

Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia

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## **Abstract**

Large numbers of refugees enter into U.S. public schools each year, and school leaders are held accountable for their achievement. School leaders must find ways to support the needs of all of their students despite their race, socioeconomic status, proficiency in English, ability levels, and nationality. The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. School leaders need this information regarding these perceived factors to be able to make sound decisions regarding instructional practices with refugee students that assist them in being successful in school. This phenomenological, qualitative study was designed to use focus group interviews with refugee parents, teachers, and administrators to learn more about and engage in meaningful dialog about this increasingly present population of students in order to investigate academic strategies and programs that parents, teachers, and administrators feel would help refugee students achieve at higher rates. The setting for this study was a school division in central Virginia with approximately 50,000 students—approximately 2,900 of them as English language learners. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select participants for focus groups. Each focus group—a group of refugee parents who had children in various levels, groups of teachers of refugee students separated by level (elementary and secondary), and a group of administrators with refugees in their school (a combined group of elementary and secondary administrators)—was comprised of five to seven members. The following were areas noted by seven out of seven (100%) parents as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, communication with parents, cultural

differences, parental involvement, homework, and resources and materials. Six out of seven (86%) parents noted the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: language barrier, previous schooling, relationships, peer relationships, and translated documents. The following were noted by six out of six (100%) elementary teachers as possible factors affecting the performance of refugee students: community support, cultural differences, parental involvement, past experiences, relationships, resources and materials, and staff development. Five out of six (83%) elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication with parents and peer relationships. Four out of six (67%) elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, previous schooling, politics, and student to teacher relationships. The following were noted by five out of five (100%) secondary teachers as possible factors affecting the performance of refugee students: cultural differences, past experiences, and resources and materials. Four out of five (80%) secondary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: community support, politics, relationships, staff development, being informed of when students were arriving, and teacher strategies. Three out of five (60%) secondary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: language barrier, PTSD, peers relationships, student to teacher relationships, and sensitivity training. Five out of five (100%) administrators perceived parental involvement to be a factor that affects the performance of refugee students. Four out of five (80%) administrators perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, communication with parents, community support, cultural differences, language barrier,

past experiences, and resources and materials. Three out of five (60%) administrators perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication with students, visiting school, interpreters, translated documents, and staff development. These data suggest that school leaders have work to do regarding meeting the needs of refugee students so that they can be successful in public schools.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Background**

Today's principals are held to high levels of accountability regarding the academic achievement of their students, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, proficiency in English, ability levels, or nationality (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development [OPEPD], 2010). This researcher used focus group interviews to collect data from refugee parents, as well as teachers and administrators who work with refugees, regarding perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students. Armed with this information, instructional leaders and other practitioners can put practices in place to minimize those factors and more effectively meet the needs of all of their students.

### **Historical Perspective/Statement of the Problem**

President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 (Dee & Jacob, 2010). NCLB was the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which serves as the federal government's primary law addressing the nation's schools. The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 established high expectations for all students and created strong accountability standards for public schools to demonstrate high student achievement (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006; Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). The most current reauthorization of the ESEA was a "plan to renovate a flawed law" (OPEPD, 2010, p.2). Within the current reauthorization, the third priority addresses the equity and opportunity for all students, stating:

Schools must support all students, including by providing appropriate instruction and access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and attention where needed. From English Learners and students with disabilities to Native American

students, homeless students, migrant students, rural students, and neglected or delinquent students, our proposal will continue to support and strengthen programs for these students and ensure that schools are helping them meet college-ready and career-ready standards.

(OPEPD, 2010, p. 5)

This law requires that English language learners be included in each state's high-stakes standards-based testing program, and improvement must be seen in the achievement of these ELLs (Wright & Choi, 2006; Aguirre-Munoz & Boscardin, 2008). School leaders are charged with finding ways to meet the needs of these students, while continuing to challenge and demonstrate academic growth for all students in their schools. Likewise, elementary school teachers are increasingly becoming responsible for meeting the needs of linguistically diverse children (Webster & Valeo, 2011).

Of the groups that have been migrating to the United States in the last 25 years, the group that has been the fastest growing segment of the school-age population has been English language learners (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners was higher in the 2011-2012 school year (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.4 million students) than in 2002-2003 (8.7 percent, or an estimated 4.1 million students). Arias & Morillo-Campbell (2008) noted, ELLs share one important educational variable — the need to increase their proficiency in English — but they differ in language, cultural background, and socioeconomic status, thus creating challenges in the education of English language learners. In addition, Good et al. (2010) noted that many parents of ELLs have had no experience with English, presenting yet another challenge.

In 2014, approximately 70,000 refugees, half of them children, arrived in the United States (Refugee Council USA, 2014). Since the 1950s, the number of refugees worldwide has more than sextupled, and according to the United States Committee for Refugees & Immigrants (USCRI) it is likely that this number will continue to grow (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006; USCRI, 2009). Even with this recent history and future predictions, no formal framework currently exists for integrating refugee children into U.S. schools (Lerner, 2012). Regardless of this challenge, school leaders are held accountable for ensuring that appropriate and quality instruction is taking place in the classrooms so that refugees experience growth and achievement, as measured on formal and informal assessments.

### **Purpose and Questions of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. The experiences of refugees and their parents in this central Virginia school division, partnered with the experiences of teachers and administrators with refugee students and families, could provide insight for educators and policy makers as they work to provide opportunities for these students to gain access to the curriculum and help them achieve at higher rates. With the accountability in place for all schools to meet the needs of all students (No Child Left Behind, 2001), researching factors affecting the performance of refugees could be the key to moving these ELLs in the direction of success and increasing student achievement. Data were collected during focus group interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators to learn more about and engage in meaningful dialog about this increasingly present population of students and academic strategies that help them to be successful. This study had one overarching research question:

1. What are the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

The sub-questions were:

- What do parents perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do teachers perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do administrators perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

### **Significance of the Study**

According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, which provided humanitarian relief through resettlement to those fleeing from persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, over three million refugees from more than 70 countries have been given safe haven in the United States (ORR, 2011). This topic is significant because The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) issued a variety of mandates, one being that the needs of English language learners be met in schools across the nation. Additionally, as state and local instructional leaders work to meet the needs of all of their students, including refugees, the findings from this study could provide valuable information to them regarding necessary professional development that will enhance instruction, promote a positive school learning culture, and protect instructional time. Ideally, this study could provide instructional leaders with an understanding of the struggles that refugees face and assist them with helping these students to overcoming these issues so that they can be successful in schools.



## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for this study. This framework was grounded in two theoretical perspectives: critical inquiry (Freire, 1972) and the cultural-ecological adaptations of minority communities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The theory of critical inquiry was appropriate because this study aimed at giving a voice to oppressed people, namely refugees. Critical inquiry was described by Crotty (1998) as an ongoing project that includes reflection and action to create a more just and freer society. Freire (1972) noted the importance of reflection on one's situation in order to move forward:

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be 'in a situation.' Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. (p. 109)

The relationships between power, culture, privilege, and oppression were also key factors in critical inquiry (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1972). Freire's critical theory, liberation philosophy, and emphasis on giving voice to marginalized people contributed to the design of this study.

Ogbu and Simons' (1998) cultural-ecological theory also framed this study. This cultural-ecological theory considered the societal and school effects, as well as the dynamics within minority communities. Ogbu's theory explored the effect that voluntary or involuntary migration has on student achievement. Voluntary minorities—also called immigrant minorities—such as those from China, India, and Japan, according to Ogbu and Simons (1998), “are those who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities (better jobs, more political or religious freedom) than they had in their homelands

or places of origin” (p. 164). Ogbu and Simons found that immigrants who entered the United States voluntarily achieved at a higher rate than those who were involuntary immigrants.

Contrary to voluntary immigrants, involuntary minorities—also called nonimmigrant minorities—sought to be different from the mainstream culture in hopes of maintaining an identity. Ogbu and Simons described involuntary minorities as:

people who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved. Unlike immigrant minorities, the nonimmigrants have been made to be a part of the U.S. society permanently against their will. Two distinguishing features of involuntary minorities are that (1) they did not choose but were forced against their will to become a part of the United States, and (2) they themselves usually interpret their presence in the United States as forced on them by white people. (p. 165)

Some current involuntary immigrants include American Indians, Native Alaskans, and Black Americans.

Refugees, according to Ogbu and Simons (1998), do not fall into the categories of voluntary or involuntary minorities, but tend to share some of the same attitudes and behaviors of voluntary immigrants. These researchers noted that refugees come to the U.S. knowing that, in order to be successful in school, they need to learn the way of their new country. Current refugees in the United States include those from the home countries of Iraq, Somalia, Bhutan, and Burma (Refugee Council USA, 2014). For the purposes of this study, refugees were included with voluntary immigrants so that performance patterns—how successful these students are in the classroom—could be determined, and an exploration of how their minority status affects their school performance could occur.

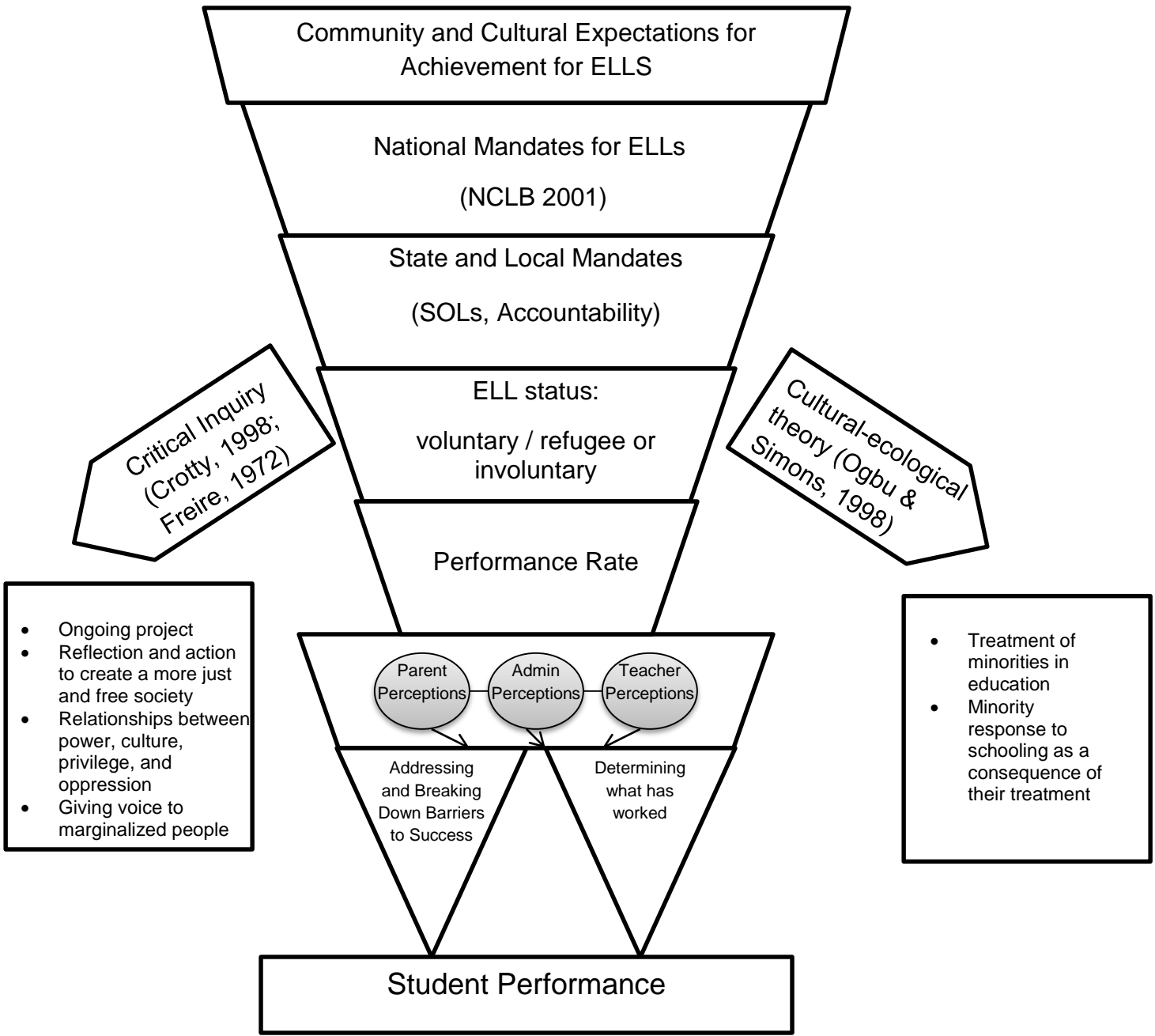


Figure 1. Theoretical and conceptual framework describing how critical inquiry (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1972), and the cultural-ecological theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) shaped this study.

## Definitions

Schools in the United States are charged with educating all children, including English language learners and refugees. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), English language learners (ELLs) are students who are in the process of acquiring English language skills and knowledge. This term, ELL, is often used interchangeably with limited English proficient (LEP), but the more prevalent term used since the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), or Nation's Report Card, is English language learner. The Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR] (2012) defines a refugee as:

Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. ("Who We Serve," para. 1)

In order to clearly understand the research completed about refugee students, the reader must be familiar with the additional terminology used in research regarding this population. These various terms are defined below.

- Acculturation - the change in an individual or a culturally similar group that results from contact with a different culture (McBrien, 2005)
- Asylum seekers - someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2014)

- Resettlement - placing a refugee in a country where they will receive legal and physical protection (UNHCR, 2014)
- Unaccompanied minors - children overseas who are eligible for resettlement in the U.S., but do not have a parent or a relative available and committed to providing for their long-term care (ORR, 2012)

## **Limitations**

According to Creswell (2007), limitations are those factors or conditions that the researcher does not place on the study and has no complete control or decision to use or not use. One limitation of this study was whether or not the responses provided by the participants were truthful. Some participants may have been affected by group pressure. A second limitation was the idea of perceptions versus reality. This researcher will be determining the perceptions of the three groups—refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools—but has no control over the reality of those perceptions. The third limitation of this study was the issue of language. Barriers to communication are possible with the language issues. Participants with strong accents were asked to repeat their answers at times, but some responses were still difficult to understand. A fourth limitation of this study was the fact that the elementary teacher focus group needed to be divided into three mini-groups, with the groups having two participants in one group, one participant in another, and three participants in the final group. This occurred due to the difficulty of synchronizing the schedules of the elementary teacher participants and could not be helped. According to Patton (2002) and Merriam (2009), the object of a focus group is to get high-quality data from a group of people who can interact with each other and consider their own views, as well as the views of others. In essence, the elementary teacher group participants did not have many colleagues with which to

interact, so some of the strength of this aspect of the study was lost. A fifth limitation of this study was the fact that the parent participants were selected by the Commonwealth Catholic Charities liaison with the criteria that they spoke English and had a variety of educational experiences prior to entering the United States. One final limitation was that the researcher served as principal in the central Virginia school division used for the study, at a school with a large percentage of refugee children, all of whom were English language learners (ELLs).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are conditions controlled by the researcher. The first delimitation of this study was the narrow focus on one population of students, since the study focused on only one school division. This, and the qualitative nature of the study, removed the possibility of generalizing the findings. Another delimitation was the small sample size. With only five to seven participants in each focus group, the population was small in comparison to the total number of refugee parents, teachers, and administrators in the school division.

### **Chapter Summary**

English language learners have been migrating to the United States at a rapid pace over the past 25 years. Over three million refugees from more than 70 countries have been given safe haven in the United States (ORR, 2011), with approximately 70,000 of them from war-torn countries and possibly fleeing from persecution entering the United States annually. Approximately half of these refugees finding shelter in the United States annually are children. Schools in the United States are accountable for meeting the needs of all students, including refugees. Since the U.S. Department of Education (2013) has such strict expectations regarding English language learners, instructional leaders need research that can provide them with

information as to factors that may contribute to the performance of these students. By utilizing this knowledge, instructional leaders can be better equipped to meet the needs of this special group of learners.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter one gives the reader an introduction to the topic of the study, the problem and its significance, and the research questions. The reader is also introduced to the theoretical and conceptual framework used for the study, as well as definitions of terms that may not be common knowledge. Chapter one ends with an explanation of the limitations and delimitations of the study and an overview of the remainder of the study. Chapter two provides a review of the current literature surrounding the topic of English language learners and refugee students in the United States. It includes various studies to familiarize the reader with refugee students and is organized by domains. The findings by the researchers are shared in this chapter and then linked back to this study's topic. Chapter three reveals the research design and methodology for the current study. The sample is revealed and data collection procedures are shared along with the instrument that will be used. Chapter three also contains a timeline for the study, as well as an explanation of how the data that are collected will be analyzed. In chapter four, the data, or findings, are reported and described. Along with an explanation and summary of the data, themes that emerge are presented briefly. Chapter five contains a summary of the findings, expresses the researcher's perception of the findings, and describes implications the findings may have on the reader and practice. In addition, this final chapter includes suggestions for future studies related to refugee students.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

### **Purpose of the Review**

This chapter provides an overview of various significant studies that have been conducted on the performance of English language learners (ELLs), specifically focusing on refugee students. With the accountability in place for all schools to meet the needs of all students (No Child Left Behind, 2001), more information is needed to better understand the variables that impact the performance of refugee students. In order to reveal what research has shown about the perceptions of factors affecting the performance of refugee students, the researcher conducted an extensive search to locate information regarding this topic. After reviewing various studies from journals, books, and dissertations, the findings indicated that there are various factors that may contribute to challenges that refugee students experience in school. More importantly, the research revealed that refugees require additional support in order to properly and successfully acclimate them to schools in the United States, providing them with an environment that promotes academic achievement. This important task of educating refugee children or children of refugees is a challenging process for researchers and practitioners (Isik-Ercan, 2012); therefore, this research could provide valuable insight into factors that affect the performance of refugee students so that instructional leaders can take steps to address these factors.

This chapter is divided into several sections. First, the researcher describes the process that was utilized to begin the search for literature involving refugee students. The second section explains the history of refugees in America, describing how the United States assisted refugees as far back as 1948 with the Displaced Americans Act after World War II. The next section provides examples from the literature about refugees' experiences in schools in the United



States, and the mandates that the government has issued regarding educating these English language learners. The fifth section describes the family dynamics of refugees, as well as what the literature says about refugee parental involvement. The next section discusses how refugees and all English language learners are affected by motivation or lack of motivation. Sections seven and eight give insight into what pre-service teachers and teachers in the field need to know in order to be prepared to successfully teach refugee students. Suggestions are also made as to types of instruction that best meet the needs of English language learners as a whole. Finally, a summary of the research is presented in the last section of this chapter indicating a need for this study.

### **Literature Search and Review Process**

The literature review process began with searches for dissertations with a related focus on English language learners. Initially the focus was aimed at motivation of ELLs and their performance, but as the search continued, more factors affecting the performance of ELLs surfaced. The search was expanded to identify other key factors that affected the performance of ELLs. Factors that were found, other than motivation, include the rate of parental involvement, programs implemented to assist ELLs and their families, teacher preparedness, types of instructional techniques used, and whether or not the students entered the country as refugees. After much consideration, the researcher elected to focus her efforts on refugee students, their circumstances, and their performance. The United States provides extensive support to refugees in the United States and around the world. Responding to their needs serves important U.S. humanitarian and foreign policy goals (Refugee Council USA, 2014). With the number of refugees entering the United States continually rising, this research could prove valuable to

instructional leaders and other practitioners as they work to determine factors that limit the success of refugees and put practices in place to lessen the obstacles for refugee students.

Key words used in the initial search using the Virginia Polytechnic University Libraries interlibrary loan services and databases included “limited English proficient,” “LEP,” “English as a second language,” “ESL,” and “achievement.” As the search began for research articles and more dissertations, and after learning about Education Research Complete, the search expanded using more specific search terms. Terms such as “parental involvement,” “instruction,” “sheltered instruction,” “SIOP,” “immigrants,” “Hispanic,” “refugee,” and “qualitative,” combined with the initial terms resulted in a myriad of hits in the way of research articles and dissertations.

In addition to the Virginia Polytechnic University Libraries interlibrary loan services and databases, a multitude of other resources were used in the literature review. Searches of journals and articles cited in the dissertations that had surfaced concluded with beneficial information regarding the selected topic. All articles were peer-reviewed and selected based on their relevance. Most of the articles were published between 2005 and 2015, with more current articles taking precedence. Research came from the United States and Canada, which has a similar system of schools as the United States, as well as similar challenges with English language learners. In addition, numerous organizations and agencies were searched for relevant literature and data related to refugees and their performance. During the search for information regarding refugees, English language learners were identified by various terms: ELLs, ELs, and ESL. For the purposes of this review, when speaking about the general term of English language learners, the group to which refugees belong, they are referred to as ELLs unless a direct quote containing a different term is used. To date, 136 sources were reviewed and narrowed to 74

based on their relevance and date.

### **History of Refugees in America**

To fully comprehend this research topic, one must understand the history of refugees in the United States. The United States has held a record of allowing refugees into the country as a form of humanitarian relief for decades, beginning with the admittance of over 250,000 displaced Europeans in the wake of World War II resulting in the Displaced Americans Act of 1948 (Refugee Council USA, 2014). For years after the establishment of this act, over 400,000 refugees fled to the United States, fleeing from their war-torn countries, in search of safety for themselves and their families. Figure 2 shows the various laws and programs that assisted refugees. The Refugee Act of 1980, a result of the influx of refugees, provided for regular and emergency admission of refugees and authorized federal assistance for their resettlement (ORR, 2012). Since 1975, the United States has resettled over three million refugees, with over half of the refugees admitted annually being children entering public schools in the United States.

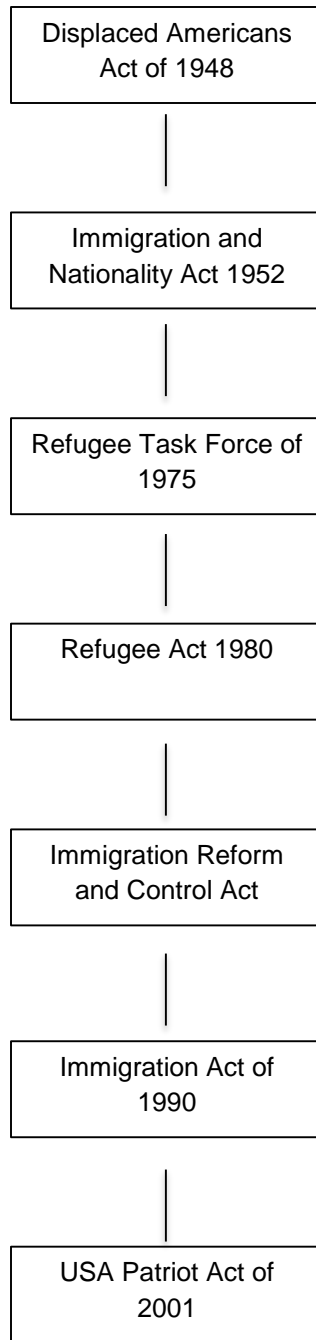


Figure 2. Timeline of key events in history regarding refugees.

President Barack Obama summarized his thoughts on immigration during a recent Immigration Address:

It is this constant flow of immigrants that helped to make America what it is . . . To this day America reaps incredible economic rewards because we remain a magnet for the best and brightest from across the globe . . . In an increasingly interconnected world, the diversity of our country is the powerful advantage in global competition . . . being an American is not a matter of blood or birth. It's a matter of faith. "E pluribus unum." Out of many, one. That is what has drawn the persecuted and impoverished to our shores. That's what led the innovators and risk-takers from around the world to take a chance here in the land of opportunity. That's what has led people to endure untold hardships to reach this place called America. (Office of the White House Press Secretary, 2010)

International Law is a basic agreement among countries to maintain the human rights of refugees. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December of 1948, was the result of the experience of the Second World War (UN). This document represents the universal recognition that all human beings are entitled to basic rights and fundamental freedoms, and that every one of us is born free and equal in dignity and rights despite nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. Various articles included in the United Declaration of Human Rights address refugees. Article XIV states the following:

- (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy, in other countries, asylum from persecution.
- (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely

arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. (UDHR, 1948)

Article XXVI states that “Everyone has the right to education.” Refugees are included in this law and should certainly be given these inalienable rights. This review of literature should provide the insights necessary to ensure that this right is provided to refugees as it is to others.

Each year, a report is presented to Congress on the behalf of the President of the United States regarding the projections of refugees entering the U.S. for the upcoming fiscal year (Refugee Council USA- Reports to Congress, 2014). As the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Health and Human Services jointly prepare this comprehensive report, it contains detailed information that assists in the determination of the number of refugees, as well as countries from which they are coming. As shown in Table 1, the number of refugees entering the U.S. in the past two years has sharply increased from approximately 58,000 in 2012 to approximately 69,000 (projected) in 2013, and has come incredibly close to the President’s authorized ceiling of 70,000 refugees.

Table 1

*Refugee Admissions for FY 2012 and FY 2013, Proposed Admissions for FY 2014*

Region	FY 2012 Actual Arrivals	FY 2013 Ceiling	FY 2013 Projected Arrivals	Proposed FY 2014 Ceiling
Africa	10,608	12,000	15,000	14,000
East Asia	14,366	17,000	17,000	14,000
Europe and Central Asia	1,129	2,000	1,000	1,000
Latina America/Caribbean	2,078	5,000	4,500	5,000
New East/South Asia	30,057	31,000	32,000	34,000
Regional subtotal	58,238	67,000	69,500	68,000
Unallocated reserve		3,000		2,000
Total	58,238	70,000	69,500	70,000

*Note.* Adapted from *Refugee Council USA – Reports to Congress (2014)*

Recently, unaccompanied alien children (UAC) have entered the United States in increasingly large numbers:

Before 2012, the number of arriving unaccompanied children had averaged between 6,000 and 7,000 annually. However, by the end of Fiscal Year 2012 the number of UAC who entered into ORR custody had increased to nearly 14,000, and then nearly doubled again to nearly 25,000 in Fiscal Year 2013. Most of these children come from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Additionally, more girls are arriving now due to increasing gender-based violence in Central America. Due to worsening conditions at home, these vulnerable children continue to risk the journey to the United States in increasing numbers. In fiscal year 2014, it is estimated that more than 60,000 vulnerable

children will arrive in need of protection. (Refugee Council USA, “Unaccompanied Alien Children,” para. 2)

According to the Refugee Council USA (2014), the refugee resettlement program is antiquated and in much need of reform since it was enacted over thirty years ago. When the refugee resettlement program was in its infancy, refugees had a minimum of one year of federal assistance and up to three years for medical assistance and reimbursement. Today, refugees have a maximum of eight months of assistance before they are expected to be employed and fully independent (Refugee Council USA, “Reform of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program,” 2014).

Various agencies track the entry of refugees into the United States and provide services to this newly arrived population. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2014), also referred to as the United Nations Refugee Agency, was formed in 1951 to support the millions who were displaced by World War II. Initially planned to be a three-year mandate to solve the problem of displaced persons, the UNHCR recently celebrated its 60th anniversary in December 2010—a sure sign that humanitarian needs are unlikely to disappear (2014). Facts and figures are vital to the overall functioning of the UNHCR, as planning and preparation are dependent upon approximate estimations each year. As of 2013, the UNHCR showed a figure of 10.4 million refugees, down slightly from the previous year, and with half of the world’s refugees being children, the UNHCR is committed to “conducting best interest assessments for vulnerable children, ensuring that unaccompanied or separated children have access to family tracing and reunification services, and engaging children through activities and education that build their skills and capacities” (UNHCR, “Protecting and Building Resilience,” para. 3).

The UNHCR is concerned at the increasing numbers of children in the United States forced from their homes and families due to fears of violence and abuse in their communities and



at home. Whether or not these unaccompanied children are to be considered refugees is at issue, but because they are fleeing persecution, as the definition of the term refugee states, thought has been given to providing the children refugee status as stated by the UNHCR:

Globally, the protection of children is a core priority for UNHCR. The international community has long recognized both the right of children to seek asylum and their inherent vulnerability. Children also face specific forms of persecution that may give rise to a claim for refugee status. (UNHCR, “UNHCR calls on the Americas,” para. 10)

Moreover, the UNHCR stressed the increase in crime and violence from which the children are fleeing and reiterated the impact the increase in unaccompanied minors entering the United States would have (UNHCR, “Children on the Run,” 2014). In fact, in September of 2014, President Obama, in his Presidential Memorandum regarding refugee admission for fiscal year 2015, noted that persons from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador were to be considered refugees.

### **Refugees in United States Schools**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) stated clear facts about English language learners in America:

In 2010-11, states in the West had the highest percentages of ELL students in their public schools. In 8 states, 10 percent or more of public school students were English language learners—Oregon, Hawaii, Alaska, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, and California (California data were imputed from 2009-10 data)—with ELL students constituting 29 percent of public school enrollment in California. Thirteen states and the District of Columbia had percentages of ELL public school enrollment between 6 and 9.9 percent. In addition to the District of Columbia, these states were Oklahoma, Arkansas,

Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Carolina, Virginia, Arizona, Utah, New York, Kansas, Illinois, Washington, and Florida. The percentage of ELL students in public schools was less than 3 percent in 13 states; this percentage was between 3 and 5.9 percent in 16 states. (NCES, para. 2)

As defined by the Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR] (2012):

Refugees are any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. ("Who We Serve," para. 1)

This increasingly growing group of people forms a significant portion of the English language learner group that has entered U.S. schools. Children who are refugees or who have parents who were refugees often endure experiences that affect their performance in schools. They may have even witnessed or experienced violent acts and/or been separated from their families (UNHCR, 2014). As noted by the BRYCS (2014):

About 35 to 40 percent of refugees resettled in the U.S. are children. The vast majority of refugee children—about 95%—resettle in the U.S. with their parents. About five percent of refugee children are resettled with relatives or other adults who have agreed to care for the children, while about 100 to 200 children per year are placed into specialized foster care through the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program. ("Refugee 101," para. 4)

Refugee children are not prepared for success in U.S. schools. One of the first problems often noted is that immigrant and refugee children often fall behind in U.S. schools. As a Somali refugee from Minneapolis stated:

[I am] thankful to the government that our children are sent to school but the problem is we have arrived recently and the kids don't know the language, the teachers are Americans and they [the children] might not even understand what the lesson is all about. They go to the same classes as the kids born here and they might end up sitting in the class without understanding anything. (Garrett, 2006, p. 7)

Beyond the language barrier that children face is the issue that refugee students have often received inconsistent schooling prior to coming to the United States:

Refugee students often arrive with minimal previous formal education, interrupted schooling, and/or limited English. In addition, refugee students need time to adjust to American culture, to make friends, and develop a sense of belonging in their new school, community, and country. (BRYCS, 2014, "Schools," para. 1)

This second factor enhances the risk that refugee and immigrant students fall behind quickly at school (Garrett, 2006). According to Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007), schools are one of the first and most influential service systems that young refugees come into contact with after resettlement. It is of utmost importance for schools to be prepared with an appropriate structure to support this very needy population.

Even with the rapid increase of refugees in U.S. schools, the Department of Education has not amended their expectation that all students, including refugees, demonstrate grade level reading skills on standardized assessments. For measuring accountability, states must create English-language-proficiency standards and implement English-language-proficiency tests.

Regulations for the law stipulate that ELLs must be tested in math beginning with the first round of state exams after the students enter a U.S. school, and in reading after they have been in a U.S. school for at least one year (Education Week, 2004). With this rapid increase of English language learners in schools and the focus on their performance and success, whether they are identified as a refugee or not, as well as the strong accountability for schools and students, many administrators have researched strategies to increase their success rate.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) issued a variety of mandates, one being that the needs of ELLs be met in schools across the nation. Such mandates change the way assessments had previously been analyzed. With NCLB (2001) as well as President Obama's blueprint for the reauthorization of the ESEA (OPEPD, 2010) in place, school leaders are required to monitor practices they have in place in their buildings to support the needs of all of their students despite their race, socioeconomic status, proficiency in English, ability levels, and nationality. Since the implementation of NCLB, school leaders have worked to implement instructional practices and programs that are directed at targeting the needs of each individual child. With the influx of refugees in our schools, school leaders continue to work to implement appropriate programs and practices to move these children forward in their learning. A challenge facing school leaders, however, is the lack of knowledge or understanding of how refugees' past geographic, social and educational experiences affect their current situation (Isik-Ercan, 2012).

### **Family Dynamics and Parental Involvement**

Many refugees move their families to the United States with their children's education as their deciding factor (Isik-Ercan, 2012), and with the perception that public schools in the United States are a safe haven for their children. They seek safety, security and opportunity for their children and hope that their children's lives are better than their own (BRYCS, 2014). In fact,

these refugee parents who have struggled to bring their children to a place of safety and opportunity have little doubt that future generations will have happier, easier, and more fulfilling lives (Atwell, Gifford, & McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009). They bring their children to the United States, where they enter schools as English language learners, so that they can receive the best education that they can possibly receive to prepare them for their perceived better lives. Burmese refugees who resettled in Fort Wayne, Indiana stated that they “no longer have stress and concerns over their children’s lives and safety” (Isik-Ercan, 2012, p. 3031). Once in the United States, however, many refugees find that this task of raising children in a foreign country is quite daunting with the challenges of language acquisition, acculturation, obtaining employment, and differing parenting expectations (BRYCS, 2014).

Isik-Ercan (2012) described her case study of the educational experiences of Burmese families in Indiana. She conducted in-depth interviews with 28 Burmese parents from 25 working class families, with most participants being refugee mothers due to many of the fathers working in other states. Through this research, Isik-Ercan found that Burmese parents endorsed all decisions the school and teachers made without question, due to their lack of educational experiences. These parents attended parent-teacher conferences and worked to be involved in and connected to their children’s schooling, but there were inevitable challenges to their involvement.

Lack of resources and strategies was noted as a reason for parents disconnecting from the schools (Isik-Ercan, 2012). Specifically, these parents felt they could not be involved beyond parent-teacher conferences because of the language barrier, since translators were only provided during parent-teacher conferences or other important occasions. The parents also commented on their lack of knowledge of the curriculum and instructional methods, stating that their preference

would have been to have it explained to them early in the year. Another challenge the parents faced, according to Isik-Ercan, was the issue of homework. They struggled to support their children with homework. Though some parents reported making strict schedules and having a structure in place for homework after school, the homework may have been too difficult for the parents to understand or they did not understand expectations and guidelines.

Conversely, Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross, Knight-Lynn, Moallem, & Goldberger (2012) found that in-home parental involvement, such as parents asking about school and monitoring homework, was a more common practice than visiting the school. These researchers, in their survey of 239 parents of English language learners, also found that the most common barriers to parental involvement revolved around parents not understanding the U.S. school systems, not wanting to interfere with the classroom teacher's job, and the language barrier. Vera et al. (2012) stressed the importance of teachers understanding why some of these parents are less involved, rather than assuming that they do not value education. Some refugee parents actually reported utilizing older siblings and other relatives in the community to assist them with homework and explaining the curriculum in order to be involved in their children's education (Isik-Ercan, 2012).

While research indicates that parent involvement may be an important factor in all children's academic success, it is particularly important for English language learners and refugees (Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Good et al., 2010). As previously stated, refugee parents hold high standards and want the best for their children as do non-refugee parents (Isik-Ercan, 2012). In their study, Harper and Pelletier (2010) included 42 kindergarten children, their parents, and their teachers. Their research showed teachers reporting that the parents of ELLs communicated less frequently with them in comparison to parents who spoke English as their

first language; however, ELL parents were just as involved in their children's education, being able to report how their children learned best, for instance. Good et al. (2010) suggested providing welcome centers, community liaison positions, peer-to-peer mentors, teacher advisory programs, tutors, counselors, parent support groups, and referrals to community agencies such as health and social services to support student success in order to provide the necessary support for refugee parents and children.

Ladky and Peterson (2008) researched 21 immigrant parents who spoke eight different languages and had been in Canada fewer than six years. Their research also included 61 teachers and 32 principals who worked in schools with English as a Second Language (ESL) populations of 20% or greater who had been recognized for successfully involving immigrant parents in their children's schooling. These researchers examined literacy practices in new immigrant homes and highlighted the value of factors like the mother's education, language, and range of literacy activities found in the home. Ladky and Peterson noted the importance of literacy at home, noting that teachers, principals, and most parents participating in their study believed it was important for new immigrant parents to read and write at home to support their children's English literacy learning. This literacy learning was reported to be most successful when it took place in English and in the child's native language (2008).

Addressing the issue of cultural misunderstandings between parents and teachers was found to be a key factor in fostering more parental involvement of ELLs (Becerra, 2012). As noted by Isik-Ercan (2012), the clash between the cultural values of family and the popular culture in the mainstream society may lead to further alienation of the child from the home culture and family. Refugee parents tend to want their children to integrate with the host country, while maintaining their cultural beliefs. Unfortunately, many refugee students lose their

cultural identity as they work to blend in with the mainstream groups. McBrien (2005) noted “cultural dissonance” wherein “children acquire the language and skills of their new culture more quickly than their parents do, resulting in family conflicts” (p. 332). She further specified that acculturation stresses contribute to the ability of refugees to cope with and succeed in their new surroundings.

Researchers (Cairo, Sumney, Blackman & Joyner, 2012; Vera et al., 2012; Becerra, 2012) explored programs that have been successful in bringing the parents of English language learners into the schools, while bridging the gap between school and parents. For example, Family and Communities Educating, or F.A.C.E. Time, was implemented in Lexington, KY, providing opportunities for refugee families to participate in their children’s education. Two sessions of F.A.C.E. Time, 11 weeks after school and five weeks in the summer, provided the refugee students with academic remediation, as well as various cultural activities. A third session, Prime Time Family Reading, afforded parents the opportunity to come to the library with their children in the summer to read with them. These programs have been successful in creating positive changes for refugees and immigrant students (Cairo et al., 2012). Simple workshops that provide parents information on how schools work in the United States, as well as educating teachers on reasons some parents of English language learners may be less involved would be beneficial to bridging the gap as well (Vera et al., 2012). The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) developed a program to assist parents of English language learners with ways to better communicate with teachers and support their children at home (Becerra, 2012).

Lee and Hawkins (2008) noted, “middle-class youth are increasingly involved in a host of extracurricular activities in out of-school time, yet immigrant youth from low income families



tend to remain within their communities” (p. 52). They researched how after-school programs that are located in immigrant communities and staffed by people intimately familiar with the immigrant families and cultures have the potential to be quality resources for schools. In their study of Hmong students participating in three after school programs, Lee and Hawkins found that after school programs, with more explicit academic instruction, can benefit refugee students by providing them with opportunities to build bridges between school and home and the refugee culture and American culture. It was noted by Lee and Hawkins that parents were encouraged to allow students to acculturate without assimilating by adopting “aspects of the dominant American culture that are necessary for social mobility without giving up their cultural identities” (p. 55).

Harper and Pelletier (2010) sought to prove that parents of English language learners would be as involved in their children’s education as parents of students with English as their first language despite the less frequent communication that took place with classroom teachers. These researchers posited that, based on the amount of involvement and diversity in backgrounds, parents of ELLs would differ from parents of students with English as their first language in their knowledge and understanding of their children’s academic progress, as similarly stated by Isik-Ercan (2012) regarding refugee parents. Harper and Pelletier (2010) concluded in their study that it is important that all parents, including the parents of English language learners, involve themselves in their children’s education at the school and at home, since the rich conversations that can take place at home can assist parents in knowing about their children’s abilities in content areas, such as reading or math.

According to Good et al. (2010), various factors work together to minimize the achievement of English language learners. These researchers, from their focus group interviews

with parents and teachers, identified five themes that contributed to the barriers of academic achievement of Latino students. Among the findings were: communication gaps; culture clashes; lack of a systemic, articulated district ELL plan; lack of teacher preparation in multiculturalism, language acquisition, and ELL instructional strategies; and a lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and new culture. As stated by Good et al. (2010), “Without a cultural shift toward high expectations for *all* students, a shared vision and mission, a clearly articulated curriculum, meaningful parental involvement, and student engagement in school, the achievement gap for Hispanic ELL students will continue to widen” (p. 334). Researchers noted that the lack of communication between parents and teachers is highly due to the language barrier, but also due to the lack of connectedness and lack of relationship (Good et al., 2010; Harper and Pelletier, 2010). Refugee parents are even more prone to this lack of communication due to their unique circumstances. As stated previously, though, their desire for their children to be successful is as strong as parents of students who are not refugees. Efforts must be made to accommodate these families in order to bridge the academic gap of these refugee students.

### **Refugees and Traumatic Experiences**

Schools are the most influential service organization that many refugee children come into contact with after resettlement (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). With so many benefits that come with entering into an organized educational system, it is unfortunate that this experience is fraught with various challenges as many of these children have experienced traumatic events that possibly include violence, torture, refugee settlement, war atrocities, and persecution, as well as many other direct and indirect unsettling experiences (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Cairo et al., 2012). In fact, refugees may face a wide variety of acute or chronic health issues, including

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Researchers have stressed that refugee children are exposed to multiple stressors, both environmental and personal, that can impact their educational success (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). Researchers Barowsky and McIntyre (2010) noted that PTSD is marked by “increased arousal, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and hypervigilance, along with the effort to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the traumatizing events” (p. 164). These researchers expand to explain that when children experience the death (or threat of death) of a parent, it causes personal trauma resulting in PTSD. While PTSD may result from one event, such as the death of a parent, it can also be a summative response to several events that occur during pre-migration, like separation from parents, and post-migration experiences of refugees, such as uncertainty regarding asylum status (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010; Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011).

Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) examined the psychosocial adjustment of 76 Somali adolescents who had resettled in the United States. They noted that when the Somali students had a greater sense of school belonging, they tended to have higher self-efficacy and lower depression. Stated more clearly, “adolescents who experienced more attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in their school had attained higher levels of self-efficacy” (p. 37). While PTSD may be significantly different from depression, school belonging did not moderate the effect of the exposure to PTSD. In fact, “greater exposure to war, violence, and displacement adversities was associated with increased depression and PTSD symptoms, and associated with lower self-efficacy” (p. 39).

Bronstein and Montgomery (2011) noted that it is evident that the accumulation of stresses indeed affects the mental health of young refugees, resulting in PTSD, depressive symptoms, and emotional and behavioral problems. Certainly, these issues would be evident in

the classroom as the children have difficulty adjusting to their new surroundings. Simply put, the first step to overcoming some of the challenges to adaptation and learning is for schools to provide a safe and nurturing environment (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010). Teachers must be armed with a thorough understanding of the emotional road that these refugee children have traveled in order to properly support them. If teachers have knowledge of and respect for the culture, they have a better chance of building a relationship with the children. Moreover, families must be supported, their trust must be gained, and resources should be provided in order to assist them with countering the effects of migration (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010).

### **Motivation as a Factor**

Given that English language learners are the fastest growing population in United States schools, interest has continued to peak regarding their performance in schools. With approximately 70,000 refugees, half of them children, arriving annually in the United States (Refugee Council USA, 2014), instructional leaders are constantly searching for ways to motivate this special group of students. Questions relating to possible correlations between motivation and academic achievement (Cho, Xu, & Rhodes, 2010; Gottfried, 1990; Nugent, 2009) have been posed by researchers, to determine whether or not increasing students' motivation will result in higher academic achievement, and if they are English language learners, whether or not they will learn English at a more rapid pace. Such factors can encourage a student to perform better, or at least to take more care with their assignments. For instance, Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) stated that it is common for foreign language teachers to believe that a student's attitude is a critical aspect of language learning.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Different forms of motivation have been studied to determine their effect on achievement. Intrinsic motivation rises to the forefront as a key to student success.

Gottfried (1990) stated that researchers should focus on intrinsic motivation in younger children for three reasons:

First, academic intrinsic motivation in the early elementary years may have profound implications for initial and future school success. Second, little is known about the nature of young children's academic intrinsic motivation. Investigating this construct in young children would permit one to address developmental issues, including dimensionality, stability, and predictability of motivation. Third, the network of cognitive and affective school factors to which young children's academic intrinsic motivation relates needs elucidation. (p. 525)

Gottfried (1990) defined academic intrinsic motivation as “enjoyment of school learning; an orientation toward mastery, curiosity, and persistence; and an orientation to learn challenging, difficult, and novel tasks” (p. 528). Teachers in Gottfried’s study rated their students, and the study concluded that academic intrinsic motivation was a significant independent construct for young students. Gottfried stated its importance as related to future motivation. The topic of intrinsic motivation was further discussed by Crow (2007), when she referred to it as the key to getting students to learn. Nevertheless, research shows that intrinsic desire shows a steady decline between third and eighth grades (Lepper, Corups, and Iyengar, 2005). This research provides instructional leaders with the opportunity to put programs in place to keep intrinsic motivation strong during these important years.

In reviewing the literature on the motivation of English language learners to read, research establishes that what is good instruction for all students is good instruction for ELLs and refugees. It was noted that English language learners might require some modification (Protacio, 2012). Several factors influence reading motivation of ELLs. Perceived competence,

the belief that one is able to perform the task (Crow, 2007), is necessary for a student to have confidence in his or her abilities. Protacio (2012) noted that providing interesting reading materials and social motivation, such as reading groups, are also key factors that promote reading motivation. Crow (2007) mentions additional factors, such as autonomy, the desire to do a task, relatedness, and feeling secure in their surroundings, as key to increasing the motivation and achievement of English language learners. As noted previously, it is paramount that refugees feel safe and secure in their school environment once they have resettled to counter the effects of trauma they may have experienced (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010). Research has shown that providing ELLs with reading materials that are high-interest, yet challenging are two additional necessities to increasing an ELL's desire and motivation to read and be successful (Cho et al., 2010).

**Integrative and instrumental motivation.** Two additional terms that research highlights regarding increasing the motivation of ELLs are integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) noted that students who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people who speak the language, as well as their culture – integrative motivation. Integrative motivation has been proven to have long-term success with regards to learning a second language. Instrumental motivation is more utilitarian, “such as meeting the requirements for school or university graduation, applying for a job, requesting higher pay based on language ability, reading technical material, translation work or achieving higher social status,” according to Oroujlou and Vahedi (p. 996). The study of both of these motivation approaches is important as ELLs rarely focus on one, but rather use a combination of them both. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) further clarify this point by stating the importance of teachers considering that the motivation of ELLs is based on a

variety of factors including integrative and instrumental motivation.

**Teacher role in motivation.** The importance of the teacher-student relationship cannot be overlooked when looking at the motivation and performance of refugees. Nugent (2009) discusses how students model their behaviors after their teachers' behaviors and behave based on their teachers' reactions. According to Nugent's study, the classroom environment that the teacher creates is a key factor in motivating a student. Matsumoto (2011) also concluded that the teacher plays an important role in the motivation of students learning a second language. A positive correlation between the learners' motivation and their perception of their teachers' commitment to teach was found in the study conducted by Matsumoto. In studying student performance, school divisions need to look at all of these factors to determine what motivates all English language learners, and more specifically refugees. Wassell, Hawrylak, and LaVan (2010) discovered that when teachers provided ELLs with space, time, and care, the students were empowered and any fears they had were minimized. These researchers also noted that teachers could inadvertently cause roadblocks to the achievement of ELLs. These roadblocks included instances when teachers impeded their access to the curriculum by watering down the curriculum and having low expectations, used poor instructional practices such as showing videos, misunderstood their English language learners' fear of communicating in English, or perpetuated misunderstandings about students, such as mistaking a student's shyness for an uncaring attitude in class (Wassell et al., 2010).

### **Teacher Preparedness**

With the rise in the numbers of refugee children in public schools in the United States, pre-service teachers require proper training in order to meet their needs (Hooks, 2008). Hooks determined, during a study of 44 Early Childhood majors, that teachers felt uncomfortable

communicating with parents of English language learners at parent-teacher conferences. Universities, however, are making pointed efforts at preparing future teachers for success with ELLs. Webster and Valeo (2011) found that there was a strong disconnect between teacher education programs and their feelings of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was defined as the “teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). Similarly, Echevarria, Short and Powers (2008) noted, “Many English language learners receive much of their instruction from content area teachers who have not had appropriate preparation or professional development to address their second language development needs or to make content instruction comprehensible” (p. 41). Not only do teachers need more preparation in working with English language learners, but they also need to know what type of instruction is best for these students.

In another Canadian study involving 25 linguistically diverse teacher candidates completing questionnaires and participating in interviews, Faez (2012) noted that there was no consistent manner in addressing the needs of English language learners in any of the teacher preparation classes. In fact, Faez reported that many graduating teachers received no training at all on working with ELLs. This could be a challenge for new teachers, considering the rate in which ELLs are entering the classroom, whether in the United States or in Canada. Faez highlighted the importance of increasing the number of linguistically and culturally diverse teachers in the classroom. The importance of ensuring that these linguistically and culturally diverse teachers receive the training and targeted instruction needed to address the needs of their students was discussed. Faez stated, “Given the unprecedented diversity in North American classrooms, there is an urgent need for a stronger commitment from teacher educators and



educational institutions to prepare [teacher candidates] to work in linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse classrooms” (p. 79).

The lack of teacher preparedness in multiculturalism was highlighted as a primary concern for parents and teachers (Good et al., 2010). Teachers and parents agreed that there was a need for highly trained, quality teachers who understood the community they served. Specifically, Good et al. noted that recruiting and retaining bilingual teachers would assist with providing the opportunity for teachers to understand the difference in culture, which caused such a disparity in the achievement of English language learners. These teachers would share deep cultural experiences with the ELLs they teach and nullify this barrier to their achievement. Research completed by Hooks (2008) unveiled two recurring themes. First, pre-service teachers who were placed in a mock parent – teacher conference with parents who were English learners, gained confidence in their abilities to work with parents who spoke English as a second language, with 43% indicating an improved confidence level. Secondly, pre-service teachers broadened their awareness and understanding of diversity through the mock parent – teacher conference experience, with 41% commenting about their growth in post conference reflections.

McBrien (2003) provided insight for teachers regarding an additional issue that refugee children face. Post-traumatic stress, according to McBrien, is largely possible to affect refugee children, as they may have endured traumatic, life-threatening experiences. These traumatic experiences could include rape, witnessing a murder, or having both parents brutally killed. Because teachers often do not know which students are immigrants or refugees, they may not be armed with the tools needed to properly support refugee students. McBrien described how teachers can provide a second chance for refugee children who may have endured traumatic, often life-threatening experiences. Figure 3 lists the strategies that McBrien shared that are

indicative of ways that teachers can be prepared to support the academic, emotional, and social aspects of their refugees. Among the strategies listed, learning a few key phrases in the refugee children's language could be important in providing appropriate support. In addition, sharing bits of their culture in school lessons, such as incorporating literature from the refugees' countries, could assist with helping the refugee children be more comfortable in class. The researcher gained permission from McBrien to include these strategies in this research (Appendix A).

<p>Find out which of your students are refugees. Be aware that they may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or other disorders, and let the school counselor know whether students seem to have emotional difficulties. Usually the families cannot afford private counseling.</p>
<p>Attempt to learn a few words in the students' languages, and learn to pronounce their names correctly. Many feel as though they do not belong when their names are Americanized, and they will be glad to teach you how to say "hello," "goodbye," and "thank you" in their native language.</p>
<p>Make sure that the students are not often sitting by themselves, and place them in mixed groups for class projects, supervising carefully to ensure that they are included.</p>
<p>Do not assume that the students are slow or need special education services because they do not speak fluent English. It takes three to five years to become proficient in a language, and many students become bored in low-level classes--especially in mathematics classes, where language is less of an issue.</p>
<p>Teach all of your students about situations that create refugees and what refugees endure before being repatriated or resettled in a new country. Introduce them to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (<a href="http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html">www.un.org/Overview/rights.html</a>) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (<a href="http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm">www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm</a>).</p>
<p>In your classes, use literature from your students' countries of origin. Youth novels about refugees can also promote understanding.</p>
<p>Realize that significant cultural differences may exist. For example, in many cultures it is considered disrespectful for a child to look directly into the eyes of an adult, especially when being reprimanded. If a refugee child reacts unexpectedly to an action by you or another student, try to find out whether the student misinterpreted the action.</p>
<p>If parents are not actively involved in their children's education, do not assume that they are uninterested. Many refugee parents cannot speak English. Some work two or more jobs. And some come from cultures in which parental involvement in schools is uncommon.</p>
<p>Be aware that refugee children may be the target of prejudice and discrimination. If you notice particular students taunting them, speak to the offending students in private to resolve situations.</p>

*Figure 3. Strategies for success in working with refugees. Adapted from "A Second Chance for Refugee Students" by J. L. McBrien, 2003, Educational Leadership, 61, pp. 77-78.*

### **Instruction for English Language Learners**

When preparing to instruct refugees, the focus must be directed on the best ways to instruct this special group of English language learners. Research supports the necessity of early

intervention targeted to foundational early reading skills as a precursor to preventing reading failure (Oh, Haager, & Windmeuller, 2007). During their longitudinal study, Oh et al. found that kindergarten ELLs who have an early tendency toward rapid letter recognition are better able to decode words, whereas phonemic awareness played a much lesser role in their developmental process. Phonemic awareness was found to be significant when examining the relationship from kindergarten to first grade. This research indicates that instructional leaders must ensure that teachers are prioritizing the early foundational reading skills of ELLs in order for these students to meet state and district standards.

Short and Echevarria (1999) found that the implementation of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) was beneficial to teachers by helping them to better understand a wide range of subject matter. Sheltered instruction encompasses a myriad of teaching strategies to support ELLs in their learning, including slower speech and clear enunciation, use of visuals and demonstrations, scaffolded instruction, targeted vocabulary development, connections to student experiences, student-to-student interaction, adaptation of materials, and use of supplementary materials (Echevarria et al., 2008). As a result of their study of 346 students on the east and west coast, Echevarria et al. (2008) discovered that students whose teachers had been trained on the use of SIOP performed at higher levels than those whose teachers had not been trained. SIOP created opportunities for the teachers to meet the needs of their ELLs, especially in language development. Using SIOP with fidelity enhanced both content learning and English language development of the English language learners.

### **Summary and Next Steps**

The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors

affecting the performance of refugee students. The literature and articles referenced in this literature review served the purpose of identifying these factors. With an increased level of accountability set forth by No Child Left Behind (2001) and President Obama's blueprint of the reauthorization of ESEA (OPEPD, 2010), school leaders must work to identify these and any other areas that may be hindering their students' success. It is essential that programs and strategies that work to move refugees and all children forward in their academics be put in place in schools. As research findings reveal, steps can be taken to better prepare teachers and school leaders to work with refugees, involve refugee parents, motivate refugees, and organize programs that work to educate refugees and their parents.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), English language learners face the challenges of learning English and academic content at the same time. These challenges, coupled with the horrifying acts that some refugee children may have experienced or witnessed, compound the difficult task of providing appropriate education for them. For instance, refugee students may have performance levels far below those of their English-proficient peers in mathematics, reading, and science. In addition, often the areas that have the highest ELL population are the least prepared to provide for their needs. As a result, the U.S. Department of Education (2013) noted that President Obama put programs in place for 2014 to assist with moving ELLs forward:

- Dedicated funding for English Learner Education- provides \$732 million in funds to states and districts for English learner education. It also provides grants that assist with the preparation of teachers of ELLs, as well as funding evaluation activities and a clearinghouse to disseminate research based practices that are effective when working with ELLs.

- Promise Neighborhoods program – provides \$100 million in funds to support projects that significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth, including ELLs. With this program, grants are provided to support these families from cradle to career with reforms, community service, and family and community support. This support is often concentrated in areas where the percentage of ELLs is high.
- Strengthening English Learner Education through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – Grants are provided that support effective, innovative programs for ELLs. In addition, states are required to implement valid and reliable assessments of English language proficiency, consistently identify ELLs, and evaluate the effectiveness of programs for ELLs. (DOE, “Supporting English Learners,” 2013)

With many opportunities in place to assist refugee children and all ELLs in schools, the possibilities are numerous. School leaders have the power and resources to make many necessary changes to diminish any factors that may adversely affect the performance of refugees in school. With the number of refugees worldwide having more than sextupled since the 1950s, and since the recent increase in unaccompanied alien minors entering the United States continues to raise the number of refugees admitted by President Obama, more research is needed to determine best practices on working with these students and ways to break down the barriers to their academic success. As research has increased on this topic over the years, this study will focus on learning more about and engaging in meaningful dialog about this increasingly present population of students and academic strategies that help them to be successful.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that the researcher employed to complete this qualitative study. Patton (2002) noted that qualitative methodologies are suitable for studies whose aim is to produce a wealth of detailed data about individuals' experiences.

Creswell (2009) described qualitative research as:

A means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. The experiences of refugees and their parents in this central Virginia school division, partnered with the experiences of teachers and administrators with refugee students and families, could provide insight for educators and policy makers as they work to provide opportunities for these students to gain access to the curriculum and help them achieve at higher rates. With the accountability in place for all schools to meet the needs of all students (No Child Left Behind, 2001), researching factors affecting the performance of refugees could be the key to moving this special group of English language learners in the direction of success and increasing student achievement.

This methodology chapter is divided into several sections. The first section describes the research design that was employed by the researcher. The next section describes the population for the study. The third section includes the IRB and informed consent process, and it gives details about how the researcher treated the data with regard to confidentiality and anonymity. The fourth section explains the process of selecting the study participants. The next section describes the instruments that were used in this study. In the sixth section, the researcher explains the measures taken to ensure that the study is valid and reliable. The seventh section describes how the researcher recorded and stored the data, with a description of the researcher as an instrument, as well as how the research assistant is utilized. The next section explains the process that the researcher used to analyze the data, including a description of the online program, Dedoose, which was employed. The ninth section describes the timeline of the study, and the final section provides a summary of the methodology.

### **Research Design**

“Qualitative research methods, by their very nature of attention to nuance and detail, allow for data gathering that can be extremely deep and take into consideration opinions and perspectives that may not initially be visible or obvious” (Butin, 2010, p. 76). For this reason, the researcher selected to perform a qualitative study that revealed many of the challenges that refugee students face. According to Merriam (2009), interviews are used in qualitative research when behaviors or feelings cannot be observed, or when past events that cannot be replicated are of interest. Merriam further noted that interviews are the “most common form of data collection in qualitative studies” (p. 86). Hence, focus group interviews were utilized to collect data in this study. Focus groups, as Merriam stated, should be selected through purposeful sampling of people who know the most about the phenomenon. As stated by Patton (2002), qualitative



studies have no specific rule for the sampling method, and that a purposeful sample is suitable when the researcher aims to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon and learn more about the experiences of the participants. Creswell (2009) said that interviews, whether they are face-to-face, by telephone, in focus groups, or by email, have several advantages: “a) useful when participants cannot be directly observed, b) participants can provide historical data, and c) allows researcher control over the line of questioning” (p. 179). This study was comprised of various focus groups. Each focus group—a group of refugee parents who had children in various levels, groups of teachers of refugee students separated by level (elementary and secondary), and a group of administrators with refugees in their school (a combined group of elementary and secondary administrators)—was comprised of five to seven members. As Creswell (2009) noted, the only person who can provide firsthand truth about a life experience is the one who lived it.

The sample selected for this study was from a suburban central Virginia school division with a population of approximately 50,000 students. For the purpose of this study, the researcher refers to this division as Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division. The World Languages Specialist and Commonwealth Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement School liaison identified twelve schools within Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division in the county as serving the majority of the refugee students. The twelve schools included four elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and a special program for new high school refugees entering the school division. These twelve schools were the focus of this study and participants were selected from them. The researcher ascertained the various perceived factors affecting refugee students’ performance using focus group interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators. This study had one overarching research question:

1. What are the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

The sub-questions were:

- What do parents perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do teachers perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do administrators perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

According to Creswell (2009), “Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 13). As stated by Merriam (2009), this “approach is well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 26). In order to best obtain the information needed to accurately represent this study’s participants’ beliefs and perceptions, a phenomenological strategy was selected. The shared experiences of the teachers and administrators who work with refugees, as well as the experiences of the refugee parents, provided insight into aspects of why some refugee students may or may not be achieving at appropriate levels in school.

### **Population**

Purposeful sampling, as suggested by Merriam (2009) and Patton (2002), was utilized to select the location of this study, which is a suburban central Virginia school division with a population of approximately 50,000 students. Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division has 72 schools and facilities to serve its diverse population of students. Approximately 2,900 English language learners are served in kindergarten through twelfth grade in this school division. In this division, mainstreaming is employed, and there are several elementary schools with a large

number of English language learners. Many of the ELLs have just recently entered the country as refugees. In the five years that the researcher has served as principal at her current school in Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division, she has developed an interest in the education and performance of refugee students, realizing that the principal, as instructional leader of the school, is a key factor in determining the success of all students. The fact that this researcher has remained at the school for five years indicates that there is a higher possibility for these refugee students to achieve success (“A Matter of Principal,” 2010). “What we know about principal retention suggests that school leaders are crucial to the school improvement process and that they must stay in a school a number of consecutive years for the benefits of their leadership to be realized” (“A Matter of Principal,” 2010, para. 5).

Within the 72 schools in Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division, the World Languages Specialist and Commonwealth Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement School liaison identified twelve schools as serving the majority of the refugee students. The twelve schools included four elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and a special program for new high school refugees entering the school division. These twelve schools were the focus of this study and participants were selected from them. The school division was specifically selected because of its large population of refugees as compared to other surrounding school divisions.

## **Data Treatment**

**Institutional review board and school division.** The Institutional Review Board (IRB) exists to protect against human rights violations (Creswell, 2009). This researcher secured approval for this study by the IRB at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in an effort to maintain the respect of vulnerable populations. Likewise, the IRB guaranteed that the research will not bring harm to the participants. This information was shared with participants as

an assurance that their participation will come with minimal risks. The researcher completed the research requirements for the Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division by September 1, 2014, in order to be granted permission to begin research. Once the IRB and Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division approved the researcher's proposal, the researcher began the research process.

**Informed consent.** Merriam (2009) stated, "In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings" (p. 230). To ensure that the researcher avoided ethical issues in the collection of data during this study (Creswell, 2009), an informed consent was provided to participants. This informed consent (Appendix B) was created using Creswell's (2009) and Butin's (2010) suggestions, and it provided the participants with information regarding the risks and benefits of participating in the study, in addition to the opportunity to opt out at any time during the study. It also explained the confidentiality and anonymity of the study. Once participants assured the researcher that they understood what the study involved, how confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, and what was expected of them as research participants, they were asked to sign the informed consent and complete demographic forms (Appendices C, D, and E) which contained questions that focused on obtaining background data of the participants. This all took place at the beginning of the session before the actual focus group interviews began. The researcher will maintain all informed consent documents for at least three years before destroying them.

**Confidentiality.** Butin (2010) noted the importance of maintaining confidentiality in data collection. "Confidentiality refers specifically to the data gathered. You want to set up procedures to make sure that the data you gather will not be inadvertently made public" (Butin, 2010, p. 104). This researcher assured the participants that their data will be kept confidential. The data will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home, and the researcher will not

“use, discuss, or benefit from the data gathered for the research work, with colleagues, or any other public venue without the informed consent of the individuals providing you with such data” (p. 106). This information was made clear to participants before research began. Any and all research data with identifiable information will be destroyed after completion of the dissertation defense. In addition, all recorded focus group interviews and other confidential files will be destroyed after completion of the dissertation defense.

**Anonymity.** In addition to confidentiality in the data collection, participants have the expectation of anonymity (Butin, 2010). The researcher addressed participant anonymity by using pseudonyms for individuals in the focus groups (e.g., T1, T2), as well as for the school division. As noted previously, the central Virginia school division in this study was referred to as Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division. Additionally, the researcher modified the characteristics of the participants (e.g., gender) and school division, as needed, to enhance the anonymity of the participants in the study, as long as this modification did not compromise the data from the focus group interviews. Finally, participants were reminded about maintaining the confidentiality of the other participants’ responses, as well as their anonymity.

### **Selection of Participants**

Merriam (2009) reported, “non-probability sampling is the method of choice for qualitative research” (p. 77). The researcher used purposeful, or purposive, sampling to select participants for the study. Purposeful sampling will be utilized because, as stated by Merriam, “it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 78). The selection criteria for the participants are shown in Figure 4. The five to seven parents, teachers, and administrators in each focus group represented others from their group with regard to their experience with or as a refugee. The researcher requested that a specialist in Research and

Planning in the school division assist in generating some of the sample population for this study. First, Research and Planning made an initial contact with schools that serve a high concentration of refugee students to determine if the principal and school agreed to participate. Once they received agreement from principals and schools, they then sent out an email to the teacher and administrator participants with electronic copies of the letter (Appendix F) requesting participation in this study if they met the criteria in Figure 4.

In order to select parent participants from these schools, the researcher collaborated with Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC). The CCC liaison used purposeful sampling to identify interested and willing English-speaking refugee parents from the twelve identified schools to participate in the focus group interviews. The CCC representative used a script (Appendix G) provided by the researcher to solicit volunteers. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, the CCC representative verified that they met the criteria for participation and sent the participation letter (Appendix H). Follow-up letters were sent to all administrators and teachers (Appendix I), as well as to parents (Appendix J) who agreed to participate in order to set up the focus group interviews. The CCC representative also made a follow up phone call to explain the details in the letter and joined the parents for their focus group interview for additional support.

Participant	Criteria
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Must be a refugee who has entered and gained residence in the U.S. within the past five years</li> <li>▪ Must have at least one refugee child attending one of the twelve identified schools in Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Must be a teacher at one of the twelve identified schools in the Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division with more than one year of teaching experience</li> <li>▪ Must have had more than one refugee student in their class in the past year</li> </ul>
Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Must be an administrator at one of the twelve identified schools in the Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division</li> <li>▪ Must have had at least ten refugee students in their school in the past year</li> </ul>

Figure 4. Selection criteria for study participants.

### Instruments

Merriam (2009) suggested “the key to getting good data from interviewing is to ask good questions” (p. 95). Individual instruments were developed for the different focus group interviews: one with the refugee parents, one with the teachers, and one with the administrators who were selected to participate in the study. These different instruments were utilized to gather

the most accurate and relevant data from the various groups from their perspective and relationship with refugee students.

**Refugee parent interviews.** The focus group interview questions for the refugee parents were derived from Isik-Ercan's 2012 study of Burmese refugees. The researcher corresponded by email with Isik-Ercan on July 8-9, 2014, and gained permission (Appendix K) to utilize the questions that were used during her research about Burmese refugees. These questions were adapted to fit the refugee parent group in this study (Appendix L).

**Teacher and administrator interviews.** The researcher corresponded with Wagner on July 8-10, 2014, and gained permission (Appendix M) to utilize the questions from his research on refugees in Pennsylvania Public Schools in this current study of the academic achievement of refugees in Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division. The researcher adapted teacher interview questions from Wagner's 2013 study of refugees in Pennsylvania public schools to fit the teacher (Appendix N) and administrator (Appendix O) groups. Though the Wagner questions were used for both groups, the final focus group interview protocols for the teacher and administrator groups differed in order to be appropriate to the group.

The researcher used suggestions for appropriate interview questions from Merriam (2009) and adapted Isik-Ercan (2012) and Wagner (2013) as appropriate. The questions were formulated to ensure that they provided the researcher with the potential for thorough, open, honest, and authentic responses regarding what teachers' and administrators' perceived as factors that affect the performance of refugee students. The questions were adapted from their original studies so that they were appropriate for focus groups interviews. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their school who were not included in the study were used in pilot interviews to ensure authenticity of the focus group



protocol.

### **Ensuring Validity and Reliability**

Merriam (2009) stated that in order for qualitative research to be valid and reliable, it must be conducted in an ethical manner. A variety of strategies was used to address any concerns of validity and reliability in this qualitative study (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2009). To maintain ethical standards, this researcher selected to utilize rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) and clarification of researcher bias, as the researcher has a specific interest in this topic as an elementary principal in a school with a steadily growing number of refugee students. The researcher and research assistant also employed reflexive journaling to ensure the authenticity of the findings and to note non-verbal responses. Additionally, digital recordings of the focus group interviews were used to verify the verbal responses of the participants.

### **Data Management**

**Researcher as an instrument.** According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), humans are the instrument of choice in qualitative studies, due to the fact that they are able to interact completely with the participants, providing feedback and requesting verification. These authors note that the human as an instrument “builds upon his or her *tacit* knowledge as much as if not more than upon propositional knowledge, and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like” (p. 187). The researcher in this study acted as an instrument by taking appropriate measures to record data in a manner that would ensure that the data were collected and reported appropriately. The research assistant in this study served as a peer debriefer to assist in accurately gathering the data from the focus group interviews. Data were collected during focus

group interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators to learn more about and engage in meaningful dialog about this increasingly present population of students and academic strategies that help them be successful. Prior to conducting the focus group interviews, the researcher prepared a focus group protocol (Appendix P) containing instructions for the researcher and research assistant, as well as the interview questions that were adapted from Isik-Ercan (2012) and Wagner (2013). Butin (2010) suggested using “open-ended questions that elicit meaningful and ‘deep’ responses that take the shape of narratives” (p. 97).

**Data recording.** During the focus group interviews, data were recorded in two ways. Merriam (2009) suggested tape recording the interview to ensure preservation of what is said in the interview. The researcher and research assistant utilized two digital recording devices—Dell laptops with Audacity software—to achieve this goal. Merriam also suggested taking notes during the interview. The research assistant recorded these notes, in addition to the digital recording, to capture the researcher’s and participants’ reactions to what was being stated in the interview. The researcher transcribed the recordings, verbatim, as this provided the “best database for analysis” (p. 110). The interview transcript had identifying information at the top (e.g., when, where, who), and was numbered down the left hand side and double-spaced to allow for room to include all of what was captured in the digital recording.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

According to Merriam (2009), “the process of data analysis is recursive and dynamic” (p. 169). Merriam noted the importance of analyzing data as they are being collected, while realizing that the “analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses and once all data are in” (p. 169). Data analysis is explained in more depth by Creswell (2009):

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It

involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data (some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion), representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. (p. 183)

Following Creswell's model of data analysis in qualitative research, data collected from the study was organized and read thoroughly. Coding by hand was then performed to identify and interpret themes. Additionally, as suggested by Merriam (2009), horizontalization was utilized to organize the data:

Horizontalization is the process of laying out all the data for examination and treating the data as having equal weight; that is, all pieces of data have equal value at the initial data analysis stage. The data are then organized into clusters or themes. (p. 26)

Imaginative variation involves "viewing the data from various perspectives" (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). The researcher used imaginative variation in order to get a true picture of the perspectives of the participants.

After the interviews, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher then performed the coding by hand, including open coding, to locate categories, or themes, that indicated a recurring pattern in the data by writing notes in the margin of the transcribed interview (Merriam, 2009). A color-coded spreadsheet was created by the researcher to more clearly identify common themes. As suggested by Merriam, the data were placed in categories that were: (a) responsive to the purpose of the study, (b) exhaustive, (c) mutually exclusive, (d) sensitizing, and (e) conceptually congruent. Categories that are responsive to the study, in effect, answer the research question. Exhaustive categories are those which allow all data to fit in a category. When categories are mutually exclusive, the data fit in only one

category. Categories that are sensitizing should be able to be identified by an outsider as to what the nature of the data in that category are. Categories that are conceptually congruent have all categories at the same conceptual level. This coding procedure was repeated for each set of focus group interviews. The researcher used the web-based program, Dedoose, to further analyze the qualitative data that were derived from the focus group interviews.

### **Timeline**

A timeline of expected stages of this study is included (See Appendix Q). The researcher submitted the research proposal to the school division and Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to September 1, 2014, and made suggested edits and alterations. Once IRB approval was granted following any required alternations, this approval was submitted to Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division. The researcher completed all focus group interviews by November 18, 2014. In December 2014 and January 2015, coding of transcripts was completed and data analysis using Dedoose was performed. The researcher describes the data and emerging themes from the study in Chapter Four and explains the findings and implications in Chapter Five, as well as the suggestions for future research and reflections in preparation for a March 2015 defense date.

### **Methodology Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. The experiences of refugees and their parents in this central Virginia school division, partnered with the experiences of teachers and administrators with refugee students and families, can provide insight for educators and policy makers as they work to provide opportunities for these students to gain access to the curriculum

and help them achieve at higher rates. With the accountability in place for all schools to meet the needs of all students (No Child Left Behind, 2001), researching factors affecting the performance of refugees could be the key to addressing them and moving these English language learners in the direction of success and increasing student achievement.

In order to best obtain the information needed to accurately represent this study's participants' beliefs and perceptions, a phenomenological strategy was selected. According to Creswell (2009), "Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 13). Purposeful sampling, as suggested by Merriam (2009), was utilized to select the location of this study, which is a suburban central Virginia school division with a population of approximately 50,000 students. The researcher used purposeful, or purposive, sampling to select participants for the study. Purposeful sampling was utilized because, as stated by Merriam, "it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 78).

The study utilized open-ended focus group interview protocol questions to engage the participants in meaningful conversations about the topic. The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. The researcher then completed coding, including open coding and horizontalization, to organize the data, and imaginative variation to view the data from various perspectives. The web-based program, Dedoose, was used to further analyze the data. For the purposes of this study and to maintain ethical standards, this researcher selected to utilize rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) and clarification of researcher bias, with reflexive journaling, to ensure the authenticity of the findings (Merriam, 2009; Creswell 2009). The digital recordings of the focus group

interviews were used to verify the responses of the participants. As suggested by Merriam (2009), the data were placed in categories that are: (a) responsive to the purpose of the study, (b) exhaustive, (c) mutually exclusive, (d) sensitizing, and (e) conceptually congruent. This procedure was repeated for each set of focus group interviews.

## **Chapter Four: Results of the Study/Findings**

This chapter presents the data collected and analyzed during this study and introduces themes and findings that were derived from the data. The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. The data were collected and analyzed from focus group interviews with refugee parents, teachers of refugees, and administrators with refugees in their schools. Purposeful sampling, as suggested by Merriam (2009) and Patton (2002), was utilized to select the location of this study, which is a suburban central Virginia school district with a population of approximately 50,000 students. Approximately 2,900 English language learners are served in kindergarten through twelfth grade in this school district. Within the 72 schools in Piedmont Rolling Hills School District, the World Languages Specialist and Commonwealth Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement School liaison identified twelve schools as serving the majority of the refugee students. The twelve schools included four elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and a special program for new high school refugees entering the school division. These twelve schools were the focus of this study and participants were selected from them. The school division was specifically selected because of its large population of refugees as compared to other surrounding school divisions.

The researcher used purposeful, or purposive, sampling to select participants for the study. Purposeful sampling was utilized because, as stated by Merriam, “it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 78). Initially, the researcher planned to have five to seven participants in each focus group, but because the researcher had difficulty gathering all of the elementary teacher participants at one time, the six elementary

teachers were divided into three small groups. The secondary teacher group and administrator group had five participants each.

In order to select parent participants from these schools, the researcher collaborated with Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC). The CCC liaison used purposeful sampling to identify interested and willing English-speaking refugee parents from the twelve identified schools to participate in the focus group interviews. Seven parents participated in this study. Two non-English speaking parents participated, but the husband participant of one of the women interpreted for them. Each time the husband answered a question, he reported for himself and the two women, since he asked them their thoughts throughout the interview.

This chapter presents the data gathered from this study as they relate to the following research question and sub-questions that guided this study:

1. What are the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

The sub-questions were:

- What do parents perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do teachers perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do administrators perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

This study was grounded in two theoretical perspectives: critical inquiry (Freire, 1972) and the cultural-ecological adaptations of minority communities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The theory of critical inquiry was appropriate because this study aimed at giving a voice to an oppressed people, namely refugees. Critical inquiry was described by Crotty (1998) as an



ongoing project that includes reflection and action to create a more just and freer society. The cultural-ecological theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) considered the societal and school effects, as well as the dynamics within minority communities. This was appropriate since the focus of this study was directed at refugee students, a large minority in public schools.

At the start of each focus group interview, the researcher reminded the participants of the purpose of the study guided by the focus group protocol. The researcher also reminded the participants that their participation was voluntary, and then proceeded to collect completed informed consent forms. The participants were ensured that the information they provided during the focus group interviews would remain confidential, and participants were provided a pseudonym that they would use to identify themselves when speaking (ex: T1, T2). The participants then completed demographic forms (Appendices C, D, and E) which contained questions that focused on obtaining background data of the participants. The demographic forms were different for the different groups since each group shared a unique perspective with regard to refugee students. The participants were reminded that the interviews would be digitally recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. All participants were in approval of being recorded.

Each of the focus groups was unique, with varying viewpoints. The dynamics of each group added to the quality of the group session. There were a total of 23 participants in this study: seven parent participants (two who spoke no English, but were interpreted by another participant), six elementary teachers, five secondary teachers, and five administrators. The participants in each group appeared comfortable and open to sharing their ideas with the rest of the participants in the group. They responded to each other positively and the conversations tended to flow naturally, even when there was disagreement of opinion. The researcher and the

research assistant witnessed much laughter and even joking amongst the group members. At one point, a participant cried, as she was so moved by the discussion of refugee experiences. At the end of each group, the researcher was thanked by the participants for doing this important work. On two occasions, the participants asked the researcher what she planned to do with all of these data, would she “go beating on doors to get things done for refugees.” The parent participants asked if they could receive a copy of the transcript once the research was completed, and the researcher informed them that she could provide them with a copy of the findings or the final report as stated in the initial letter requesting participation.

The results of the data collection began with the demographics of the various groups of participants: parent, elementary teacher, secondary teacher, and administrator. Since the researcher used the web-based program, Dedoose, to assist with data analysis, themes and patterns were easily identified. The researcher used horizontalization to ensure the saturation of all identified themes. After presentation of the demographics for the various groups, the question-by question data for each group are presented. The quotes are coded according to the focus group in which the person who is being quoted participated - parent group (PG), elementary teacher group (EG), secondary teacher group (SG), or administrator group (AG), then by participant, including their coding participant number (example, P1, T1, S1, A1), and then page number from the transcription. Finally, the data are summarized and the common themes amongst all of the groups are presented.

According to Patton (2002), “the challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data” (p. 432). Due to the extensive data collected from the various groups of participants, the data in this chapter are presented in sections. The first section focuses on the information derived from the parent group. The next section has a presentation of data from the

elementary teacher group. The following section contains a presentation of data from the secondary teacher group. The final section presents the data from the administrator group. After the individual groups are presented, a summary of commonalities between the various groups is presented. The researcher made a tremendous effort to “reduce the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton, 2002, p. 432).

### **Parent Focus Group and Response by Question**

The parent focus group consisted of seven participants, two of which did not speak English, but were interpreted by another participant. As shown in Table 2, the parent focus group consisted of five males and two females. The two females were the non-English speaking participants. The table denotes how many children the parents have and the levels in which the children are in school. Participant demographics played an integral role in understanding the data. Table 3 presents data which specifies percentages for the parent group. For example, the parent population included refugees from Sudan (14.3%), Nepal (14.3%), Afghanistan (14.3%), Somalia (14.3%), and Iraq (42.9%). They arrived in the United States with their families between 2009 and 2014, and they have children ranging from elementary level to high school level.

Table 2

*Parent Focus Group Demographics*

Participant	Gender	No. of Children in Public Schools	Children in Elementary School?	Children in Middle School?	Children in High School?	Nationality	Year Arrived in U.S.
P1	M	4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sudanese	2012
P2	M	1	Yes	No	No	Bhutanese	2009
P3	M	4	Yes	No	Yes	Afghani	2014
P4	M	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Somali	2009
P5	M	1	Yes	No	No	Iraqi	2013
P6	F	1	Yes	No	No	Iraqi	2013
P7	F	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Iraqi	2013

Table 3

*Parent Focus Group Demographics (with percentages)*

Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
M	5	71.4%
F	2	28.6%
<b>No. of Children in Public Schools</b>		
One	3	42.9%
Two	0	0%
Three	1	14.3%
Four	2	28.6%
Five	1	14.3%
<b>Children in Elementary School?</b>		
Yes	7	100%
No	0	0%
<b>Children in Middle School?</b>		
Yes	3	42.9%
No	4	57.1%
<b>Children in High School?</b>		
Yes	4	57.1%
No	3	42.9%
<b>Nationality</b>		
Sudanese	1	14.3%
Nepali	1	14.3%
Afghani	1	14.3%
Somali	1	14.3%
Iraqi	3	42.9%
<b>Year Arrived in U.S.</b>		
2009	2	28.6%
2012	1	14.3%
2013	3	42.9%
2014	1	14.3%

**Parent Focus Group Question 1.** What resources do you need to provide a good education for your child?

Four out of the seven participants consistently shared their perception that the schools needed better modes of communication. Specifically, the parent participants wanted the school to have better communication with them by way of translated documents. One participant stated,

“I guess a better way of communicating with parents, through the letters or through the... which the district has been ...you know...doing that, but there are parents that do not understand anything that is being written or the phone calls...” (PG, P2, p. 1). The parents agreed with each other with nodding of heads, as well as verbally. Another parent confirmed the need for better communication with parents vocally by stating,

I remember at one point I received a letter that was in my language, in own language rather than English. And, that was actually very helpful because the students could have actually read that letter . . . Because if the parents don’t understand, then it will be difficult for them to pass it on to their own children. (PG, P1, p. 2-3)

Another participant shared that he was very pleased with the communication at his school, “...they send me the email, write, they send (inaudible) with my children. They send in different ways, they send the information, they ask for my approval for taking my children to other (inaudible). This is wonderful” (PG, P3, p. 3-4).

All of the parents spoke highly of the available resources in the school division, including teaching materials and transportation. One participant, however, shared his concerns about transportation, “The bus which take two of my, my sons, my children, they pass to my house, right, and I have to walk two streets ahead and you know and get my children to the bus” (PG, P3, p.2). This participant also had a concern about the food system, “Food is...up to this point...it is not clear for me whether that’s something uh-food is given to the students or students should take food to the school” (p. 2). It was unclear to P3 why two of his sons received approval for free lunch and the other two had not, and he was hoping for clarity.

Another resource that was referred to by the parents was books versus computers. A participant stated, “So I think the priority should be given to books for them to read than going to

the computer, which they cannot understand much of it and there is too much information” (PG, P4, p. 4). This statement was supported by Participant P3, who stated that he also preferred books to computers since he thought the books would help students with their language.

**Parent Focus Group Question 2.** Has your child had any experiences that may hinder his or her academic performance?

None of the refugee parents shared traumatic experiences that the children may have faced before entering the United States. They did, however, speak about other issues, including ones in their children’s current school that they believe have an impact on their students’ academic performance. One participant felt strongly that the amount of schooling the children had in their home country was a key factor. This participant spoke for others in the community, stating:

...those kids may have only gone for five years in the school and because of their financial needs, financial crisis they may have dropped out from the school and worked for some years, for five years then came to United States. So that child could be 18 years of age or very close to 18 and only attended five or six grade. Now when he arrives here, he would have to go and attend high school, at least start from grade nine or ten, which he won’t be able to do. (PG, P2, p. 6)

According to P2, the requirement of students starting high school due to their age, though they may have had little schooling had a major impact on the academic performance of students in his community. Participant P3 agreed with P2 regarding this age factor. “If a student should be in grade nine, but because of his high age, we take him to grade 11, then this would be an adjustment of resources and they would not be competent (inaudible)” (PG, P3, p. 8).

Participants P1 and P3 both noted that the language barrier that was present for their students had a large impact on their academic performance. Participant P1 stressed that because the students come from different backgrounds, they may not have had access to English. He stated, “I mean for example, I come from Sudan and even though Arabic is not the first language there most of the students go to Arabic schools. They don’t see English at all” (PG, P1, p.6). He reiterated that when these students come to the United States, this language barrier is created and impacts the performance of refugee students. Participant P3 voiced his agreement about the language barrier, noting that he felt that it was only a problem during the first year.

While discussing experiences, or lack of experiences, for the students, the conversation moved back to resources for three out of the seven participants. Participant P2 stated that since the refugee students had minimal experiences, more ESL coaching, or tutors, were needed in the schools. A participant shared a story about his child not being selected for after school tutoring. “At some point one of my kids was telling me that I see they have some children who are with me in the class and they are doing after school classes, why can’t I join this” (PG, P1, p. 7). He went on to express his opinion about the need for more opportunities for tutoring and extended summer classes for refugee students in order to teach them the basics and better prepare them for school. Participant P4 agreed with the point P1 made, and expressed that he thought that some of the refugee parents could be tutors or ESL teachers because they may have an educational background, but were not able to be ESL teachers since they did not have a degree. He did not understand the system in the United States in that it did not allow these willing parents to be ESL teachers without degrees.

Cultural differences and the food system were two areas that Participant P3 referred to as impacting refugee student performance. He stated, “...in schools food is given to students.



Since the international students in schools have different communities are coming in, but there is no halal food, right? There is wonderful food (inaudible) but Muslims do not take pork” (PG, p. 8). He specified that some communities do not take meat at all based on their cultural beliefs, and that his desire was for the schools to serve food that was suitable for the different cultures.

**Parent Focus Group Question 3.** Tell me about your communication with your child’s teacher?

Three out of the seven participants—P1, P2, and P3—shared that they communicate with the teachers through emails and phone calls. Participants P1 and P2 mentioned that they also visit the school when they can, but P1 shared that many refugees work two jobs and have a hard time visiting the school. The group shared a laugh when P2 mentioned that he sometimes makes unexpected visits to the school. Participant P2 went on to explain why some refugee parents do not participate as much as other parents:

There could be people in the community who have never contacted the teacher, never in whole academic session. The reason I see behind it is the communication, the barrier in language. They themselves are illiterate in their native language so how could we expect them to come in front and speak in others’ language and express their literate side. (PG, p. 9)

Participant P2 continued, stating that those parents who are able to communicate through phone calls, emails, or visits certainly would do this.

**Parent Focus Group Question 4.** How do you feel when you go to your child’s school?

This question brought a tremendous amount of emotion and enthusiasm from the parents. Five of the seven parents reported positive feelings about their children’s schools, with two of the parents being interpreted by another. Immediately after this question was asked, one

participant excitedly waved his hand, smiling and yelling out his identifier so he could answer, “I feel great because I mean the shape and the type and the resources of the schools that I’ve seen back home and the ones that I’ve seen here, are totally, totally no way to compare them” (PG, P1, p. 10). He reiterated how pleased he was with the various resources in his children’s schools, specifically the access to the teachers. Participant P2 noted his agreement with P1 and added that he believed that all of the refugee parents felt wonderful going to the schools. He also shared his approval of the resources available stating, “So the school has very good resources, a lot of good resources for our kids to grab and get the knowledge” (PG, P2, p. 11). Participant P5 (who entered with P6 and P7 during this time) interpreted for P6 and P7, stating that they felt happy when they visited the schools.

Relationships, specifically student to teacher relationships, was a large part of the group discussion for this question. Five of the seven participants spoke about how they knew that the relationships that were being developed in the schools were helping their children to be successful. Participant P2 expressed how appreciative he was about what the teachers did for his child. A participant shared a story about the first few times he entered the school with his daughter, and how her reaction changed, causing him to know that the teachers were doing great things with his daughter:

. . . when I took my youngest daughter on the first day to the school here, . . . she was actually trying to go back with me . . . The next day, and this is something that I’m not going to forget . . . she told me, dad I want to go back to school. The school teachers are good! I don’t know how to speak their language . . . but they are good! So this actually reflects how wonderful the teachers are . . . (PG, P1, p. 11-12)

Both participants P1 and P2 stressed that they felt that they do not do enough to thank the teachers for all that they do and how they make them and their children feel at the school.

A participant shared his thoughts about visiting the school. He stated, “When I visit the schools, I definitely feel proud because I am quite new to this country and I compare everything to my own country and no doubt (inaudible) I see a big change for which I am happy” (PG, P3, p. 12). He shared a story about the cultural differences in schools in Afghanistan and the United States. His son had told him that if he returned to Afghanistan, he would not go with him because teachers in Afghanistan punish the students for mistakes made by the students. This difference was a key reason that his son wanted to stay in the United States, and Participant P3 liked the change he saw when he visited the schools.

**Parent Focus Group Question 5.** What does the principal do to welcome you in the school?

Seven out of the seven participants felt welcomed in the schools. Each participant remarked on the various communications sent out by the principal, as well as the teachers. One of the participants stated, “The principal holds PTAs, which is very interesting. They come and ask us, we come to school and they keep asking us what do we need for improvement of our kids and that’s very helpful and we like it” (PG, P4, p. 14). Two participants mentioned the phone communications that the principals send out to parents and how impressed they were with the direct line of communication from the principals. A participant commented enthusiastically, “The wonderful thing that I like about the principals is their messages that come either through the telephone or the voice messages. It’s absolutely fantastic” (PG, P1, p. 14). Another participant verbally expressed his appreciation of the voice messages. Participants P3 and P5

expressed that most of their interaction was with the teachers, but they understood that the principal plays a crucial role in their children's experiences at school.

**Parent Focus Group Question 6.** How do you think your child's peers view your child in school?

The language barrier was mentioned by four of the seven participants as an issue with how peers viewed their children in school due to the inability to communicate. One participant verbalized his perception:

And I think in a way that is, that is, it could be they are also looking at it that way, like thinking, yeah this guy, we don't know him, how will we communicate? He doesn't understand our language. So it's a kind of barrier in there but surely through time it gets eliminated. (PG, P1, p. 16)

Participant P1 noted that he believed that this barrier occurred mostly at the beginning, when they first arrived in the country and at the school, and eventually the refugee children made friends with their classmates. Another participant articulated his perceptions about the language barrier and its effect on peer relations. He stated, "I think the younger the child is, the easier it is for him to, you know, interact and cope with the environment of the school, and his class, and his peers" (PG, P5, p. 18). He noted that his kindergarten child had no difficulties with her peers. Because P5 was interpreting for P7, who had children in elementary, middle, and high school, he shared comments by P7:

The older ones last year had big problems coping with other children, with other friends, or make friends. They were shy. They were like separated, afraid to express their feelings and all these kinds of restrictions and barriers between them and the others. And approximately they didn't talk to anyone until this year. (PG, P5 for P7, p. 18)

Still another participant verbalized his perceptions about his Nepali community and the way the students' peers viewed them. Though he had not had any difficulties with his own child, who was in kindergarten, he was able to note, "They don't seem to be very frank enough because the interaction lacks there, and so they try to isolate themselves at the corner of the classroom" (PG, P2, p. 17).

Two of the seven participants, P1 and P3, referred to the cultural differences that the students had to overcome with their peers. They noted that the children shared experiences that they had with other students that were different than what had been experienced in their own culture. Participant P3 chuckled as he shared a conversation he had with his son:

Just yesterday, my son told me that (inaudible) one of the students came to me and wanted to shake my hand. So, I told him so what. So what? This is cultural differences and slowly with interacting and helping with the parents, they understand how to behave and be close to the other students. (PG, p. 17-18)

**Parent Focus Group Question 7.** How do you think teachers view your child in school?

Five of the seven participants shared their perceptions regarding the way their children's teachers viewed their children. One participant shared a conversation he had with his kindergarten daughter regarding how often she wanted to go to school:

So every morning, my daughter wakes up and she says, Daddy, are you not going to make me ready? It's almost time to go to school. I tell her today is Saturday. And the next morning, on Sunday morning, she does the same thing and I ask her why do you want to go to school on Saturday and Sunday? Because I love going to school, I love my teacher, I love my friend. So the students get that love, affection from the teacher. They don't want to part from them. (PG, P2, p. 19)

The participants continued speaking about the relationships the students had with the teachers, which they perceived impacted their children's desire to come to school. One participant shared his perception by stating, "So I think she would not have loved the school unless or until she felt that love from the school itself, whether it's from the teachers, whether it's from the peers, whether it's from her school colleagues or whatever" (PG, P1, p. 19). Participant P3 confirmed the other two participants' statements, stating that his children were happy and wanted to go to school without their parents walking them. He noted, "I touch it from my neighborhood and from the school, from the teacher" (PG, p. 20).

A difference was noted in the high school with regard to the perceptions of how the teachers viewed the refugee students. One participant shared that his son felt that the teacher was not calling on him to participate in class. He stated, "...he was telling me that a certain teacher was not really helping him to participate, like even if he wanted to answer a question, like he tells me that he was neglected several times" (PG, P1, p. 19-20). This participant explained how he met with the teacher to discuss the perception that his son had, and he found that it was a coincidence.

**Parent Focus Group Question 8.** What do you think the challenges your child faces at school are?

Five out of seven participants spoke of the language barrier as one of the biggest challenges that their children faced in school. One participant shared his concern with the expectations being the same for a student who does not understand the language with a student who is from the United States. He stated, "The teacher expects from the home country students, they expect the same thing from them. This is a challenge to be able to communicate language,

you know, different culture, different environment” (PG, P3, p. 21). Another participant who was interpreting for P7 noted:

My wife’s family, she’s in the third grade and she did not start with the English so the English language is a bit of challenge for her. She cannot form, this is her second year, and she cannot form the sentences very well. She is facing a difficulty, and since her mother doesn’t know English, it is more of, you know, trouble for her. (PG, P5, p. 22)

Participant P1 agreed with the two participants and spoke of this language barrier as a cause for limited parental involvement. Yet another parent confirmed and shared his experiences from his community when the parents cannot assist their children with their homework:

They come with questions and homework that are very hard to understand, for them to understand actually, and when they come home, the parent that doesn’t understand what this is, maybe they don’t speak English and they ask for help, and the parent cannot help, she or he cannot understand what they say. (PG, P4, p. 22-23)

A participant agreed and stated, “I’m not saying that all of the parents are equal, but so many of them really find it difficult actually to try and solve, not only middle school, even at the elementary level” (PG, P1, p. 23).

The amount and type of previous schooling was another challenge presented by two of the seven participants in response to this question. One participant, as he referred back to the type of schooling his family experienced in Somalia, stated, “Having siblings in middle school and high school who didn’t have previous schooling, and came here maybe a few years ago, they have a challenge in some subjects. An example of them is chemistry, which is very challenging for them” (PG, P4, p. 22). Participant P1 agreed noting how different the education systems

were. He stressed his desire for after school programs and tutoring to be provided for the refugee students to better prepare them.

Another participant shared his concerns with graduation requirements as a challenge for newly entered refugee students. He stated:

The other challenge, this is what I hear, that those seniors in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I don't know how, this is my understanding. I heard something. If the students are not good for the passing, they fail the school. They don't give them their diploma. (PG, P3, p. 21)

He noted that his friend has a son who is a senior and should not be expected to improve his performance in such a rapid rate, and then he expressed his concern that the child would likely receive no diploma.

**Parent Focus Group Question 9.** Does your child have challenges with cultural differences between school and home?

Three out of the seven participants shared their perceptions of the cultural differences in the school. One participant spoke with passion regarding how it clashed with home:

I know they came from a community that so many things they think this is not right, this is not right, not only culturally, but also religious ones, too. As much as we try actually to adjust that one in a progressive way, sometime we get into clashes with them because they see their peers in the schools doing something and they come back and want to do it straight away. So it's a huge challenge there and I think that is a big difference there.

The cultural differences are huge. (PG, P1, p. 23-24)

Another participant referred to the cultural differences as “remarkable” when he shared his perceptions (PG, P3, p. 24). Yet another participant pointed out how different cultures may not be accustomed to customs in the United States, such as hugging, and how this could be



uncomfortable to someone who is new to the country. He stated, “So you know, when they see friends hugging each other, you know, same gender or different gender, they are really, really shocked” (PG, P2, p. 24).

**Parent Focus Group Question 10.** How do you think the school system supports your child?

Five of the seven participants referred to the translated documents that they receive from the schools. One participant expressed how this supported parents and students:

And some of the schools have put a lot of effort in providing the translations, you know translated documents for especially those parents who are, you know, illiterate in English and you know get a, at least they understand any communication coming from the school district. (PG, P2, p. 25)

Another parent spoke of the various translated documents that come home to parents, but voiced a concern that the documents do not necessarily come home in the languages that the parents understand. He stated, “We get the letters and the communication in English and Spanish. We don’t know English, and Spanish is completely strange to us. It’s like Chinese” (PG, P5, p. 28). This parent suggested a solution to the unpracticality of the school district providing translations for all languages:

But there can be some volunteers, the schools can ask the assistance or help of the parents themselves to translate some letters in different languages according to students that which languages they speak. For example, I can speak Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, and English. I can translate from English to three other languages. They can speak Urdu or Spanish or whatever language they come from, so they can help their children and other children from the same nationality translating and helping and participating with the

school to give this service to the parents, to the family and to the children at the same time. (PG, p. 28)

Resources and materials were mentioned repeatedly by six of the seven participants. Some of the specific additional resources that were mentioned included transportation, tutors, and volunteers. One participant expressed his appreciation of the services that are provided to students and parents by stating, “So I guess the services that the schools are providing are all very good services and I don’t think there is anything left to comment on anything else” (PG, P2, p. 25). Another participant noted that transportation was provided, and wonderful, but stated that the security was “not sufficient” as he referred to security issues around the world (PG, P3, p. 25). One participant reiterated his request for more tutoring services to be provided for refugee students. He articulated his concern, “I know that means a lot of resources, but I could see it’s possible, it’s possible. That would really help them. After school, maybe one hour, two hours, helping them with homework” (PG, P1, p. 27-28).

Two of the seven participants, P1 and P3, voiced how they felt that schools could partner with community organizations to provide additional support to refugee students and parents. One participant said, “I think at some point I remember, there are organizations providing volunteers to refugee children, but maybe if the schools could also come up with something like this or maybe they just devote some of the time” (PG, P1, p. 28). When Participant P3 spoke of community organizations, he referred to English classes for students and parents. He mentioned that his wife spoke no English and they had received no support regarding English classes for three months. He questioned, “So this is something that is considered, right? If school system would consider it, it would help a lot” (PG, p. 29).

Two of the seven participants spoke passionately about counseling that the schools provide to high school students. One gentleman stated:

They do services for counseling, but students from outside where, from refugees who are coming here, they have this mentality of not going there because maybe they don't know who that person is, or maybe they are kind of scared that you know, what kind of course you are taking, you know, you don't have money, who is going to pay your college. (PG, P4, p. 26-27)

Two participants commended this gentleman for mentioning the topic of counseling for high school students. Participant P1 stated that he also did not understand the counseling services. He felt that the refugee students should be told exactly how the system works so that they can have a better idea of the type of assistance is available to them for attending college.

**Parent Focus Group Question 11.** How often do you work with your child on homework?

Seven out of the seven participants contributed their thoughts about homework. One gentleman spoke enthusiastically about how he helps his daughter:

P2, P2, P2! I help every single day even Saturday and Sunday. Otherwise my child would be crying *all* [emphasis added] night long. And homework, we finish everything given to her for a week by Tuesday, if she brings it Monday, then we'll be finished by Tuesday even, or Wednesday. (PG, P2, p. 29)

Another participant shared how his family has a system in place for homework. He noted, "My older son (inaudible). He is responsible for the two students in high school, and I see the homework of the other two" (PG, P3, p. 31). One participant noted that he wants to help his

children with homework, but due to his work schedule, he is unable to help as often as he would like. This participant, in sharing the routine when he comes home from work, stated:

Personally, I go home and the moment I land there, I will see each one of them having his papers and waiting for me. Dad, I've got a homework, dad I've got a homework, oh, I've got a homework, I've got a homework. And it's--we try to do their best, we try to do their best, but it's still difficult, and that's why I was actually thinking that maybe if the resources allow and the district could provide some resources and then the students could get back and then get some help from the teachers, that would really be helpful. (PG, P1, p. 30)

Parental involvement, or the lack of parental involvement regarding homework, was discussed in depth by six of the seven participants. One participant stressed that the parental involvement depended upon the education level of the parents, and that his refugee community helps each other with homework. He stated:

If the father and mother are educated, it will be easier for them to help the children on whatever level they are. If not so, this could be very difficult. In our community, as Iraqis, we help each other. There are some families that the father and mother they don't know any English. They struggle and they have many children in different levels. (PG, P5, p. 32)

Similarly, another parent communicated what he knew about some members of his Nepali community. He noted, "And there are parents that I've seen, the dad who is very literate, and has wonderful English, you know, reading, writing, speaking, you know, very, very talented person, but wife never attended any school" (PG, P2, p. 30). In this example, the father wanted to help his children, but was unable to due to his work schedule, and the mother was unable to help.

Parental involvement, according to Participant P1, is “a big challenge” due to parents working and trying to help their families (PG, p. 30). A participant noted, “Every family will not fit, it’s not easy, especially those families and problems where the parents do not know English and the students too, and they need support and they could not provide support and there is a problem” (PG, P3, p. 31).

Five of the seven participants shared their views on how additional resources and materials could be beneficial with regard to student homework issues. One participant suggested, “If they are or if the school is in connection with a church, one of the parents already raised this, if they are in connection with the churches, they can get volunteers . . . to help the refugee families. . .” (PG, P1, p. 30). Another participant verbalized his agreement with Participant P1 by remarking, “The school could use more volunteers or involve parents and have those students struggling in the classroom, have their homework done at the school before they are released from the school in the evening, it would probably help” (PG, P2, p. 31). Yet another participant spoke of resources and materials regarding monetary support that he felt the schools could provide agencies:

Homework would be good if the school division supports the agencies that brought us here. Because some of the agencies provided services from the beginning. Because lack of money, maybe they cannot plan for a long time. I think if the school division contributes money or any kind of assistance to the agencies and have communication with the agencies, we would be fine with homework. (PG, P4, p. 34)

During this discussion about homework, there was disagreement about which age group of students required the most support with homework. One participant’s perception is noted, “The small children in elementary school will need more efforts and will need more supervision

because they will not understand what the homework is” (PG, P5, p. 32). Another participant respectfully disagreed and shared his perception, stating, “So to me I think the issue is those who are in the high levels...that’s going to be their issue, because the subjects that they are given is not like, not like the little, the ones in elementary” (PG, P1, p. 33). Participant P2 voiced his agreement regarding high school students requiring more support and attention:

And when these students do not meet requirements and if we let them do their parts for themselves and not monitoring they could be saying, “Oh I’m doing my homework,” and chatting with someone else on Facebook. Oh, my teacher gives me homework on the computer, so Dad, look I’m doing my homework. They could be cheating anyways, so I guess we should be monitoring those students. (PG, p. 33-34)

### **Elementary Teacher Group and Response by Question**

The elementary teacher group consisted of six female participants, as shown in Table 4. Four of the participants were white and one was black. Participant T2 chose not to designate a race, as indicated by the dash. Table 5 displays the information for the elementary teacher group in percentages. The elementary teachers’ ages ranged from 31 years old to over 61 years old, and their teaching experiences ranged from six years to over 21 years as an educator. Participants T2 and T3 were ESL teachers, so the table indicates that they taught children in multiple grades, whereas the other elementary teacher participants taught in one grade level. Due to the difficulties of gathering the six participants together in one setting, the researcher performed three different interviews with the elementary teachers. Participants T1 and T2 interviewed together in Elementary Group 1 (EG1). Participant T3 interviewed alone in Elementary Group 2 (EG2). Participants T4, T5, and T6 interviewed together in Elementary Group 3 (EG3).

Table 4

*Elementary Teacher Group Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Teaches in Grade						Race/ Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Age Group
		Kg	1	2	3	4	5			
T1	F	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	White	6-10	31-40
T2	F	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	21 or more	61 or more
T3	F	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	White	16-20	41-50
T4	F	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Black	16-20	31-40
T5	F	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	White	6-10	51-60
T6	F	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	White	21 or more	51-60

*Note.* The dash for race/ethnicity of T2 represents data that was not reported by the participant.

Table 5

*Elementary Teacher Group Demographics (with percentages)*

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
M	0	0%
F	6	100%
<b>Grades Teaching</b>		
Kg	2	33.3%%
First	1	16.7%
Second	1	16.7%
Third	1	16.7%
Fourth	5	83.3%
Fifth	3	50%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black	1	16.7%
White	4	66.7%
Not specified	1	16.7%
<b>Years Teaching</b>		
0-5	0	0%
6-10	2	33.3%
11-15	0	0%
16-20	2	33.3%
21 or more	2	33.3%
<b>Age Group</b>		
31-40	2	33.3%
41-50	1	14.3%
51-60	2	33.3%
61 or more	1	14.3%

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 1.** About what year did you begin working with refugee children?

The six elementary teachers had varying lengths of experience working with refugee students, ranging from three years to 19 years. Participant T1 had the least amount of experience with refugee students with three years. Participant T5 has worked with refugee students for nine years. Both T2 and T3 have 10 years of experience with refugee students. Participant T4 has worked with refugee students for 11 years. Participant T6 has 19 years of experience with refugee students.



**Elementary Teacher Group Question 2.** Based on your setting and responsibilities, what went well for you when you began working with child refugees?

Communication was noted by the elementary teachers as important when working with refugee students. One participant mentioned that she learned to communicate with the refugee parents even though she did not speak their language. She stated, “But you just, you tuned into body language . . . Because communication isn’t always verbal. And, so that worked really well for me, got that particular gift” (EG1, T2, p. 2). Participant T1 agreed that understanding body language was helpful in communicating with refugees. Participant T3 noted the importance of communication, as well. She stressed the need for clear communication with the organizations that support the refugees.

Two of the six participants discussed how working with community members for additional support for the refugee students was a successful strategy. One participant explained how community support worked for her and her school:

. . . the refugees that I worked with in the past and presently now, we had a good support network with refugee and immigration services or with a church group that was supporting them, so there was great communication between the organizations that were supporting refugees and the school so that we could help our refugee families acclimate as much as possible into the school setting. (EG2, T3, p. 1)

Another participant shared similar perceived benefits to utilizing community support:

. . . the church would adopt families and then they would become involved in the students’ lives, and then they would make the transition from where they came from to here, America, and give them housing and clothes and things like that, and then transition them into the school and be an advocate for the kids. (EG3, T4, p. 1)

Relationships, past experiences, and ESL teachers were also mentioned while discussing what worked for refugee students. With regard to relationships, one participant noted, “They recognize people who have an open heart” (EG1, T2, p. 3). A second participant, T5, referred to the children noticing when their teachers helped them and supported them after they were ready to learn. This same participant compared the refugee students’ past experiences to their desire to learn, stating, “It’s almost like they haven’t had water or food and they are receiving this kind of education in a way that they are trying to make up for lost time. I see almost a desperation” (EG3, p. 1-2). A different participant vocalized her thoughts about the ESL teachers, commenting, “What was encouraging to me was the help of the ESL teacher and her assistant” (EG3, T4, p. 1).

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 3.** What did you decide to do to support child refugees that had positive results?

The elementary teachers discussed various successful strategies that were used to support the refugee students with whom they had worked. Five out of six of the elementary teachers referred to the resources and materials in place that had positive results. Several participants spoke about providing tangible supplies that the children would need regarding resources and materials. One participant stated that she and a colleague would “help a family, I guess you would say monetarily, because through donations, through donations of school supplies, and clothing, and donation of our time” (EG1, T1, p. 3). Another participant reported, “I made sure they also had material things, such as books and crayons, and exposure that some of our kids may take for granted” (EG3, T4, p. 2). Similarly, another participant stated:

I think that learning became easier for them as they became less focused on how they were going to get food, how they were going to get clothing, where they were going to

sleep, and whether or not they were in danger. (EG3, T6, p. 3)

One participant noted how she was certain to get to know her refugee students and what they liked so that the resources she found for them would be meaningful. She shared a story about a refugee student who liked cowboys and how she would find books that would “interest him and if he couldn’t read all the words he could get the gist of the story through the pictures” (EG1, T2, p. 4). Various other successful resources and materials were mentioned by the elementary teachers, including the use of churches, tutoring, and English classes for parents so that children could be better supported. Still another participant spoke of resources and materials with regard to staff development that was provided to teachers. She stated that at one school where she had worked, she had implemented “a school wide SIOP program to help inform the classroom teachers on best practice strategies to help second language learners . . . it also helped equip classroom teachers with more strategies to work with our refugee population” (EG2, T3, p. 2).

Four of the five elementary teacher participants spoke of various relationships that were forged that provided positive results with the refugee students. One participant referred to the relationship that is forged between the student and the teacher to help them move forward from past experiences:

I have had children who came from, what I would consider, as an American, horrifying situations, and I felt that part of my job was for them to feel safe and cared for, and so part of my role became not just as teacher but as a comforter, perhaps, someone who just made them as though they weren’t here surviving, that they were here with people who cared about them. (EG3, T6, p.3).

Participant T4 agreed with T6 on the significance of the student to teacher relationship in guiding children through their past experiences. Another participant discussed enhancing peer

relationships and the success she had experienced with the use of peer buddies. She mentioned how she would have safety patrols assist the refugee students, stating that though the peer buddies did not necessarily know the students they were assisting were refugees, “. . . they know that they are students in need . . . of help with learning the alphabet, learning how to read, learning math, and just familiarizing themselves with the school and the culture” (EG2, T3, p. 1). One participant talked about the relationships she built with the refugee parents and how it helped her efforts with the students:

I thank them for choosing the United States as their place to come and I tell them our country is a better place because they are here sharing their culture with us. And so, I think our parents have a really warm and positive view of our school . . . (EG1, T2, p. 3)

Two of the six elementary teacher participants discussed increasing parental involvement as a strategy to bring about positive results. Participant T3 spoke of creating a home school connection. She stated, “the more we were able to help them understand the homework, the necessity to make sure that it got done, setting up a homework environment at home that would help them, that would let our students be more successful” (EG2, p. 2). Another participant noted:

I try to reach out to the parents whenever they come into the office for something, whenever they come to PTA meetings, or anytime even when I see them at Walmart, I try to make them feel welcomed and let them know we would like to see them come into the school. (EG1, T2, p. 3)

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 4.** Why do you think any of the things you mentioned worked well?

While discussing why the strategies that had been implemented with refugee students

worked well, three of the six participants mentioned relationships as a key factor. One participant gestured with her hands as she stated, “I believe learning became fun and became a goal for them once they realized that they were okay and safe” (EG3, T6, p. 3). Another participant explained why she thought forging a relationship with parents worked, stating, “I think by building a rapport with the parents, it just gives them a bridge to feel like this might be a place where they could make it. You know, try to give them a little bit of hope” (EG1, T2, p. 4). This participant continued on with regard to forging relationships with the students, noting how students respond to individualized attention and appreciate it since they have had so little previously. Participant T1 agreed with Participant T2:

. . . it’s that taking time to get to know what they enjoy, what drives them, what’s their interest, and that’s what I found that works with students. You know, who are new to this culture, this school, this area. Find out about them; take time to forge a relationship with them so that they feel comfortable here. You know, kids are aware they are different or they are struggling in an area or that they are not a good reader or that they are different, so if you make them feel comfortable and normal then they are going to want to do better, you know, they are going to have more confidence. (EG1, T1, p. 4-5)

Three of the six participants felt that the strategies worked due to the resources and materials that were provided. Participant T3 noted the commitment by the community and the teachers . . . that everyone was on board with helping the refugee students be successful. Participant T5 mentioned the advocates and support teachers as good resources that were important in bringing about the success of the refugee students. A third participant spoke of how the resources and materials helped by stating that she thought, “learning became easier for them as they became less focused on how they were going to get food, how they were going to get

clothing, where they were going to sleep, and whether or not they were in danger” (EG3, T6, p. 3).

Three of the six participants noted why working with the children to overcome their past experiences worked to the benefit of the children. One participant stressed the importance of allowing refugee students to have the opportunity to share their experiences by stating, “When you can find a way to incorporate their experiences into your lessons they, they can take part with confidence and speak with a certain amount of experience and authority . . .” (EG1, T2, p. 5). She went on to talk about a story that a student shared about how he knew a lion was outside of his tent while he was at a refugee camp, and how the other students who were not refugees were intrigued by the story. She stated, “We were honoring and affirming their experiences, validating their experiences” (p. 5). Another participant pointed out, “. . . there are things that are taken off of their shoulders . . . they are placed back into a situation that is manageable for a child . . .” (EG3, T5, p. 3).

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 5.** Based on your setting and responsibilities, what do you wish you had known before you became involved in working with child refugees?

There was much discussion amongst the elementary teacher participants with regard to what they wished they had known prior to working with refugees. Four of the six participants mentioned that they would have liked to know more about the cultural differences that would come with the added students. One participant mentioned how a staff development she had received from Commonwealth Catholic Charities when a group of Somali refugees had entered her school had helped her with that population of students. When she talked about the lack of training she had received about other refugee populations, she stated, “I wish I had had that same kind background building to have more of a window into what they were coming from and what

they needed from us and what we could provide for them” (EG2, T3, p. 3). Another participant reflected on her desire to know more about the cultural background of her refugee students:

I, many times, wish I knew more about cultures and traditions . . . I want to understand where they’ve come from, and so . . . I understand why this reaction happened, why I’m getting this type of answer, or why the child may have reacted in this way. (EG3, T5, p. 4)

Another participant agreed with T5 and spoke of a large group of refugee students arriving at her school. She reflected, “And so it was a few of us that were apprehensive, I guess you would say, about, I don’t know, I guess the unsureness of what to actually do” (EG3, T4, p. 5). This participant spoke of staff development that was provided to the staff on the cultural backgrounds of this newly arrived group of refugee students and how that helped the teachers. Another participant talked about cultural differences with regard to gender biases. She noted that some of the refugee children arrived with their parents’ biases against women, and that “they weren’t as respectful of us because in their native country, maybe women weren’t in those positions” (EG3, T6, p. 5). According to this participant, knowing the cultural backgrounds would have prepared the teachers for situations such as this.

Two of the six participants noted the need to know more about the past experiences of the refugee students. One participant, though she had received training about a particular refugee group, noted, “Every refugee situation is a little bit different” (EG2, T3, p. 3). Another participant discussed wanting to know more about the past experiences of the parents:

I wish I knew more personally what their parents gave up. Many of our students come to us, their parents were considered professionals in their country and they give up everything to get here. It takes us sometimes awhile to figure that out. That their parents

are janitors now or working at a fast food place or making beds at a hotel so that their children could have what our children take for granted. (EG3, T6, p. 4)

One elementary teacher participant made a point about the politics involved with refugees entering the United States and schools. She emphasized, “I wish I had *not* [emphasis added] known or had not had to find out the politics behind what goes on in education when you are dealing with refugee students” (EG1, T2, p. 6). She went on:

For instance, a refugee case worker told me that the amount of money the United States Government allocates to refugees and we are required by the conventions of NATO membership to take in  $x$  number of refugees, and we do not meet our quota, we are falling short, and the amount of money hasn’t changed since 1995. So you stop and think. Could you live now on your 1995 salary? At 1990... the rent rates that they are now. The amount of money that used to last them three years, which included support from a refugee agent, lucky it lasts three months now. (EG1, p. 6)

Participant T2 expressed her concern with the expectations of No Child Left Behind, and T1 agreed, stating, “. . . why would your expectations of these children who could have never been in this setting, in a structured school setting like this, and you expect them to, you know, to fall right in . . .” (EG1, p. 6).

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 6.** What do you think are some of the challenges that refugee students face?

The participants spoke freely about what they perceived as challenges for their refugee students. All six participants spoke about the cultural differences causing challenges for the refugee students. One participant noted, “They’ve got six months to figure out the whole cultural system, the whole school system” (EG2, T3, p. 4). Another participant referred to the



cultural differences regarding gender roles. Specifically, she stated, “. . . teaching is a primarily female dominated profession and for some of them to take orders and hear rules from a female, that doesn’t always or they are not used to that and that has been challenging in some instances” (EG1, T1, p. 7). Participant T2 agreed with T1 stating that she had seen this challenge with gender roles often. A participant shared a story about how a refugee student had difficulty adjusting to the cultural differences in his new country. She stated, “I think some of the challenges are trying to learn how we do it here. The customs, the routines, and the scheduling, things . . . that was a big challenge and it still is a big challenge for some of our students” (EG3, T4, p. 6). She continued with her story about a child from Somalia, recalling, “. . . he could not adjust at all to how we did things here. He would forage his food. I would find him under desks and things like that. He became sometimes violent towards other students. . .” (EG3, p. 6). Participant T6 noted that she had a similar experience where her refugee students from Somalia and Bosnia had been “scratching and clawing for food” or “learning to eat with a fork” (EG3, p. 6). She continued, stating, “. . . it’s so hard to help a child when you can’t speak their language and you’re not certain about their culture and you’re not trying to step on toes or embarrass or upset someone” (EG3, p. 6). Participant T5 concurred with T6, saying how the refugee children are trying so hard to “culturally assimilate to their surroundings” (EG3, p. 7).

Two of the six participants, T1 and T2, discussed the challenges refugees faced regarding exceptional education. Participant T2 noted the difficulty of identifying ESL students with disabilities, “We have students that are ESL and probably also need an IEP. But because of the language barrier you can’t test them with the traditional methods” (EG1, p. 8). She shared her frustrations that her anecdotal notes were not enough to help a student who had been in the country for seven years and was still identified as a Level 1 ESL student. Conversely,

Participant T1 noted how some teachers assumed that because a student was “not getting it as fast as they should” that they should be identified as having a disability (EG1, p. 8).

The challenges with forging relationships was an area of discussion for several of the elementary teacher participants. Two of the six participants reflected specifically on the challenges with peer relationships. One participant noted the instances of bullying she had witnessed towards the refugee students “simply because they are different” (EG1, T2, p. 7). She went on to explain, “And some of our students are not treated kindly because they are perceived to be representative of forces that we would rather not see exist in the world. And that has brought fear . . .” (EG1, p. 7). Participant T4 referred to the violence that some new refugee students had towards other students causing challenges with peer relationships. This participant also noted that the student to teacher relationship was a challenge as she tried to “find this nurturing state, let him know it’s safe . . .” (EG3, p. 6).

Two of the six participants noted the language barrier as a major challenge for refugee students. One participant commented, “. . . obviously we don’t know all of these languages, and that’s an obvious barrier when you’re trying to help the child” (EG3, T6, p. 6). She noted how fortunate her school was to “have child translators who can help us with that” (EG3, p. 6). Another participant, when asked about the challenges that refugees face, stated, “The number one is the language barrier initially and the cultural barrier is so great” (EG2, T3, p. 3).

Other challenges noted by the elementary group were the past experiences of the refugee students and the amount and type of previous schooling that they had. One participant said, “. . . it’s very hard when they have come to us with no education previously” (EG3, T6, p. 6). A second participant agreed:

I would guess that it’s not quite as huge in a primary situation, because when I’m trying

to go and help a child that's in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but reads on a first grade level, it's very difficult to find something that's going to give them interest and help them to feel like they are making progress when they see pictures, and see words that don't really fit their age.

(EG3, T5, p. 7)

Participant T4 disagreed and noted that even students in primary grades experienced challenges due to lack of experiences. She explained how having a refugee student who was not able to hold a pencil or crayon, or use scissors or even a book appropriately could be a challenge in the primary grades.

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 7.** Please share some additional barriers that you have encountered when working with refugee students.

When asked about additional barriers that the teachers had encountered while working with their refugee students, some of the participants discussed additional barriers, while others spoke more about the barriers they had already mentioned. One participant who had not already mentioned the language barrier, spoke in depth about the challenges that this barrier presented:

I find it really hard many times to connect with parents because of the language . . . Most every conference that I will have will be . . . some language barrier there and for me to get my point across, on how classroom behavior should be or how organization should be and for them to really understand how we are going to conduct a classroom. Or even the parents being able to communicate to me what they are seeing at home and what the child is bringing home and what they understand that the child has to do. (EG3, T5, p. 8)

Two of the six participants added parental involvement as a barrier to the success of refugee students. One participant described how difficult it was to involve the parents when a child is experiencing difficulties when the parents are “just in survival mode themselves” and do

not quite understand how to help (EG2, T3, p. 4). Another participant noted that the refugee parents want the best for their children, but that they “don’t always understand . . . in an education situation what the responsibilities are all the time” (EG3, T5, p. 10). Participant T6 added the challenge that occurred if the refugee parents were illiterate in their home language since this would limit their involvement in school. She stated, “If they weren’t educated at all and they come to us as an upper elementary student, and their parents weren’t educated, it’s very difficult” (EG3, p. 9).

Participant T4 described an additional challenge that her school faced when refugee students arrived. She explained that birthdays were not accurate and that “everybody had January 1<sup>st</sup> birthdays in the same year, and we were trying to figure out, ok, how is that possible, but due to documentation reasons, I guess, I’m not sure, that would be a good question to know” (EG3, p. 8). She discussed how this caused problems with placing students in the correct grade level. Some three year old children were being considered for kindergarten due to this confusion with birthdates.

Other barriers that were shared by the participants extended their thoughts from question six, where they had expressed their perceptions of the challenges that refugee students faced. For instance, two of the six participants who had already shared the challenges that arose due to cultural differences spoke more about this topic. Participant T3 noted that cultural differences caused a barrier “because there’s different expectations with education, how education is perceived by the family, and what their role, what their involvement should be is perceived differently” (EG2, p. 4).

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 8.** What did you decide to do about these barriers?

The elementary teachers shared various strategies that they used to overcome the barriers with which they were presented regarding refugee students. One area that was discussed by four of the six participants was relationships, specifically how they worked to improve relationships between the students and the teachers, between the teachers and the parents, and between students or peers. Two of the participants shared what they did to improve student to teacher relationships. One of them told how she would react as a “protector,” a “shield,” and a “mother-lion” to her refugee students when she found out they had been victims of bullying (EG1, T2, p. 12). She mentioned how she would scold the bullies with a “ferocious voice” while the refugee student stood behind her (EG1, p. 12). In order to build a relationship with her refugee students, Participant T4 noted how she took time to get to know them.

Two of the six participants mentioned how they would improve their relationships with refugee parents. Participant T5 shared that she would let the parents know that she supported them, saying, “. . . we’re the little threesome here with the student, the parent, and the teacher, and I need you to help me to help them” (EG3, p. 11). She noted that she was able to get buy-in from the parents when they realized that they were working together to help the child be successful. Another participant commented similarly:

One of things I like to say to the parents, when I first meet the parents . . . is that I’m here to help you help your child. What do you want for your child? And I try to make sure that the parents know that I want the same thing they want for their child . . . (EG3, T6, p. 10)

Strategies that were used to improve peer relationships were mentioned by two of the six participants. Participant T6 commented, “. . . there’s not *one* [emphasis added] refugee child, there’s not *one* [emphasis added] child from Somalia, there’s not *one* [emphasis added] child

from the Sudan; there are others for them to buddy up with, partner with so that they don't feel completely isolated" (EG3, p. 10). She discussed how she was usually able to pair refugees up with a successful refugee from their home country so they could sometimes speak together in their native tongue. Another participant, T2, mentioned educating the non-refugee students about the refugees in order to help to lessen their fears and "get these students on her team or his team" (EG1, p. 12).

In order to bridge the cultural gap, one of the participants implemented parent information nights and international potluck dinners. She noted how "they would come with their food from their country and their opportunity to share some of what they come from and something that they take pride in with us" (EG2, T3, p. 5). Another participant mentioned how she would relate lessons in the curriculum to the countries where her refugee originated and incorporate their traditions or cultural backgrounds into her lessons in order to bridge the cultural gap (EG3, T4, p. 10-11).

Some of the participants spoke of what they did to improve communication and parental involvement. Participant T3 discussed providing interpreters so she could "bring the parents to the table, to bring the whole family to the table, to help them understand what our expectations are for their children and what we would like to see happen from their standpoint" (EG2, p. 5). Similarly, another participant stated that teachers should not "feel reticent about getting in contact with those parents whether they know a little bit of the English language or not. And to be consistent just like it would be if it was an American child" (EG3, T5, p. 11).

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 9.** What would you tell someone in another district related to the barriers you encountered?

As the elementary teacher participants began to share what they would tell others in a

different school district, they reflected on some of the barriers they had mentioned. Participant T3 noted how she would tell others “what a gift it is to have that opportunity to be in contact with people from so many different cultures, and that every culture has their own gifts and their own uniqueness to share, something to contribute” (EG2, p. 5). Participant T1 would tell others how happy she was to have the diversity, especially since she came from a school that had no diversity before (EG1, p. 13). Another participant summed up her thoughts on the cultural differences and what she would say to someone else from outside of her school district:

You can look at barriers as something that is negative, but if you walk into the classroom every day, and you know of the challenges there, but I really believe that the classroom I’m in or the school that I’m in is a direct representation of the world. It’s all the children of the world, it’s all diversities, it’s multicultural, and when I step out into the marketplace, that’s there, too. The languages, the cultural difference, the faces, the traditions and so forth, so it’s like moving in and out of, you know, the way the world is. (EG, T5, p. 12)

Participant T3 spoke about the need for resources and materials for the refugee students. She would tell others from another school district to be sure to ensure that the students had access to tutoring opportunities from community members and parent volunteers, as well as peers (EG2, p. 5). Another participant also spoke of using “the resources in your community and thinking of it as a team effort” as something she would tell others (EG3, T6, p. 11). One participant shared that she would advise a person from outside of the district about mistakes she had made so that they would not duplicate them. She then stated that she would “get on my soapbox and rant and rave about the government doesn’t provide enough money and the county doesn’t provide enough money” (EG1, T2, p. 13). She explained that she would share this information so that

the person would be “forewarned” and “better prepared” (EG1, p. 13).

**Elementary Teacher Group Question 10.** What factors do you believe led to these barriers?

The participants spoke at length about the factors that they believed led to the barriers that they discussed. In essence, the factors and the barriers tended to be very similar, and even the same in some instances. Four of the six participants thought that cultural differences led to barriers for refugees. One participant remarked about the cultural differences, stating, “. . . the needs and the things to overcome within a classroom of many cultures, and many languages, and many traditions, we can’t, we just can’t meet it all” (EG3, T5, p. 14). Another participant submitted, “Most people, however, have no clue what culture is. They have no clue what constitutes cultural differences” (EG1, T2, p. 14). This participant later shared her perception of how cultural differences were an issue. She shared a story, “I have had students that I knew, I knew they were going to be genitally mutilated. And tried to talk to the mother about it, and it was just such a part of their culture” (EG1, p. 15). She also spoke about how males in some cultures think it is appropriate to beat their wives. Participant T1 agreed with T2. One participant cried as she spoke about a former student’s culture and traditions:

One of the first war refugee children I had nearly broke our hearts at my school, because it was right before the spring testing, when he came to me one morning, he came into our class just like it was any other day, so happy they had found his father’s head. And I was thinking this little boy is ten years old and this is, this is something he should never have to know. And before I could even say, please let’s talk about this privately because it might be traumatic for other children to hear, he was talking about how important it was in his culture to bury the body, and they were so excited. They were sending out other



relatives to hopefully in that area find the rest of his remains. (EG3, T6, p. 15-16)

Four of the six participants perceived that parental involvement was a major factor that caused barriers with regard to refugee students. Regarding parents, Participant T1 offered, “If they have a good outlook on life, then the kids are going to. If they are open and willing to accept help and assistance then I think the kids are, too” (EG1, p. 14-15). Another participant stated that the most successful refugee students will be the ones who “have the encouragement and support from the family members” (EG2, T3, p. 7).

Four of the six participants shared their perceptions that past experiences and/or PTSD were factors that caused barriers with refugee students’ performance. As one participant stated, “They may be coming from war, they may be coming from religious persecution, they could be coming from, they could have been exiled from their country because they are not socially accepted” (EG2, T3, p. 6). She continued, noting, “. . . trauma is the number one factor” and they wouldn’t leave their homes if they “weren’t under some kind of traumatic situation.” As Participant T6 shared the story of the child who was happy about his father’s head being found, she also stated, “I’m supposed to worry about him passing a writing test, and *this* [emphasis added] is what he’s dealing with” (EG3, p. 16). Participants T1 and T2 had finished their interview and realized they had more to say about an additional factor that they believed caused barriers. When the interview continued, the two participants spent several minutes talking about PTSD and trauma. One of the participants described her personal experiences with PTSD and what she perceived was occurring with some of her students:

Our students, you can’t tell me that a student has lived in a refugee camp where they’ve seen a parent murdered isn’t suffering from PTSD. And PTSD can have long lingering effects. And the two primary ones that we would focus on with kids is inability to focus

and concentrate and memory issues, short term memory issues. And if it doesn't get into the short term memory, it's not going to stay in the long term memory. (EG1, T2, p. 18)

Participant T1 added, "These kids are dealing with more than we will ever, ever have experienced in our lifetime, and we're expecting them to compartmentalize those emotions" (EG1, p. 18). She continued, noting how a teacher could read a book that might trigger a negative memory and "you've just thrown their whole day."

An additional factor was mentioned by four of the six participants. This factor, lack of staff development, was discussed regarding teachers having no training to help students dealing with trauma. One participant stated, "They come to us with such needs emotionally, that as a county, we don't have that available to them" (EG1, T1, p. 18). Participant T2 described how she would tell a teacher to have a refugee student who had come from a war zone beside them during a fire drill, noting, "Because I've seen kids freak out, and be diving under desk, and terrified and shaking and crying" (EG1, p. 19). She explained that she would attempt to prepare the students from war zones by showing them graphics and even possibly playing a recording of what the fire drill sounded like. Another participant shared her concern regarding the lack of staff development, saying, "Just not knowing, it's the fact of not knowing and understanding how the coping and all that stuff. . ." (EG3, T4, p. 13). Still another participant expressed the need for staff development and training as she contemplated, ". . . so it's like where do I go with this? And how do I keep this moving in a place to find success and still be able to educate a child?" (EG3, T5, p. 14)

Other perceived factors that were discussed by the participants as causing barriers for refugee students included relationships, the language barrier, and the lack of resources and materials. These factors have been included in previous sections as barriers, as well as

intertwined with other factors described in this section.

### **Secondary Teacher Focus Group and Response by Question**

The secondary teacher group consisted of two female participants and three male participants, as shown in Table 6. There were four white participants and one participant who chose not to designate a race. Table 7 displays the information for the elementary teacher group in percentages. The secondary teachers ranged from 31 years of age to over 61 years of age, and their years of experience ranged from six years to over 21 years in education. Several of the participants taught in multiple grades, as shown in the table. There was no Participant S5, as one participant did not attend, and the last participant that arrived came late and picked up the S6 identifier card. The researcher continued the interview with this participant as S6 instead of changing him to S5.

Table 6

*Secondary Teacher Focus Group Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Teaches in Grade				Race/ Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Age Group
		9	10	11	12			
S1	F	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	21 or more	61 or more
S2	M	Yes	No	No	No	White	6-10	41-50
S3	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	White	11-15	41-50
S4	F	Yes	No	Yes	No	White	16-20	31-40
S5								
S6	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	White	16-20	51-60

*Note.* Participant S5 did not attend the focus group meeting, and is signified by the blank cells. In addition, the dash for race/ethnicity of participant S1 represents data that was not reported by the participant.

Table 7

*Secondary Teacher Focus Group Demographics (with percentages)*

Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
M	3	60%
F	2	40%
<b>Grades Teaching</b>		
Ninth	4	80%
Tenth	3	60%
Eleventh	4	80%
Twelfth	3	60%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black	0	0%
White	4	80%
Not specified	1	20%
<b>Years Teaching</b>		
0-5	0	0%
6-10	1	20%
11-15	0	0%
16-20	2	40%
21 or more	1	20%
<b>Age Group</b>		
31-40	1	20%
41-50	2	40%
51-60	1	20%
61 or more	1	20%

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 1.** About what year did you begin working with refugee children?

The secondary teachers had varying lengths of experience working with refugee students, ranging from seven years to 17 years. Participants S2 and S4 had the least amount of experience working with refugee students at seven years and nine years, respectively. Participant S4 noted that she had worked with refugee students in another school division before joining the one where she was currently working. Participant S3 had been working with refugee students for 13 years. Participant S1 had worked with refugee students for 17 years. Participant S6 had not yet arrived when this question was asked.

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 2.** Based on your setting and responsibilities, what went well for you when you began working with child refugees?

Several of the secondary teacher participants commented on teacher strategies and relationships being key to what worked well for them when they began working with refugee students. One participant, S4, spoke of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model and the training she had received in this model of instruction being helpful. Another participant, S2, discussed scaffolding and differentiating instruction to help his students. Still another participant also mentioned teacher strategies, stating, “Definitely it originated with instruction. A lot of one-on-one. . .” (SG, S1, p. 2). This participant also stressed how building relationships was key to working with refugee students. She continued, “. . . a lot interest in where they were from, established a relationship, and I always thought that that was really a key in building a relationship with each child” (SG, p. 2).

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 3.** What did you decide to do to support child refugees that had positive results?

Each of the participants was able to share what worked for them as they taught refugee students. Three of the five participants talked about making the instruction personal for their refugee students. One participant explained how she invited the refugee students to “share their experiences with their different culture because we’re going to be covering so many things that are real to them and part of their personal story” (SG, S4, p. 3). Another participant, while teaching his earth science class, allows the refugee students to describe places they have seen that other students may never see. He explained, “. . .so we get to talk about seeing a volcano, seeing the Himalayas, seeing these different places, and I can get them to share their experiences with the environment, their personal experiences . . . so that they can contribute to a personal

level” (SG, S2, p. 3). Still another participant, S1, agreed that she also gave her refugee students similar opportunities to share personal experiences during English class where she incorporated writing prompts into her instruction that encouraged the children to write about their experiences.

Two of the five participants felt that building relationships was a strategy that worked with their refugee students. Participant S3 shared how he would “make them feel that I was interested” as he shared stories of his own personal experiences with international students. (SG, p. 3). He noted how he would try to “make any connection I can so they can feel like this teacher is interested in me and my background and where I am from.” Another participant noted that he would make his refugee students “feel comfortable enough to share and educate me . . . And that gives them ownership of their education and it makes them feel connected” (SG, S4, p.3).

Other items mentioned by the secondary teachers that showed positive results with refugee students included the use of resources and materials and community support. A participant shared how he found ways to “support them financially, support them in financial and familial needs, such as buying them groceries or supplying them with personal hygiene items and those sorts of things” (SG, S6, p. 4). He also noted how he helped the refugees connect with community organizations, such as churches, for additional support.

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 4.** Why do you think any of the things you mentioned worked well?

Three of the five participants responded, noting why they felt that the strategies they used with refugees worked well. All three respondents cited relationships that were built in the process of teaching refugee students as important in the successes they achieved, and Participant S3 included valuing the students’ past experiences as key, as well. Participant S3 noted that

building relationships worked well with the refugee students because it works well with all students. Another participant agreed, stating, “. . . if a student doesn’t think that you care about them as an individual, they are not going to perform for you” (SG, S4, p. 4). The secondary teacher who had worked successfully with refugee students for 17 years told how she made connections even outside of school, such as at a restaurant if she saw the student there. She finished by saying, “So it’s taken even outside of these four walls to the community, and that’s something they always remember, and I benefit from that as much as they do” (SG, S1, p. 5).

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 5.** Based on your setting and responsibilities, what do you wish you had known before you became involved in working with child refugees?

Two of the five participants commented on what they wished they had known before working with refugee students. Both spoke about the need for more understanding about the cultural differences with which they were presented. One participant noted how he wished he had more knowledge about his refugee students’ cultural backgrounds “so that we could better prepare interactions that could happen, and maybe foresee problems or plan for more positive interactions based on that” (SG, S2, p. 5). The other participant had similar thoughts:

I wish I had more time to really sink my teeth into the different cultures . . . because I’m always asking questions, constantly asking questions, from what do you eat, so what are you going to do this weekend. I’m just interested and I wish I knew more. (SG, S1, p. 5-6)

This participant commented on trying to bridge the language barrier at least slightly by learning to say hello in his students’ various languages, so they could have some communication.

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 6.** What do you think are some of the



challenges that refugee students face?

Each secondary teacher participant commented on what they perceived as challenges that refugee students face. All five participants made remarks about the cultural differences being a challenge for refugees. One participant specifically spoke about gender roles when referring to cultural differences as a challenge. This participant, a male teacher, noted that many of his male and female refugees were not used to women being equal:

Whether it's a young man who sees women differently, that are now his teachers, or the role of young women in education, and now they're now equals, but they don't self-advocate because they're not used to that. They're quiet and shy in the back. (SG, S2, p. 8)

Other participants remarked about other cultural differences. Participant S1 shared a story about a refugee student from Sudan who, in his own culture, did not have many choices, but here in the United States he had too many choices. This cultural difference was a reason for the student being deported since he was not accustomed to having so many choices and repeatedly made the wrong choices. Another participant spoke in depth about her experiences with Nepali students and cultural differences:

I see a lot of culture shock with my students because they come to the U.S. and they are dropped in this public school, and without any kind of real support, we're expecting them to be fully immersed in our classrooms and to just assimilate overnight. And many of them do not know how to function in a classroom setting like what we have and there aren't a lot of allowances built in the system for that. (SG, S4, p. 7-8)

Participant S4 shared information from a study that she had completed, and found that only 25% of students in Nepal typically advance beyond middle school, which would be different for them,

as they come to the United States and have at least four more years of schooling left.

Similarly, Participant S3 described how the education background and expectations could be different for refugee students. Participant S6 discussed how cultural differences related to religion could play a part in the challenges that refugees face, specifically regarding certain countries:

. . .some of the stereotypes are sometimes brought up in the classroom, and teachers are left, teachers and administrators are sometimes left to have to deal with the hurt that is caused as a result of some of the acting out or the words that are spoken in relation to the stereotypes. (SG, p. 6)

This difficulty with cultural differences, according to Participants S6 and S3, contributed to another challenge of peer relationships. Another participant confirmed the others' concerns with a comment, "I see that there are such a mix of kids and the challenge sometimes in instruction is placing the correct students with...right? Because sometimes they don't get along" (SG, S1, p. 9).

Communication, the language barrier, past experiences, and the lack of resources and materials were four other challenges revealed by the secondary teacher participants. Participant S6 noted that the students had difficulty communicating with each other or understanding what the other students were trying to say. Another participant shared a story about a student who was in his class attempting to take a PSAT that he was proctoring. The language barrier that was present prevented the student from understanding any directions. He remarked, "There was no point in having her sit there for three and a half hours and suffer through this" (SG, S3, p. 8). Finally, one participant referred to the trauma from past experiences that refugee students may face when he stated, "There's a lot of potential emotional issues that children can be seen, or

been in violence or they've seen or have been in refugee camps for so long. And there's a psychological element to that. . ." (SG, S3, p. 7). Participant S3 also perceived that refugee students faced the same challenges as other impoverished people in America, calling it a "double whammy" (SG, p. 5).

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 7.** Please share some additional barriers that you have encountered when working with refugee students.

The participants in this secondary teacher focus group continued to share what they perceived as barriers, often reacting to the other participants' comments. Some of the additional barriers that were shared were new barriers that had not been mentioned yet, and some were already shared in the previous question regarding the challenges that refugee students face. The issues of exceptional education concerns and lack of staff development were some of the new barriers that were discussed. One participant voiced a question that gained reaction and verbal agreement from the other participants. He asked, "Also how do you determine if it's an ELL problem or an IEP problem?" (SG, S2, p. 10) Another participant, when noting an issue with staff development, stated, ". . .real professional development around dealing with, talking with, engaging with, being aware of the population I think has been missing for a while" (SG, S3, p. 11).

Two other barriers that had not yet been shared by the participants were politics and the students' literacy in their home language. A participant said, "I find the notion that we're going to put them here knowing they're going to fail this class, knowing they're not going to pass your SOL. Why do we set them up for failure?" (SG, S2, p. 11) This question caused others to nod in agreement. Still another participant shared a concern that some of her refugee students, specifically Nepali students, were not literate in their home language "which makes it an even

bigger challenge” (SG, S4, p. 10).

Other barriers discussed with this question had been mentioned at least briefly in the previous question regarding the challenges that refugee students face. The lack of resources and materials, though it had already been reported as a challenge, was discussed again by three of the five participants. Two participants voiced their concern about the refugee students not having adequate resources at home. One specifically talked about the students’ hunger:

Every morning I bring the buses in and every morning I’m in the cafeteria and it is something to see how hungry these students are. They all sit at a long table, and they are...breakfast is so important, so if their bus is late, I want to be sure they grab something to have because *they are hungry* [emphasis added], and it is amazing how many essays I’ve had with the word hunger in. (SG, S1, p. 11-12)

Participant S2 shared this same concern, and added that the students may not have warm jackets. He also commented about not having the resources and materials needed to communicate with the students, stating, “I don’t think we ever found a Nepalese - English dictionary” (SG, S2, p. 10). One other participant expressed her frustrations that there were not enough ESL teachers to support her refugee students, commenting, “I mean, it’s the simple stuff that we take for granted, that we don’t even understand that they don’t know. And we don’t have enough support for our students at our school and it’s frustrating” (SG, S4, p. 10).

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 8.** What did you decide to do about these barriers?

The secondary teachers had an extensive conversation about what they had done to resolve the barriers that had been discussed. Three of the five participants discussed looking at their skills and the skills of their colleagues and looking for staff development opportunities.

One participant wanted to be the first to respond:

. . . another barrier that I actually I just thought of was getting the impression that I was not qualified to make recommendations to help my students, so I am currently enrolled in the University of Richmond's curriculum and instruction with a specialization in ESL education program. I will be finished with my masters in a year and will be a licensed ESL teacher. (SG, S4, p. 8)

Participant S2 noted that he attended a WIDA conference to learn about scaffolding for his students, and Participant S3 discussed ensuring that the teachers who worked with refugee students had the needed skill set to be successful with them.

Three of the five participants discussed the various resources and materials that they worked to provide for refugee students or for other teachers. One participant shared programs he had created to support refugee students, including preparing them for college and finding the “financial means and support, emotional support to go there” (SG, S6, p. 13). This participant also noted that he had taught the SIOP method to many in previous years, providing strategies for teachers to use when working with refugees and all English language learners. As mentioned before, Participant S4, responded to the lack of resources, specifically ESL teachers, by working to become one herself. She also explained how she had been working with others to provide tutors from colleges to assist the refugee students, but has been faced with the challenge of “having our students be able to stay after school so that the college students can tutor them in their native language and also help them in the English language skills” (SG, S4, p. 13). Another participant, S1, noted that she worked closely with the ESL teachers and provided tutors for the refugee students through the National Honor Society.

One participant added a strategy she used to include everyone in her classroom so that all

could learn from the refugee students:

I refer to my classrooms as the United Nations, because we've got everybody from everywhere in the world in there and it really does enrich our content experience. It really does. I can't, I can't add a personal story about what it's like to look at the Himalayas. I have several students who can and they can talk about the challenges that that creates. . . (SG, S4, p. 14-15)

Others in the group voiced their agreement that the school had changed so much in its diversity causing a need to help their students and community embrace this change, including discussing the different cultures and the past experiences of the students.

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 9.** What would you tell someone in another district related to the barriers you encountered?

One participant shared that he had already been in discussion with people from other school districts, and though it seemed that his current district needed more resources, his district had more resources than these other districts. He also noted that he would share a reason for the challenge with refugee students in that it was "like plugging a dam with about 15 holes versus three holes" due to the extensive mix of students and cultures (SG, S2, p. 16).

Another participant spoke of keeping an eye on politics regarding what he would tell someone from another school district:

I would tell them that they need be prepared and start looking for ways to continue to adapt and be ready for what's coming. Because if we take a look at what's happening in other states . . . and what's happening in the world news, whatever's happening in the world, there's a very good chance that it's going to be coming your way. (SG, S6, p. 16)

Participants S2 and S4 voiced their agreement with the statement made by S6, and Participant S2

continued this line of discussion regarding politics:

It's just a natural trend for culture and the world as it is, right? Trade has already done that. Cultures are starting to really do that, and now the people themselves are starting to move as well. So I think that globalization trend will make it... will we call them refugees at that point? Well, it depends on their situation still, right, are they...they come at the lower socio-economic, are they fleeing somewhere? (SG, S2, p. 16)

**Secondary Teacher Focus Group Question 10.** What factors do you believe led to these barriers?

The secondary teachers began a lengthy discussion about their perceived factors that led to the barriers that refugee students experienced. As with the elementary teachers, the factors and the barriers tended to be very similar, and even the same in some instances. Four of the five participants shared their concerns with community support and understanding. One participant noted what she used to see with Catholic Relief Services assisting refugees, saying, "I used to see them a lot bringing several in. He would be their spokesperson. Haven't seen that lately. I've seen more families coming in and signing their students up" (SG, S1, p. 23). Several other participants talked about the community support and the need for the schools to be notified that refugee students are arriving:

I'm not really sure how that works, do they notify the school system that, hey you have this group of students that may be coming in 60 days or whatever timeframe they give them...tomorrow? I don't know. Does that communication from these government agencies that help direct where refugees end up, does that go to school systems so that we could, if possible, prepare in advance? I mean, I don't even know if that happens. (SG, S2, p. 22)

Another participant stated, “I got the impression from *our* [emphasis added] administrator that, no, they just kind of showed up one day and now...” (SG, S4, p. 22). Conversely, a different participant voiced his support of the ESL specialist for his school division:

She does communicate with outside agencies and with the state, so she does have a good idea about what is going to come in terms of refugees, and in terms of refugees and other groups. And often it’s going to be like you said, Catholic Diocese or some other group, Lutheran. (SG, S6, p. 24)

A different factor that two of the five secondary teacher participants mentioned as causing barriers was the lack of targeted staff development. One participant, who had previously provided professional development to teachers regarding how to work with refugee students explained what the teachers needed to know before the refugees arrived in their classrooms:

. . . things such as religion, and culture, and what were the governmental circumstances or political circumstances that led them to the... to have to come to this country, and what they are going to face when they get into the community. (SG, S6, p. 20)

This participant continued on about the need for sensitivity training for the teachers so they could support the children with traumatic past experiences:

But when we’re dealing with folks that may be coming from Afghanistan or Iraq, or someplace like that, war torn areas, then you’re going to get a lot of the refugees...or Egypt as well...And there’s going to be some, how do we, how do we prepare for these students who may have lost their parents or seen their family members killed by maybe an American or maybe somebody from some other group? But we have to be prepared for those sorts things, and I *don’t* [emphasis added] think it’s best to leave it at . . .

“You’re going to be getting these students and that’s it. Good luck to you.” I hope that’s



not the message that the teachers take away from things, but it's possible that that's what they do take away. (SG, p. 21)

Another participant shared the same concerns regarding staff development, stating, "And in order for the professional development to be effective, research shows it has to be ongoing. It can't just, it can't just be one hour on a teacher workday" (SG, S4, p. 20). With regard to staff development for sensitivity to issues that the refugee students may be facing, one participant shared the facts that she does current events with her class, and:

. . . it's a place on a map to me...it's their personal story. So, I think we have to be cognizant of, just because they are in America, doesn't mean they cease to be, you know, wherever they are from. That is still part of their identity, and we definitely need to be sensitive to it. (SG, S4, p. 21-22)

Two of the five participants discussed the students' past experiences as a factor that may cause a barrier with refugee students, as well. For instance, a participant spoke of a student confirming that she had lost both of her parents before coming to the United States.

The perception of cultural differences as a factor causing the barriers for refugee students was shared by three of the five participants. One participant discussed how change was difficult for the refugee students. He stated, "They want to hold on to their culture, and again they feel safe there, so that is understandable" (SG, S2, p. 17). Another participant spoke of cultural differences with regard to parents understanding the expectations and practices of the school.

She described her perception:

I think a lot of them don't understand the concept of parent teacher conferences because it's not something they do in their native culture. They don't, they don't go question the teacher. They just send their child to school. They go to work. (SG, S4, p. 19)

Three of the five participants also spoke of limited resources and materials as a factor causing the barriers for refugee students. One participant focused on financial resources, stating, “There’s a financial barrier, so nobody ever wants to ask for anything or advocate for anything, so where are we going to come up with the money?” (SG, S4, p.17) Another participant mentioned the need for interpreters in order to help to alleviate the language barrier. She remarked, “I am an exceptional education teacher, so when I have had students who have IEPs and are refugees, I have to get an interpreter. That gets a little complex sometimes” (SG, S1, p. 19). Yet another participant, S2, shared his difficulties with holding parent teacher conferences and needing interpreters, noting that he had only had three conferences with refugee parents in seven years. He noted that in each of those three instances, the refugee parent brought a family or community member with them to interpret for them.

#### **Administrator Focus Group and Response by Question**

The administrator focus group, as shown in Table 8, was made up of one male and four females. Two of the participants were white, and one was black. Two participants chose not to designate a race. Table 9 shares the demographics for the administrator group in percentages. For example, the administrators’ experience as an administrator ranged from two years to 15 years, and their ages ranged from 31 years old to 60 years old. The administrator group consisted of two elementary administrators and three secondary administrators.

Table 8

*Administrator Focus Group Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Admin Role	Level	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Admin	Age Group
A1	F	Principal	Elementary	Black	6-10	41-50
A2	F	Admin Aide	Secondary	—	2-5	51-60
A3	F	Principal	Elementary	White	2-5	51-60
A4	F	Asst. Principal	Secondary	—	11-15	41-50
A5	M	Principal	Secondary	White	11-15	41-50

*Note.* The dashes for Race/Ethnicity of participants A2 and A4 represent data that was not reported by the participants.

Table 9

*Administrator Focus Group Demographics (with percentages)*

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
M	1	20%
F	4	80%
<b>Admin Role</b>		
Principal	3	60%
Assistant Principal	1	20%
Admin Aide	1	20%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black	1	20%
White	2	40%
Not specified	2	40%
<b>Years in Admin</b>		
2-5	2	40%
6-10	1	20%
11-15	2	40%
16-20	0	0%
<b>Age Group</b>		
31-40	0	0%
41-50	3	60%
51-60	2	40%
61 or more	0	0%

**Administrator Focus Group Question 1.** Approximately how long has your school served refugee students?

There were varying responses regarding how many years the schools that were represented by the administrators had served refugee students. Participant A1 stated that her school had likely been serving refugee students for about six to seven years. Participant A2 stated that her school had likely served refugee students since the 1970s. Participant A3 estimated that her school had been serving refugee students for approximately 10-15 years. Participants A4 and A5 were both administrators at the same school, and A5, the principal, estimated that his school had been serving refugee students since the 1970s, or post-Vietnam

War era, approximately 40 years. Several of the administrators noted that, in recent years, their refugee population had increased.

**Administrator Focus Group Question 2.** What do you think are some of the challenges that refugee students face?

The administrator participants freely shared what they believed were the challenges that refugee students faced. Three of the five participants cited cultural differences as a challenge. One participant in particular listed the challenges with cultural differences for one of her students from the Congo:

I see a big cultural gap . . . For example, I have a student who's from the Congo, and she's not used to making eye contact. And so it's been very uncomfortable for her to get used to making eye contact . . . The foods are different. The ways people act are different. The expectations in the classroom are different. (AG, A2, p. 2-3)

Another participant spoke of cultural differences combined with the refugee students' past experiences:

I was going to find some way to work PTSD into it. That depending upon what their refugee situation is, what they're leaving, what they're fleeing, even things like fire drills and loud noises can be very disturbing for some kids. Or a uniformed officer with a drug dog. We look at that generally as, it's a good thing, they're running the dogs today, whereas you might be in an environment where a uniformed person carrying a dog means a very bad thing for them. So it's cultural, but it's also that safety and security issue.

(AG, A5, p. 3).

Participant A4 stated, "I think finding work and finding a balance between what they left and what's here is difficult" with regard to her perceptions of how the refugee families deal with past

experiences (AG, p. 4).

Two of the five administrators shared that building relationships was a challenge faced by refugee students. An administrator who serves a mainly homogeneous population said, “I think the biggest issue for our students is seclusion” (AG, A1, p. 3). This participant felt that the refugee students stood out because they were different in her school, and they could not make peer connections. Another participant, A3, described the difficult task of building a trusting relationship between the refugee student and the teacher so that the students can have a “sense of safety from where they come from and what they’ve experienced” (AG, A3, p. 3).

Two of the five participants noted the language barrier as a challenge for their refugee students. Participant A2 cited the language barrier equally challenging as the cultural differences for refugee students. Another participant also noted the language barrier as a challenge, remarking, “We have 55 different countries represented at my school, and how on earth would we be able to communicate? It’s proven to be very difficult” (AG, A4, p. 2).

**Administrator Focus Group Question 3.** What do you think your teachers see as factors affecting refugee students’ performance?

Three of the five administrators thought that their teachers would see communication or the language barrier as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. One participant thought the language barrier would be what teachers perceived as the biggest barrier, stating, “They can’t...they don’t understand the language, and they’re trying to acquire the English language, so being able to communicate with them, because...in terms of instructing them appropriately on grade level would be the biggest challenge . . .” (AG, A1, p. 4). Another participant agreed that the language barrier would be perceived as a challenge, remarking, “It’s the walking the balance of having these kids in regular classes, and how do you hold them

accountable for the curriculum and yet be accommodating for their needs for the language? It's a difficult line to walk" (AG, A2, p. 4).

Three of the five administrators agreed that their teachers would cite the lack of resources and materials as a challenge. An administrator at a school that has an ESL teacher as an itinerant only, who is not at the school on a daily basis, noted, "So there is no continuum or consistency of services that they're provided" (AG, A1, p. 6). Another participant, A2, noted the lack of parental resources about which teachers would report, including lack of interpretation services for phone conversations and even the refugee parents' minimal access to the internet. An additional concern that teachers may have, according to Participant A4, was limited assessment resources for teachers to use to determine the progress of their refugee students.

One administrator shared that she thought her teachers would see cultural differences as a main challenge affecting the performance of refugee students:

At my school, teachers for the most part, teachers see that depending on what region you are from, you are going to look at school in a different way. Students from the Asian region and Africa maybe, perhaps, as opposed to South and Central America, it's very different, because their outlook of school is very different. (AG, A4, p. 4)

**Administrator Focus Group Question 4.** What programs have you implemented in your school to help your teachers educate refugee students?

None of the administrator participants were able to share any programs that they had in place specifically for refugee students. There was discussion about programs that were implemented for ESL students as a whole, but none for the specific ESL group of refugees. Participant A5 noted, however, that the ESL specialist for the county was working on a government grant that would provide monies for tutoring opportunities for refugee students. One

participant, A3, mentioned the SIOP model and differentiation that she was implementing in her school, but commented that it was not directed at solely refugee students.

**Administrator Focus Group Question 5.** Why do you think any of the programs you mentioned worked well?

Because the participants had not listed any programs that they had implemented for their refugee students, one respondent commented, “Questions four and five are sad!” (AG, A2, p. 8). In response, another participant shared what he perceived as reasons that the schools had not yet implemented programs specifically for refugee students:

I don’t know that the refugee numbers, until fairly recently, have really warranted stand-alone programs, just from a purely pragmatic financial...you know it’s not a classification like ESL, or special ed that has a lot of law behind it. I think it’s a fairly fluid thing. I think as the refugee numbers increase, particularly with some of the stuff that’s going around, within the next twelve months, going around in Capital Hill, there may be a movement to address that. So maybe it’s sad right now but it might not be as sad a few months from now, dependent upon what type changes, what changes are done with immigration status. . . (AG, A5, p. 8-9)

This participant questioned whether or not, in the future, a child coming from a drug-torn area of Mexico would be considered a refugee.

**Administrator Focus Group Question 6.** Are there programs that you have implemented that did not work well with refugee students?

Similar to question five, because the administrators had not implemented programs specifically for refugee students, they could not comment on what programs did not work well with their refugee students. The conversation momentarily focused on the programs, such as the



SIOP model and immersion programs, which were in place for English language learners as a whole group, and whether or not these programs would be appropriate and work with refugee students. One participant nodded, stating, “I always see them....of a mix of our ESL, as well as our McKinney-Vento students, having some of those same needs” (AG, A3, p. 10).

**Administrator Focus Group Question 7.** If the answer to #6 is yes, why do you think they did not work?

This question was not discussed with the administrator group since it was not applicable based on the responses to the previous questions.

**Administrator Focus Group Question 8.** How do you think you can better support your teachers as they work with refugee students?

Each of the administrator participants contemplated how they could better support their teachers as they worked with refugee students. Providing the needed resources and materials to the teachers was one strategy that surfaced with three of the five participants regarding supporting teachers. One participant stressed that she wanted to provide more support to those students who “have mental health or serious behavioral issues or suffering from post-traumatic stress, I would very much like to see a broader continuum of services to address those things that impact their learning” (AG, A1, p. 11). Another participant expressed her desire to implement a “newcomer’s classes, where it would be just a little bit of a transition time, to learn some safety language, to be able to say I’m scared or ask how to go to the bathroom or I’m hungry” (AG, A3, p. 10). She hoped to have newly arrived refugee students participate in this newcomer’s class before going into the general education class. Another administrator noted that she would like to implement a bilingual program, like she had experienced in another school district where “and half their day was taught, at the elementary level, half of their day was taught in English and half

in their own target language” (AG, A4, p.11).

Another participant shared that he would like to bring quality staff development to his teachers from groups that work extensively with refugee students:

I mean, it needs to be...there are agencies like Commonwealth Catholic Charities and United Methodist Family Services. There are agencies that deal with refugees every day and really get deep into it. That would be helpful for us to have quality training and in-service . . . (AG, A5, p. 12)

**Administrator Focus Group Question 9.** Are you able to provide support for refugee parents when they come into your building for meetings?

Overall, the administrators noted that, though they feel that refugee parents do care and want to be involved, they do not get a tremendous amount of parental involvement with regard to visiting the schools and attending meetings. Participant A4 mentioned that when the refugee parents come into her school, they often bring their own person to interpret for them. One participant stated that it was easy to translate documents in Spanish, but with the refugees entering with so many different languages, it was more difficult:

. . . the cost to have things translated is unbelievably prohibitive, so you really have to be careful with your funds in terms of what are you going to have translated into Bengali...not just a note home from a teacher, but it’s going to be like your biennial survey or something like that. (AG, A5, p. 14)

Another respondent, A3, mentioned having an event recently at her school where many refugees attended. She noted that she was able to communicate with them with many graphics in her PowerPoint presentation to illustrate that their children needed a good night’s sleep, good rest, a quiet place to do homework.

**Administrator Focus Group Question 10.** What additional supports do you feel you need from your school district or the state to assist you with providing adequate support to refugee students?

The administrator participants shared a variety of supports that they hoped the school district or state could provide. A resource that was mentioned as a necessity by three of the five participants was translated documents so that better communication could occur between school and home. One participant responded, “It would be nice even if we could just have some form letters that were in different languages that we could draw on just to pull out” (AG, A2, p. 16). Another participant stated, “A variety of translators...translators that can translate into a variety of languages. We have Spanish translators left and right, but that’s becoming not the majority anymore” (AG, A4, p. 16). Participant A5 agreed with A4 and continued, including the need for staff development:

It’s just the communication piece that’s the biggest challenge. I mean a little bit of training on refugee status would be nice, but honestly it’s the most expensive thing, is the thing we need the most, and that is a way for me to be able to communicate to a parent who speaks Swahili or that speaks Arabic or that speaks...oftentimes we find ourselves using the kid as the translator . . . (AG, p. 17)

The administrator group began a discussion about the need for a transition program for refugee students:

You know when we talk about acquiring a language is what, three to five years, but then acquiring an academic language is more like five to seven years. And yet, like we were saying, we thrust them into these classrooms with similar grading practices and expectations. And I don’t think we’re setting them up for success. (AG, A3, p. 17)

This comment by Participant A3 encouraged other participants to share their concern about state expectations regarding refugee students. One participant expressed what message he thought refugee students might receive when they are required to take an SOL test after having only been in the country for a short time:

Welcome to America, you're stupid. That's the message that they get real quick off the bat. And some of these kids are not literate in their home language, let alone in English. And some of these kids are coming from countries where they don't use Arabic characters, so it would be like dropping one of us off in Beijing and saying you've got one year to learn Chinese, and then you're going to take a test on Chinese history in that one year in Chinese. (AG, A5, p. 18)

Still another participant remarked that the refugee students need to have their basic needs met. Specifically, she spoke about clothing and heavy coats that her students needed. She commented, "I think sometimes if those needs are not being met then the parents...then the children can't think about school if they don't have some of those basic needs" (AG, A2, p. 17). Though Participant A2 noted that community organizations sometimes helped with those needs, she felt that the schools could do more to support the refugee students with these basic needs.

**Administrator Focus Group Question 11.** Do you have programs in place to celebrate the various cultures represented in your school?

Four of the five administrators noted that they had implemented programs in their schools to celebrate the various cultures represented in their schools. A high school administrator spoke of the programs at his school, stating, "There's a variety of international clubs that focus on international culture, international food, international dance" (AG, A5, p. 19). He also commented about an International Day event that was "a showcase of our different international

students that will perform music and dance and theater in their home languages.” Another administrator from the same high school described how the entire student population enjoyed these cultural events, stating, “. . . if you ask them to bring a can of cranberry sauce, to get into one of these events, we’d have probably 1,000 cans. We celebrate each other all the time. It’s just a wonderful place” (AG, A4, p. 19). Others in the group contributed to the conversation about how they celebrated the different cultures represented in their schools and encouraged parent participation, as well as built relationships. One participant spoke about their events, stating, “We do International Night. We do potluck dinners. We have Dress as your Culture Day. We just, you know . . . our diversity is our strength and we talk about that all the time” (AG, A3, p. 19). One other participant, A2, mentioned that food brought cultures together. She noted that parents were proud to send in food from their culture for school functions.

### **Summary of Data**

For the purpose of data analysis, the researcher used the web-based program, Dedoose, to code the transcripts and find excerpts that were representative of the various codes. To display the results from this study, the researcher provided a variety of tables, figures, and graphs that were generated and exported from Dedoose. Table 10 illustrates the various codes made during the transcription process. Codes are identified as a parent code or a subordinate, as well as by how deep they fall in the hierarchical code/tag tree. For instance, the ‘Relationships’ parent tag has two subordinate levels – 1) the children tags: Peer Relationships and Student to Teacher Relationships and 2) the grandchildren tags subordinate to Peer Relations: Social Cues and Sense of Belonging. The frequency of the codes is demonstrated in Figure 5, with more popular codes shown in a larger font.

Table 10

*Identified Codes Across all Focus Groups*

Id	Parent Id	Depth	Title
1		0	Language Barrier
2		0	Staff Development
3	2	1	Sensitivity Training
4	2	1	Teacher Strategies
5	2	1	Informed of Students Arriving
6		0	Resources/Materials
7	6	1	Books vs. Computers
8	6	1	ESL Teachers
9	6	1	Interpreters
10	6	1	Translated Documents
11	6	1	Transportation
12	6	1	Tutors
13	6	1	Exceptional Ed
14	6	1	Counseling/Grad. reqs
15	6	1	Understanding the system
16		0	Parent Involvement
17	16	1	Homework
18	16	1	Visiting School
19		0	Relationships
20	19	1	Peer Relationships
21	20	2	Sense of Belonging
22	20	2	Social Cues
23	19	1	Student to Teacher Relationships
24		0	Cultural Differences
25	24	1	Food system
26	24	1	Gender Roles
27		0	Past Experiences
28	27	1	PTSD
29		0	Communication
30	29	1	Communication with parents
31	29	1	Communication with Students
32		0	Community Support
33		0	Literacy in Home Language
34	33	1	Parents' Literacy in Home Language
35	33	1	Students' Literacy in Home Language
36	33	1	Amount/Type of Previous Schooling
37		0	Politics

*Note.* Each code is identified by the number shown. Some of the codes had a Parent ID, as shown. For example, Peer Relationships has a Parent ID of Relationships, which is number 19.



Figure 5. Code Cloud from all Focus Groups

**Research Sub-Question One.** What do parents perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

During the parent focus group, though the parents were pleased with the school system as a whole, many areas surfaced regarding what they perceived as affecting their children’s performance, as shown in Appendix R. The following were areas noted by seven out of seven (100%) parents as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, communication with parents, cultural differences, parental involvement, homework, and

resources and materials. Six out of seven (86%) parents noted the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: language barrier, previous schooling, relationships, peer relationships, and translated documents. Four out of seven (57%) parents perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: visiting the school and counseling/graduation requirements. Community support was perceived by three out of seven (43%) parents as affecting the performance of refugee students. Two out of seven (29%) parents perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: literacy in the home language, past experiences, student to teacher relationships, books versus computers, transportation, tutors, and understanding the system. One out of seven (14%) parents perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: food system, parents' literacy in the home language, ESL teachers, and interpreters.

**Research Sub-Question Two.** What do teachers perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

This section will be divided into two sections: elementary teachers and secondary teachers. The elementary teachers listed several factors that they perceived to affect the performance of refugee students, as shown in Appendix S. The following were noted by six out of six (100%) elementary teachers as possible factors affecting the performance of refugee students: community support, cultural differences, parental involvement, past experiences, relationships, resources and materials, and staff development. Five out of six (83%) elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication with parents and peer relationships. Four out of six (67%) elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, previous schooling, politics, and student to teacher relationships. Three out of six (50%)



elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: language barrier, gender roles, homework, PTSD, and ESL teachers. Two out of six (33%) elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: parents' literacy in their home language, visiting school, exceptional education, interpreters, tutors, sensitivity training, and teacher strategies. One out of six (17%) elementary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: food system, students' literacy in their home language, and being informed of when students are coming.

The secondary teachers shared various factors that they perceived to affect the performance of refugee students, as shown in Appendix T. The following were noted by five out of five (100%) secondary teachers as possible factors affecting the performance of refugee students: cultural differences, past experiences, and resources and materials. Four out of five (80%) secondary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: community support, politics, relationships, staff development, being informed of when students were arriving, and teacher strategies. Three out of five (60%) secondary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: language barrier, PTSD, peer relationships, student to teacher relationships, and sensitivity training. Two out of five (40%) secondary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: visiting schools, ESL teachers, exceptional education, interpreters, and tutors. One out of five (20%) secondary teachers perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, communication with students, communication with parents, gender roles, and students' literacy in their home language.

**Research Sub-Question Three.** What do administrators perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

Several areas of concern were noted regarding the administrators' perceptions of what affected refugee students' performance, as shown in Appendix U. Five out of five (100%) administrators perceived parental involvement to be a factor that affects the performance of refugee students. Four out of five (80%) administrators perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication, communication with parents, community support, cultural differences, language barrier, past experiences, and resources and materials. Three out of five (60%) administrators perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: communication with students, visiting school, interpreters, translated documents, and staff development. Two out of five (40%) administrators perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: PTSD, relationships, peer relationships, and sensitivity training. One out of five (20%) administrators perceived the following as affecting the performance of refugee students: food system, students' literacy in their home language, politics, student to teacher relationships, ESL teachers, tutors, and being informed of when students are arriving.

### **Emergent Themes**

Appendix V displays the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students as seen by all of the focus groups. Several themes, as seen in Table 11, emerged from the data that were collected from this study. The table shows the percentage of all 23 study percentages who considered the listed theme to be a factor affecting the performance of refugee students. According to Saldana (2013), a theme is "an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection. . ." (p. 14). Saldana also noted that "a set of themes is a good thing to emerge from analysis" (p. 14). The researcher has presented the themes that emerged in this study in the upcoming sections. A brief description has been included with each theme, and they will be

further discussed with the findings in chapter five.

Table 11

*Major Themes Identified by all Participants*

Theme	% of participants (n=23)
Improvements needed in communication	95%
The need for community support	76%
Cultural differences and the role they play	95%
The language barrier and its effect	71%
The amount and type of parental involvement	86%
The effect of past experiences on refugee performance	81%
Relationships and the role they play	76%
Resources and materials to support refugees and teachers	100%
The need for staff development and training for teachers	67%

**Theme One: Improvements needed in communication.** Better modes of communication was shared repeatedly as an area of concern by the study participants. One parent participant stated, “I guess a better way of communicating with parents, through the letters or through the... which the district has been ...you know...doing that, but there are parents that do not understand anything that is being written or the phone calls...” (PG, P2, p. 1).

Communication was also noted by the elementary teachers as important when working with refugee students. One participant mentioned that she learned to communicate with the refugee parents even though she didn’t speak their language. She stated, “But you just, you tuned into body language . . . Because communication isn’t always verbal. And, so that worked really well for me, got that particular gift” (EG1, T2, p. 2). Secondary teacher participants perceived communication to be a challenge for refugee students and their peers. Participant S6 noted that

the students had difficulty communicating with each other or understanding what the other students were trying to say. Administrators felt that better communication could occur between school and home. One administrator responded, “It would be nice even if we could just have some form letters that were in different languages that we could draw on just to pull out” (AG, A2, p. 16).

**Theme Two: The need for community support.** The topic of community support surfaced often in the various conversations with focus group participants. When Participant P3 spoke of community organizations, he referred to English classes for students and parents. He mentioned that his wife spoke no English and they had received no support regarding English classes for three months. One elementary teacher participant explained how community support worked for her and her school:

. . . the refugees that I worked with in the past and presently now, we had a good support network with refugee and immigration services or with a church group that was supporting them, so there was great communication between the organizations that were supporting refugees and the school so that we could help our refugee families acclimate as much as possible into the school setting. (EG2, T3, p. 1)

A secondary teacher noted what she used to see with Catholic Relief Services assisting refugees, saying, “I used to see them a lot bringing several in. He would be their spokesperson. Haven’t seen that lately. I’ve seen more families coming in and signing their students up” (SG, S1, p. 23). Participant A2 noted that often community organizations helped with the basic needs of refugee students since that was an area that needed to be addressed even before academics could be a focus.

**Theme Three: Cultural differences and the role they play.** The challenge of cultural differences was discussed often in the focus group interviews. A parent participant spoke with passion regarding how it clashed with home:

I know they came from a community that so many things they think this is not right, this is not right, not only culturally, but also religious ones, too. As much as we try actually to adjust that one in a progressive way, sometime we get into clashes with them because they see their peers in the schools doing something and they come back and want to do it straight away. So it's a huge challenge there and I think that is a big difference there.

The cultural differences are huge. (PG, P1, p. 23-24)

Cultural differences, specifically regarding gender biases, was an issue for some of the elementary teachers. One participant noted that some of the refugee children arrived with their parents' biases against women, and that "they weren't as respectful of us because in their native country, maybe women weren't in those positions" (EG3, T6, p. 5). A secondary teacher participant noted how he wished he had more knowledge about his refugee students' cultural backgrounds "so that we could better prepare interactions that could happen, and maybe foresee problems or plan for more positive interactions based on that" (SG, S2, p. 5). One administrator participant listed the challenges with cultural differences for one of her students from the Congo:

I see a big cultural gap in especially how they, how do I say this, their exposure to school and expectations of school. For example, I have a student who's from the Congo, and she's not used to making eye contact. And so it's been very uncomfortable for her to get used to making eye contact. So just some things like that are very different . . . The foods are different. The ways people act are different. The expectations in the classroom are different. (AG, A2, p. 2-3)

**Theme Four: The language barrier and its effect.** Many participants perceived the language barrier as a factor that affected the performance of refugee students. A parent stated, “I mean for example, I come from Sudan and even though Arabic is not the first language there most of the students go to Arabic schools. They don’t see English at all” (PG, P1, p.6). Elementary teachers also felt that the language barrier needed to be addressed. An elementary teacher, when asked about the challenges that refugees face, stated, “The number one is the language barrier initially and the cultural barrier is so great” (EG2, T3, p. 3). The secondary teachers shared their concerns regarding the language barrier, too. One secondary teacher remarked, “I am an exceptional education teacher, so when I have had students who have IEPs and are refugees, I have to get an interpreter. That gets a little complex sometimes” (SG, S1, p. 19). An administrator commented about the language barrier, stating, “We have 55 different countries represented at my school, and how on earth would we be able to communicate? It’s proven to be very difficult” (AG, A4, p. 2).

**Theme Five: The amount and type of parental involvement.** Parental involvement presented as a problem for the various study participants. A parent participant stressed that the amount of parental involvement depended upon the education level of the parents. He stated:

If the father and mother are educated, it will be easier for them to help the children on whatever level they are. If not so, this could be very difficult. In our community, as Iraqis, we help each other. There are some families that the father and mother they don’t know any English. They struggle and they have many children in different levels. They need to be supervised and helped with the homework. So we help each other and whatever, according to the time we have. It’s not all the time, but sometimes. We do help children with the homework for each other. (PG, P5, p. 32)

An elementary teacher participant noted that the refugee parents want the best for their children, but that they “don’t always understand . . . in an education situation what the responsibilities are all the time” (EG3, T5, p. 10). Overall, the administrators noted that, though they feel that refugee parents do care and want to be involved, they do not get a tremendous amount of parental involvement with regard to visiting the schools and attending meetings.

**Theme Six: The effect of past experiences on refugee performance.** Past experiences were perceived by several participants as a factor in the performance of refugee students. Though the parents spoke mainly of the lack of educational experiences that their children had in the past, the teachers and administrators also shared their perception of possible past experiences that were affecting their refugee students’ performance. One elementary teacher described what she perceived was occurring with some of her students:

You can’t tell me that a student has lived in a refugee camp where they’ve seen a parent murdered isn’t suffering from PTSD. And PTSD can have long lingering effects. And the two primary ones that we would focus on with kids is inability to focus and concentrate and memory issues, short term memory issues. And if it doesn’t get into the short term memory, it’s not going to stay in the long term memory. (EG1, T2, p. 18)

A secondary teacher participant referred to the trauma from past experiences that refugee students may face when he stated, “There’s a lot of potential emotional issues that children can be seen, or been in violence or they’ve seen or have been in refugee camps for so long. And there’s a psychological element to that. . .” (SG, S3, p. 7). An administrator spoke of cultural differences combined with the refugee students’ past experiences:

I was going to find some way to work PTSD into it. That depending upon what their refugee situation is, what they’re leaving, what they’re fleeing, even things like fire drills

and loud noises can be very disturbing for some kids. Or a uniformed officer with a drug dog. We look at that generally as, it's a good thing, they're running the dogs today, whereas you might be in an environment where a uniformed person carrying a dog means a very bad thing for them. So it's cultural, but it's also that safety and security issue. (AG, A5, p. 3).

**Theme Seven: Relationships and the role they play.** The need to build relationships was discussed as key to improving refugee students' performance in this study. A parent participant shared his perception of why his daughter loved going to school, stating, "So I think she would not have loved the school unless or until she felt that love from the school itself, whether it's from the teachers, whether it's from the peers, whether it's from her school colleagues or whatever" (PG, P1, p. 19). With regard to relationships, one elementary participant noted, "They recognize people who have an open heart" (EG1, T2, p. 3). Likewise, a secondary teacher participant stated, ". . . if a student doesn't think that you care about them as an individual, they are not going to perform for you" (SG, S4, p. 4). An administrator who serves a mainly homogeneous population said, "I think the biggest issue for our students is seclusion" (AG, A1, p. 3). This participant felt that the refugee students stood out because they were different in her school, and they could not make peer connections.

**Theme Eight: Resources and materials to support refugees and teachers.** The need for more resources and materials surfaced as a concern in the various focus group interviews. The refugee parents were overall pleased with the resources that were provided by the school and school division, but one parent spoke of the various translated documents that come home to parents, voicing a concern that the documents do not necessarily come home in the languages that the parents understand. He stated, "We get the letters and the communication in English and



Spanish. We don't know English, and Spanish is completely strange to us. It's like Chinese" (PG, P5, p. 28). The elementary teachers shared how they perceived that having adequate resources and materials would positively affect the performance of refugee students. Participant T3 said that she would tell others from another school district to be sure to ensure that the students had access to tutoring opportunities from community members and parent volunteers, as well as peers. A secondary teacher participant expressed her frustrations that there were not enough ESL teachers to support her refugee students, commenting, "I mean, it's the simple stuff that we take for granted, that we don't even understand that they don't know. And we don't have enough support for our students at our school and it's frustrating" (SG, S4, p. 10). An administrator at a school that has an ESL teacher as an itinerant only, who is not at the school on a daily basis, noted, "So there is no continuum or consistency of services that they're provided" (AG, A1, p. 6).

**Theme Nine: The need for staff development and training for teachers.** Though staff development was not discussed by the refugee parents, it was referred to often by the teachers and administrators. An elementary teacher participant shared her concern regarding the lack of staff development and the need for training, saying, "Just not knowing, it's the fact of not knowing and understanding how the coping and all that stuff. . ." (EG3, T4, p. 13). A secondary teacher who had previously provided staff development to other teachers spoke about the need for sensitivity training for the teachers so they could support the children with traumatic past experiences:

But when we're dealing with folks that may be coming from Afghanistan or Iraq, or someplace like that, war torn areas, then you're going to get a lot of the refugees...or Egypt as well...And there's going to be some, how do we, how do we prepare for these

students who may have lost their parents or seen their family members killed by maybe an American or maybe somebody from some other group? But we have to be prepared for those sorts things, and I *don't* [emphasis added] think it's best to leave it at, leave the teachers at being said, "You're going to be getting these students and that's it. Good luck to you." I hope that's not the message that the teachers take away from things, but it's possible that that's what they do take away. (SG, S6, p. 21)

An administrator shared that he would like to bring quality staff development to his teachers from groups that work extensively with refugee students:

I mean, it needs to be...there are agencies like Commonwealth Catholic Charities and United Methodist Family Services. There are agencies that deal with refugees every day and really get deep into it. That would be helpful for us to have quality training and in-service . . . (AG, A5, p. 12)

As previously noted, these nine themes will be referenced further in chapter five. The findings will be detailed regarding each of the themes. Implications for each finding, as well as suggestions for future research, will also be addressed in chapter five.

## Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceived as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. The experiences of refugees and their parents in this central Virginia school division, partnered with the experiences of teachers and administrators with refugee students and families, could provide insight for educators and policy makers as they work to provide opportunities for these students to gain access to the curriculum and help them achieve at higher rates. With the accountability in place for all schools to meet the needs of all students (No Child Left Behind, 2001), researching factors affecting the performance of refugees could be the key to moving these ELLs in the direction of success and increasing student achievement. Data were collected during focus group interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators to learn more about and engage in meaningful dialog about this increasingly present population of students and academic strategies that help them to be successful. This study had one overarching research question:

1. What are the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

The sub-questions were:

- What do parents perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do teachers perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?
- What do administrators perceive as factors that affect the performance of refugee students?

This chapter begins with an overview of the findings from the study. The next section

discussed the implications that related to each finding. The researcher then made suggestions for future studies regarding the performance of refugee students. Lastly, the researcher reflected on the study, including the process and interactions with the participants.

### **Summary of Findings**

Findings for this qualitative study were based on the data collected through in-depth focus group interviews with refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who had refugees in their schools. The following nine findings were derived from the themes that emerged from the data analysis presented in chapter four: improvements needed in communication, the need for community support, cultural differences and the role they play, the language barrier and its effect, the amount and type of parental involvement, the effect of past experiences on refugee performance, relationships and the role they play, resources and materials to support refugees and teachers, and the need for staff development and training for teachers.

**Finding 1. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the lack of proper communication affects the performance of refugee students.**

Communication between students and teachers, as well as between teachers and parents, was a widely discussed topic in all of the focus groups. Specifically, the parent participants wanted better communication with parents by way of translated documents. The elementary teachers mentioned strategies they had used to improve communication with their refugee students and families, such as finding interpreters. This group also spoke of the need to have good communication with organizations that support refugees. A secondary teacher noted that the students had difficulty communicating with each other or understanding what the other students were trying to say, perhaps contributing to their students' lower performance rates. An

administrator summed up the administrators' concern about lack of communication hindering refugee students' progress:

. . .honestly it's the most expensive thing, is the thing we need the most, and that is a way for me to be able to communicate to a parent who speaks Swahili or that speaks Arabic or that speaks...oftentimes we find ourselves using the kid as the translator . . . (AG, A5, p. 17)

According to Good et al. (2010), various factors work together to minimize the achievement of English language learners. These researchers, from their focus group interviews with parents and teachers, identified five themes that contributed to the barriers of academic achievement of English learners. One of these themes was communication. Isik-Ercan (2012) noted that parents could not advocate for the recognition of their diverse needs and rights for school services. In addition, because of the parents' inability to communicate, refugee parents often did not attend school functions.

**Finding 2. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the amount of focused community support provided to refugees and schools affects the performance of refugee students.**

All of the focus groups discussed the need for consistent community support in order to help their students to perform at higher rates. Two of the parents felt that schools could partner with community organizations to provide additional support to refugee students and parents. One participant said, "I think at some point I remember, there are organizations providing volunteers to refugee children, but maybe if the schools could also come up with something like this or maybe they just devote some of the time" (PG, P1, p. 28). This participant also suggested that schools should partner with the churches in order to recruit volunteers to work with refugee

students. Two of the elementary teacher participants discussed how working with community members for additional support for the refugee students was a successful strategy. They spoke of having a good support network with refugee and immigration services or with a church group that was supporting the refugees and adopting families, helping them to acclimate to the school setting. Similarly, the secondary teachers discussed that using community support had shown positive results with refugee students. One participant noted how he helped the refugees connect with community organizations, such as churches, for additional support. Another secondary teacher shared her concerns with community support, noting that she had not seen as many representatives from Catholic Relief Services assisting refugees as she had seen in previous years. Administrator participants felt that refugee students needed their basic needs met before they could focus on learning, and that community organizations, such as churches, often helped the refugee families with these needs.

Research documents a need for community support for refugees as well. Good et al. (2010) suggested providing welcome centers, community liaison positions, peer-to-peer mentors, teacher advisory programs, tutors, counselors, parent support groups, and referrals to community agencies such as health and social services to support student success in order to provide the necessary support for refugee parents and children. Other researchers looked to find ways to bridge the gap for refugee students by creating community organizations to support them and their families. Family and Communities Educating, or F.A.C.E., was implemented in Lexington, KY, providing opportunities for refugee families to participate in their children's education. This program has been successful in creating positive changes for refugees and immigrant students (Cairo et al., 2012). Moreover, programs in the community were put in place by President Obama in 2014, as noted by the Department of Education (2013), that would benefit

refugee students and all English language learners. The Promise Neighborhoods Program, for example, provided grants to support these families from cradle to career with reforms, community service, and family and community support.

**Finding 3. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that cultural differences play a large role in the performance of refugee students.**

Each of the participants shared their perceptions about cultural differences and the effect they had on refugee students' performance. Several of the parent participants referred to the cultural differences as "huge" or "remarkable" when they spoke of them. They discussed cultural differences that ranged from hugging friends to foods and religion that affected their children each day. Elementary and secondary teachers shared the perception that some refugees were unaccustomed to taking direction from female teachers due to gender biases in their cultures. They also expressed the desire to understand more about the refugee students' cultures so they could be better prepared to support them in the classroom. Some administrators expressed the perception that different cultures viewed schooling, or education, as less important than others, causing those refugee students to perform at lower levels than others.

As noted by Isik-Ercan (2012), the clash between the cultural values of family and the popular culture in the mainstream society may lead to further alienation of the child from the home culture and family. Refugee parents tend to want their children to integrate with the host country, while maintaining their cultural beliefs. Unfortunately, many refugee students lose their cultural identity as they work to blend in with the mainstream groups. McBrien (2005) noted "cultural dissonance" wherein "children acquire the language and skills of their new culture more quickly than their parents do, resulting in family conflicts" (p. 332). According to

Barowsky and McIntyre (2010), if teachers have knowledge of and respect for the culture, they have a better chance of building a relationship with the children.

**Finding 4. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the language barrier affects the performance of refugee students.**

The language barrier was a topic that emerged in each of the focus groups. Several of the parent participants viewed the language barrier as the biggest challenge that their students faced. They stressed that the students come from different backgrounds with no access to English, and when they arrive in the United States and must learn English, it impacts their performance. Elementary and secondary teachers noted their perception that the language barrier that was present for their refugee students caused challenges for the students. One participant commented, “. . . obviously we don’t know all of these languages, and that’s an obvious barrier when you’re trying to help the child” (EG3, T6, p. 6). The teachers expressed the need for more interpreters to assist them in breaking down this language barrier. Several of the administrators thought that their teachers would see communication or the language barrier as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. One participant specifically thought that the language barrier would be what teachers perceived as the biggest barrier, especially in terms of instructing their refugee students appropriately on grade level.

Research showed that refugee parents felt they could not be involved in their children’s schooling beyond parent-teacher conferences because of the language barrier, since translators were only provided during parent-teacher conferences or other important occasions (Isik-Ercan, 2012). Vera et al. (2012), in their survey of 239 parents of English language learners, also found the language barrier as one of the most common barriers to parental involvement. Similarly,



other researchers noted that the lack of communication between parents and teachers was highly due to the language barrier, but also due to the lack of connectedness and lack of relationship (Good et al., 2010; Harper and Pelletier, 2010).

**Finding 5. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the amount and type of parental involvement affects the performance of refugee students.**

Each of the groups shared their perceptions about refugee parents and their involvement. The parent participants stressed that refugee parents wanted their children to experience success, and explained their perceptions about refugee parental involvement. Participant P1 noted that parental involvement is “a big challenge” due to parents working and trying to help their families (p. 30). According to this parent, it is difficult for refugee parents to visit the school or assist with homework due to time constraints of multiple jobs they may hold. Other parents spoke in depth about the challenge that refugee parents face regarding assisting their children with homework due to the limited education of some refugee parents. An elementary teacher participant described how difficult it was to involve the parents when a child is experiencing difficulties, when the parents are “just in survival mode themselves” and do not quite understand how to help (EG2, T3, p. 4). Secondary teachers noted that it was difficult to get refugee parents to attend parent teacher conferences. Overall, the administrators noted that, though they feel that refugee parents do care and want to be involved, they do not get a tremendous amount of parental involvement with regard to visiting the schools and attending meetings. The teacher groups and the administrators discussed ways of increasing parental involvement, such as having more interpreters for meetings.

Refugee parents who have struggled to bring their children to a place of safety and opportunity have little doubt that future generations will have happier, easier, and more fulfilling lives (Atwell et al., 2009). Schools should not assume that refugee parents are uninterested in their children's education, as many have multiple jobs, cannot speak English, or come from cultures where parental involvement is uncommon (McBrien, 2003). As parental involvement has proven to be important to refugee students' success, researchers (Cairo et al., 2012; Vera et al., 2012; Becerra, 2012) explored programs that have been successful in bringing the parents of English language learners into the schools, while bridging the gap between school and parents. For example, Family and Communities Educating, or F.A.C.E., was implemented in Lexington, KY, providing opportunities for refugee families to participate in their children's education.

**Finding 6. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the past experiences that a refugee student has had will affect his or her performance.**

Past experiences were viewed by the different group members differently. The refugee parent participants, when speaking about the past experiences of refugee children, referred to the minimal schooling experiences that they may have that would affect their performance. One participant, as he referred back to the type of schooling his family experienced in Somalia, stated, "Having siblings in middle school and high school who didn't have previous schooling, and came here maybe a few years ago, they have a challenge in some subjects. An example of them is chemistry, which is very challenging for them" (PG, P4, p. 22). The teachers and administrators also noted the limited past experiences of the refugee students as a contributing factor to their performance. In addition, the teachers and administrators shared their perceptions that traumatic events that the refugee students may have experienced could affect their

performance. As one elementary teacher participant stated, “They may be coming from war, they may be coming from religious persecution, they could be coming from, they could have been exiled from their country because they are not socially accepted” (EG2, T3, p. 6). The teachers and administrators discussed the need for teachers to be prepared to support children who may be experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder.

Researchers have stressed that refugee children are exposed to multiple stressors, both environmental and personal, that can impact their educational success (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). Researchers Barowsky and McIntyre (2010) noted that PTSD is marked by “increased arousal, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and hypervigilance, along with the effort to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the traumatizing events” (p. 164). These researchers expand to explain that when children experience the death (or threat of death) of a parent, it causes personal trauma resulting in PTSD. Bronstein and Montgomery (2011) noted that it is evident that the accumulation of stresses indeed affects the mental health of young refugees, resulting in PTSD, depressive symptoms, and emotional and behavioral problems. Certainly, these issues would be evident in the classroom as the children have difficulty adjusting to their new surroundings. Researchers also noted the limited prior experiences in schooling as a factor in the performance of some refugee students, noting that they often arrive with minimal previous formal education, interrupted schooling, and/or limited English (BRYCS, 2014, “Schools,” para. 1).

**Finding 7. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that relationships between refugees and their teachers and peers, as well as relationships between the school and the parents affect the performance of refugee students.**

Relationships were discussed by each of the groups. Several parent participants spoke about how they knew that the relationships that were being developed in the schools were helping their children to be successful. They perceived that these relationships impacted their children's desire to come to school. One participant shared his perception by stating, "So I think she would not have loved the school unless or until she felt that love from the school itself, whether it's from the teachers, whether it's from the peers, whether it's from her school colleagues or whatever" (PG, P1, p. 19). Teachers and administrators spoke of their perception that a variety of relationships affected the performance of their refugee students, including student to teacher relationships, peer relationships, and teacher to parent relationships. An elementary teacher participant, when discussing student to teacher relationships noted, "They recognize people who have an open heart" (EG1, T2, p. 3). The difficulty with cultural differences, according to several secondary teachers, contributed to a challenge with peer relationships, since many of the children from one culture did not get along with those from another culture. The teachers discussed strategies they used to improve peer relations, such as the use of peer buddies and pairing refugee students up with refugees from the same country when possible. Teachers and administrators shared ways to improve their relationships with parents, to include holding programs at their schools and inviting the parents, as well as taking the time to get to know the parents.

If teachers have knowledge of and respect for the culture, they have a better chance of building a relationship with the children. Moreover, families must be supported, their trust must be gained, and resources should be provided in order to assist them with countering the effects of migration (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010). The importance of the teacher-student relationship cannot be overlooked when looking at the motivation and performance of refugees. Nugent

(2009) discusses how students model their behaviors after their teachers' behaviors and behave based on their teachers' reactions. According to Nugent's study, the classroom environment that the teacher creates is key in motivating a student.

**Finding 8. Refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the availability of resources and materials affects the performance of refugee students.**

Resources and materials were mentioned repeatedly by the various study participants. Some of the specific resources that were mentioned as important to parents with regard to improving refugee student performance included transportation, tutors, and volunteers. One parent noted, "The school could use more volunteers or involve parents and have those students struggling in the classroom, have their homework done at the school before they are released from the school in the evening, it would probably help" (PG, P2, p. 31). Similarly, another parent noted the need for more opportunities for tutoring and extended summer classes for refugee students in order to teach them the basics and better prepare them for school. Yet another parent expressed his opinion that the schools should provide monies to the agencies that support refugees. Teachers and administrators felt that resources, such as churches and volunteers were helpful in supporting refugee students, but that they needed more. They spoke at length about the need for translated documents for parents and interpreters for meetings so that communication between the school and refugee parents could be improved. Some of the teachers and administrators referred to the need for additional ESL teachers as a resource to support refugee students. An administrator at a school that has an ESL teacher as an itinerant only, and who is not at the school on a daily basis, expressed her concern that this very necessary human resource was not available consistently to her refugee students.

Lack of resources and strategies was noted as a reason for parents disconnecting from the schools (Isik-Ercan, 2012). Families must be supported, their trust must be gained, and resources should be provided in order to assist them with countering the effects of migration (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010). In their study of Hmong students participating in three after school programs, Lee and Hawkins (2008) found that after school programs, with more explicit academic instruction, can benefit refugee students by providing them with opportunities to build bridges between school and home and the refugee culture and American culture. In addition, Good et al. (2010) suggested providing welcome centers, community liaison positions, peer-to-peer mentors, teacher advisory programs, tutors, counselors, parent support groups, and referrals to community agencies such as health and social services to support student success in order to provide the necessary support for refugee parents and children.

**Finding 9. Teachers of refugee students and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive that the amount of staff development that the teachers receive affects the performance of refugee students.**

Though refugee parents did not have a concern in this area, teachers and administrators shared their thoughts about staff development, specifically regarding supporting the needs of refugee students. Several of the teachers had previously participated in staff development sessions that they found to be beneficial in helping them to understand the needs of their refugee students. One elementary teacher participant stated that at one school where she had worked, she had implemented “a school wide SIOP program to help inform the classroom teachers on best practice strategies to help second language learners . . . it also helped equip classroom teachers with more strategies to work with our refugee population” (EG2, T3, p. 2). Another participant mentioned how a staff development she had received from Commonwealth Catholic Charities

when a group of Somali refugees had entered her school had helped her with that population of students. When she talked about the lack of training she had received about other refugee populations, she stated, “I wish I had had that same kind background building to have more of a window into what they were coming from and what they needed from us and what we could provide for them” (EG2, T3, p. 3). In fact, several participants stated the desire to have staff development regarding post-traumatic stress disorder to prepare them for refugee students who may have experienced trauma. One participant, who had previously provided professional development to teachers regarding how to work with refugee students explained what the teachers needed to know before the refugees arrived in their classrooms:

. . . things such as religion, and culture, and what were the governmental circumstances or political circumstances that led them to the . . . to have to come to this country, and what they are going to face when they get into the community. (SG, S6, p. 20)

An administrator shared that he would like to bring quality staff development to his teachers from groups that work extensively with refugee students, such as Commonwealth Catholic Charities.

Faez (2012) stated, “Given the unprecedented diversity in North American classrooms, there is an urgent need for a stronger commitment from teacher educators and educational institutions to prepare [teacher candidates] to work in linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse classrooms” (p. 79). With the rise in the numbers of refugee children in public schools in the United States, pre-service teachers require proper training in order to meet their needs (Hooks, 2008). As a result of their study of 346 students on the east and west coast, Echevarria et al. (2008) discovered that students whose teachers had been trained on the use of SIOP performed at higher levels than those whose teachers had not been trained. In essence, teachers

must be armed with a thorough understanding of the emotional road that these refugee children have traveled in order to properly support them (Barowsky & McIntyre, 2010).

### Implications for Practice

Nine major themes that aligned to existing literature emerged from the data in this study. The results presented in chapter four illustrated the perceptions that refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators with refugees in their schools had regarding the factors that affect the performance of refugee students. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher would recommend the following implications, in order for school leaders to better support refugee students, their parents, and their teachers.

**Implication 1. School leaders should work to find ways to better communicate with refugee students and their parents, providing translated documents in various languages, as well as interpreters for meetings.** Better means of communication will allow refugee students and parents to understand the structure of school. Translated documents, specifically, will keep parents informed of happenings in the school.

**Implication 2. School leaders should develop partnerships with organizations that support refugees, churches, and volunteer organizations to provide additional assistance to refugee students and their families.** By developing these partnerships, volunteers would be available to come to the schools and serve as mentors or tutors for the refugee students. Families could also receive the support that they need when churches and organizations are more involved.

**Implication 3. School leaders should prepare teachers for the different cultures that will make up their school population. They should also find ways to recognize and celebrate the various cultures in their schools.** ESL teachers could research the countries from



which the refugee students are arriving and provide information about the various cultures to the classroom teachers. Programs, such as International Night, can be implemented to celebrate the different countries and cultures represented in the school.

**Implication 4. School leaders should find ways to alleviate the language barrier that is present with refugee students and their families. Suggestions include hiring staff that speak various languages and utilizing parent volunteers to assist with interpretation and translation of documents.** By maintaining a more diverse faculty and staff, the possibility of providing students and their families the opportunity to speak with those who speak their language would be increased. If parents assist with interpretation and translation, they would feel valued and appreciated.

**Implication 5. School leaders should put programs in place to encourage refugee parents to participate in school activities, including English classes for parents and interpreters at parent teacher conferences and other meetings.** Refugee parents want to participate in their children's learning. When they receive the assistance that they need, such as these English classes, parental involvement could increase. Schools should design programs that occur at various times to accommodate refugee parents' work schedules.

**Implication 6. School leaders should research the refugee groups that are attending their schools to determine what their past experiences may be. By communicating with the organizations that support refugees, they may be able to find out more about the groups that are arriving.** School leaders should have their teachers trained to support students who may be experiencing PTSD, as well as provide remediation programs for students who may have had little previous schooling before entering the United States.

**Implication 7. School leaders should work to forge relationships between the school and refugee parents and students. They should encourage teachers to build positive relationships with their refugee students by learning more about where they are from and incorporating their experiences into their instruction.** Relationships can be forged with students by incorporating literature from their country into the lesson. Parents should be invited to the school often so that they feel welcomed and involved.

**Implication 8. School leaders should look for funding sources to provide various resources, such as tutors, additional ESL teachers, translated documents, and interpreters, so that refugee students and their parents can be better supported.** School divisions may consider writing grants in order to garner these funds. Many grant opportunities are available if school leaders dedicate time to research them.

**Implication 9. School leaders should look for funding sources to provide quality, ongoing staff development to teachers of refugee students, to include instructional strategies that work with refugee students, how to recognize signs of PTSD and what to do for children suffering from PTSD, and training on different cultures that will make up their school population. Institutions of higher education should also develop training programs for pre-service teachers with regard to working with refugee students.** When teachers have the appropriate training, they should feel more prepared to successfully support refugee students and meet their needs. Staff development should be meaningful and ongoing, such as monthly professional learning communities focusing on refugees, or quarterly training from organizations that support refugees and assist them with resettlement.

## **Suggestions for Future Studies**

This study focused on one school division in Central Virginia. In addition, the refugee parents that participated in the study were educated English-speakers, other than two women who were interpreted by the husband of one. A researcher may duplicate this study with school divisions other than the Piedmont Rolling Hills School Division. Moreover, a study could be completed in which the refugee parents were not educated English-speakers. Being armed with the knowledge that the number of refugees entering the United States will continue to increase in future years, and after a review of the findings of this study, additional research studies should be considered to examine research questions like:

- What are the most effective leadership practices for a building principal with regard to supporting refugee students?
- What are the English and Math SOL pass rates of refugee students who have been in the United States for fewer than five years as compared to those who have been in the United States for five or more years?
- How can U.S. policy regarding refugee resettlement be enhanced so that refugee agencies are better able to support refugees for an extended length of time, with additional resources and trainings for refugee families and schools that serve refugee students?
- How effective are tutoring programs for refugee students?
- How does ongoing assessment and analysis of data help to improve the performance of refugee students?
- What do refugee students perceive as factors affecting their performance?

## **Reflections**

Completing this study provided the researcher with truly transforming experiences from the moment she completed her Human Subjects training (Appendix W) to receiving IRB approval (Appendix X) to the final moments of data analysis and reporting. She was fortunate to be able to meet with and talk to refugee parents who were passionate about sharing their perspectives on their children's educational experiences while here in the United States, as well as advocating for themselves with regard to what they perceived would assist their children and their refugee community. The researcher sat with teachers and learned about their varying experiences with refugee students, and she witnessed how touched they were about what these children may have endured before coming to the United States. The administrators with whom the researcher spoke had the opportunity to share what they needed as additional supports so that their teachers could be better armed to help their refugee students to be successful. The conversations that took place during this study enhanced this researcher's respect for her fellow administrators who are committed to supporting the needs of all students.

As the researcher is currently a principal in an elementary school with refugee students from various countries, including Nepal, Sudan, Egypt, and the Congo, she hoped to learn more about the perceptions of refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators with refugee students in their schools, so that she could become an even better school leader, making changes to her leadership practices based on what she found. The researcher feels that this research will also benefit those outside of the walls of her school, though. The words from the parents about what they think is great about the schools, as well as what they hope could be improved, in addition to the pleas from the teachers and administrators about needed resources for their schools, are valuable to any school leader hoping to enhance their programs for their

refugee students. The researcher's overall goal is to impact educational leaders who serve refugee students in their schools. Public school leaders will be able to benefit from this research as they plan programs for their schools and support their teachers as they plan effective and appropriate instruction and experiences for their refugee students. The researcher also hopes to have universities utilize this research as they design programs for pre-service teachers. As pre-service teachers leave universities better prepared to teach refugee students, and as school divisions provide supports and staff development for their schools, the performance of refugee students can surely improve.

The words of one of the participants in this study say so much, "I refer to my classrooms as the United Nations, because we've got everybody from everywhere in the world in there and it really does enrich our content experience" (SG, S4, p. 14-15). The classrooms now are representative of the world. Another participant noted that everyone should simply keep a close eye on the news because "whatever's happening in the world, there's a very good chance that it's going to be coming your way" (SG, S6, p. 16). This research will help school leaders to be prepared for these wonderful children that will soon arrive at their schools. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." These refugee students, like all of our students, need to be able to receive quality education so that they can go and change the world and make it a better place for all!

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## Appendix A

### Permission letter from McBrien

Wed 3/18/2015 8:33 AM  
McBrien, Jody <jlmcbr@sar.usf.edu>  
Re: A Second Chance for Refugee Students

To: Katina Otey

 We removed extra line breaks from this message.

[Bing Maps](#) + Get more apps

---

Nice to hear from you, Katina, and all the best on your dissertation and defense!

Yes, of course, you can adapt the strategies and credit the source. I'm not quite sure which article you are using, but I am glad to help!

Best,

Jody Lynn McBrien, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, College of Education University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee  
8350 North Tamiami Trail, B322  
Sarasota, FL 34243  
Visit the College of Education website: <http://sarasota.usf.edu/coe>

"In just one day, 200 million work hours are consumed by women collecting water for their families. This is equivalent to building 28 Empire State Buildings every day"  
(<http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/women/>)

---

From: Katina Otey <[kwotey1@vt.edu](mailto:kwotey1@vt.edu)>  
Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2015 9:57 PM  
To: McBrien, Jody  
Subject: A Second Chance for Refugee Students

Hello Dr. McBrien,

I am hoping the email finds you!!

I bring you greetings from Richmond, VA! I have been researching the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students in Central Virginia. During my research, I came upon your great article. I really like your list of "Strategies for Success." I am wondering if I can adapt your list to include in my dissertation. I would certainly credit you and list your work in my references.

I am in the final stages of editing my dissertation and would love to hear from you as soon as possible.

Thank you so much for your consideration!

Katina Otey  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Tech

## **Appendix B**

### Informed Consent

#### **VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

#### Informed Consent for Participants

#### in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

#### Focus Group Interview

Title of Project: Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia

Investigator(s): Katina Otey and Dr. Carol Cash

Co-investigator(s): Dr. Jodie Brinkmann, Anna Hatfield, and Christina Vitek

#### I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to examine what refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools perceive as factors affecting the performance of refugee students. The experiences of refugees and their parents in this central Virginia school district, partnered with the experiences of teachers and administrators with refugee students and families, could provide insight for educators and policy makers as they work to provide opportunities for these students to gain access to the curriculum and assist them in being successful.

School leaders are held accountable for ensuring that appropriate and quality instruction is taking place in the classrooms so that refugees and all students experience growth and achievement, as measured on formal and informal assessments. Researching perceived factors affecting the



performance of refugees could be the key to moving these ELLs in the direction of success and increasing student achievement.

## II. Procedures

Upon giving informed consent, you will participate in focus group interviews for approximately 45-60 minutes with five to six others in your like group (refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, or administrators who have refugee students in their school). You will answer questions regarding their perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students and how you see refugees performing in school. The focus group interviews will be recorded utilizing two recording devices. In addition, the interviewer and an assistant will take notes. Following the focus group interviews, the researcher or assistant will transcribe all interviews using transcriber software and prepare for coding. The interviews will take place at a convenient location in your school division to be determined later.

## III. Risks

There are minimal risks associated with this study. The researcher will address participant anonymity by using pseudonyms for individuals in the focus groups, as well as for the school district. As noted previously, the central Virginia school district in this study has been referred to as Piedmont Rolling Hills School District. Additionally, the researcher will modify your characteristics (e.g., gender) and school district, as needed, to enhance your anonymity, as long as this modification does not compromise the data from the focus group interviews.

## IV. Benefits

Participants will benefit greatly from this study. Parent participants will benefit as administrators learn more about what they perceive as factors that affect their children's performance. With administrators armed with this information, they can put programs in place to provide the supports that refugee students and parents need in order to be successful. Teacher participants will benefit from the study since their administrators who will better understand the needs of refugees will better support them. In addition, teachers will have a clearer understanding of what refugee parents concerns are regarding the educational experiences of their students and their

ability to support them at home and at school. Administrators will benefit from the study as they obtain information regarding the parents', teachers', and other administrators' perceived factors affecting the performance of refugee students. With this information, they can determine which programs should be implemented in schools that will support refugee students and parents and assist refugee students in being successful in schools. The overall goal of the study is to ensure that the administrators, who are accountable for the achievement of all students, including refugee students, are provided with information that will help them meet the needs of this special group of students. No promise or guarantees of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate. You may contact the researcher at a later time for a summary of the research results.

#### V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

This researcher will assure that your information will be kept confidential. The data will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home, and on the researcher's and assistant's password protected computers. The transcriber, if not the researcher, will sign an agreement to ensure confidentiality, and provide all original materials to the researcher, making no additional copies. Any and all research data with identifiable information will be destroyed after completion of the dissertation defense. In addition, all recorded focus group interviews and other confidential files will be destroyed after completion of the dissertation defense. The researcher will address your anonymity by using pseudonyms for individuals in the focus groups, as well as for the school district.

Members of the researcher's dissertation committee may view copies of transcripts. It is also possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes since the IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in the research. There may be professional publications, articles, and presentations resulting from this study. This information will be made clear to you before research begins, and you will be asked to sign the informed consent.

## VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation given to you for participating in this study.

## VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used. You are also free to choose not to answer questions in the focus group interview with no risk of penalty.

## VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will have the following responsibilities:

- I agree to answer the focus group protocol questions honestly and to maintain professional confidentiality in relation to other participants' responses. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree to allow the researcher to record the interview. Initial \_\_\_\_\_

## IX. Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Subject signature

Should you have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct and research subjects'

rights you may contact:

Investigator Telephone/e-mail

Katina Otey

804-426-2065

kwotey1@vt.edu

Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

Dr. Carol Cash

804-836-3611

ccash48@vt.edu

Departmental Reviewer/Department Head Telephone/e-mail

David M. Moore

Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research Compliance

2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)

Blacksburg, VA 24060

540-231-4991

moored@vt.edu

[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]

## Appendix C

### Parent Group Demographics

What is your gender?	Male Female  circle one
How many children do you have in public schools?	
In what grade levels are your children?	Elementary      Middle      High  circle one
From what country do you originate?	
In what year did you come to the United States?	

## Appendix D

### Teacher Group Demographics

What is your gender?  (Circle one)	Male  Female
In what grade (s) do you work?	
How many years have you been teaching?  (Circle one)	2-5 years  6-10 years  11-15 years  16-20 years  21 or more years
What is your ethnicity?  (If you choose not to answer, please leave blank)	
What is your age group?  (Circle one)	21-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  I wish not to answer

## Appendix E

### Administrator Group Demographics

<p>What is your gender?</p> <p>(Circle one)</p>	<p>Male</p> <p>Female</p>
<p>In what administrative role (s) do you serve?</p> <p>(Circle one)</p>	<p>Principal</p> <p>Associate Principal</p> <p>Assistant Principal</p> <p>Resource Teacher</p> <p>Administrative Aide</p> <p>Other _____</p>
<p>How many years have you been an administrator?</p> <p>(Circle one)</p>	<p>2-5 years</p> <p>6-10 years</p> <p>11-15 years</p> <p>16-20 years</p> <p>21 or more years</p>
<p>What is your ethnicity?</p> <p>(If you choose not to answer, please leave blank)</p>	
<p>What is your age group?</p> <p>(Circle one)</p>	<p>21-30</p> <p>31-40</p> <p>41-50</p> <p>51-60</p> <p>61+</p> <p>I wish not to answer</p>

## Appendix F

### Letter to Teacher and Administrator Participants

Katina Otey  
11419 Rose Bowl Dr.  
Glen Allen, VA 23059

October 2014

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am currently a doctoral candidate working on my EdD in Educational Leadership through Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). In order to complete the dissertation requirement, I am doing a qualitative study on refugee students and their performance. My dissertation title is “Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia.” My study has one overarching research question: *What are the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students?*

I will be interviewing (in five different focus groups) one group of five to seven administrators of schools with a high concentration of refugee students, two groups of five to seven classroom teachers who have been working with refugee students (one elementary group and one secondary group), and two groups of five to seven refugee parents (one elementary group and one secondary group) to determine the perceptions each group has regarding the factors that affect the performance of refugee students. I am hoping that you will participate in my study, as the results will be important in addressing the barriers to the achievement of this rapidly increasing group of students. Before you agree to the interview I can confirm that:

- The school division has given permission for this research to be carried out.
- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your anonymity will be maintained at all times and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation, nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- A copy of the interview questions will be sent to you seven days before the interview.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.



I sincerely hope that you will be able to help me with my research. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at kwotey1@vt.edu. Once I hear from you, I will set up an interview that will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour outside of contractual hours. If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it, please feel free to email me at the above email address.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Sincerely,

Katina Otey  
Virginia Tech

## Appendix G

### Script for Commonwealth Catholic Charities

Hello, this is Cao Kim and I'm calling from Commonwealth Catholic Charities. Mrs. Katina Otey is working on a project to learn about the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students. She will be talking to refugee parents, teachers of refugee students, and administrators who have refugee students in their schools. This topic is important since Mrs. Otey hopes to share the perceptions about which she learns with administrators so that they can better support refugee students in their schools.

I offered my assistance to Mrs. Otey to solicit parent participants since I work so closely with you all. I am calling to ask if you would be willing to join Mrs. Otey and/or her assistant, along with other parent participants, to answer a few questions and tell her your thoughts regarding your child's school experiences. Your participation is completely voluntary. This phone call serves as an invitation for you to participate.

The group discussion will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Once I secure parent participants, Mrs. Otey and I will be contacting you again with a date, time, and location for the group discussion.

Would you be interested in participating?

**Yes**

Great. I just have a couple of questions to ask to make sure you meet our study criteria:

1. Are you a refugee who has entered and gained residence in the U.S. within the past five years?
2. Do you have children that attend school in one of these twelve schools in Piedmont Rolling Hills School District? *[List the twelve identified schools that serve refugee students.]*

*[If no to either question, politely explain that they do not meet your study criteria].*

*[If passed screening questions]* What I need to do now is share your information with Mrs. Otey. Can I share your mailing address with her? Mrs. Otey will be sending you a confirmation letter in the next couple of days that gives you all of the details about the meeting, including the date and time and a map to [location]. I will also contact you again by phone to further explain the details of the meeting. Please know that you can call me at \_\_\_\_\_ if you have any questions about the meeting or if you need to cancel for any reason.

Thanks so much for agreeing to participate. Do you have any questions before we hang up?  
*[Answer any questions they might have.]*

Okay. Mrs. Otey will be sending you a letter soon and I'll also be contacting you again with details about the meeting! Thank you again! Talk to you soon!

**Borderline**

*[Prod a little bit and then...]* Okay. I understand that you aren't sure whether you want to be part of the discussion. *[Repeat screening questions above]*. Would you mind if I put your name down as an alternate?

**No**

*[Prod a little bit and then...]* Okay. Thank you for your time. Take care.

## Appendix H

### Letter Requesting Parent Participation

October 2014

Dear Parent:

I am currently a doctoral candidate working on my EdD in Educational Leadership through Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). In order to complete the dissertation requirement, I am doing a qualitative study on refugee students and their performance. My dissertation title is “Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia.” My study has one overarching research question: *What are the perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students?*

I will be interviewing (in five different focus groups) one group of five to seven administrators of schools with a high concentration of refugee students, two groups of five to seven classroom teachers who have been working with refugee students (one elementary group and one secondary group), and two groups of five to seven refugee parents (one elementary group and one secondary group) to determine the perceptions each group has regarding the factors that affect the performance of refugee students. I know that Mr. Kim from Commonwealth Catholic Charities contacted you regarding your participation. I am hoping that you will participate in my study, as the results will be important in addressing the barriers to the achievement of this rapidly increasing group of students. I can confirm that:

- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your anonymity will be maintained at all times and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation, nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- A copy of the interview questions will be sent to you seven days before the interview.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to help me with my research. I will contact you personally within the next several days to hopefully set up an interview that will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour if you are in agreement. If you have any queries concerning the nature of the

research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please email me at kwotey1@vt.edu.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Sincerely,

Katina Otey  
Virginia Tech

## Appendix I

### Follow up Letter to Teacher/Administrator Participants

Katina Otey  
11419 Rose Bowl Dr.  
Glen Allen, VA 23059

October 2014

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a focus group interview as part of my research. As previously agreed the interview will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ in room \_\_\_\_\_ starting at \_\_\_\_\_. The interview should take no longer than 45 minutes to an hour. The title of my research project is “Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia,” and I am interested in exploring the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents regarding these factors.

Before the interview goes ahead I would like to confirm that:

- The Superintendent has given permission for this research to be carried out.
- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your anonymity will be maintained at all times and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation, nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- A copy of the interview questions will be sent to you seven days before the interview.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please email me at [kwotey1@vt.edu](mailto:kwotey1@vt.edu).

Thank you for your continuing support

Sincerely,

Katina Otey  
Virginia Tech

## Appendix J

### Follow up Letter to Parent Participants

Katina Otey  
11419 Rose Bowl Dr.  
Glen Allen, VA 23059

October 2014

Dear Parent,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a focus group interview as part of my research. As previously agreed the interview will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ in room \_\_\_\_\_ starting at \_\_\_\_\_. The interview should take no longer than 45 minutes to an hour. The title of my research project is “Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia,” and I am interested in exploring the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents regarding these factors.

Before the interview goes ahead I would like to confirm that:

- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your anonymity will be maintained at all times and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation, nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- A copy of the interview questions will be sent to you seven days before the interview.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please email me at [kwotey1@vt.edu](mailto:kwotey1@vt.edu).

Thank you for your continuing support.

Sincerely,

Katina Otey

## Appendix K

### Permission Letter from Isik-Ercan

**From:** Zeynep Isik-Ercan <isikz@ipfw.edu>

**Date:** July 8, 2014 4:35:35 PM EDT

**To:** "Katina W. Otey (kwotey)" [REDACTED]

**Subject:** Re: A request regarding your research about refugee students

Dear Katina,

It is my pleasure! I am happy that you will undertake a study to learn about immigrant perspectives. You might want to look into my dissertation study, free to access here (under where it says file: [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/ap/10?0::NO:10:P10\\_ACCESSION\\_NUM:osu1253548918#abstract-files](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/ap/10?0::NO:10:P10_ACCESSION_NUM:osu1253548918#abstract-files) ), that have similar questions in the appendices. They are more geared towards "professional and English proficient" immigrant families, quite different from refugee families in the Burmese families. Hope they help! Please keep me updated about your study, sounds very interesting!

Much respect,

Zeynep.

Zeynep Isik-Ercan, M.A., Ph.D.

Assistant Professor in Early Childhood Education

College of Education and Public Policy,



Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne

2101 E. Coliseum Blvd.

Fort Wayne, IN 46805

Office: 1-260-481-6440

Cell: 1-614-266-3648

Office Location: Neff Hall 250P

>>> "Katina W. Otey (kwotey)" [REDACTED] 07/08/14 10:44 AM  
>>>

Dear Dr. Ercan,

I bring you greetings from Richmond, Virginia! I am reaching out to introduce myself to you, thank you for your research regarding refugees, and ask for your support of my future research. I am currently working through Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (known better nationally as Virginia Tech) in an Ed.D program within the School of Education for Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

I am writing to ask permission to utilize your Interview Protocol for Burmese Families, as seen in your study, *In Pursuit of a New Perspective in the Education of Children of the Refugees: Advocacy for the "Family."* I will not necessarily be studying Burmese refugees, so I would need to adapt your tool to fit my study.

I appreciate your consideration of my request for permission to use your Interview Protocol. Any thoughts, concerns, guidance, or suggestions would be gratefully received and considered invaluable. I hope you approve and are pleased that you have inspired further study in such a worthy topic area.

Thank you for your consideration!

KO

Katina W. Otey

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Appendix L

### Parent Focus Group Interview Questions (adapted with permission from Isik-Ercan, 2012)

1. What resources do you need to provide a good education for your child?
2. Has your child had any experiences that may hinder his or her academic performance?
3. Tell me about your communication with your child's teacher?
4. How do you feel when you go to your child's school?
5. What does the principal do to welcome you in the school?
6. How do you think your child's peers view your child in school?
7. How do you think teachers view your child in school?
8. What do you think the challenges your child faces at school are?
9. Does your child have challenges with cultural differences between school and home?
10. How do you think the school system supports your child? (Services, translation, extra courses, tutoring etc.)
11. How often do you work with your child on homework?

## Appendix M

### Permission Letter from Wagner

**From:** Wagner Tim <twagner@uscsd.k12.pa.us>

**Date:** July 10, 2014 2:56:32 PM EDT

**To:** "Katina W. Otey (kwotey)" [REDACTED]

**Subject:** Re: dissertation research tool

Hi Katina,

Congratulations on your progress -- March 2015 will be here before you know it!

You are welcome to adapt my interview questions for your focus groups -- no problem at all. The APA citation for a dissertation (I'm pretty sure!), is listed below.

If it works for you, I'll look forward to future collaboration.

Thanks,

Tim

Wagner, T.M. (2013). *Supporting refugee children in Pennsylvania public schools* (doctoral dissertation). University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.

--

Dr. Timothy M. Wagner

Gifted Education Coordinator  
Middle School English Language Arts Curriculum Leader  
Upper St. Clair School District  
1825 McLaughlin Run Road  
Upper St. Clair, PA 15241  
w/ +1 412-833-1600 x2530  
m/ +1 412-400-4743  
[twagner@uscscd.k12.pa.us](mailto:twagner@uscscd.k12.pa.us)

On Thu, Jul 10, 2014 at 9:06 AM, Katina W. Otey (kwotey)  
> wrote:

Hello!

Thank you for responding so promptly!

The topic of my dissertation is: Factors that Affect the Achievement of Refugee Students. During my research on refugees , I came upon your dissertation and noted the questions you used in your interviews with teachers. I would like to adapt them to fit my focus group interviews if that is ok.

I am hoping to get approval to begin my research by October or November of this year, and if all goes as planned, I will be defending my dissertation in March of 2015!!!

Maybe after all of this is completed, we could look at other ways to collaborate!

Please let me know if you approve of me adapting your interview questions.

Thanks so much for your help!

KO

Katina W. Otey

[REDACTED]

On Jul 8, 2014, at 9:41 PM, Wagner Tim wrote:

Dear Katina,

Dr. Kerr recently contacted me with a message you had sent related to the refugee work from my dissertation. Thank you so much for reaching out. I am excited for the opportunity to collaborate with you.

Please let me know in what ways you'd like to use my work -- I'm happy to help. In fact, if you're interested, this might be a really great opportunity to eventually compare data

and potentially co-author an article based on our findings.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Thanks,

Tim

--

Dr. Timothy M. Wagner

Gifted Education Coordinator

IB Middle Years Program Coordinator

Middle School English Language Arts Curriculum Leader

Upper St. Clair School District

1825 McLaughlin Run Road

Upper St. Clair, PA 15241

w/ [+1 412-833-1600 x2530](tel:+14128331600x2530)

m/ [+1 412-400-4743](tel:+14124004743)

[twagner@uscscd.k12.pa.us](mailto:twagner@uscscd.k12.pa.us)

## Appendix N

### Teacher Focus Group Interview Questions (adapted with permission from Wagner, 2013)

1. About what year did you begin working with refugee children?
2. Based on your setting and responsibilities, what went well for you when you began working with child refugees?
3. What did you decide to do to support child refugees that had positive results?
4. Why do you think any of the things you mentioned worked well?
5. Based on your setting and responsibilities, what do you wish you had known before you became involved in working with child refugees?
6. What do you think are some of the challenges that refugee students face?
7. Please share some additional barriers that you have encountered when working with refugee students.
8. What did you decide to do about these barriers?
9. What would you tell someone in another district related to the barriers you encountered?
10. What factors do you believe led to these barriers?



## Appendix O

### Administrator Focus Group Interview Questions (adapted with permission from Wagner, 2013)

1. Approximately how long has your school served refugee students?
2. What do you think are some of the challenges that refugee students face?
3. What do you think your teachers see as factors affecting refugee students' performance?
4. What programs have you implemented in your school to help your teachers educate refugee students?
5. Why do you think any of the programs you mentioned worked well?
6. Are there programs that you have implemented that did not work well with refugee students?
7. If the answer to #6 is yes, why do you think they did not work?
8. How do you think you can better support your teachers as they work with refugee students?
9. Are you able to provide support for refugee parents when they come into your building for meetings?
10. What additional supports do you feel you need from your school district or the state to assist you with providing adequate support to refugee students?
11. Do you have programs in place to celebrate the various cultures represented in your school?

## **Appendix P**

### **Focus Group Protocol**

#### Welcome

Thanks for agreeing to be part of the focus group. We appreciate your willingness to participate.

#### Introductions

Researcher/Moderator; Research Assistant

#### Purpose of Focus Groups

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech and I am conducting focus groups to determine perceived factors that affect the performance of refugee students.

I asked you to come in to do a focus group interview with me and need your input. I want you to share your honest and open thoughts with us.

#### Ground Rules

1. We want you to do the talking.
  - We would like everyone to participate.
  - I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. There are no right or wrong answers.
  - Every person's experiences and opinions are important.
  - Speak up whether you agree or disagree.
  - We want to hear a wide range of opinions.
3. What is said in this room stays here.
  - We want folks to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up.
4. We will be tape recording the group.
  - We want to capture everything you have to say.
  - We don't identify anyone by name in our report. You will remain anonymous.
5. Please try to identify yourself by your letter and number each time before you speak.
  - Example: I am P3. I have three children in the public school.
6. My assistant and I will try to avoid nodding or any facial expressions or responses during the entire meeting.

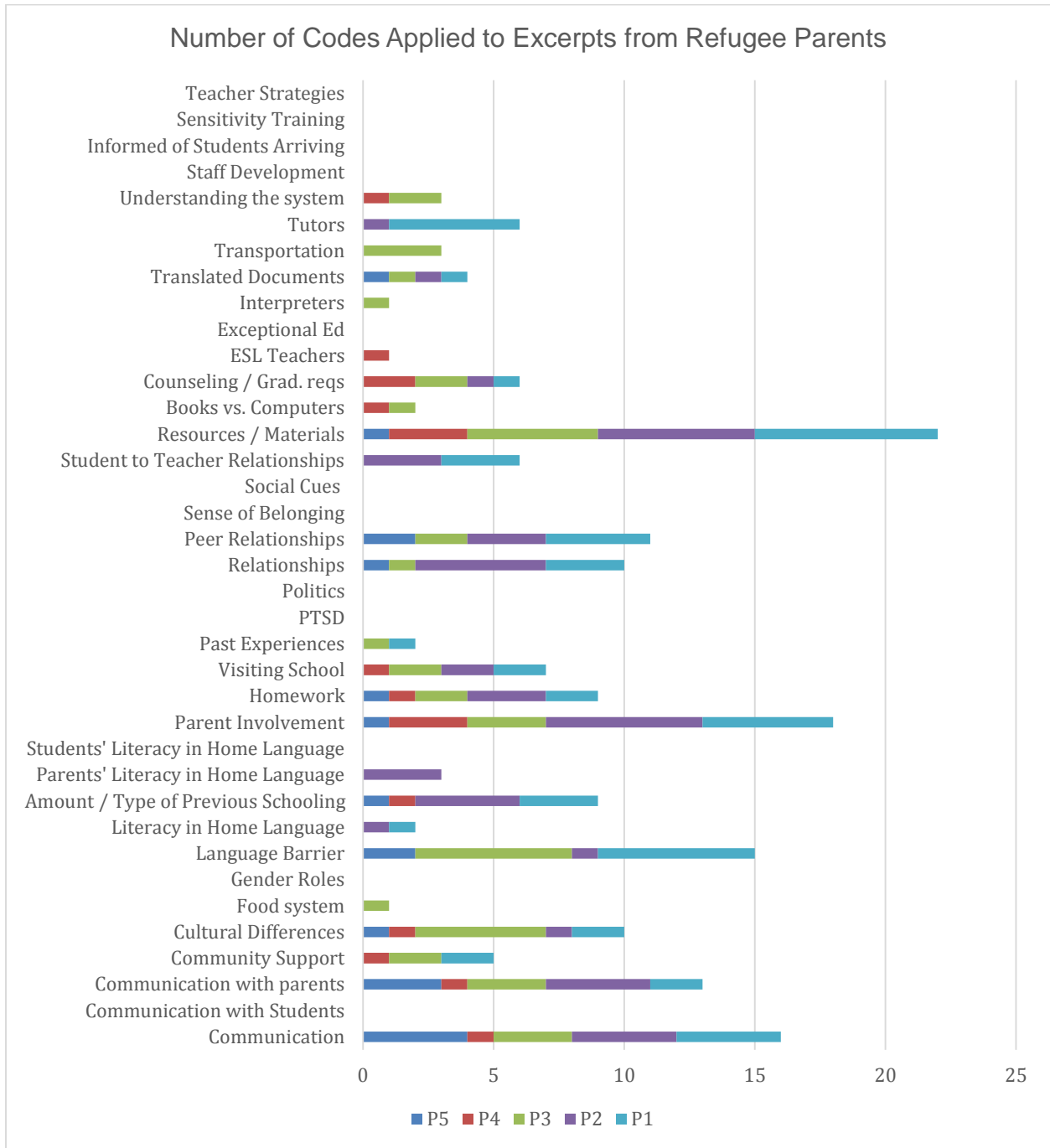
## Appendix Q

### Timeline of the Study

Date	Event
July 11, 2014	Submitted proposal to Committee Chair for approval
mid July-beginning of August 2014	Edited as recommended
August 2014	Submitted proposal to IRB for approval
August 2014	Submitted to HCPS for approval
October 1, 2014	Edited as recommended
October 24 , 2014	Conducted Pilot Parent Focus Group Interviews
October 28, 2014	Conducted Parent Focus Group Interview
November 6, 2014	Conducted Pilot Teacher Focus Group Interviews
November 13, 2014	Conducted Pilot Admin Phone Interview
November 17, 2014	Conducted Administrator Focus Group Interviews
November 13, 2014- November 18, 2014	Conducted Teacher Focus Group Interviews
October 29, 2014- December 2014	Transcribe all Focus Group Interviews
December 2014- February 2015	Complete coding and analysis of data; conclusions
March 2015	Defend dissertation

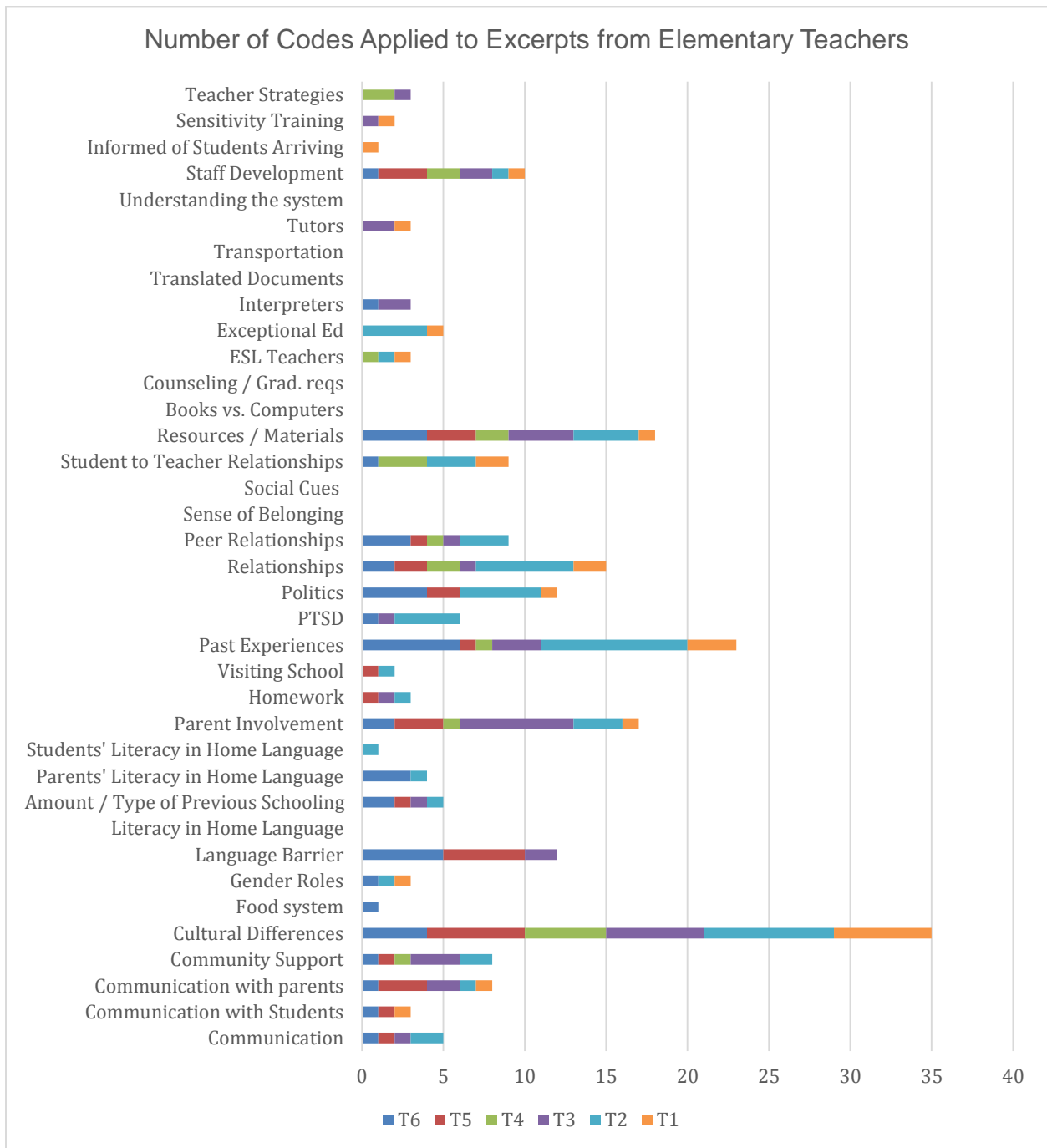
## Appendix R

### Refugee Parents' Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students



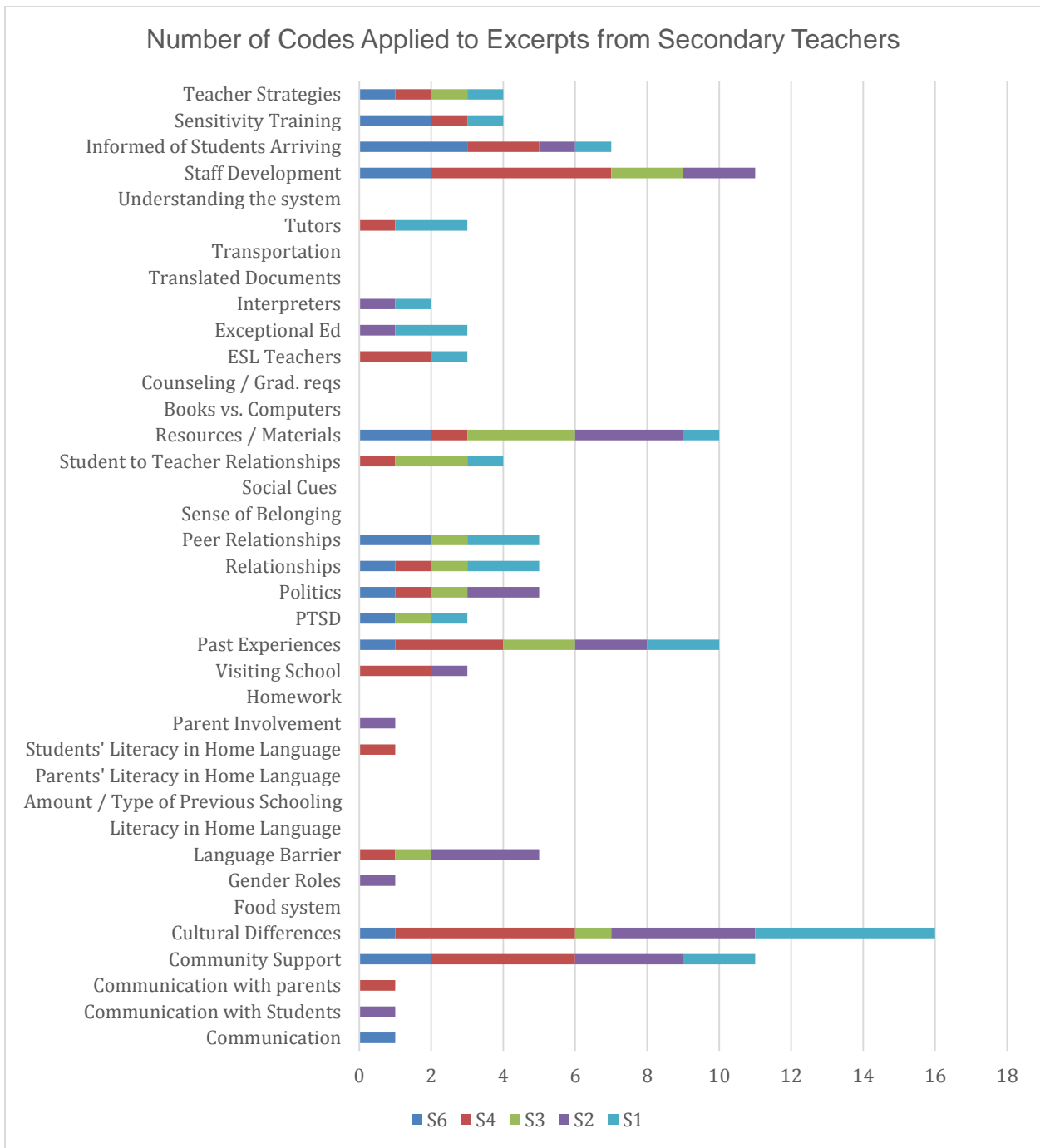
## Appendix S

### Elementary Teachers' Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students



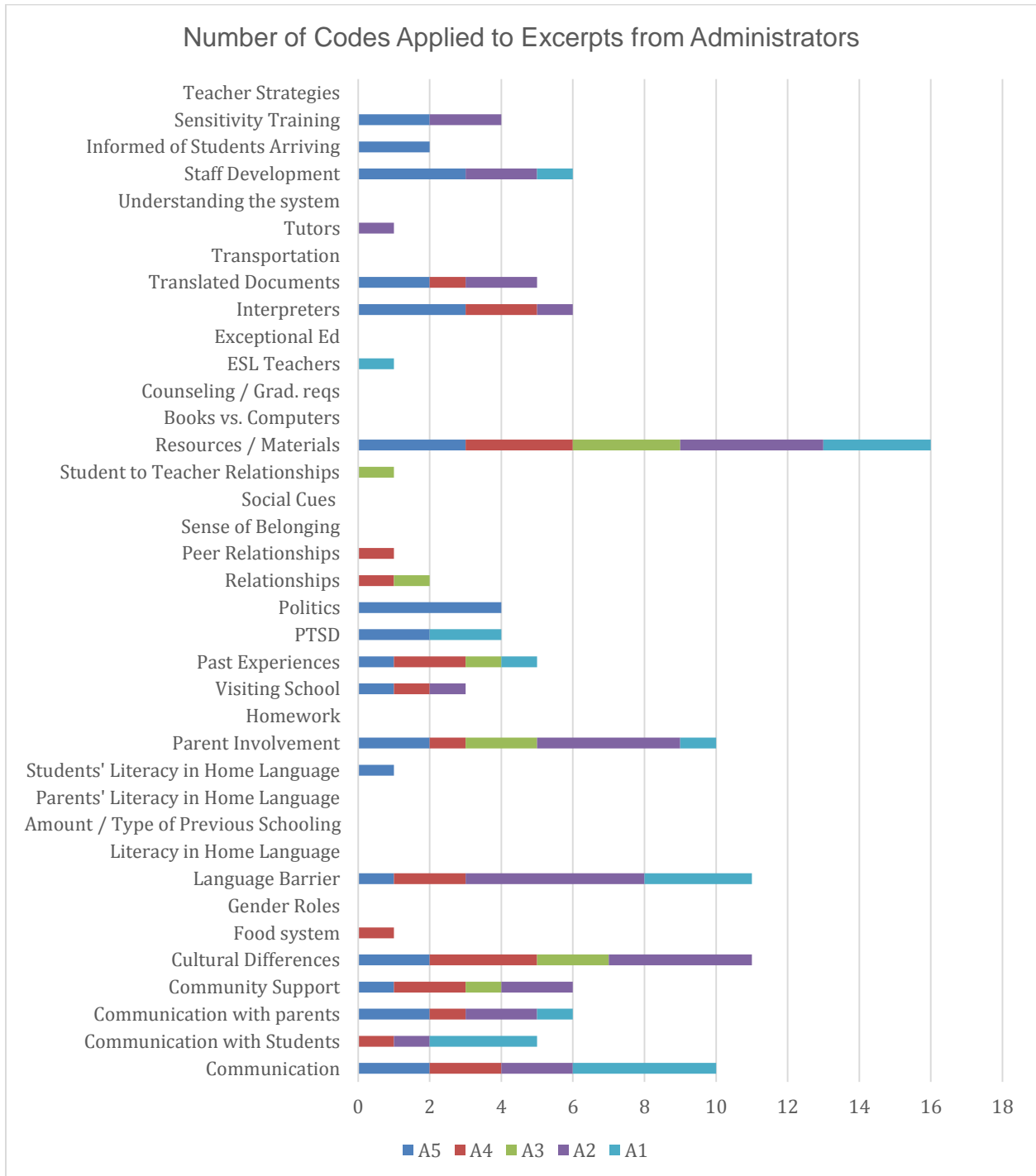
## Appendix T

### Secondary Teachers' Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students



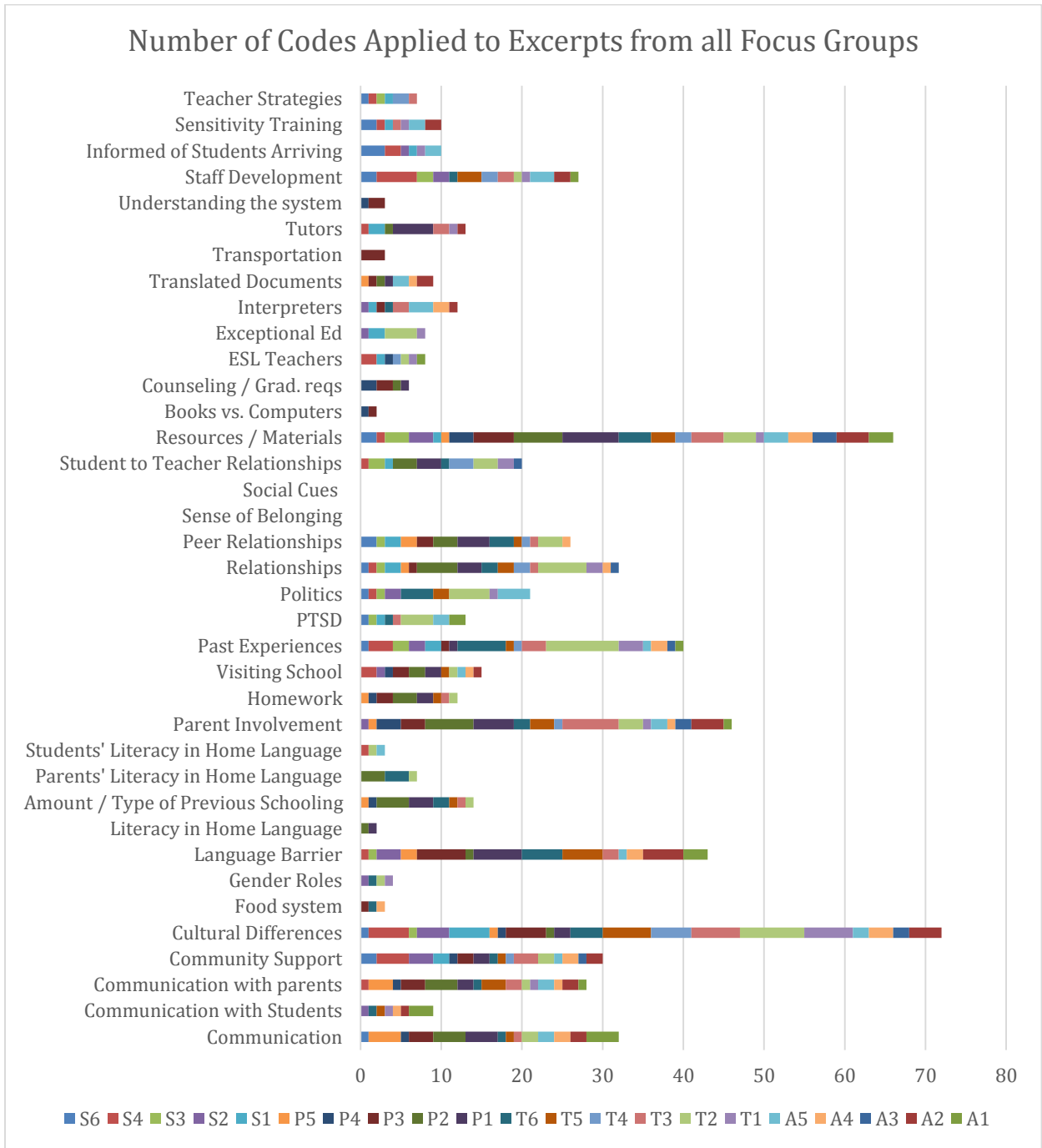
## Appendix U

### Administrators' Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students



## Appendix V

### All Focus Groups' Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students





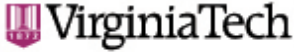
# Appendix W

## Training in Human Services Certificate



# Appendix X

## IRB Approval Letter



**Office of Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 19, 2014  
**TO:** Carol S Cash, Katina Wright Otey, Jodie L Brinkmann, Anna Nicole Hatfield, Christina Conlon Vitk  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Perceived Factors that Affect the Performance of Refugee Students in Central Virginia  
**IRB NUMBER:** 14-851

Effective September 19, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **September 19, 2014**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **September 18, 2015**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **September 4, 2015**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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