education, and cultural restrictions originating in the home country, and (c) the migration experiences and learning needs of these women with low language and literacy skills in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. One of the two primary approaches that dominate educational research is the qualitative research process. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research “is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1–2).

Qualitative research methods that seek to build understanding and discover meaning are immensely practical for a study that examines the factors and barriers, learning needs, and migration experiences of Arab refugees women with low language and literacy skills. Qualitative research methods with a person-to-person interviewing approach to data collection provide participants the opportunity to give an unqualified assessment of their culture, education, and migration experiences. Rather than a prioritized set of categories within which participants fit their views, they were free to choose aspects of Arab refugee women’s culture, education, and migration experience upon which to comment. Through qualitative research, information completely unanticipated by the researcher soliciting input about the quality of participants’ lives as refugees was collected. The idea here is that the resulting data are richly descriptive and faithful to Arab Refugee women’s perspectives.

Data Collection

The study involved one-on-one interviews to engage participants in conversations, with the intent for them to be purposeful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Research interview is defined as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a [meaningful] conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (deMarrais, 2004, pp. 51–68). According to Patton (2002), the primary purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. The interviews were designed to last for 60 minutes. The researcher audio-recorded the interviews to ensure their accuracy and used the data to complete the study. The researcher provided a copy of the interview transcript after it was completed to allow the participant to acknowledge its accuracy. Participants were not be paid and were able to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The researcher assigned Pseudonyms by changing names to Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning there was a mix of more- and less-structured interview questions, flexibility, specific data captured from respondents, interviews guided by the list of questions or issues explored, and no predetermined wording or order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the voices of individuals that the Arab culture often silence allowed the researcher to engage in the topic more personally and add depth to the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The individuals interviewed were also able to tell their personal experiences and stories rather than being represented by what the majority voice perceives them to be.

Data Analysis Procedures

The study used a layered approach to begin analyzing the data. According to Gregg (2017), this is a systematic approach to protocol that breaks up the data collected into a number

of layers or levels. Findings from the data served as an access point to begin the more intensive phase of data analysis. Data collection goals for the interviews identified the points at which Arab refugee women had difficulty and examined the ways in which Community Education program practices and policies helped or hindered their progression at each stage of integration into the United States. In her review of the data analysis on women's participation in postsecondary education, Ekstrom (1972) characterized barriers as threefold: institutional, situational, and dispositional: (a) ***Institutional barriers*** are factors such as admission/registration practices, financial aid, and types of curriculum services adopted that derive from the institutions/ organizations limiting participation; (b) ***Situational barriers*** are constraints arising from family and community obligations and personal finances limiting access; and (c) ***Dispositional barriers*** are those person specific characteristics, including fear of failure, attitude toward intellectual activity, and level of aspiration.

This research study compared patterns among Arab refugee women grouped by socioeconomics and other factors such as literacy and educational skills level to identify gaps in progress, completion/certification, and upward mobility among these women. For a deeper understanding, the researcher utilized metaphors for data analysis in an attempt to find common themes among the interviews that serve as foundations for the framework. For example, in Arab culture blindness is often a metaphor associated with unfamiliarity, strangeness, and a lack of smarts and focus. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explained, metaphors are part of a wider use of linguistic symbols and can create shared cultural meanings. Given the potential lack of linguistic understanding by refugees, these metaphors can serve as shared cultural meanings or connect two phenomena that may not normally be characterized together but are not meant to be taken literally (Goodall, 2000; Noblit, 2013).

Coding was used to aid the researcher in understanding the perspective of the participant and in analyzing their combined experiences. Codes were created during the research process, based on the data, for the purposes of analyzing the data (Urquhart, 2013). Coding the transcriptions, or breaking them down into meaningful and manageable pieces of data, was a critical part of the data analyses. Coding helps prevent the interviewer from overemphasizing the importance of any one aspect and helps ensure a thorough analysis of the entire interview (Charmaz, 2006). For this study, the researcher designated the codes by yellow, pink, blue, green, and orange colors and sorted them in a table.

As each phase of coding began, it was important to continue reviewing the data in previous phases so that connections were constantly being made until saturation occurred. Urquhart's (2013) Selective Coding method was applied. In selective coding, the researcher strove to find emerging threads or categories. Selective Coding started taking shape when codes relating to core categories began to emerge (Urquhart, 2013). Some Selective Codes emerged more often than others. A single Selective Code denotes a prominent theme (Birks & Mills, 2011; Urquhart, 2013).

The Role of the Researcher

Researchers are rarely total participants or total observers. There is often a mix of roles wherein one might either begin as a full participant and then withdraw into more of a researcher position or vice versa. Although the ideal in qualitative research is to gain the perspective of the participants, full participation is not always possible. Being born into a group, "going native," or just being a member does not necessarily afford the perspective necessary for studying the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2001) underscores the balance needed between insider and outsider in qualitative research. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher might begin as a spectator and then gradually become involved in observing the

activities. In another situation, an investigator might decide to join a group to see what it is actually like to be a participant and then gradually withdraw.

The researcher may want to keep all thoughts, feelings, and biases in a notebook to keep it out of a research study. The study further acknowledges that personal and work background often influence data interpretation. Member checking was utilized during and after interviews to increase the credibility, validity, and transferability of the study results and to minimize any personal bias on the results of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During each interview, the researcher also restated and summarized information, questioning participants on the accuracy of the information. After the researcher transcribed the interviews, the researcher asked participants to review the content of their transcript for accuracy. Additionally, the researcher consulted with resources and advisors throughout the evolution of this study. Lastly, the researcher included ample and relevant quotes from participants to substantiate the findings of the study (Maxwell, 2005).

Proposed Participants and Selection Criteria

The participants of this study were women who had lived in the Piedmont Area of North Carolina for less than 3 years. The sample representation was small, comprising of five Arab refugee women. Although smaller sample sizes may not lend themselves to generalizations, single cases can be used to prove that a vital phenomenon can occur (Piotrkowski, 1978).

Participant selection included the following criteria:

- Age: Participants ages ranged between 25 and 50 years old.
- Country of origin: participants were from Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, and Syria.
- Religion: All participants were Muslim and practiced the Islamic faith.

- Language: The Arabic language was the mother tongue of all participants, though with slight variation in dialect.
- Education: Not all participants possessed a high school diploma.
- Socioeconomic background: All participants were stay-at-home “Housewives” and dependent upon their husbands for financial and material support.
- Participants were recruited through refugee events hosted by the resettlement agency and community organizations. A recruitment and informational table was set up on-site during these events.
- Persons of interest were identified in terms of the following: Arabic speaking, refugee, and dressed in hijab (veil).
- A one-on-one conversation with interested persons took place and appointments scheduled with potential participants upon their approval.

This study used purposeful sampling, which is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Additional to knowledge and experience, the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner were essential.

Site Selection

Study participants met the researcher at a public library, and each interview was designed to last 60 minutes. A public library presented the perfect neutral venue and was a safe location.

The selected site was located within the city limits and was near the participants' residences. All participants were familiar with the public library and could easily commute to the library within a 10-minute drive time.

Protection of Participants

Protecting the rights and welfare of those who volunteer to participate in research is a fundamental tenet of ethical research. The principles underlying the Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (National Commission, 1979), which serves as the leading source guiding ethical standards governing research with human participants in the United States, emphasizes that research must respect the autonomy of participants, must be fair in both conception and implementation, and must maximize potential benefits while minimizing potential harms. To that end, the proposed study impressed upon its participants that whatever they said would be free of reprisals, especially since they all came from staunchly patriarchal homes. Age, names, and geographic location of the participants were not to be specified. Identity protection was paramount; therefore, participant pseudonyms were used.

Recording research interviews is an excellent way to capture qualitative data. An audio recording of an interview also allows the researcher to refer back to the interview and take a fresh look at the interview data. Developing a rigorous database management protocol is essential for two reasons. First, standardized transcripts prevent the production of incompatible data products. Second, it reduces the chance that the analysis will be compromised or delayed. Creating a coherent, cohesive, and orderly database ensures that high-quality analysis is possible. Each transcript was not treated as an independent word processing product, but rather part of a more extensive collection of data stored in a standardized format.

Isaac (2015) identifies the following steps for managing qualitative databases which will be applied to this study:

1. Keeping copies of relevant information. The cloud-based data storage management system Dropbox was used to store and back up data as the analysis proceeded.
2. Information was kept in a password-protected computer and on password-protected platforms.
3. Field notes or researcher commentary was arranged in chronological order.
4. The researcher provided for the safe storage of all materials.
5. The researcher deleted the data once the study was complete.
6. Transcriptions will be kept for at least 3 years after the close of the study, after which time they will be destroyed.

Following these steps prevents research confusion at the data analysis stage.

Potential Interview Talking Points/Questions

The following is a list of interview talking points and questions:

1. In what educational program(s) do you participate?
2. Explain how the program sufficiently addresses your non-academic needs.
3. What additional resources do you need to aid or assist you in your educational development?
4. What are the social and economic barriers you encountered in the United States?
5. How have the challenges and your literacy level in your home country affected your participation in education programs in the United States?
6. What are the educational programs needed in North Carolina to provide more academic success?

Measures of Trustworthiness and Validity

The validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethical disposition of the researcher. According to Patton (2001), the credibility of the researcher, along with rigorous methods, are essential components to ensure the credibility of qualitative research, for better or for worse. Patton (2001) also asserts that trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of those who collect and analyze the data and their demonstrated competence. Reliability and validity are therefore conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor, and quality in qualitative research. It is also through this association that the way to achieve validity and reliability of research becomes affected by the qualitative researchers' perspectives which are to eliminate bias and increase the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about a social phenomenon (Denzin, 1978).

Participants in this study were interviewed and provided with a consent form and a copy of the interview questions. The results of the research were generalized from a sample to a similar population. Establishing external validity follows directly from the sampling that presents an accurate representation of Arab refugee women's challenges and barriers. Although the total population may not be available, external validity renders it plausible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Furthermore, Johnson (1997) contends that if the validity or trustworthiness can be maximized or tested, then more "credible and defensible results" may lead to generalizability, which is one of the concepts suggested by Stenbacka (2001) as the structure for both doing and documenting high-quality qualitative research. Therefore, the quality of research is related to the generalizability of the results, and thereby to the testing and increasing the validity or trustworthiness of the research.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and how they relate to the main research questions. Various methods of qualitative research were implemented such as one-on-one interviewing, semi-structured interview questions and purposeful sampling. Each interview included one Arab refugee woman who had lived in the Piedmont area of North Carolina for at least 3 years. A demographic classification of the participants and mutual themes from the interviews is included in this chapter in tabular form.

The general purpose of this study was to document and analyze factors, barriers, and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills. The goal of this study was to show how their prior experiences and current life contexts affect their educational participation and future learning. This research also focuses on the impact of low-level language and literacy skills in English and views their involvement in educational programs with major community-based providers. A total of five participants were interviewed. All the Arab refugee women had lived in the Piedmont area of North Carolina for at least 3 years prior to this study and mostly participated in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and General Educational Development (GED) programs. All participants were interviewed at a public library located within the city limits and near the participants' residences. All participants were asked six questions in order to gain a better understanding of the social and economic barriers affecting their participation in educational programs, literacy development, and English language proficiency.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the factors and barriers that promote or limit Arab refugee women participation in Community Education Programs?
2. What are the primary literacy, education, and cultural restrictions originating in the Arab refugee woman's home country?
3. What are the migration experiences and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skill in the Piedmont area of North Carolina?

Participant Demographics

The participants interviewed for this study were women who had been living in the Piedmont Area of North Carolina for at least 3 years. The study sample included five Arab refugee women. They were aged between 32 and 50 years: two participants were in their 30s, two were in their 40s, and one was in her 50s. All of the participants spoke Arabic; 60% were housewives and 40% worked part-time. For the participants' level of education, $n=3$ (60%) had a middle school education, $n=1$ (20%) had a high school diploma, and $n=1$ (20%) had an associate's degree from their country (see Table 1).

Table 1

Arab Refugee Women Demographics

Participant's Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Country of Origin	Religion	Primary Language	Highest Level of Education Per Home Country	Socioeconomic Status
Participant 1	49	Iraq	Muslim	Arabic	Middle school	Work part time
Participant 2	34	Iraq	Muslim	Arabic	Middle school	Work part time
Participant 3	32	Syria	Muslim	Arabic/Kurdish	High school Diploma	Housewife

Table 1

Cont.

Participant's Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Country of Origin	Religion	Primary Language	Highest Level of Education Per Home Country	Socioeconomic Status
Participant 4	40	Sudan	Muslim	Arabic	Associate degree	Housewife
Participant 5	53	Iraq	Muslim	Arabic	Middle school	Housewife

Interview Questions

The following is a list of interview questions and talking points:

1. In what educational program(s) do you participate?
2. Explain how the program sufficiently addresses your non-academic needs.
3. What additional resources do you need to aid or assist you in your educational development?
4. What are the social and economic barriers you encountered in the United States?
5. How have the challenges and your literacy level in your home country affected your participation in education programs in the United States?
6. What are the educational programs needed in North Carolina to provide more academic success?

Themes

While conducting the interview process for this study, the participants were excited to express and share their experiences, while others withdrew from the process because of some cultural perspective. The key themes and subthemes are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Emerging Themes and Subthemes

Emerging Themes	Emerging Subthemes
Language barriers	
Early marriage and family responsibilities	Low participation rates in educational programs in the Piedmont area of North Carolina
Low literacy and education level in home country	

The significant themes for this study were chosen after meticulous transcription of audio recordings of the interviews and successive coding of the data from those transcripts. The themes are **Language barriers, Early marriage and family responsibilities, and Low literacy and Education level in home country**. The subtheme is: **Low participation rates in educational programs in the Piedmont area of North Carolina**.

The first theme, Language barrier, is substantial because one of the biggest obstacles that most refugees must overcome when coming to the United States is learning English. The Language barrier is a fundamental hurdle for Arab refugee women in this study and appears to stop them from making vital connections and inroads in their communities. Even daily tasks like taking a bus or grocery shopping can be extremely overwhelming. Because learning English is a priority, ESOL classes may be the most valued service.

The second theme, early marriage and family responsibilities, are primary factors that limit Arab refugee women's participation in community education programs. The perpetuation of child marriage and its harmful impacts on poverty, protection of girls, family honor, and the provision of stability during unstable social periods are also identified as significant factors (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2005). According to Chayn (2015), in Arab society, education for girls is often not a priority. Instead, they are forced

to focus on day-to-day survival and housekeeping work and suffering from men's harsh and cruel behavior. Chayn's point is significant because it was discussed during the interview process which lead the study to include low participation rates in educational programs as a subtheme. This theme is also significant because, this topic is the guiding question for the entire study, to document and analyze the factors and barriers that promote or limit educational participation of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills, which is also the largest gap in this study.

The third theme, Low literacy and education level in the home country, is significant because for Arab refugee women with minimal or no schooling experience the need is primarily centered on their lack of literacy skills (including the English language), often complicated by the fact that many are not literate in their first language. Gombert (1994) reasoned that the more education one has, the easier it is to learn all aspects of a new language. The lesser the education one has, the more difficult it is to profit from formal education, where organization and thinking skills and school-based skills are needed to succeed.

The following participant responses reflect a thorough analysis of the themes and subthemes of the study.

Theme 1: Language barriers. The first emerging theme from the interviews was how Arab refugee women identified their language barriers as an essential problem as they adjust to new communities and new cultures. The participants in the study told many stories about problems they have encountered in America, more specifically, the Piedmont area of North Carolina due to language barriers. They reported facing language barriers when they went to the hospital, DMV, their child's school, the local grocery store, and when lost and seeking direction. Study participants seemed motivated to overcome language barriers and to learn English. Most

believe they cannot improve their lives and get a better job until they become proficient in speaking English. Most of the participants in this study seemed to know about English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs in their community and attended these classes.

Participant 1. Participant 1's response regarding attending English classes in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program highlighted the difficulty in overcoming the language barrier and learning English with busy lives and responsibilities. The following statement reflects how she identifies her language barrier and how this has affected her life.

When I first came to America everything was hard because of no English, unable to do simple things like buying food from grocery shop or ride a bus. But I decided to attend English classes to get a job and be able to help my children on their homework. But I think ESOL program didn't help me address my nonacademic needs. A lot of times I am not able to follow the lesson, so I self-study. I bought a dictionary and study myself or watching YouTube.

Participant 2. Regarding attending English and GED classes, Participant 2's response highlighted the benefit of transitioning from the ESOL program to the GED program in the following statement: "I was not able to express myself when I came to America. But I registered in ESOL program and the program helped me to learn English and I was able to move to GED program to get my diploma."

Participant 3. Participant 3's response regarding attending English classes was similar to Participant 2 in highlighting the benefit of the ESOL program to help overcome the language barrier:

We arrived in America. We don't know the language and I couldn't understand anything. Our children are sent to school, but the problem is they can't understand the teachers or the lessons. I joined ESOL program to learn English and help my family.

Participant 4. Participant 4's response regarding attending curriculum classes at one of the community college programs in the Piedmont area of North Carolina was in-depth:

The main obstacle I have faced in the U.S. is language the barrier. I couldn't schedule doctor appointment for me or my kids. Also, I really found it difficult to obtain a driver's license with limited English. It is a matter of educating myself. Sometimes it takes over a year, it is really complicated process.

Participant 5. Participant 5's response regarding attending English classes was similar to Participant 2 and Participant 3 in highlighting the benefit of the ESOL program to overcome the language barrier:

I think the language is the main thing. When I arrived in U.S., the language barrier was my main problem. Specially I have to be always at the hospital due to my illness. I felt isolated and lonely. But ESOL program assist me to learn a basic words and sentences I can use them in my daily life.

Theme 2: Early marriage and family responsibilities. Early marriage and family responsibilities was the second theme that emerged from the data analysis and is the most detailed. The participants had much to say about the effects early marriage had on their lives and the extent to which it bounded them to family responsibilities. This leads to the first subtheme which is low participation rates in educational programs in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. The following illustrates what Participant 2 said about her experience on early marriage and what

the other participants said about their experiences on family responsibilities and how this had prevented them from participating in the educational programs.

Participant 1. Participant 1's response about how family responsibilities affect her participation in educational programs:

I am suffering from several daily strains. I have to do everything for my kids and husband. In our culture mother has to do the housekeeping works and take care of children as well. I have to cook, clean daily and work to help my husband pay house's bills. My husband doesn't help because he is a man and woman has to do everything. I really have no time to go to school and follow my lesson.

Participant 2. Participant shared her experience of early forced marriage and frequent pregnancies without spousal support:

When I came to America, I was so excited to complete my high school and going forward to complete my college, unfortunately I dropped school to get married by the age of 16. I thought marriage will give me security, companionship, happiness and money. However, it denies my opportunities to education and build life skills. My ex-husband controlled my life and my opportunity to get better education and overwhelmed me with family responsibilities.

Participant 3. Participant 3's response was similar to Participant 1 in how family responsibilities prevented her to continue her associate degree:

We came to America from different country and culture. Our life is difficult, as a mother I have to take care of three boys. My husband has to work out of state as it was hard to find a good job in North Carolina. I have to find a time to do life responsibilities and deal

with language barrier as well. My dream was to complete my associate degree but unfortunately it is difficult without support.

Participant 4. Participant 4's response was similar to Participants 1, 2, and 3 in how the family responsibilities and burdens overwhelmed them:

We were in a transit camp for few years before relocated to America. My children were out of school for a while. When we came to America, we get our children in to school we believe they get good education, but we face discrimination due to our culture and religion. My husband and I enrolled in ESOL program to learn English, but my husband left school for work and I was out for a while because I have a little child and couldn't afford to pay child care. Also, couldn't get a driver license soon because of the language barriers.

Participant 5. Responses from Participant 5 were not similar to other participants, as she came to America alone with some health issues: "I came to America alone with some money from my country that help me with life responsibilities. However, being alone also a big responsibilities, particularly I have some chronic illness."

Theme 2 subtheme: Low participation rate in the educational programs. Participant 2 revealed that her experience of an early forced marriage, frequent pregnancies, and the burdens of raising children without spousal support burdened her into inaction. Basic sustenance and empowerment tools such as sound physical and mental health, financial stability, the convenience of child care, and access to various modes of transportation were lacking, thereby preventing her participation in the educational programs. The views expressed by Participant 2 were shared by Participants 1, 3, and 4 regarding the absence of basic sustenance and empowerment tools.

Theme 3: Low literacy and education level in home country. One of the main challenges standing in the way of Arab refugee women achieving a comprehensive development pathway is the issue of low literacy levels in their respective home countries. Participants highlighted the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) findings that standing in the way of literacy development programs in the Middle East are continued armed conflicts, wars, and the threat of war that have menaced the region over the last 2 decades (UNESCO, 2003). Participants also pointed out that literacy development programs in the Arab countries lacked an emphasis on Arab women education, early childhood education did not have a rich second language education program focus and governments failed to invest in K-12, adult basic and higher education programs. The views shared by the participants are highlighted in the following statements:

Participant 1. Participant 1's responses to literacy level indicated that the lack of adequate education in Arab countries prevented her from completing her education:

I lived in the war zone and life was unsafe in my country. I couldn't reach to school because of daily armed fights on the street. I didn't have a chance to complete our formal schooling or learn English language. Woman and girls in my county had no education opportunities as men or boys.

Participant 2. Participant 2's responses were similar to Participant 1. However, she highlighted that government in her country failed in running the schooling system.

We faced poverty and fear. I couldn't complete my high school after war. My family was looking for a safe place to live outside of my country. Government didn't encourage woman to complete her education. They removed some of the girls' schools and make it

for boys only. No good programs for woman. No childcare provided to help mothers complete their education.

Participant 3. Participant 3's responses were similar to Participants 1 and 2 in sharing the issue of low literacy level in her country:

When I came to U.S. I can't speak English because we only start learning English in the ninth grade so it is hard for us to speak, read or write English. Also, the government in my country didn't educate the woman and we have to get permission from father, husband or brother to complete education.

Participant 4. Participant 4's responses were similar to other participants in sharing the issue of low literacy level in her country:

In my country the educational programs are weak, the government didn't support academic needs. Also, the country suffers from war, poverty and no good educational programs. In my case we, specially girls, drop school early to get marriage. From my point of view woman has to complete her education to be independent. The woman without education will not be good for her life.

Participant 5. Participant also shared her view about literacy and second language programs in her country:

We only start to learn English in ninth grade and focus only on learning grammar. In my country the education for woman not important. Government didn't build new schools or universities. Most of them are damaged. They spend the money on war.

Self-actualization Theory

This study is grounded in Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of Self-actualization derived from humanistic psychological theory. Self-actualization, according to Maslow, represents

growth of an individual toward fulfillment of the highest need. Maslow (1954) describes human motivation as a hierarchy of needs. He created a psychological hierarchy of needs, the fulfillment of which theoretically leads to a culmination of fulfillment of “being values,” or the needs that are on the highest level of this hierarchy, representing meaning.

Maslow’s (1943) triangle of the hierarchy of needs reflects a linear pattern of growth depicted in a direct pyramidal order of ascension (see Figure 1). Moreover, Maslow states that self-actualizing individuals are able to resolve life’s contradictions and ultimately reflected in the manifestation of free will. Finally, Maslow (1943) describes self-actualization as “the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (p. 370). According to Maslow (1943), what human beings are capable of becoming is specific to each person’s needs. It is evident that the participants in this study were clearly hampered from exercising free will and were subjected to a series of outside influences such as their spousal controls, financial dependence, cultural constraints, and religion.

Summary of Results

This chapter examined the key findings of this study. Arab refugee women participant demographics were highlighted in tabular form. Emanating from this study were the following emerging themes: Theme 1: Language barriers; Theme 2: Early marriage and family responsibilities; and Theme 3: Low literacy and education level in their home country. Low participation rate in educational programs emerged as a subtheme of the study’s Theme 2. Abraham Maslow’s (1943) humanistic psychological theory of Self-actualization served as the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study.

Self-Reflection

The field of Adult Education draws from several learning orientations. Cognitive, emotional, and socio-societal influences play an essential part in how we understand, acquire, or change worldviews, and how we retain knowledge and skills. I have been engaged in an Adult education master's program. The design of the learning activities in this program helped me better understand and deal with critical existential problems of my life. It also helped me identify my other learning goals, satisfy my psychological needs, and specifically answer my everyday questions of what exactly I need to accomplish.

It also helped me build confidence in new and developing personality roles. It allowed the exploring of my skills and capabilities and in carrying out my plan, but with new ideas and concepts. As a student from a different culture, the adult education master's program helped me critically understand my current and evolving cultural dynamics while also understanding how people replicate their values, beliefs, and behaviors. As I looked back over the last 5 years of my life, I realized how, as an Arab woman, I had enormous ambition to change the world, but I remembered that, even then, certain cultural constraints held me in chains. I had to do what my husband, my brother, or my uncle wanted me to do. I always asked probing and uncomfortable questions. After that, I tried to understand the "culture traps," and invariably, there are many that propelled or impeded the direction I decided and where I wanted to go to define my strategic directions, situational visions, missions, and values.

I began to ask myself what vision I wanted for my future and how the culture change or shift must facilitate the accomplishment of my vision. Furthermore, I realized that I had to change my behavior to create the desired culture shift. We need to evaluate learning consistently as adult learners, and it should take on meaning as a part of the total experience because we need

to know whether it is meeting our needs and expectations, whether it leads toward what we need to know, and whether it eliminates the dark areas of ignorance we are experiencing.

In summary, this new process helped me build my philosophies and theories as an Arab woman, adult learner, and adult educator, prompting me to act in new and different ways while reflecting on interactions with others. As I awake in the morning, in prayer, in exercise, and in study, a new transformative phase starts. I will have new anxieties, hopes, challenges, and possibilities. This kind of learning causes me to refine my practice and life's lessons; it gets me to understand and manage the unforeseen potential and surprises of life with different ways of learning and knowing.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Recommendations & Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze the factors, barriers, and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills. The study intended to show how their prior experiences and current life contexts affect their educational participation and future learning. Upon review of the literature, it became evident that early marriage, poverty, violent conflict, violence against women, inequality, climate change, war, post-war, natural disasters, and environmental degradation are examples of the primary factors that limit Arab refugee women's participation in community education programs in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. A real gap exists in documenting women's participation in community educational programs.

An analysis of the collected data revealed that Arab refugee women and their families live complicated lives as they adjust to new communities and a new cultural reality in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. Poverty, a lack of economic opportunities, fundamental culture differences, and transportation challenges, a dire lack of the most basic educational programs, emotional isolation, prejudice, and a host of other challenges severely impacted Arab refugee women and their health status, educational aspirations, job searches, and housing needs. The researcher chose the three key themes and subtheme of this study after diligent transcription of the audio recordings of the interviews and successive coding of the data from those transcripts. This chapter further illuminates the connection between the research questions and the study's findings as it attempted to address specific gaps in the literature. The researcher also provides recommendations for future research in this chapter.

Research Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

Research Question 1. *What are the factors and barriers that promote or limit Arab refugee women's participation in Community Education Programs?*

This question examined the factors and barriers and the extent to which they promote or limit Arab refugee women's participation in community education programs in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. Chapter 4 revealed participant responses to this question. There was a slight divergence in participant responses, in that one participant shared her experience concerning early marriage, frequent pregnancies, and the burdens of raising children without spousal support. However, all participants were consistent in their perceptions about the absence of basic sustenance and empowerment tools such as financial stability, the convenience of childcare, and access to various modes of transportation.

Research Question 2. *What are the primary literacy, education, and cultural restrictions originating in the Arab refugee woman's home country?*

This question asked for the identification of primary literacy, education, and cultural restrictions in the participant's home country. One of the main challenges the participants shared in Chapter 4 was the issue of low literacy levels, or the lack of literacy skills, including English language proficiency, in their respective home countries, which is often complicated by the fact that many are not literate in their first language. Participants also pointed out that literacy development programs in Arab countries lacked an emphasis on Arab women's early childhood education, did not have a rich second-language education program focus, and the government failed to invest in K-12 adult basic and higher education programs.

Research Question 3. *What are the migration experiences and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills in the Piedmont area of North Carolina?*

This question asked for the migration experiences and learning needs of Arab refugee women with low language and literacy skills in the Piedmont area of North Carolina.

Participants indirectly revealed their migration experiences in the absence of a sufficiently safe, circuitous journey by sea, land, or air. They found themselves forced to turn over their life's savings and forced to put their lives in the hands of criminal networks to cross international borders. However, participants were consistent in identifying new life challenges in the host countries. They felt stuck in low-level employment positions that required no English, finding appropriate housing was difficult, isolation in their communities became the norm, and the emotional isolation caused by these stresses took a heavy toll on them. Cultural differences deterred them from receiving legal, health, and education services.

Recommendations for Improved Arab Refugee Women Participation in Community

Education Programs

The following recommendations gleaned from the study's findings focus on building stronger and better support systems for Arab refugee women in their participation in Community Educational Programs:

1. Throughout the interview process, participants highlighted the need for the rote practice of oral skills, especially with very low-level learners, to ensure they have a solid foundation in crucial foundational skills areas. These include, but are not limited to Arab refugee women being able to greet people with English proficiency, identifying and describing themselves to others when needed, using Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), talking to their children's teachers, interpreting the origin and intention of written correspondence, and purchasing items in a variety of shopping settings. This study also sought to identify best practices and innovative community

- instructional strategies for teaching Arab refugee women according to their needs and skill levels.
2. This study recommends making interpreter services more accessible and widely available in the Piedmont area of North Carolina, especially in places such as hospitals, doctor offices, schools, local courts, banks, and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).
 3. During the data collection process, the participants expressed their need to make refugee orientation programs more comprehensive, ongoing, and that it addresses long-term needs. The current one-time programs only address the basic needs refugees have when they first arrive in the host country. The study suggests using follow-up programs to help Arab refugee women with issues such as transportation, childcare, citizenship, obtaining health care services, dealing with discrimination, traffic codes knowing how to resolve motor vehicle accident issues, and labor laws.
 4. The study recommends that in cases where participants are not fully conversant in the English language, that a co-researcher with Arabic language proficiency and an in depth cultural understanding be included in the study

Recommendations for Future Research

This study serves as a supportive resource guide for the next generation of women's scholars, practitioners, and activists in local Arab communities through research. The following are recommendations for future research:

1. A qualitative research study documenting the skills of Arab refugee women and highlighting their success rates in their host communities, including interviews of actual Arab refugee women who made achievements and contributions in their host

communities. This will prompt a change in the tone and tenor of the discourse, moving it from a deficit driven approach to one that embraces the abundance and successes model.

2. A qualitative research study directed at capacity building programming strategies for Arab women specific to their legal and gender rights within their respective households, local communities, as well as in the host country in general. Arab women have shown that they do not always take full advantage of, and are not always familiar with legal and gender protections afforded to them by the law of the land.

Conclusion

This study was grounded in Abraham Maslow's (1943) humanistic psychological theory of self-actualization, by which he describes human motivation as a hierarchy of needs reflecting a linear pattern of growth depicted in a direct pyramidal order of ascension. The participants in this study were hampered from exercising free will and were subjected to a series of outside influences such as spousal control, financial dependence, cultural constraints, language barriers, religion, and challenges of their new lives in the host country. The data collection showed that there is more than one single constraint, challenge, or barrier that affects their participation in Community Educational Programs. Finally, Maslow (1943) describes self-actualization as "the desire to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (p. 370). According to Maslow (1943), what human beings are capable of becoming is specific to each person's needs. Participants in this study were far from reaching self-actualization because their journey towards self-actualization remains unresolved and incomplete.

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Appendix

Data Collection Procedures

No.	Task	Start Date	Finish Date
1	Submit Institutional Review Board (IRB) Form	6/19	07/19
2	Recruitment and selection of sample participants	07/19	08/19
3	Conduct Interviews	08/19	08/19
4	Code Interviews	09/19	09/19
5	Send thank you notes	09/19	09/19
6	Defend Thesis to Committee	10/23	10/23
7	Submit Thesis to the Graduate College	10/19	10/19