

I Come in With Full Force: How Somali Mothers' Hopes, Parenting Practices, and Experiences
Can Reimagine Schooling for Their Children

Asha Omar Warsame

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Reading Committee:

Gail Joseph, Chair

Ann Ishimaru

Soojin Park

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Asha Omar Warsame

University of Washington

Abstract

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Asha Omar Warsame

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Gail Joseph

College of Education

The Somali diaspora, stemming from the civil war of 1991, introduced Somali refugees individuals deeply rooted in an oral nomadic tradition to the global stage, particularly in the Western world, notably the United States. Emerging as a dynamic new community, they have grappled with challenges while navigating various systems in their host countries, most notably the education system. Discrimination, anti-black rhetoric, islamophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments have all been hurdles they have faced. As policies and programs strive for greater inclusivity and cultural relevance, especially in education, exploring how to support Somali families with young children best becomes crucial. This qualitative study aims to contribute to the limited literature on Somali families with young children in the early learning years by addressing three research questions: 1) What are Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children? 2) How do Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning? 3) How do Somali families reimagine schools? Employing Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and a Decolonial Lens, this study delves into these inquiries through the lens of Somali mothers. The research employs ten individual interviews and four community design

circles. The findings of this study underscore the profound significance and interconnectedness of religion (deen), culture (dhaqan), and the lived experiences of the mothers. These pivotal ideals/values and lived experiences shape the mothers' aspirations, strategies to nurture their children's development, and innovative approaches to reimagining schools. Moreover, the study sheds light on the techniques employed by mothers to transmit knowledge and confront the numerous barriers their children encounter within both public and Islamic schooling environments. Ultimately, this study enhances our understanding of these families' lived experiences, potentially guiding transformative actions that could reshape how Somali families are engaged. By highlighting their cultural practices and identifying effective strategies, pathways can be forged that allow them to sustain their language, religion, and culture.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear hooyo (mother), Sadiyo. It is also committed to honoring and leveraging the knowledge of Somali families and communities, focusing on learning grounded in their lived experiences and meaning-making systems. The first part of my dissertation, “I Come in with Full Force,” came from a focus group I conducted with Somali families in the autumn of 2020. When I asked the mothers if they had any concluding thoughts about their school experiences, one mother expressed a desire to be treated like other parents, explicitly referring to White parents who could directly, without self-censoring, say what they wanted. She spoke passionately about the inequities and stereotypes she had faced as a Black and visibly Muslim mother. Despite numerous challenges, this mother's strength and determination to advocate for her children and herself inspired me. Her story reflects the experiences of many refugee and immigrant families fighting for a better future for their children. I hope to contribute positively to that future.

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I Come in With Full Force: How Somali Mothers' Hopes, Parenting Practices, and Experiences Can Reimagine Schooling for Their Children

Introduction

In the last two decades, a significant number of immigrants and refugees coming to the United States have been from Africa (Anderson, 2015; Gambino et al., 2014; Pew Research Center, 2022). African people come to the United States through different pathways; some arrive as immigrants, while others arrive as refugees. The experiences of an African coming to the United States as an immigrant versus those who arrive as refugees are vastly different. While immigrants migrate to other parts of the world seeking opportunity and employment or escaping political, racial, or religious oppression, refugees are forced to flee their home countries due to civil wars, famine, political unrest, and/or destabilization of governments.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022) estimated that at the end of 2022, there were 35.3 million refugees worldwide. Being a refugee and seeking asylum is fraught with numerous traumatic experiences. Refugees spend countless years in refugee camps where they are displaced and face a scarcity of resources. They are in a foreign and unsafe environment, lacking security and facing xenophobia. Many refugees develop PTSD and must endure separation from family members, including their children (Bigelow, 2007; Magan, 2020). Due to the lack of support in the refugee camps and the extended periods that families must stay, their children, in most cases, experience disrupted schooling.

The lack of experience with schooling makes it difficult for refugee families to navigate the educational systems in their host countries. They are faced with a system that does not know how to support their specific needs. As more African immigrants and refugees arrive in the U.S.

and enter the education system, the need to understand and better support this population is more critical for families. The lack of knowledge of African immigrants and refugees, specifically Somali immigrants and refugees, has led to misinformation, racism, and a deficit perspective when addressing their unique needs in various spaces (Magan, 2020; Nilsson et al., 2020). While the U.S. student population is increasingly diverse, the extant literature on African immigrants lacks the voices of refugee families from different cultures, particularly those from Somalia. The early learning literature must include research about Somali families and children to achieve transformative actions. Also, understanding the nuances of how Somali parents communicate, support, and encourage their children is vital to promoting transformative, culturally, and linguistically sustaining family and community-school partnerships.

African immigrants are among the fastest-growing immigrant population in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2022; U.S. Census, 2014), yet they remain understudied and are barely visible in the educational literature (Kiramba et al., 2020; Kumi-Yeboah, 2020). While the literature on African immigrant refugee children is starting to grow, it still lacks the voices of families in the educational discourse. Furthermore, due to the limited research on this diverse group of people, educators, administrators, and policymakers tend to classify them as African American (Kiramba et al., 2020). However, while African refugees and immigrants are racially Black, they are not descendants of slavery. This grouping takes away from African immigrants and African Americans and their unique historical and contemporary experiences related to their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, social, and psychological backgrounds. Combining African immigrants with native-born African Americans makes it difficult for school districts to fully understand students' unique experiences and academic needs (Kiramba et al., 2020; Rong & Brown, 2002; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Ukpokodu, 2018). Due to the unique experiences of

immigrants and refugees, further subgroup distinctions are necessary. Data-driven decision-making requires quality data collection that focal groups can disaggregate to understand who benefits and drive equitable resource deployment meaningfully.

Currently, the vast majority of African-born populations that come to the United States are from West African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, East African countries such as Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, or other African countries such as Egypt and South Africa (U.S. Census, 2014). While West Africans typically come to the U.S. as immigrants, most people from East African countries come as refugees. Thus, the literature is flush with the West African experience and scant on the experiences of populations such as those from Somalia. While African immigrants share some similarities, some differences, such as their language, religious beliefs, immigration, socioeconomic status, family configuration, and diverse geopolitical backgrounds, impact their schooling, educational experiences, and learning outcomes (Kiramba et al., 2020; Ukpokodu, 2018). Immigrants from countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana are considered voluntary immigrants who come to pursue better opportunities or join their families in the U.S. willingly or via diversity visa lottery programs. According to Ukpokodu (2018), voluntary immigrants are likely to be educated and possess the tools to navigate the education system of their host society. In contrast, involuntary immigrants, such as refugees or those seeking asylum from war-torn and conflict-ridden countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, and Rwanda, are less likely to have an educational background and experience with formal schooling due to the limited resources available to them. This leads to challenges in successfully navigating the educational system in their new host society.

Furthermore, the families and children who come as refugees have experienced trauma that other immigrants may not have, so their experiences in the U.S. educational system are

different. Educators and administrators must better recognize these groups' individual experiences. Stark differences in the voluntary immigrants' experience versus those of involuntary immigrant refugees may result in distinct educational outcomes for students.

Figure 1

Map of Africa



Social and Historical Background of Somali People

Somalia is a country in Africa situated in the Horn of Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Since Somali is inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis, Somali is the

official language. The majority of Somalis are Sunni Muslims, making Islam the dominant religion. However, Somali society is anchored in a tribal system comprised of major clans and minority groups such as Somali Bantu, Reer Hamar, and “occupational caste groups” (Abdi, 2020, p.275). In this review, I also include Somali Bantus who are not ethnically Somali but identify as Somali because they have a history rooted in Somalia. Somali Bantus are an ethnic minority group who are descendants of enslaved southeast Africans (Nilsson et al., 2012; Roxas, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Somalia, a country with a rich culture with diverse traditions, is known among Somalis as the land of poets; however, its story has been distorted due to many years of civil war. Somalis had to flee their home due to the civil war that led to the collapse of the Somali government in 1991. Many Somalis were displaced from their homes, fleeing without possessions to survive and relocate to refugee camps in Kenya. Displaced Somalis experienced separation from families, death of kin, and extended years of living in refugee camps—all of which contributed to Somali families’ and children’s compromised psychological and physical health (Roy & Roxas, 2011). Most recently, Somalis who returned to Somalia experienced famine and drought; they rely on the Somali Diaspora to support their already limited means (Magan, 2020). Over the past several years, Somalia has had a transitional government and is rebuilding. Yet, thousands of Somalis still reside in refugee camps or are a part of the Somali Diaspora, living all over the globe.

The United States is among the top ten countries where Somalis resettle in the western world. According to the CDC (2014), Somalis have the most significant presence in the United Kingdom, followed by the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Switzerland. The resettlement of Somalis to the United States began in 1990 due to the Civil war that had

officially broken out in 1991 but wreaked havoc in some parts of the country as early as 1988. According to the CDC (2014), Somali arrivals tripled between 2011 and 2014. Since 2014, Somali resettlement to the U.S. has remained steady at about 9,000 arrivals annually. Somalis were among a large group of refugees admitted to the United States in 2014. Somalis are believed to be the fourth-largest group of African immigrants in the U.S. (Capps et al., 2012). According to King-ries (2014), the largest Somali communities in the U.S. are located in Minnesota, Washington, and Ohio.

Somalis are racially Black and come from a country where 99.99% of the country is Muslim. When they arrive in their host countries, their lives become consumed by the difficulties and challenges of being a refugee in a new country. In addition to language barriers in their host country, most new Somali immigrants confront xenophobia and ethnic prejudice. Opposing narratives about who Somalis are ethnically and religiously precede their arrival in host countries due to misinformation and negative messaging in the media. The media propagates the narrative that Somalis are war savages from the most dangerous country in the world (Magan, 2020). These preconceived notions of Somalis negatively impact their resettlement and transition into their host countries.

Early Learning in Somali Families & Communities

The early years are critical to the development and learning of children. Families are primary influencers of their children's development, learning, and well-being (Fine, 1993; 2003; Halgunseth et al., 2009; Klebanov & Travis, 2015; Olivos, 2006; Wilder, 2014; U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Family Engagement is considered a key component of high-quality early care and education (Powell et al., 2010; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). Family engagement plays an essential role in school readiness for children and the development of children's social, emotional, and academic competencies (Sheridan et al., 2011; Weiss et al., 2006). According to Hallgunseth et al. (2009), "as a means to supporting family engagement and children's learning, it is crucial that programs implement strategies for developing partnerships with families" (p. 3). An integral component of building a strong partnership between families and early learning programs "requires a culture that supports and honors reciprocal relationships, commitment from program leadership, a vision shared by staff and families, opportunities to develop the skills needed to engage in reciprocal relationships, and practices and policies that support meaningful family engagement" (Hallgunseth et al., 2009, p.4). The Office of Head Start (2018) maintains that family engagement is everyone's responsibility. The Office of Head Start's Parent Family Community Engagement framework outlines strategies for early learning administrators, educators, and family service providers. While emphasizing that family engagement is a shared goal, the framework states that:

At the program level, family engagement involves parents' engagement with their children and staff as they work together toward the goals families choose for themselves and their children. It also involves families and staff working toward goals to improve the program. Head Start and Early Head Start staff work together with families, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness. (Office of Head Start., 2018, p.2)

While all these components are critical and should be the goal of early learning related to family engagement, little can be found in the literature about how Somali families engage with

their children and how their funds of knowledge add to the parent-child relationship and family well-being. *Funds of knowledge* is the principle that people are experts because of their life experiences (González et al., 2005). This approach considers the households and communities as the focus of the analysis and goes beyond just looking at the individual by recognizing the community at large. According to González et al. (2005), an essential element of funds of knowledge is *household functioning*. Household functioning:

Helps make sense of and give meaning to cultural objects and social practices in a particular way and within the concrete circumstances of life in which we find them (p. 277). Human beings and their social worlds are inseparable. They are embedded in each other; thus, human thinking is irreducible to individual properties or traits. Instead, it is always mediated, distributed among persons, artifacts, activities, and settings. People think in conjunction with the artifacts and resources of their social worlds, and these artifacts and resources, in turn, are made available through the social relationships and settings within which human beings constitute their lives (p. 261)

Given the scant literature on Somali families in ECE applying household functioning can unearth practices Somali families take to educate their children. Somali families use their funds of knowledge to help their children resist assimilating Eurocentric behaviors and values deemed essential to thrive in education (Grosfoguel, 2008). As such, it is essential to consider informal learning spaces and settings--family homes and communities, and the knowledge that families hold near and dear to them that they instill in their children. Further research is needed about families' wealth of knowledge, their narratives, and the valuable resources they provide for their children's early learning and development (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Yosso, 2005).

While the pathway refugees trek is fraught with many obstacles, refugee experience research shows that Somali families are resilient (Basford, 2010; Biglow, 2007; Bowie et al., 2017; Magan, 2020; Roxas & Roy, 2011). Somali families have persisted and adapted despite the many challenges they have had to overcome. Through stories, they use these experiences to motivate their children to overcome school barriers and personal lives (Bigelow, 2007; Roxas & Roy, 2011). The knowledge and skills that Somali families share with their children contribute to their community's social, economic, and political factors, and the knowledge flows beyond the nuclear family because, within Somali communities, extended families are essential in children's development and learning. In Somalia, where families are large and multigenerational, the interconnection between the extended family and the community provides family structure. (Bowie et al., 2017). Within this shared collective view, extended family members' roles include raising and teaching children about Somali traditions to help ground them in their ethnic identity (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Huraibi, 2014). Extended family members are central to the family unit, and their opinions on family decisions are highly regarded. As findings in my study with Somali mothers showed, families include their elders in setting goals and making decisions that collectively impact the families (Warsame, 2019). This collective cultural identity is what the Somali mothers believed strengthened their family unit (Warsame, 2019). To understand Somali families' experiences, we have to consider and learn from their complex funds of knowledge and how they negotiate and navigate school systems using their funds of knowledge that take into consideration their language, spiritual strengths, and beliefs such as their Islamic religion, the refugee experience, storytelling skills, and support from extended family members.

Numerous researchers emphasize that parental involvement in schools is governed by a school-centric notion of what counts as valuable endeavors and contributions, thereby undermining the efforts of Somali families (Alitiappola, 2002; Bigelow, 2007; Lawson, 2003; Roxas & Roy, 2011). Research has shown that immigrant families' home-based engagement is not considered an asset because they do not fit into the dominant conventions of school-based participation (Mapp & Hong, 2010; McWayne et al., 2016). There is a lack of studies investigating how Somali families are experiencing early schooling in the U.S. context. Due to a White-dominant, school-centric approach, Somali families are marginalized and stripped of their voices and agency regarding their children's education. Authentic partnership requires the school system to understand the various perceptions of Somali families, learn about their experiences, and identify strategies to help Somali families become genuine partners in their children's education. Understanding and honoring the Somali family's funds of knowledge, ways of learning, and values prepares educators to work toward a "greater equity in the role of nondominant families and communities in education" (Ishimaru, 2020, p.55). My research will illuminate the knowledge, teaching methods, plethora of skills and learning styles, and unique assets that Somali families possess.

Early learning often considers family engagement a foundation of practical and high-quality early childhood education (Powell et al., 2010; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). However, the built-in practices exclude nondominant families because they are not recognized as experts (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). Literature addressing this issue is lacking, so my research endeavors to illuminate a qualitative foundation that illustrates Somali families' experiences and untapped knowledge and their perceptions of early learning education in the United States as a means to improve the strategies early learning programs use when working with Somali families. This

study will highlight Somali families' cultural practices used to support children, which may provide a path to transform early learning family engagement practices--current notions of *best practices*, if you will—in a manner that supports Somali families' equitable learning and partnering with the early learning arena. According to Souto- Manning (2013):

It is important to acknowledge that young children are active members of different groups and learn how to function within each of them. When teachers value and build on students' practices in-home community contexts and bring such practices to the classroom, they can foster more responsive and equitable learning experiences. (p.75)

It is essential to consider the various contexts in which families participate and their children navigate spaces such as homes, communities, and schools-- where children learn the rules and customs (Souto-Manning, 2013). To support children and their learning, we need to learn about, understand, and support family goals. While this is a complex research area of the lives of Somali families and children, this research has the potential to inform policy, practice, and theory. Somali families possess a rich foundation of life experiences and are experts in their priorities and hopes for their children. This study will significantly contribute to the field of education as it guides best practices related to serving the needs of Somali children and their families in an equitable and culturally enlightened manner. Family knowledge and engagement are important in ECE. Yet, there is limited knowledge on Somali family engagement in ECE. That information is critical for ECE programs and educators to know in order to support Somali children's growth and development. My research seeks to provide a contribution to the literature by investigating Somali mothers' approaches and values for early learning. To that end, my research questions are as follows: 1) What are Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children?

- 2) How do Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning?
- 3) How do Somali families reimagine schools?

Significance of the Study

This study aims to capture Somali families' experiences and familial and cultural knowledge while exploring the experiences and perceptions of Somali families who have children attending early learning programs and public schools in Washington State. Generally, early learning programs in Washington have a sparse understanding of Somali families, their cultural resources of knowledge, and system of learning. My research aims to include the voices of marginalized Somali families and communities whose voices are suppressed and dismissed in spaces where change needs to occur. My review of the literature highlights that regardless of all the challenges Somali children and their families face, their parents are an integral part of their educational lives and their overall wellbeing. It is essential to include the voices of Somali families because of a false narrative associated with Somali parents in which an underlying deficit perspective drives education professionals to see Somali parents as lacking the initiative to participate in their children's education (Roy & Roxas, 2011). This is an opportunity for Somali people, among the fastest-growing immigrant populations in the United States, to no longer remain understudied and invisible in any context. In early learning literature, Somali families' voices speaking to their family engagement experiences are far overdue. This study serves to understand better the lived experiences of families who can achieve transformative actions that could potentially reinvent and transform how Somali families are engaged. Highlighting their cultural practices and identifying strategies can also create pathways that will allow them to sustain their culture, religion, and language.

Schools need to build relationships with Somali parents and involve them in a manner that reflects an understanding and appreciation of their culture rather than regarding them as problematic, apathetic, and difficult to reach. A potential solution to this problem and a way to challenge the deficit narrative of Somali families is to listen to their voices and include their stories, lived experiences, and expertise in research, practice, and policy. Specifically, this study will examine the education and schooling of children in early childcare and education programs and explore how Somali families sustain their children's identity, development, and learning. These intervention programs often approach families as the problem rather than the system that does not sustain their lifeways and identity. We must reimagine what family engagement could look like in the early years. Like Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy's call to reframe the "object of critique from our children to the oppressive system" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p .3), my study will reframe the object of critique from the families to the system. This study hopes to expand on the research around immigrant and refugee families in the context of early learning in the U.S. by including Somali families whose presence is absent from current literature. This research would be significant because it would illuminate Somali families' cultural and familial practices, providing insight into strengthening partnerships with families and making meaningful family partnerships with Somali families by including their values and needs. Starting with what is important to them could support the early learning family engagement practices and what is considered best practices.

Furthermore, this study is vital in Washington and other states where Somalis and other refugee and immigrant communities have a significant presence. Understanding families' experiences regarding U.S. education systems and family engagement will enhance the process of moving away from parenting interventions based on deficit models to family-sustaining

programs where families are put first in what they want for their children. This research will help us shed light on how families support their children in the early learning years, and on assisting and equipping families beyond the early childhood years. This research will extend the single narrative experiences of Somali families minimally captured in the literature as related to Somali students in higher education by including families with young children. Examining the Somali family's perceptions of family engagement in their young children's development and education has the potential to challenge the deficit modes of thinking that are held of Somali families as uninvolved and not engaged in their children's education. Through their stories and experiences, this study could produce a theory that considers the Somali family's strengths. My study will find a practical application of theories and connect the community to the academy by illuminating their voices and lived experiences in the research. This is more critical now that we have gone through a pandemic where the learning environment of most children is their homes, and the roles of families have shifted.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The current gap in the early learning literature is the lack of experiences of Somali families in early learning. Research demonstrates the lack of inclusion of Somali family experiences and cultural practices. Moreover, the voices of Somali families with young children are missing from policy, research, and theories. Without including families, we are missing out on opportunities to build meaningful partnerships that could positively impact families, children, and communities. Accomplishing this requires research on the experiences and cultural practices of Somali families and efforts to capture their perceptions and understandings of education and schooling in the context of the United States. This research could potentially help families and educators as they seek to engage with families in ways that will consider their funds of

knowledge and expertise. Knowing this would help create more culturally responsive curriculums, assessments, and reciprocal relationships and illuminate Somali families' cultural familial practices. Acquiring new knowledge and understanding in this area will assist in establishing greater equity in the early learning programs. When we recognize Somali families' culture, language, priorities, aspirations, and spiritual practices as valid, there will be space for partnerships where families are meaningfully included and their valuable insights are welcomed as a means of improving the quality of education for their children and the lifting of the community at large. Change that allows for different ideas and solutions that families could identify for themselves.

- 1) What are Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children?
- 2) How do Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning?
- 3) How do Somali families reimagine schools?

Conceptual Framework

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

It is essential to explore the cultural, social, and historical contexts that influence Somali families' hopes for their children, parenting practices, and experiences in the early learning years if we are to provide Somali families with educational opportunities that are consistent with their experiences, values, and beliefs. The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) guides my exploration of Somali families' experiences, cultural practices, and priorities and aspirations for

their children as I endeavor to understand how they cultivate their children's learning, identity, and development. CHAT is designed to meaningfully guide the examination of complex, interconnected, and nested activity systems (Engstrom & Sannino, 2010). It provides a comprehensive theoretical understanding of how context, history, and culture shape the priorities and aspirations of Somali families and their meaning-making of child development. CHAT's framework has been developed over three generations of research focusing on the shifts of understanding the individual and culture. Initial research involved Vygotsky's (1978) focus on the sociocultural and object-focused dimensions of human learning. Vygotsky understood that human behavior required a historical perspective that engaged analysis at all scales (Coles, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1978), "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88). Subsequently, Vygotsky's student Alexei Leont'ev observed that human action was a culturally organized activity that took place collectively in a world constructed of social relations, not separate from it (Cole, 2005). I will be drawing from the third generation of CHAT, which was expanded on by Yrjö Engeström (2001). Engeström and his colleagues visually represented CHAT as a complex triangle model emphasizing the multiple overlapping activity systems. In this present iteration, CHAT holds that every human action is object-oriented and is mediated by tools, rules, division of labor, and community (Engeström, 2001). *Subjects* include groups or individuals whose perspective is considered for analysis. *Object* is what gives the human action its direction; object is the central component of activation. *Tools* include materials and concepts that mediate the accomplishment of the object (Cole, 1999). Community refers to individuals who have a common object of the activity. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the community plays a central role in the process of making meaning. This is important because the child is considered a

cultural participant living and developing within their communities. Therefore, child development is not separate from children and their social environments (Rogoff, 2003). As such, my research focuses on the conceptual tools Somali families utilize to understand and mediate the educational process and experiences within their communities.

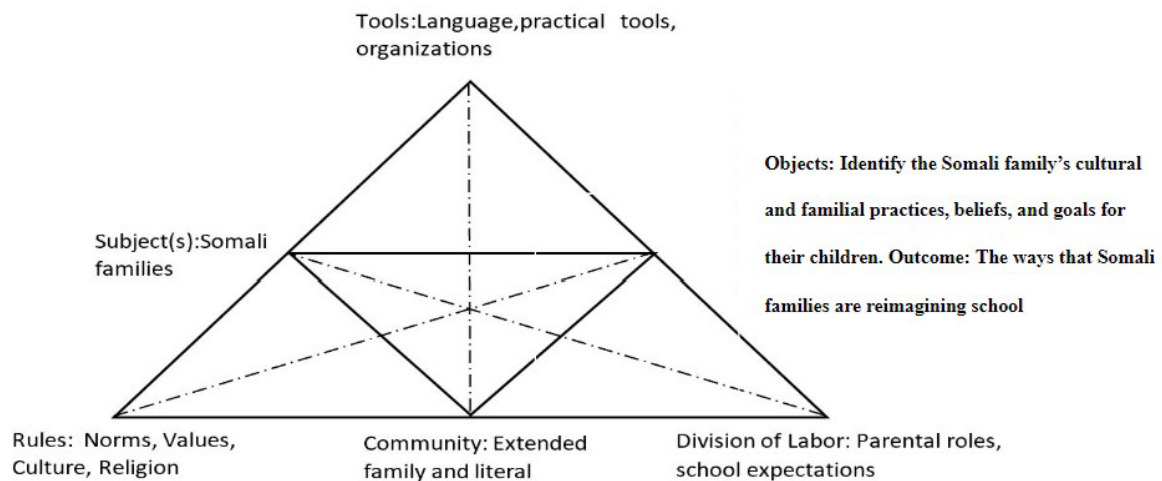
Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is a valuable framework for capturing and highlighting Somali families' familial and cultural practices and beliefs. CHAT aims to de-center individual humans in socio-cultural research by examining interactions between human's material and contextual, cultural constraints those materials emerged from. Therefore, it considers the system as the unit of analysis instead of an individual or an individual's actions in isolation. To examine the lived experiences of Somali families, CHAT guides an understanding of the historical and cultural influences that shape their perspectives on child development and early learning. CHAT helped me to study the cultural tools of Somali families and communities, such as their linguistic, spiritual, and cultural practices. Understanding how culture influences Somali families' knowledge of child development is vital to their experiences in early childhood education contexts. Using CHAT allowed me to capture the breadth of experiences and expertise that Somali families and communities bring to the educational context of early learning.

To better understand human development, we must first acknowledge that children develop and learn within the various contexts of their cultural communities. Rogoff (2003) states that "human development is a cultural process...people develop as participants in cultural communities...their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities-which also change" (pp. 3-4). Somali families' cultural practices of child-rearing are sociocultural skills they learn through interwoven mediating

structures and tools, such as family, community, rules, norms, assumptions, and labor divisions that lead to the object or goal.

CHAT evolved as a third-wave activity theory as Engeström and others began to look at intersections among activity systems (Mills, 2016). The intersections of the six elements of CHAT, as perceived by Engeström (1999), are most often illustrated using the triangle diagram. For the purpose of my study, specific variables related to the Somali community are assigned to each element (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cultural Historical Activity Theory



Elements and Their Variables

Subject(s): Somali parents and families with young children birth to age 8 who have children enrolled at a Dual language preschool program.

Instruments (tools): Tools or actions that Somali parents and families use to support their parenting practices, specifically the tools that they are utilizing to support their children's learning, development, and identity. The mother shared the tools they used to navigate and understand their community's early learning context. (e.g., people, organizations, and other meaningful resources). In *Figure 3*, I highlight the diverse tools mothers identified to support their children's development. For instance, the mothers emphasized the importance of using the Somali language to teach their children about their culture. This approach not only helps to strengthen their cultural identity but also facilitates inter-generational communication. Furthermore, the mothers viewed formal education as a crucial pathway to ensuring their children's academic success. They also discussed the use of Dugsi (Qur'anic school) to support their children's Islamic identity and learning.

Rules: Determined by the community based on their norms, values, culture, and religion; together, these factors guide Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children as well as informing the tools that they utilize in their parenting practices and how they re-imagine schooling. It also impacts how families make sense of, interact with, and participate in early learning programs. In Figure 3, concepts such as Somalinimo (the cultural, social, and political identity of Somali people), Deen (Islamic faith), and Dhaqan (culture) are identified as foundational pillars by mothers. These concepts play a vital role in shaping their aspirations, parenting practices, experiences, and decision-making processes. They significantly influence the mothers' choices regarding schools and profoundly impact their children's well-being and livelihood.

Division of Labor: Parental roles, school expectations. The experiences that they have in formal and informal learning spaces. The mothers discussed extensively the tensions they experienced at U.S. school systems.

Objects: Identify the Somali family's cultural and familial practices, beliefs, and goals for their children.

Outcome: The ways that Somali families are reimagining school

CHAT helped me better understand the various forms of knowledge and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that Somali families bring into the U.S. education context. This study highlights the Somali families' knowledge, practices, skills, and experiences to ensure they are embraced and acknowledged. CHAT allowed for the situating of research in cultural practices in early

learning. Research that speaks to Somali families' lived experiences, attitudes, and experiences as they engage in their children's learning and development can inform policies and programs and transform partnerships. CHAT can become a vehicle through which I can offer alternative interpretations based on the experiences of Somali families. A way to move from the school-centric white-normed models of parent training toward culturally specific and sustaining forms of family engagement and partnership is to regard Somali families as "producers of critical knowledge and not just consumers" (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p 165.). Utilizing CHAT allowed me to situate the learning and teaching of nondominant communities at the forefront and challenge the deficit perspectives of families and communities. As such, CHAT provides a framework for challenging structural oppression and leveraging the cultural repertoire of families. Finally, I hope my research highlights the strengths of families as agents of meaningful change as their advocacy is understood through the lens of a rich, community-centered culture.

My analysis included looking for recurring patterns in the various concepts of CHAT. While focusing on the rules established within family and community to explore how they are determined and upheld and how the community influences the experiences and values of the subjects. This approach allowed me to better understand families' experiences and perspectives of early learning and family engagement and their culturally specific parenting goals and practices. The knowledge that Somali families have shared about their lived experiences and insights can open more expansive and complex opportunities for what learning, community, and culture of educational equity could look like (Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2016). Somali families' decisions about early childhood education are anchored in their unique cultural scripts. I was particularly interested in the cultural frameworks that guide the Somali family's decisions about their young children's identity, development, early education, and the hopes and

aspirations that they want for their children. By asking Somali parents to reflect on their experiences navigating early learning programs in the United States, I was especially interested in issues of power, influence, and equity issues in those spaces. Therefore, a sociocultural perspective on learning that considers family, peers, society, and history as important influences on how an individual learns guides my research. The study illuminated how families support their children, their experiences with schools, and their goals for their children. Revealing the strengths, skills, and knowledge that Somali families bring to early learning contexts will amplify their expertise rather than putting acceptance of imposed institutional know-how at the forefront.

Decolonial Lens

In addition to CHAT, I incorporate a *decolonial lens* (Grosfoguel, 2008; 2013) to address the concepts that sociocultural learning theory may not fully encompass. The decolonial lens allows for a nuanced exploration of power dynamics, epistemic delinking, and the identification of solutions within oppressive systems and legacies of colonialism. As related to the research at hand, a decolonial lens helps to delineate the historical and ongoing power dynamics that have influenced the experiences of Somali mothers, including colonialism and other forms of oppression on the social, gendered, cultural, and educational systems. Somali mothers became the focus of this study because they were overwhelmingly comprised of the participants in this study. While I sought to include families, it became evident that mothers were the primary individuals interested and willing to participate. By considering these power dynamics, the decolonial lens shed light on how Somali families' hopes, dreams, and educational practices have been and continue to be influenced by external forces and power structures.

Much of the study's literature review explores the significance of a culturally sustaining lens that values the worldviews of Somali families--their ancestral knowledge and the importance of sustaining culture and community. Examining the importance of sustaining culture involves an undergird of a decolonial lens conceptual framework that reflects the lived experiences of indigenous peoples, whose epistemologies are passed down through their histories, learning practices, values, and stories (Barajas-López & Bang, 2018). It is crucial to recognize that knowledge construction and learning can vary across different communities (Meyer, 2008). So, when considering learning and knowledge production, it is essential to acknowledge alternative traditions that inform learning beyond dominant early learning frameworks (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017).

The literature identifies tensions that may evolve between families and schools as a function of differing cultural understandings; a decolonial lens helps reveal the underlying sources of these tensions, which in turn can serve to ameliorate strife. Abdi (2021) highlights how schools perpetuate colonial agendas and goals, often disregarding families' priorities to preserve their culture, knowledge, and life pathways. The decolonial lens allows for re-centering the knowledge that is fundamental to the development of children, families, and communities, recognizing that Eurocentric ways of knowing are not the sole answer (Barajas-López & Bang, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The prevailing discourse in early childhood education often revolves around evidence-based practices, school readiness, and dominant norms of development (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). A decolonial lens shifts away from that framework. It challenges the thinking of the dominant culture by re-centering the focus on the knowledge, cultures, and spirituality of families and communities. This approach, combined with this study's methodology of community design circles, enables deep engagement, listening, and

collaboration with Somali families. By centering the voices and experiences of Somali mothers and employing collaborative and inclusive research practices, a decolonial lens allows for incorporating Somali families' depth and breadth of knowledge and wisdom, rooted in their lived experiences and influenced by their global and local epistemological traditions.

Finally, the decolonial lens elucidates how Somali families support their children as they delink from the colonality of the West. Addressing the delinking process helps in understanding how Somali mothers envision educational approaches that promote the sustainability of their religion and culture and challenge Eurocentric norms and structures. The decolonial lens considers the intersectionality of Somali families and the various forms of oppression they face, such as Islamophobia and xenophobia. Furthermore, this lens enables my analysis to focus on the historical injustices, power dynamics, and diverse ways of knowing that shape the experiences of Somali families, providing a more comprehensive understanding that can lead to transformative and empowering approaches to education and community development.

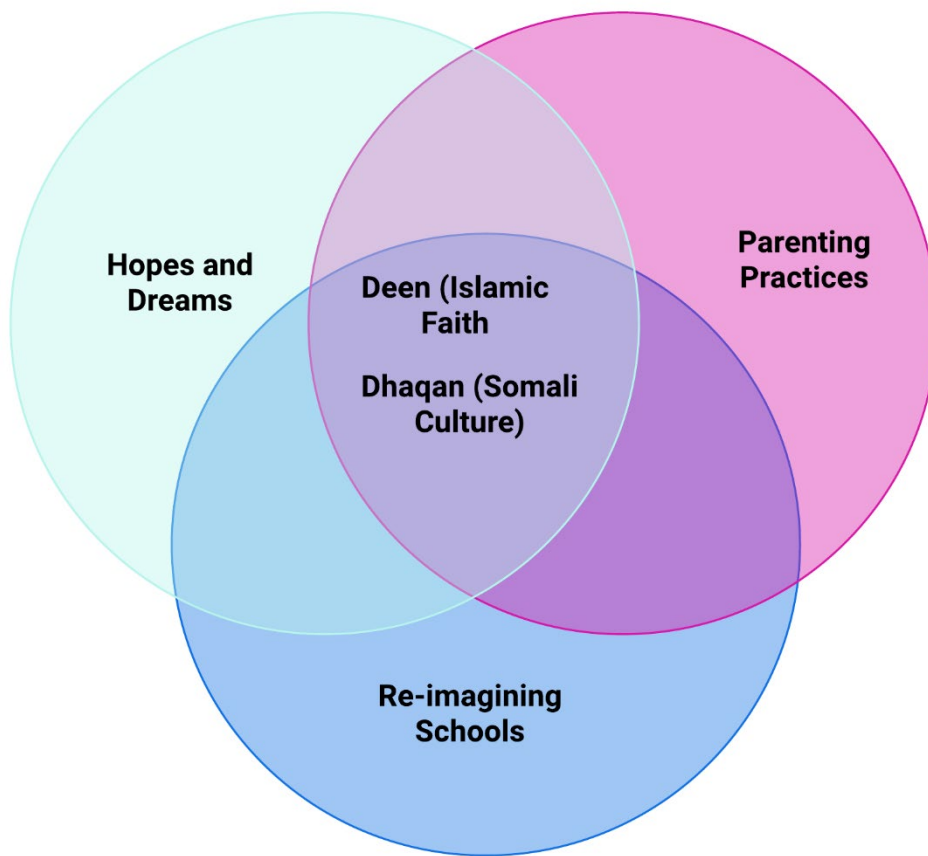
In this study, families showcase epistemic delinking by resisting dominant Western epistemologies or ways of understanding and knowing. They are giving precedence to their indigenous practices, thereby challenging Western traditions. For instance, in the context of reimagining schools, families introduce critical elements of decolonization by questioning and aiming to disconnect from systems that sustain colonial power dynamics. As they reimagine schools, they envision environments conducive to more equitable and inclusive ways of knowing for children, families, and communities. In discussing these visions, families seek to distance themselves from colonial perspectives on the purpose and outcomes of education. They aspire to

create spaces where their children's diverse identities—Black, Somali, Muslim, American—can thrive, with a focus on Islamic principles.

What stands out to me as a researcher viewing this through a decolonial lens is that Somali Muslim mothers consistently prioritize approaches that shield their children from feeling detached from their faith and culture (deen and dhaqan), whether it's shaping their learning, identity, or development, or envisioning their goals and aspirations. This reflects a conscious effort to break away from colonial expectations and redefine their roles and aspirations. Mothers employ various strategies and nurture aspirations for their children to ensure their well-being in this life and the hereafter.

Figure 4

Visual of Decolonial Lens



This visual representation aims to illustrate the intersectional relationship between Deen, Dhaqan, and the aspirations of Somali families in reshaping educational paradigms. The Venn diagram shows the mutual influence between these elements. Dhaqan, itself impacted by religious beliefs, plays a pivotal role in shaping the envisioned transformation of schooling. Central to this convergence lies the Somali community, embodying these ideals. They seek to preserve their religious and cultural identities while advocating for a reimagined educational system that integrates and respects these essential facets of their heritage. They aspire to foster inclusive schools that honor their religious convictions and cultural values.

The prevailing discourse about Somali students is that they are challenging to educate, have behavior issues, may be at risk, and lack parents who care about their education (Abdi, 2021; Alitiappo, 2002, 2004; Bigelow, 2008, 2010; Basford, 2010). When it comes to Somali families in the literature, they are blamed continuously for not being involved in their children's schooling. Teachers and schools hold deficit perspectives of the children and their families as not valuing education (Abdi, 2021; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Parental involvement is governed by a school-centric notion of what counts as a contribution based on the dominant narrative that undermines Somali families' efforts (Abdi, 2021; Kusow, 2006; Roxas, 2008; Roy Roxas, 2011). Somali families are marginalized and stripped of their voices and agency regarding their children's education.

Literature Review

To better understand the educational experiences of young Somali children and their families, it is critical to understand the social and historical background of the Somali experience, including Somalis in the diaspora, because the refugee experience has a lasting impact that continues today. Next, I reviewed the literature on several education issues in the United States that are particularly impactful on the Somali education experience, including inequities, experiences of Black Muslim refugee students, and teacher lack of knowledge about their student's experiences. I also reviewed the literature on faith, spirituality, family roles, and community wisdom because my research questions investigate how these topics influence how families educate children. First, I'll begin by describing how I searched for literature.

Literature Review Search Process

The literature included in this review was acquired through searches of electronic databases such as Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education Full Text, PsycINFO, Education Source, PubMed, Academic Search Complete, family studies abstracts, sociological abstracts, and article reference lists. Keywords used to search for relevant materials included: African, Somali, immigrants, children, child, refugee children, refugees, parental involvement, parent participation, parental role, family engagement, academic achievement, early learning, school community relations, k-12, and family supports. This yielded 90 articles. After a review of abstracts for all the articles the literature search was further narrowed to specifically include literature that addressed the educational experiences of African immigrants and refugees in formal and informal settings. Another criterion that was used for the exclusion of the articles was considering that there is limited research on African immigrants, and the existing research mainly focuses on West Africans rather than East Africans. Most of the research that looks at the experiences of the African-born immigrant comes addresses sub-Saharan Africa. It's important to recognize the rich diversity within the African immigrant community and the nuanced and multifaceted narratives of their experiences their various educational, social, ethnolinguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Somalis, in particular, present unique aspects that are not extensively covered in the existing literature, contributing to an incomplete understanding of their distinctive experiences. A comprehensive search of literature published from 2000 to 2021 identified 23 articles that addressed the topic and were included in this review. After multiple attempts, most of the studies found in the electronic databases were not relevant to my question because they were not focused on education-related topics. Hence, a

perusal of relevant research articles' references yielded articles focused on African and Somalis in the Diaspora, all of which were included in the review. Twenty-three articles that were ultimately selected for review were coded by themes that addressed my research question, using the following keywords: parental factors, community factors, African student experiences, role of the family, informal, formal, Somali, refugees, and immigrants.

The increased number of Somali students, PreK through grade 12, in the U.S. warrants research that captures their lived experiences, including that of their families, as they play a vital role in their children's education. Therefore, an inclusion criterion that was used in this literature focuses on the challenges and inequities Somali children and families navigate in the U.S. education system, highlights their strengths, and describes how Somali parents support their children's learning in formal and informal contexts.

Educational Issues for Somalis in the Diaspora

Thomas (2016) using Cultural historical activity theory and an ethnographic method for this study and examined why Somali parents in Norway withdrew their children from mainstream schools and sent them to Somalia and Middle Eastern countries to attend school. Thomas, using a participant observer approach and semi structured interviews, met with 10 parents and 15 youth. In 2012, there were 14,789 Somali children, ages of birth to 17 years old in Norway (Thomas, 2016). This figure represented the highest number of immigrants from non-western backgrounds in Norwegian schools. Somalis in Norway arrived as asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum Seekers are considered those already in the country where they request residency (Thomas, 2016). According to the minister of education and research in Norway:

We want the gap in educational achievement between minority and majority language pupils to be reduced. We want more young people from language

minorities to complete upper secondary and higher education. We want minority language adults to have a good command of the Norwegian language that will facilitate their inclusion in working life and enable them to help their children with their schooling. (Thomas, 2016, p.3)

Thomas (2016) noted that the Norwegian educational authorities called for more research "that sheds light into the differential educational levels and competencies of minorities, which is commensurate with the aim of this study" (Thomas, 2016, p.3). The phrasing employed is problematic in that it sends out the call for research using a deficit perspective phrasing that serves to perpetuate normative discourse about families from the get-go. The manner in which this notion is perpetuated within the research narrative is clear as the author describes being baffled by some Somali parents resorting to withdrawing their children from the safety of Norwegian schools and sending them to schools in war-torn Somalia and other unstable regions in the Middle East given that Norwegian schools are second only to Iceland when measured on "happi- ness" [*sic*] in PISA tests (Thomas, 2016, p.3). The presentation of this research is problematic because while it puts the perspective of both the educators and Somali parents' side by side, it appears as if the author while highlighting the reasons why Somali families are taking their children back to Somalia or Middle Eastern countries, is also undermining their decisions. In making this comment, Thomas (2016), on the one hand implies that the parents are irresponsible, disregarding the safety of their children. On the other hand, he positions Norwegian culture and conceptions of education as superior to Somalis. The author also reifies a war-torn narrative without giving context or highlighting other aspects of Somali culture. When parents in the study stressed that they did not trust the Norwegian schools and felt like they were conspiring to take their children away from them to "indoctrinate them with decadent values," the author's responds that as a teacher he can assure them that this is not the case (Thomas, 2016,

p.11). A parent responds, "How long have you been a teacher? How else do you explain that Somalis are overrepresented in these statistics?" a parent speaking to the statistics of Somali families who've had their children taken away by child welfare services (Thomas, 2016, p.12).

Thomas concludes that Somali parents move their children from the Norwegian school system for three main reasons: religion, culture (dhaqan), and families and the choices they are making. Reading the paper, one could be guided to conclude that Norway's education system supersedes the needs and wants of Somali families. Thomas (2016) shares that European migrants have had similar issues with their children being taken away from their families; however, the difference between the migrant families and the Somali families is that migrant families home countries supported them when issues like this came up whereas the Somali families were refugees and therefore couldn't receive the same support. Therefore, the Norwegian government was held accountable for its actions in separating the children from the migrants. Despite the push toward a school-centric perspective, Thomas (2016) concludes that schools need to reform by making schools a place that accepts different cultures and identities. He calls for more teachers who are reflective of the emerging communities, and more training for teachers to expose them to culturally responsive teaching.

The research seems to reflect a system in which Somali families lack advocates in the Norwegian education system. Somalis in the Diaspora share a culture; however, their experiences vary as a function of the differing infrastructures they navigate in their new home countries. This is a country showing the power that it has. The study shares how Norway can have authority over families in the country and their homeland if they choose to go back by telling them that they are establishing a child welfare service in Somaliland. The experiences of

Somalis in the Diaspora only further highlight how necessary it is for families and their community's voices to be included in the research.

Alitolppa-Niitamo's (2002) study was a six-month classroom based ethnographic research study that examined the schooling experiences of Somali youth in Finland. The study initially centered on the experiences of four boys and two girls but later incorporated additional youth participants, including their peers and siblings. This expanded the total number of participants to 11 boys and 8 girls, all within the age range of 11 to 20 years. The research also incorporated the perspectives of four fathers and three mothers of the students. In addition, the author conducted interviews with 18 authorities and school administrators, 17 Finnish teachers, five Somali teachers, 27 Somali community members, and two imams (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002, p15). The author noted that "Authorities seem to expect refugees and immigrants to change rather than gearing the system and its legitimized practices towards the diverse needs of the changing population" (p. 278). This echoes what Somali families also face in the U.S and other parts of the world. The challenges that Somalis face in Finland are similar to Somali families making their new homes in the United States, including navigating a new world in which their traditionally tight-knit extended families are poorly understood and acknowledged. Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) corroborates that Somali families value education, noting that formal education was valued in Somalia, though few had the privilege of access to formal education. The value of formal education was "reflected in the attitudes" of the Somali parents in Helsinki (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002, p 279). Somali parents in Finland considered formal education as a pathway that would afford their children opportunities to gain and develop skills that would open doors to economic opportunity (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002). However, Somali parents faced the challenge of safeguarding their children from the values of Finnish youth that conflicted with their values

and worldviews. Parents wanted their children to “respect authorities, such as parents, teachers and elderly people, and to keep their distance from sexually precocious behavior and premarital sexual relationships, which are common among Finnish youth" (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002, p.28). The challenges that families faced in Finland, such as prejudice and racism, and acculturation stresses, were similar for families across the Diaspora.

Abdi (2021) conducted a phenomenological study of how the multiple identities of five Somali immigrant mothers (as Black, working-class immigrant women) impacted their experiences in UK school structures. Abdi (2021) also conducted focus groups with fifteen teachers and school leaders and forty-five students. The study found that the Somali mothers engaged with the schools through their multiple roles as mothers, community members, and cultural brokers. Their strong cultural identity and traditions empowered them to challenge the prevailing deficit narrative about their community. This enabled them to advocate for their children's education while employing leadership practices deeply rooted in indigenous African worldviews of motherhood. Abdi (2021) argued that the UK's traditional school structures follow Western colonial leadership practices that create a conflict between schools and families in terms of what family engagement means, what leadership is, and who is enacting leadership. Abdi (2010) also makes an important point that: “coloniality is concerned with knowledge-- whose knowledge has value and who is positioned as a producer of knowledge.” (Abdi, 2021, p. 3). This is important because nondominant communities' bases of knowledge are often dismissed and are not viewed as valuable. Abdi mentioned that “school is intended to develop students and communities that uphold and reproduce colonial and Western capitalistic goals” (Abdi, 2021, p.3). When parents are not viewed as being engaged in the school unless they conform to the Eurocentric notion of what engagement is, oppressive expectations and challenges are imposed

on families whose notions of engagement do not align with the dominant values. Abdi (2021) aligns her position with that of Crozier and Davies (2005, 2007), who “cautioned against a monolithic approach to a conception of parental engagement, one that fails to consider the needs, expectations, and barriers faced by families when engaging schools” (Abdi, 2021, p.10). These challenges stem from immigrant families and students being subjected to processes of *othering* based on race and gender by school staff and leadership.

Ultimately, Abdi (2021) hopes that her study aids in the change needed in the school system to understand and value the qualities and expertise Somali mothers bring when it comes to their children’s education. Abdi’s study heavily focused on perception of Somali mothers as resisting, rather than amplifying their efforts to advocate or enrich their children’s education. Abdi (2021) highlight the manners in which Somali mothers’ voices are unheard and not valued in the school system as they are treated like children. A deficit narrative is also imposed on Somali families, as illustrated by a teacher’s assessment that Somali boys will not settle down and do their work. When asked what was different about Somali boys, the teacher added, “perhaps it’s the family thing like we were saying, more absent fathers. I don’t know” (Abdi, 2021, p.18).

A goal of Abdi’s research included developing strategies to address these challenges by pushing to “expand notions of parental involvement from school-centric to larger bodies of knowledge and expertise rooted in lived experiences, and ‘funds of knowledge’ within these communities that offer a better understanding of how parents are involved in the education of their children” (Abdi, 2021, p.4).

Abdi (2021) describes how Somali mothers employed *Hooyonimo* in response to the discrimination and oppression faced by their children. Hooyonimo is a concept that Abdi (2021)

draws from *matrilotency*, “an Indigenous African worldview on motherhood, to understand Somali mothers’ conception of their role in their children’s education” (p.25). According to Abdi (2021), *hooyonimo* had to be reimagined in this new context for the Somali mothers who initially believed it to have values about harmony. *Hooyonimo*, in this new context, because responding to the prejudice and oppressive school environment involved collectively coming together and advocating for their children and standing up to school authorities who were over-policing Somali boys in Gates School because they believed that “children belonged to all (Abdi, 2021, p.25) A mother stated:

We used to tell our children, ‘Your teacher is right; whatever the teacher says is correct.’ We need to forget about our ways of how we did things back home and of trusting the school blindly. ...Here, the teacher is not your second parent. In fact, some of them are your enemies. Here, you have to watch out, because some of the teachers are the problem. [translation] (Abdi, 2021, p.22)

The excerpt shows that because of the adversities that the children were experiencing at school, the concept of *Hooyinimo* changed. *Hooyinimo* went from the parents telling their children that the teachers were their second parents to warning their children about the teachers as being a potential threat.

These studies are laying the groundwork for my research by highlighting both the challenges faced by Somali families and their children and the ways these families resist oppressive school systems. They emphasize how families prioritize their values and objectives. The research illuminates the evolving dynamics within the Somali diaspora, illustrating how families employ diverse strategies to help their children navigate a racially biased system while maintaining and enriching their cultural identity. The studies have provided valuable insights,

allowing me to identify gaps that warrant further investigation. They have guided the development of my research questions, focusing specifically on families with young children. Moreover, these studies have shaped my conceptual framework and methodology to adopt a strength-based approach.

Educational equity issues in America

Prior to coming here most African immigrants view the United States as a utopia, a place where they will be able to accomplish and live out all their dreams, dreams that seemed unattainable in their countries of origin (Kiramba et al., 2020; Ukpokodu, 2018). Unfortunately, upon arrival to this new land, they are immediately confronting challenges such as language barriers, stereotypes, racism, pressures of assimilation, and acculturation, relearning the ropes of navigating school environments, and inequities (Basford, 2010; Bigelow, 2007, 2008; Roxas & Roy 2012; Ukpokodu, 2018). Much of the literature around the Somali immigrant experience is collected from the perspectives of older Somali youth who discuss how they are impacted by their families, peers, and context (Basford, 2010; Bigelow, 2007, 2008; Roxas, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Roxas & Roy, 2012). There is limited research focused on parents of young Somali children. Existing data is, more often than not, collected from the perspective of educators who view parents as not involved (Bigelow, 2007, 2008; Roxas, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Roxas & Roy, 2012). Educators need to hear from Somali families with young children if these early learners are going to be supported in their educational endeavors. Without investing and understanding the intersectionality of Somali families, what is likely to happen is that educators, policymakers, and researchers will continue to misidentify and misrepresent the students and families they serve.

Black Muslim and a Refugee in U.S Schools

Mainstream schools expose immigrant students to the dominant culture of their new society. In return, schools become a place where students explore the meaning of their own identity. Studies show that Black immigrant youth face more challenges than Asian and LatinX immigrants because of their religious identity and racial background (Basford, 2010; Kusow, 2006; Oikonomidy, 2007; Rong & Brown, 2002). Bigelow (2008) found that youth who experienced xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia became less engaged in their schools. Ukpokodu (2018) asserts that African students who are Muslim are "more likely to experience tremendous challenges in navigating and negotiating the U.S. school system and culture that are plagued by xenophobia or Islamophobia than non-Muslim African immigrant students" (p.73). Evidence of xenophobic and Islamophobic behavior can be found in several studies (Abdi, 2021; Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Basford, 2010; Bigelow, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Roxas, 2008; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Ukpokodu, 2018). Since they are black and Muslim, Somali students usually experience cultural and religious prejudice from staff and peers (Basford, 2010; Bigelow, 2008; Roxas, 2008; Roxas & Roy, 2011; Ukpokodu, 2018). Basford (2010) shared the experience of the Muslim students when they visited another high school that had a population that was predominantly white and middle to the upper class, noting that, "When the hijab-clad Kalsami students walked through the hallways to use the bathrooms, they heard students yell from a nearby mathematics class, 'Look, there go the little terrorist!'" (p. 495). Basford goes on to describe how the Kalsami students observed several people in the math class, including the math teacher, laugh loudly at the comment. In another instance, Basford (2010) shares that a supervisor from a university displayed religious scrutiny of the Kalsami students who were praying publicly in the classroom. The teacher questioned and was concerned about

whether the practice was “legal in schools.” The supervisor’s reaction reveals how little some people in the field of education understand students’ rights to practice their religion. The experience also exposes how dominant society envisions “multiculturalism” as having nothing to do with religion (Basford, 2010, p 495).

Roy and Roxas (2011) address the complexities of power that educators display at schools. In most studies that were reviewed, students' religious and cultural practices are often met with disapproval from authorities at school who don't understand them. The authors also found that most educators in their study received little to no training on culturally responsive teaching, leaving schools are ill-prepared to support refugee children within the education context. One educator interviewed in Roy and Roxas’ (2011) study questioned the validity of their students wearing the hijab because they did not always see others wearing them. This educator failed to consider the distinctions between the decisions of individual students, and the educator did not consider that some students chose to wear the hijab while others did not. The students in the study were punished for practicing their faith and trying to uphold their family values of praying by being sent to the principal's office multiple times and missed instructional time when they had to pray.

Oikonomidoy (2007) conducted a Qualitative study examining the experiences of Somali female students and their experiences with religious discrimination and language learning in their host country's education system. The author highlights that Muslim Somali female high school students found it challenging to move from predominantly Muslim countries where their schooling was around teaching the Quran and learning about Islam to the States where “their religion provided them with minority status” (p.19). Students in this study talked about instances where they were targeted simply for wearing hijab, one sharing, “When you come here people

say “‘what is under your scarf?’ and they try to pull it off and stuff like that.” Later in the interview, she added,” people judge us by what we wear, like our scarves and stuff. They think we are bald or something.” (p. 19)

According to Oikonomidoy (2007), students in the study shared that their peers would ask them about Osama Bin Laden, to which she would respond, “How am I supposed to know? I am going to the same school as you, wake up in the same neighborhood as you. It is just crazy!” (Oikonomidoy, 2007, p. 20). In another instance, she mentioned that she confronted a teacher in a class who spoke negatively about Islam in discussing the Gulf War. She brought to his attention the diversity that characterizes Muslim people and encouraged him not to target one religion, “because every religion, everything has bad people” (Oikonomidoy, 2007, p. 20). These traumatic experiences often lead students to question their identity as Muslims and Black and whether they should embrace or discard their identities. Students who chose to embrace their Muslim Black identities used it as a tool to overcome challenges at school. Somali culture and religious values continue to influence the identity, perceptions, and practices they bring to schools, and students utilize those practices as a form of strength. Students kept their prayers, and young women wore their hijabs (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Leet-Otley, 2020).

Experiencing prejudice in the mainstream schooling system led some parents to try charter schools as an alternative. The Basford (2010) study described how East African Muslim youth perceived their acceptance by students and teachers in mainstream U.S. schools compared to an East African charter school. (Basford, 2010) found that Muslim students had better experiences in charter schools because in mainstream schools, while they felt invisible, they also felt targeted in the classroom because of their beliefs. For instance, in mainstream schools, students reported that teachers made more biased comments and imposed more restrictive

religious accommodations. Teachers were perceived as annoyed with the students who were frustrated explaining their prayer rituals to them. In turn, even after students explained, some teachers did not let them pray. The students also shared how, after 9/11, the mainstream school climate was stressful for them, and the teachers did not speak up for them against bullying students; they didn't alleviate their burden. In contrast, students at the charter school reported that the teachers "appeared to serve East African youth as advisors, mentors, and even 'second parents'" (Basford, 2010, p. 498). The students stated that the teachers spent more time with them and were more involved. Therefore, in my study, i seek to explore how the families and the program address and mitigate the challenges faced by students.

Teachers Lack Knowledge About Their Student's Experiences and Backgrounds

Misunderstanding between students and teachers can occur due to cultural background differences (Kiramba et al., 2020; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Nasir et al., 2009). Because teachers receive little to no training on culturally responsive teaching, and if they do it might not include religion as a cultural intersection, and therefore the amount of time and support they give refugee students is limited. Roxas & Roy (2012) qualitative study with six Somali Bantu high school students and their families illustrate this issue in their study examining challenges Somali Bantu students endure during the transition to the school system. The teacher in the study did not know the students' previous experiences. When asked about the method of communicating with the students' family and how the teacher tried to motivate or help the student, the teacher responded:

She did not have the time to attend to a student who did not put in the time their self. She explained that her teaching commitments at school and role as the English Department chair gave her little time to ‘cheerlead a student who did not want to be in the game.’” (Roxas & Roy, 2012, p. 478)

One counselor in another study said:

I guess education isn't in the culture of the Somali Bantu because coming from Africa, you know—I guess they just don't value it there, so it's a real challenge for the teachers to help them value what we value. But we are working really hard to get these little guys on track. (Roy & Roxas, 2011, p. 533)

These educators failed to look inward to consider how the education system is failing the students, their families, and the lifelong impacts on the students.

Abdullah, the student from Roxas & Roy’s (2012) study, internalizes the educator’s lack of support, labels himself as a failure, and questions his intellect and capability of doing the work. Roxas and Roy (2012) state, “Abdullah adopted the meritocratic views put forth by his educators; that is, he internalized the ‘bootstrap’ metaphor, attributing his failures to himself rather than the intersection of factors including the lack of school support” (Roxas and Roy, 2012, p. 486). When students feel like their teachers are not interested in getting to know who they are, they feel unwelcome and invisible, which leads to them feeling marginalized (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Basford, 2010). Regardless of whether Somali students are achieving in the classroom, the need to connect with educators to see them as individuals and understand their personal experiences is meaningful for Somali students. Experiences of oppression profoundly impact refugee and immigrant students’ identity as learners and their views about the school.

Faith and Spirituality

Somali family's approach to educating children include faith, spirituality, family roles, and community wisdom. I reviewed the literature on three topics pertaining to how and what Somali families educate their children about. This provides insight into my research questions about families' approaches to educating children. One of the most common themes that emerged from literature is the importance of religious beliefs as an asset for children and families. Religion is an essential factor in the Somali community. Scholars such as Basford (2010) and Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) assert that immigrant groups situate their identity first in their faith and that parents reinforce religious traditions at home. Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) emphasizes that Somalis in the Diaspora identify themselves first as Muslims instead of Somali. Participants in the studies discussed how Islam educates them on all aspects of life, whether family relationships, learning, or social interactions. They see Islam as a way of being. Somalis are Muslim *and* Black, distinct from the predominantly white non-Muslim American mainstream. Islamic beliefs profoundly influence Somalis in their homeland and the Diaspora. Religion and spirituality shape the roles of families (Roubeni et al., 2015). For Somalis, the family constitutes the foundation of the Islamic community.

Somalis greatly value traditional culture and religion; families use religion to teach in an informal context. Culture and religion are considered the means of protecting and teaching children within the Somali community. Somali parents view the same threads as essential to supporting their children's academic endeavors and a way to hold on to their cultural and traditional ways of being. Some families send their children back to Somalia during the summers so they can meaningfully immerse and learn about Somali culture because they value and believe immersion in Somali culture gives their children a foundational lens through which to navigate

their experiences in the states. Somali families strongly value teaching their children the Quran. Awokoya (2020) reaffirms the importance of cultural integrity and how immigrant families instill traditional values, expectations, and practices in their children. Thomas's (2016) study in Norway found that parents stressed that they sent their children back to Somalia to grow up in a Muslim country to get closer to their *deen* or religion. Norway lacks Islamic schools so some Somali parents, committed to their traditions, or cultural integrity, if you will, send their children back to Somalia to receive the Islamic and cultural education they value as it ensures continuity of their community. Parents reported that they would have failed in their duties as parents if their children had lost their religion and culture (Thomas, 2016). Thomas interviewed a 20-year-old girl whose parents sent to Syria, Egypt, and Somalia when she was seven years old. When asked about her experience, she reported:

I am very happy for the experience I had. My parents wanted me to understand the importance of Islam. I studied the Qur'an and learned to appreciate my religion. Obviously, I wish I spoke Norwegian much better, but religion, like anything else of value, comes at a cost. Inshallah, I will catch up and do well. (Thomas, 2016, p.10)

Going to Somalia is associated with the idea that children will gain respect and understanding of their culture. Although not all the young people in Thomas's (2016) study shared this sentiment. Two out of the three students, when asked if they would send their children back to Somalia two agreed, and the third said she was upset about spending the summer of her youth in Somalia she shared she felt left out by her classmates who are now at universities. In response to a question regarding her daughter's education in Norway lacking in language and cultural competence, the parent replied: "I say first save the soul, and all else follows. She could have become a drug addict today, barely standing on her feet as they do

around Oslo Central Station. At least I don't have to see her corpse before I die, Inshallah" (Thomas, 2016, p.11). Ultimately, parents justified sending their children to Somalia during summer breaks an effort to save their children. This was echoed by many of the parents who felt that they were losing their children to drug and criminal activity their new environment, and they felt the schools were adding to the problems. Families shared that they lost trust in Norwegian schools because they taught their children about things their religion and culture are opposed to. One Somali father said:

"More and more Somalis are convinced that schools in Norway are eager to take away their children. The neighbors, teachers, and child welfare services conspire to seize Somali children so they can indoctrinate them with decadent values." (Thomas, 2016, p. 11)

Similarly, Leet-Otley (2020) critical ethnography study highlights the experiences of young Somali girls wearing the hijab and dealing with anti-Muslim discrimination at a K-6 public charter school in a city in the Midwest. The author had twelve students ten- to thirteen-year-olds participate in semi structured interview. Leet-Otley shared that research has shown "that female teachers often feel compelled to help immigrant girls overcome what they perceive to be oppressive cultures. For Somali girls, this often takes the form of teachers encouraging them to take off their hijab" (p. 48). Leet-Otley (2020) shares an excerpt from a conversation with Fatima, a second-generation Somali student, about an experience she had in first grade. The author asks Fatima if she liked her school. Fatima says she did not because teachers would tell her to take her hijab off: "No, the teachers and the principals. And they would tell me to take off my scarf, and I would say- no! So, then they convinced me to take it off, and they told me to wear a Halloween costume. They bought me a Halloween costume that, like, really shows my figure, and they told me to take off my scarf, and when [*sic*] - and then my mom took me out of

that school because my mom, she didn't like it. They convinced me to take off my scarf! (Leet-Otley, 2020, p. 48)

Fatima describes a scenario in which a teacher and administrator take it upon themselves to be the “saviors” to this young Muslim girl they assume was being oppressed—in doing so, they went against her and her family’s values. In response, Fatima’s mother disenrolled her from the school. This is an excellent example of how schools and educators are going against the wishes of the families and children they intend to serve. Aligning with the notion that schools are teaching values opposed to those of the Somali families, Abdi (2021) highlights how school structures can be colonial in nature and represent the intentions of coloniality. Abdi (2021) states that colonial school structures may be explained in two ways: focusing on the purpose of schools and how schools are “intended to develop students and communities that uphold and reproduce colonial and Western capitalistic goals” (p.3), and “the specific schooling practices that uphold, reproduce, and reify colonial purposes of schooling” (p.3).

Family Roles

Family support was essential to immigrant and refugee students navigating their new educational settings. Students reported that their families were vital to their academic aspirations (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Bigelow, 2007; Kiramba et al., 2020; Kumi-Yeboah, 2020; Roubeni et al., 2015). In her qualitative research, Bigelow (2007) explored the challenges that Somali immigrant youth and their families dealt with such as religious and racial bias in both educational and non-educational settings. Bigelow (2007) found that a significant cultural capital for the Somali family was their “unwavering belief that education is paramount and the one sure path to success in the United States” (Bigelow, 2007, p.18). Similarly, Tzenis’s (2019) qualitative longitudinal study investigating Somali diaspora youth aspirations and the conditions

that influenced them, found that many students contended that their parents were the primary reason they had high hopes for their education. The students shared that "without parents, you can't do anything" (p.19). This highlighted the aspirations that parents instilled in their children, who understood that they wanted them to have opportunities they were not afforded in their home countries (Roubeni et al., 2015; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Families are essential agents of change in their children's lives at home and school. Basford's (2010) study occurred in Minnesota, where the United States' largest Somali population is concentrated. In this qualitative case study, the author delved into the experiences of 21 Somali students, exploring the impact of their education in both mainstream schools and the only culturally specific charter high school in Minnesota. Notably, this charter school was composed of a student body of 98% East African Muslims, with the majority identifying as Somali. In response to the experiences of racism and religious antagonism that families witnessed their children experiencing in mainstream schools, Muslim immigrant families united to create Kalsami Charter High School where their children's language, culture, history, and religious beliefs would be at the forefront of their learning. Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) found that students who took lessons in the Somali language and culture and religion from a Somali teacher were notably distinctive; the students were engaged with the familiar content presented in a familiar language. The school was culturally sustaining, community-driven, and included Somali teachers, administrators, board members, community members, and elders. According to Basford's (2010) study, the students attending this charter school maintained their identity as Muslims and Somali and their relationship with their parents and the community. This change was possible because their funds of knowledge and ways of being were acknowledged and

included in the school context. This shows us how parents are agents of their children's learning in formal settings, such as schools, and that families are not without knowledge and agency.

The Muslim parents in this study were the ones who decided for their children to leave mainstream schools to attend Kalsami Charter High School. To send their children to a school that engages in culturally sustaining practices and values the funds of knowledge that Somali students bring created space in pedagogy practices, such as storytelling, that date generations back in Somali history. Somali families come from an oral culture where lessons are taught and learned through storytelling, poetry, and songs. Somali families enrich their children's learning by using orality as a form of teaching and helping them communicate, listen, and speak (Bigelow, 2008). Elders are an essential part of this process because children learn alongside them, giving them the invaluable experience of learning firsthand from those who contribute to their cultural identity. Drawing on families as being essential to their children's learning, Bigelow (2007) points out how Somali families were an asset to their children's educational success by making sure that they could study and not worry about the financial burdens of the household. An experience that's often discussed in the scope of immigrant children is that families, due to their language barrier, rely on the students to translate; however, Bigelow's (2007) qualitative study discusses how the mother relies on other support from the community and family members to oversee the success of her children. Bigelow's research shows us that Somali parents value education and are involved by making sure that their older children do not have to worry about the financial burdens or the process of becoming cultural brokers for the parents. Mothers monitor their children and inquiries about how they are doing, and even asks where they are sitting in the classroom to ensure they sit in the front. The mother jokes with her child about sitting in the back. Also, the mother monitored who her daughter was making friends

with and encouraged her to be around students who were perceived to be studious. This study highlighted that the mother wanted her children to focus only on school and not worry about other responsibilities. Somali families also find resources within their community; if a child has an older sibling, that sibling will also help. Extended family members also play an integral role in helping students (Oikonomidoy, 2007; Roubeni et al., 2015).

Here is a communication issue in how schools are engaging with families. Several studies suggest that when Somali students have a hard time in school, their families are usually pointed out as the cause as they are not perceived to value education (Roxas, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). On the other hand, others pointed out that education is invaluable to Somali families and that Somali parents have immense regard and a positive attitude toward learning (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Basford, 2010; Bowie et al., 2017, Bigelow 2007; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Parents in these studies were enthusiastic about their children's learning, and as a community, they viewed education as a gateway out of poverty. Parents' positive views about education positively influence their children's perception. While students face many challenges in their schooling, they are sustained and motivated by their parents' encouragement and substantial expectations (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002). Roy and Roxas (2011) used an ethnographic study of Somali Bantu families to understand the family's educational experiences. They interviewed mothers, fathers, elders, and siblings of the students they observed at the school, and also they interviewed educators, counselors, and community members. Interviews revealed a massive disconnect in communication between the families and teachers. They discussed how the teachers in the study were frustrated with their students' progress with schoolwork and attributed it to their home lives, and they blamed the students and the parents for not being able to learn the language and excel in the content. However, the parents discussed how they were

involved in helping their children with schoolwork and wanted their children to excel in school and achieve high grades. The school's narrative upheld the notion that the students were not motivated to learn because their home life was problematic. Families used storytelling to give their children hope; they shared stories about the opportunities they were not afforded back home. Families encouraged their children by reminding them of the opportunities they had in the United States that were not available in Somalia, especially because they were Bantu. Somali Bantu families shared stories about the value of education and the opportunities to pursue education with their children. Sharing these stories allowed parents to express the difficulties they endured and hardships they had to overcome and continue to contend with, to enable their children to attend school (Roy & Roxas, 2011). The Somali Bantu parents in the study shared the ways they encouraged and helped their children with whatever experience they possessed. A parent discussed how he assisted his child with the skills he gained in Somalia and the refugee camps. The siblings also provided support by calling teachers, getting updates, and assisting their siblings. The families were eager and networked with whoever could provide additional support for their children, including imploring the researchers to look out for their children while they were at school. Somali Bantu parents enrolled in English language courses at community colleges to model the value of education for their children. The educators continued to embrace a deficit perspective related to families, often overlooking the opportunity to draw on the strengths of their students' families. In essence, educators closed the door to potential partnerships as a path to meaningfully supporting their students (Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Bowie et al.'s (2017) study in Seattle, Washington used a descriptive phenomenological design to look at Somali families' parenting experiences in the United States. The participants in the study included 14 mothers and 6 fathers. According to Bowie et al. (2017), Somali parents

experience a sense of being misunderstood and marginalized by authorities, resulting in a lack of respect towards the system from their children. For instance, during the study, mothers revealed instances where school officials conveyed to students that parents are not allowed to use physical discipline. Consequently, children began threatening to report their families to child protective services, leaving the families feeling that schools were misinterpreting and undermining their parental authority. This, in turn, fostered an environment that encouraged disrespect from the children. The pattern devastates Somali families who cling to the hope for their children to succeed in their new home country while retaining their cultural and spiritual values. Somali families in the study felt that their tight-knit community's contributions to childrearing and character development was an ethos not welcome at their children's schools. The role of parents in Somalia's education system does not involve the expectation that families be directly involved in the formal education of their children but rather families provide the necessary foundation and resources for their children to succeed within their community and the world at large--teaching their children cultural values, language, traditional practices, and good manners--while respecting and trusting teachers completely with the formal education of their children (Bigelow, 2007; Bowie et al., 2017; Roubeni et al., 2015). Western notions of parent's direct involvement in the formal education of their children is anathema. The expectations of the U.S. school system were puzzling to the Somali parents in the study, for example volunteering in the classroom. Parents not fluent in English described how the language barrier made them feel inept, misunderstood, and disempowered when it came to their role in their children's education. To face this obstacle, families drew on the strengths of their community--they networked within their community, depending on each other and community elders for support.

Community Wisdom

Somali communities provide a plethora of support in navigating a system new to families at the intersection of two cultures. A strongly linked community that supports the family's values positively influences the well-being of children and the community at large (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Bigelow, 2007; Kaptejns & Arman, 2008). The social networks that families utilize are integral to the support they provide for their children. The family is the central unit of society, and the family's role is considered vital in raising and educating children (Huraibi, 2014). Somali families have a strong community identity that supports and helps ground their children in their ethnic culture. Like most immigrant communities, Somalis are deliberate in their choice to live in ethnic communities where they can come together and support one another. The community serves as a source of strength and accountability when parents confront challenges around supporting their children. Somali families support their children by moving to areas where their children have access to optimal conditions. Frequently, Somali create informal Qur'anic schools for their children within their communities. A Qur'anic school is a setting where during weekend classes children are taught how to read and write in Arabic and learn about Islamic practices such as how to pray, fast, and perform obligatory rituals (Bigelow, 2007; Huraibi, 2014). Thomas (2016) asked a Somali *imam* (a mosque leader) about his thoughts on why Somali parents were sending their children to Somalia and the Middle East during their summer breaks. The man responded by saying that Somali people place a big emphasis on the task of educating their children in the Qur'an and that they are often boastful about how much of the Qur'an their child has memorized and can recite from memory. The imam continues, "The West has yet to appreciate the religiosity of the Somali" (Thomas, 2016, p.11). Quranic learning opportunities greatly influence Somali families and how they bring up their children and shape their identity as

learners and Muslims.

Power struggles often occur between schools and families, resulting in unfavorable perceptions of each other. The American educational system has long been based on white normative dominant norms and practices (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; McWayne, 2021). So, while Somali families are willing to do whatever they can to support their children's education, they have difficulty navigating the system when they try to advocate for their children. Families are looked down upon and treated as if they do not know any better. Frequently, schools ask the parents to confirm and adhere to their ways rather than take responsibility for the culture they have created. They wield an unbending authority that makes families feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. Somali families see the schools as parts of a system that pushes the dominant culture onto them and their children by putting forth ideas contradictory to parents' role and their school involvement.

As I discussed previously, Somali families and their children coming to the U.S. must overcome many barriers. Children and families face barriers within the school system are fraught with many deficit ideologies; however, children's home culture positively contributes to their learning and development by utilizing their oral traditions and religious practices. The literature does not capture well families' assets but instead focuses on how families and their children are lacking. We have limited information about how African immigrants, primarily Somali immigrant refugee families, support their children in formal and informal contexts.

From the standpoint of schools, Somali families are viewed as lacking expertise, unreachable, and uninterested in their children's education. The deficit understanding held by schools guides decisions related to engaging Somali families, similar findings exist for non-

dominant families (Ishimaru,2020). For example, in the literature, Somali families are perceived as not being involved in their children's education and, therefore, not being an asset to their children (Bigelow,2007; Roxas, 2008; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Much of the research on the experiences of Somali students focused on how teachers and schools were positioned as *the* experts where they demonstrated and transmitted their expertise and knowledge about children's development and learning to the parents, who they viewed as not having the expertise to live up to their parental responsibility.

Washington State is considered to have the third-largest population of Somali people in the United States, after Minnesota and Ohio. Within King County, Somali students are among the third largest English Language Learning (ELL) students receiving services within schools (Ott, 2010). While there is some research on Somali families in the health education field (Betancourt, et al., 2020; Halcón et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2009; Lightfoot., 2016; Nepal et al., 2010;), there is limited knowledge about Somali family's cultural practices and experiences in the early learning field. There is little existing literature on the Somali immigrant family experience as they navigate the early childhood education field. In particular, Somali families' cultural familial practices are missing from the early learning family engagement literature. Much of the emerging literature has focused on the Latinx population.

Methods

Researcher's Positionality

My lived experiences strongly influence my research interest. As a young Black Muslim Somali woman and first-generation refugee, I view the world through a multifaceted lens. This

kaleidoscope perspective provides me with a range of viewpoints, including an understanding that, as a researcher working within my own community, I may face some obstacles. However, I also recognize that I possess many strengths that I can contribute to the field.

My previous research with Somali mothers who were early learning educators allowed me to better understand my positionality as both a researcher and Somali person. Through creating the focus group questions, conducting the focus groups, and analyzing the data, I was able to adopt an emic perspective. As someone with the same background as my participants, I had extensive knowledge of Somali customs and values, which enabled me to engage in authentic and open conversations with them. Many of the topics discussed during the focus groups resonated with my experiences, allowing me to ask relevant and insightful questions.

My insider status as a Somali woman was an asset in building rapport, nuanced understanding, and trusting relationships with my study participants. This foundation of trust allowed me to engage families authentically and to have open and honest conversations, enabling me to collect rich and meaningful data.

As a researcher, I was aware of the potential perception that my academic background was a form of power and privilege that could make me an outsider to some. This self-awareness helped me remain critical and reflect on my actions, words, and choices. I was able to have. Although I am not a parent, I have served as a guardian, aunt, sister, community member, and mentor. In my Somali culture, the word for maternal aunt is *habayar*, its root words being *habar* meaning mother, and *yar* meaning little, which considers my role as a maternal aunt to be a little mother in a community where collectiveness is vital. This captures the importance of my role in the lives of my nieces and nephews. I have also been an interpreter for PTA meetings and

supported families while living in Washington, in addition to supporting data collection with families for local community organizations.

The first part of my dissertation title came from a focus group that I conducted with Somali families during the autumn of 2020. When I asked the mothers if they had any concluding thoughts about their school experiences, one mother expressed a desire to be treated like other parents, specifically referring to White parents who could directly without self-censoring. She spoke passionately about the inequities and stereotypes she had faced as a Black and visibly Muslim mother. This mother's strength and determination to advocate for her children and herself, despite facing numerous challenges, inspired me. Her story reflects the experiences of many refugee and immigrant families fighting for a better future for their children. I hope to contribute positively to that future.

Research Design

Qualitative research design will help focus the study on meaning and process. Qualitative methods offer an effective way of gaining insight into how "individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (p. 23). A qualitative research design allows for a nuanced approach to my endeavor to learn about Somali families--their hopes and dreams for their young children, their experiences with their children in the early learning years, and how they cultivate and support their children's identity, learning, and development. I'm also interested in how Somali families conceptualize child development based on cultural and familial practices. According to Merriam

and Tisdell (2016), "Qualitative researchers conducting a qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 24). This study is essential to illuminate the cultural, community, and familial practices of Somali families in a manner that will provide a foundation for professionals to build stronger partnerships with families to improve child outcomes. My use of qualitative research methods and community design circles, allows for a *first person* shift in this narrative by illuminating the voices of Somali families without further marginalizing them. By exploring their varied backgrounds through lived research, I seek to capture the nuances of the participant's cultural practices inherent within their context. I will explore and highlight Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children and the schools they attend. Qualitative research design can be a vehicle for positive change in how families are depicted by including their experiences and expertise, and illustrating that families have a wealth of cultural expertise that greatly contribute to learning. I seek to capture and illuminate Somali families' complex, dynamic, and subtle dimensions and their practices, experiences, and organizational life. It is essential to document and capture the wisdom and knowledge of Somali families in their social and cultural context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Sampling Procedures and Rationale

For the current study, a purposeful sampling (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) technique was used to recruit Somali families who have or have had children enrolled in SDPs dual language preschool program. A criterion-based sampling technique was used to recruit ten parents and legal guardians who (a) identified themselves as Somali, (b) was a parent or legal guardian of a child birth to age 8, and (c) have been in the United States for at least five years. The sample size of ten allowed for a continuous in-depth dialogue for the families to *dream* together.

Along with the criterion sampling, the participants of this study also represented convenience sampling techniques (Creswell et al., 2011) since the participants were readily available to partake in the study through the early childhood education program. My existing relationship with the organization was a function of my own participation in developing a Somali language assessment tool with the school's leadership team. I proposed that we interview families of children currently or previously enrolled in the program to discuss their children's learning, development, and goals. I considered this an excellent opportunity to initiate the process of cultivating change-making. Beginning with exploring families' priorities for their children's learning. Throughout the process of learning from and with Somali families, an action item/tool/ strategy/process will be created collectively, and the tool will be used to create more equitable changes.

Participant Demographics

Participant Demographics, 2022

Pseudonym	Age of Participant	Number of Children	Ages of Children	Participant Birthplace	Education Background	Years in Washington
AZ	32 Years	2	6, 7	Kenya	Social work degree, pursuing master's in business.	23 Years
Abyan	30 Years	3	1, 3, 6	Somalia	Psychology. Computer Science ongoing	21 Years
Astan	40 Years	7	4, 8, 10, 11, 17, 20, 21	Somalia	Completed education in Somalia	10 Years
Dunyo	29 Years	2	1,4	Somalia	Started education in Egypt.	10 Years

Fahmo	33 Years	5	3, 5, 6, 8, 14	Kenya Refugee Camp	Completed high school	14 Years
Mama Jannah	35 Years	4	8 months, 2, 4, 5	Yemen	Completed high school in Yemen	11 Years
Maha	35 Years	3	8 months, 11 months, 5 years	Syria	Business degree in Washington	17 Years
Riyan	30 Years	3	10 months, 3, 5	Somalia	Social work, master's in social work (ongoing)	18 Years
Salma	38 Years	4	3, 7, 12, 13	Somalia	Limited school due to civil war	11 Years
Yasmin	27 Years	3	1, 3, 4	Somalia	Ongoing College	23 Years

Data Collection Procedures

This study aimed to start with the needs and priorities of Somali families regarding their children. I wanted to illuminate Somali families' values, beliefs, cultural, familial practices, and perceptions of early learning and family engagement. Using community design circles and individual interviews, I had dialogues with Somali families who had children enrolled in a dual language early learning program in Washington. The community design circles, and individual interviews explored the various experiences of the families. They aimed to capture Somali families' dreams and priorities for their children while highlighting their practices. The goal was to illuminate their lived experiences by discussing their experiences with early childhood and family engagement.

Setting

Somali Dual Program (SDP) (a pseudonym) is a community-based nonprofit organization in Washington State serving the King County area's East African immigrant community . It was founded in 2012 to respond to the resource disparity concerns in the Early Learning Community. SDP offered technical assistance to family childcare educators participating in the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Early Achievers program. In 2015, SDP organized the first East African Child Care conference with an attendance of over 250 Early learning educators (SDP Annual Report, 2019). SDP has since expanded its services to include opening the first dual language preschool program in Somali and English in the United States, Offerings at SDP include family engagement and advocacy programs, and professional development training for Early Learning Educators. SDP also serves as a support HUB for a unique pilot program that supports 14 Family Child Care providers in operating high-quality dual language multicultural preschool programs within their homes. This is particularly important in Washington as around 60% of childcare providers in King County identify as family child care and many are Somali (SDP Annual Report, 2019). Most of the children enrolled at the SDP preschool programs come from immigrant and refugee families who have stressed concerns about their children losing their sense of culture and language due to the loss of spoken heritage languages as children enter early learning programs. To meet the needs of the families and community, SDP launched its dual language preschool program to preserve immigrant and refugee children's identity through culturally sustaining child-focused programs by promoting the progression of traditional African parenting methods and narratives that are rooted in community (SDP Annual Report, 2019). Additionally, to increase the quality of East African and early childhood education programs, SDP reached out to Dr Gail Joseph and initiated developing a measure with the partnership of

Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington, to co-create a language assessment tool to support professional development efforts and inform early learning programs, policies, and practice.

Community Design Circles

Community design circles approach is a solidarity-driven process of partnership that “seeks to theorize and enact new forms of collaboration with nondominant families and communities, in terms of both change-making practices and the process of research itself” (Ishimaru et al., 2018, p. 38). Community design circles methodology emerged from the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016). According to Ishimaru et al. (2018), community design circles are offered, “as a methodological evolution aimed at reclaiming the central agentic role of families of color in transforming educational research and practice” (p. 38). Community design circles allow for the creation of space to honor and build from the lived experiences and highlight the priorities of Somali families rather than focusing on the challenges often discussed in the literature. Ishimaru et al. (2018) found that community design circles made it clear that the families participating in the research were “agentic changemakers” (p. 41). The approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the Somali family's experiences, practices, cultural knowledge, and the space to build “capacity for social dreaming” (Ishimaru et al., 2018, p. 38), leading to change and co-designing with Somali families. The present study, in keeping with the spirit of community design circles, sought to match Ishimaru et al.'s (2018) efforts to “position research not simply as an outcome to leverage in an existing power paradigm but a process of change-making that opens new transformative solutions and actions” (p. 41). Through a partnership with Somali Dual Program and adopting the community of design circles methodology as a means of rejecting Western colonial notions of the extractive process of

research, my study was the first step in prioritizing the lived experiences of the Somali mothers by starting from their knowledge and expertise. Participant mothers recruited for this study were Somali with children currently enrolled or previously enrolled in SDP's dual language preschool program. Mothers participated in four community design circles via Zoom, at the request of the participants. Community design circles allowed for a space where participants could collectively listen and respond to each other's experiences and perceptions. I facilitated the design circles and provided various modalities to engage with the Somali mothers online. I shared a Google document where participants could collaborate and share their ideas. I wrote down what the participants wanted to share and used PowerPoint slides to document our various dialogues.

The first design circle meeting focused on relationship building and shared understanding of the problem. An opportunity for the Somali mothers to get acquainted and identify a shared goal, and their collective hopes and dreams for their children, occurred during this first meeting as we focused on research question one: What are Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children?

The second community design circle focused on the second research question: How do Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning? The discussion was around families' current activities with their children. We delved into exploring what was significant to them and asked questions such as "How do you envision your children's experience in schools, programs, and communities?" In design circle two, we reviewed and established consensus regarding the overarching themes that had emerged from the first meeting. Subsequently, we initiated an icebreaker activity where the mothers shared their definitions and understanding of *hooyonimo* (matropotency). This led to a conversation about the roles of

mothers and how families support their children's learning, development, and identity. The mothers emphasized the importance of creating a secure environment for their children to thrive and grow, teaching them religious obligations such as wearing the hijab, observing prayers, and utilizing the Qur'an to regulate their emotions. They also emphasized the need to exemplify the desired behavior and lifestyle they wanted their children to embrace. Additionally, the mothers discussed the significance of striking a balance between raising their children in the States and maintaining their Deen (Islamic faith).

The third community design circle addressed the research question: How do Somali families reimagine schools? Participants brainstormed ideas in response to the collectively identified problem. The fourth community design circle involved sharing a summary of the first three community design circles to the mothers. The team discussed how the revelations from the previous community design circles could inform professional development, including starting an action plan to develop a Somali language assessment tool to ensure that their hopes, goals, and dreams were captured.

The community design circle approach allowed study participants the opportunity to thoughtfully consider topics that surfaced during the gatherings. The safe space of the community design circle served as a platform for a flow of open dialogue between participants where sharing thoughts was welcomed and encouraged. As a researcher, community design circles focused on shifting the narrative of Somali families toward justice and holding space with them as agents of change. Community design circles yielded essential information in answering my research questions by collaborating with the families.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to the community design circles, individual semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A interview guide) gave participants a space to talk about their personal experiences and choices privately without concern for potential group feedback around specific personal decisions related to their practices or decisions regarding their children. The interviews allowed me to explore further the participant's backgrounds, educational experiences, and parenting practices. The interviews were conducted in the language the participants chose. During the interviews, I took notes and recorded the interviews via Zoom. The interview questions allowed for a fluid conversation in which additional topics could be discussed. Through the interviews, I was able to highlight the essential elements of their experiences. As an insider, I prohibited myself asking questions based on my own experiences and assumptions about their experiences; instead I asked in-depth and probing questions to provide the participants the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words (Adam, 2015). Semi-structured and open-ended questions provided me a lens through which to view the daily experiences of Somali mothers. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to illuminate the essence of the Somali family experiences by asking questions that elicited descriptive responses. This provided space for the participants, Somali mothers, to tell us their stories, which was a good way of illuminating the unique individual experiences of Somali families who are navigating the education system in the United States.

Measures and Instruments

The Dedoose, an analysis tool was used to upload the interview transcriptions, code themes, and help highlight recurring themes. This step helped me reflect on the text and link any patterns that illuminated the mothers experiences. Deedose allowed me to create codes based

from the transcriptions and my conceptual frameworks which then became my codebook for coding the rest of the transcriptions for the interviews and the community design circles.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis consisted of an iterative process. Thematic analysis to look for themes and patterns in the data and categorize it and then using codes or labels (Glesne, 2016). According to Tissdel (2016), “The data analysis involves identifying recurring patterns that characterize the data. Findings are these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they were derived. The overall interpretation will be the researcher's understanding of the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Glesne, 2016, p. 25). According to Glesne (2016) “the goal of thematic analysis is to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of some social phenomenon through understanding the processes that tend to involve that phenomenon as well as the perceptions, values, and beliefs of people toward it” (Glesne, 2016, p.184). According to Glesne (2016) “A strength of thematic analysis is its ability to help reveal underlying complexities as you seek to identify tensions and distinctions and to explain where and why people differ from a general pattern” (Glesne, 2016, p.184).

During the analysis, I adopted an iterative approach, moving among the data to develop codes, themes, and tentative hypotheses. The coding scheme encompassed various categories, drawing on overarching concepts from the conceptual framework. For example, I focused on the Rules, Tools, and Community Division of Labor concepts from CHAT (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory) to explore their manifestations in the data. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, I incorporated both line-by-line coding and grouping and chunking techniques. I began with line-by-line coding to delve deeply into the data, capturing subtle nuances and patterns. For instance, when a parent mentioned anything related to religion, such as "Allah" or

"Deen," I tagged the code "Deen" onto the corresponding sentence. For example, when a parent said, "Even like showing them that love for Allah comes first," I tagged this sentence with the "Deen" code, as the parent's focus was on "Deen." This line-by-line tagging facilitated the identification of emergent themes from the transcriptions. Subsequently, I employed grouping and chunking techniques to analyze the data holistically and tagged the predefined codes aligned with the conceptual framework. This approach enabled me to examine the data more broadly, identifying overarching patterns and categories that emerged across the dataset. By combining line-by-line coding and grouping and chunking, I was able to conduct a thorough and nuanced analysis of the data.

Analyzing the transcription of the community design circle discussions and the individual interviews allowed me to trace families' sense-making process, organize their thoughts about early learning and family engagement, and highlight their priorities and goals for their children. This approach allowed me to draw out the patterns while gathering and organizing my data and decipher themes from what the participants have shared.

Data Trustworthiness and Credibility

I thoroughly reviewed the data during both the data collection and analysis phases. To enhance the credibility of my research while developing the community design circle guiding protocols, selecting quotes from transcripts, and interpreting and analyzing participants'

responses, I established trustworthiness through member checks. After each community design circle was completed, I would revisit the data during subsequent meetings, discussing the topics and quotes related to our discussions with the participants by sharing a recap on PowerPoint slides. This allowed them to verify whether I accurately captured their input and provided opportunities to add or clarify any information. To ensure the reliability of my study I also did peer reviews. I collaborated with a Somali research assistant who supported me with the translations of the transcriptions. She meticulously reviewed the recordings and transcriptions to ensure accuracy in transcription and translation. The research assistant and I held regular meetings to resolve any ambiguities or discrepancies in terms or expressions, ensuring a consensus.

Additionally, I enlisted the support of a Filipino research scientist who reviewed the English transcriptions and the initial codes I had generated. Following each design circle, I would debrief with the Filipino research scientist to gain insights, ask further questions, and clarify any ideas that might have been overlooked during the sessions with the participants. This multi-layered approach to data validation and cross-checking enhanced the robustness and credibility of my research.

Findings

As I delve into my findings, it is crucial to recognize the unique experiences of the Somali mothers in this study. Their generational status and individual identities, which they have navigated with remarkable resilience, have profoundly shaped their parenting decisions, approach to nurturing their children's holistic learning, identity, and development, and their reimagining of schooling. Some mothers, known as Generation 1.5, arrived in the States as

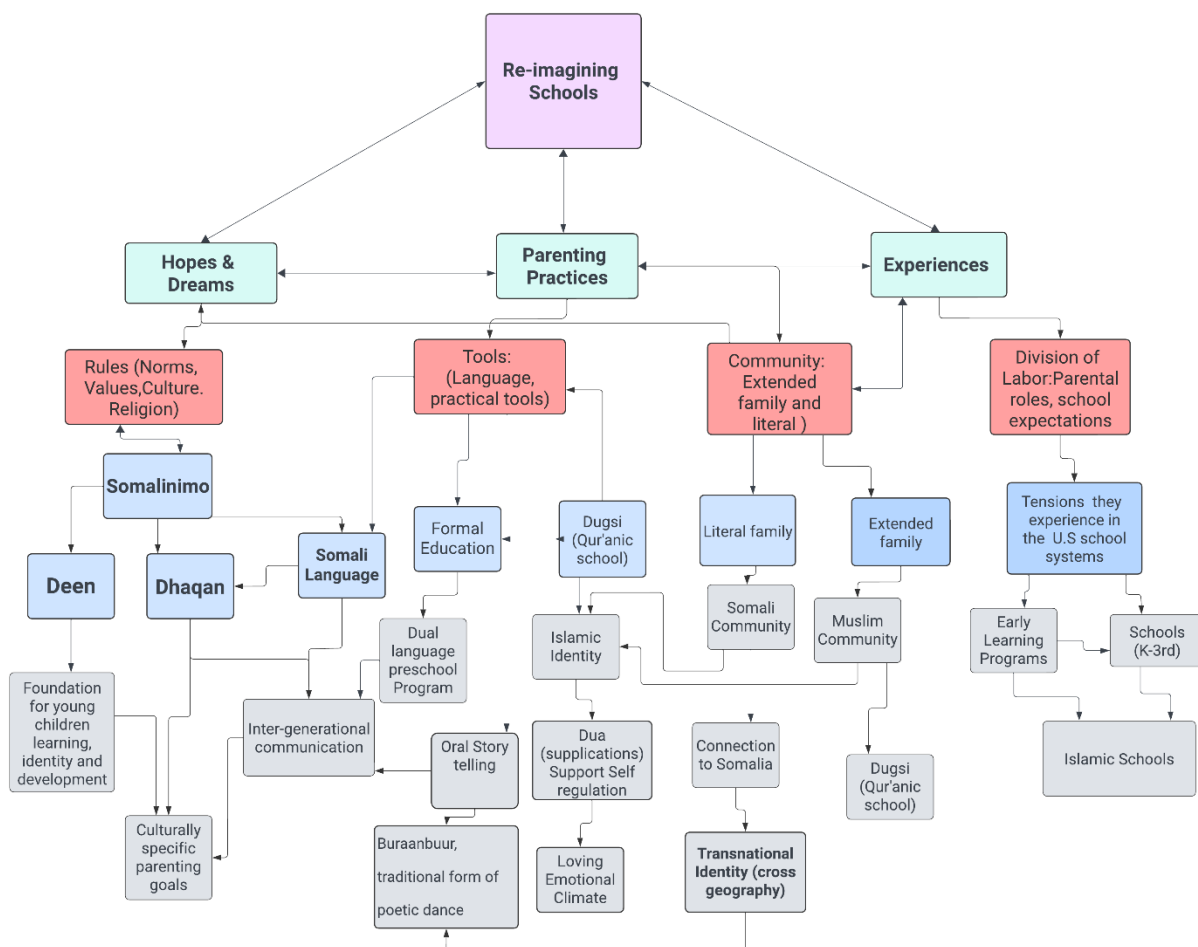
children, while others, considered 1st generation, came after age 13 (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Out of the ten participants, seven completed some form of schooling in the states, ranging from elementary school to college. The other three participants arrived between the ages of 24-30, having completed schooling abroad and not attending state schools.

The mothers in this study, with their diverse experiences, are not just passive recipients of their circumstances. They actively engage in a nuanced blending of their own schooling experiences, upbringing, Islamic faith, and *dhaqan*. They challenge the traditional meaning of *hooyonimo* from the older generation, which focuses on being consistently strong while only pouring into your children without concentrating on one's own well-being. These mothers, with their agency and determination, are redefining the concept of motherhood and their role within this evolving landscape, reconciling new ideas and concepts with their experiences in the United States. This process is distinct from previous generations who relied primarily on their experiences abroad (Warsame, 2019). These mothers integrate both "here" and "there" experiences, leaning more heavily on their schooling experiences in the United States due to their youthfulness upon arrival. They deliberately reflect on which practices and decisions facilitated their own learning, identity, and development, as well as the areas they wish their parents had the tools and experience to help navigate as they went through schooling in the United States.

These mothers are not just passive observers of the differences and similarities between the society in which they grew up and the context in which they are now raising their children. Unlike their parents, who did not attend schooling in the United States or did not live here during

their youth, the parents in this study have an insightful look into the schooling environment and American society. This understanding has helped reshape the ideas they had about how to raise children in the current climate. Reflecting on their experiences, they ponder how to implement strategies that sustain and support their children's holistic selves.

Figure 3: Concept Map



This figure presents a conceptual map illustrating key concepts that have emerged from the data, for example concepts such as Dhaqan, Deen, and Somalinimo are listed under rules since they were defined as the norms and values that guided the Somali mothers culturally specific parenting goals, practices etc. These concepts have been identified through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), enriched by a decolonial perspective. The map includes elements like Rules, Tools, Community, Division of labor, and the study's outcomes. This visualization depicts the distinct concepts that underscore culturally specific parenting goals, hopes, dreams, and practices. This concept map illustrates the way they intersect, overlap, and their interconnected nature. For example, CHAT has illuminated the tensions that the mothers faced when it came to how their Islamic values were often in conflict with the secular values that surrounded their children (i.e., the division of labor) as well as the dominant Christian white normative environments. These tensions prompted the mothers to think about the approaches (i.e., tools, community, rules) they used to support their children's aspirations and their learning, identity, and development. By reframing their parenting styles to incorporate an approach rooted in love and reasoning, rather than fear as seen in previous generations, these mothers aimed to foster a deeper understanding and relationship with their faith. They hoped this would, in turn, bolster their children's resilience and ability to cope with challenges in the dominant culture.

Research Question 1: What are Somali families' Hopes and Dreams for their children?

In most of the responses, Somali mothers described their hopes and dreams as rooted in their deen (Islamic faith) and dhaqan (culture). The overarching themes that emerged were knowledge of deen, a successful child is rooted in dhaqan (culture), obtaining formal knowledge, and children's overall well-being. The following section will discuss these overarching themes, followed by Somali mothers' ideas for achieving their children's hopes and dreams. Pseudonyms were used in place of mothers' real names.

Knowledgeable of Deen (Islamic faith)

A Child with Deen (Islamic faith) Will Have a Strong Foundation in their Identity and Understanding Their Purpose in Life

When asked about the qualities they hoped their children would embody, the mothers emphasized the importance of a Islamic foundation for their children, which highlights the importance of religion (i.e., rule) for Somali families. Abyan, for instance, expressed that a successful person acknowledges their creator and worships Allah exclusively. The parents desired their children to feel proud of their identity and to be individuals of good character, deeply connected to Allah - *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* (SWT) (Arabic for the most glorified, the most high, a Muslim honorific for Allah). They aspired for their children to become leaders and find contentment in who they are. Moreover, they hoped their children would prioritize actions that would benefit them in the afterlife rather than solely focusing on worldly pursuits which illustrates a decolonial perspective of the mothers. Dunyo emphasized the significance of her children's knowledge of the natural world and their understanding of general and religious

knowledge. In line with other parents' sentiments, she stressed the importance of discipline and respect for parents and elders, values rooted in Islamic teachings (i.e rule):

I want them to be knowledgeable in both scientific and religious knowledge. And, of course, everyone wants their child to know all sides and to be perfect. I want them to know the religion and for them to respect their parents and elders. Once we are in the hereafter, of course, you (the parent) will be questioned about their (the child's) religion, what you have taught them of their religion, not what general knowledge you taught them (Dunyo, 2022, p. 4).

Riyan said children need a solid foundation in their religion, culture, and personal beliefs. To Riyan, success for children would look like having happy children who are healthy and well-educated in worldly and spiritual matters. Riyan strongly emphasized her children being connected to Allah (SWT) and being children who have Deen (Islamic faith, i.e., rule). She put forth that Deen is the number one value she wants for her children and hopes all she instills in them will benefit them and her as a parent. Riyan mentioned how she envisions the person she wants them to be by focusing on their spiritual and moral development. She wants her children to embody all that she has taught them and, even when she is no longer around, are viewed as good people with good character and be remembered as children who are connected to Allah. She wants her children to continue to perform acts of worship even when she is no longer alive, which will benefit them and their parents: This demonstrates the belief that the mothers hold that their parenting practices and goals for their children are not only considered in this world a decolonial thinking that incorporates their hopes and dreams that are across time and space.

Deen is number one because I feel like even if a child is educated. They're smart and cultural and, you know, like these worldly things, if they're not people that are connected to *Allah (SWT)* (God) I don't want stuff like that. I want my kids to pay *Zakat* (charity) for me, and I want them to make *Umrah* (a pilgrimage to Mecca), read Qur'an every time, and make *Dua* (a supplication or prayer). Kids will benefit me not in this world but in the hereafter. That's one thing that's important to us (Riyan, 2022)

Dunyo, in response to the question, "Imagine your child is an adult, what do you hope they will be like?," explained that the most important thing to her was teaching them about religion (i.e., rule). She discussed how the environment the children were being raised in impacted them, providing examples of the behavior and manners of children in a Muslim country. For instance, in Muslim countries, Dunyo said children were expected to greet their elders, (i.e. community) which differed from how Somali children in America responded to their elders. Dunyo also expressed concerns about the education system, the lack of respect for elders, and the religion children adopted while living in the West. She urged that children should be raised and educated outside the states, in a Muslim country, and be allowed to return after finishing high school to attend college in the West:

What they want to become is their choice, but the most important thing I think of now is teaching my kids the religion, getting out of here, and taking them to Masar (Egypt). Because granted, this place already had flaws; the education and upbringing are different here. The environment affects a person. I returned from Saudi for Umrah last March and

saw my cousin's kids. It's been a while since I've noticed that – they enter the house and say *Assalamu Alaikum* (peace be upon you), kiss your hand, and hug you. Is a child born here (in the US) going to kiss your hand say *habayar* (aunty), and stand and get things for you? They (children in the U.S.) don't go past their room; you wouldn't think a child lived in the house. (in the U.S.). They should get educated there (a Muslim country) and come here for college. (Dunyo 2022,)

Another parent, Mama Jannah, shared that she hopes for her children to learn Arabic an essential tool for understanding the Qur'an. Her dreams include her children growing up in a Muslim country (i.e., community) where they could learn Arabic to understand the Qur'an, which highlights the role of language as a tool to achieve the desired outcome, in this case, understanding the Qur'an and strengthening their faith. Based on her experience in the Somali community, Mama Jannah observed that while many have memorized the Qur'an, they often lack a true understanding of the religion because they rely on others to translate it. She emphasized that knowledge of Arabic is crucial for a stronger connection with God. Mama Jannah also critiqued the Somali community, stating that they prioritize learning other languages, such as English, which may benefit life in this world, but not necessarily for the afterlife, again which emphasizes a decolonial lens of what languages should be prioritized, and how language is an essential tool. She explained that learning Arabic is essential because it helps one understand the meaning of the Qur'an and the purpose of their actions and, therefore, will allow a person to live a mindful life. She hopes that teaching children Arabic will enable them to pass on these benefits to the next generation:

I would love for my children to first learn the Arabic language. Because people think Arabic is only a language, but it's the language to understand the religion...The Qur'an was not brought down just for the Arabs. It's important to know the language of the Qur'an to understand what the verses are talking about [*sic*], the benefits, and so forth. (Mama Jannah, 2022)

Mama Jannah went on to say that she believes that young children should learn essential values and principles (i.e., rule), such as what's good for them and what they should avoid, which includes fasting, prayer, and understanding the reasoning behind religious expectations. She believes that learning and implementing this with children as young as five years old, will make life easier and help a person avoid sin:

For example, when I was going to school, at five, we were taught what is good for your life: prayer, *Suam* (Ramadan), *riba* (interest related to money--example of one sin you should avoid), and what is behind the payment because Somalis nowadays use *riba* easily and excessively. You learn stuff like that easily and early, so you do not struggle to figure it out on your own. You understand the meaning behind everything. Putting that knowledge in your brain at an early age makes it easier. (Mama Jannah, 2022)

AZ brought up an interesting experience from her childhood. She recalled having to feel like she had to hide her faith to fit in and explained that she did not want her children to experience this feeling. AZ believes that starting the process of teaching her children when they

are young will help them avoid repeating the cycle. She views young children as receptive to learning religious and cultural values that will, in turn, support them to develop principles and values so that others do not easily influence them as they age:

I feel like for my children, I want them to be successful in this world and in the hereafter, and I feel like the younger me had to do a whole lot of hiding my religion. I would leave with a scarf when I was going to school (and then) I would put my scarf and my skirt in my backpack and then wear pants and stuff, and then I would have to put my scarf and skirt back on, and I would get back on the bus. I was like, I know this is my identity, but I also want to fit in... I don't want that for my kids. I want them to be very grounded in who they are and stand up for their religion. It took my parents to put us in an Islamic school for me to see the beauty of Islam. (AZ, 2022)

Abyan shared values (i.e. rules) she hopes for her children to be people who have modesty and are decent, compassionate, considerate, and God-conscious. Abyan revealed that she wants her children to know that Allah (SWT) will hold them accountable for their actions and how they deal with people. She explained that she is worried about social media's influence on people. She hopes that as her children grow, they maintain their modesty and are conscious of their actions and behaviors toward people:

The best way I can explain it is not just being, you know, modest. Right now, everyone just does what they want to do. Right? Modesty is really important to me. I want them to

know that you know Allah exists (there is a God), and then at the end of all this, you know Allah (God) will hold them accountable. (Abyan, 2022)

The mothers all emphasized the importance of their children's education and moral character in achieving success. They discussed how they want formal and religious education for their children. Both exemplify as tools seen to support the success of the child. Astan wants her children to be respectful and become community leaders (i.e. community). She hopes they will study at Al-Azhar, a prestigious Islamic university in Egypt (i.e., community), to become Sheikhs:

As an individual, I hope for them (children) to be respectful. I hope for them to be someone who mixes and stands out as a leader in their community. Number one, I would love for them to be a Sheikh (Islamic scholar). I would love for them to come out of Al-Azhar University, an Islamic University, God willing. (Astan,2002)

A Successful Child is Rooted in Their Dhaqan (Culture)

After expressing that Deen (Islamic faith) was the number one aspiration for their children, which again highlights the importance of religion (i.e., rule) for Somali families, the mothers said that they dreamed of their children embodying the various characteristics, values, and norms of Somali culture (i.e., rule). When the mothers were asked what success means, they shared that a successful child is rooted in their culture. The parents wanted their children to be proud of their heritage, background, and culture. Maha points out that because her children

would be in an environment where they are less likely to see people who look like them, they need to have pride in themselves and where they come from (i.e., community). Maha emphasized the importance of her children knowing who they are and having pride because it will help them succeed now and in the future by assisting them in developing a strong sense of self-confidence:

I think that's [*sic*] very important for kids to be successful; knowing who they are, the value of their religion, and their culture helps them succeed in the future and now.

(Maha,2022)

AZ defined success as her children being confident and comfortable with their identity and becoming leaders (i.e., community). She highlighted that Muslim mothers are raising the next generation of Muslim community leaders, so it is important that her children become people who are firm in their beliefs and stand up for those beliefs. She emphasized that she does not want her children to be followers. AZ stated, “For me, it's them being leaders. Honestly, I don't want my kids ever to be followers. Being good leaders and just being happy with who they are as a whole.” AZ also emphasized the benefits of teaching Dhaqan to children at an early age:

I think that is very important because if you don't implement Dhaqan, if you don't implement culture, if you don't implement that at a young age, then kids are going to be so lost, and this is when the brain is developing so when you're not developing the principles and values that are core to you as a parent for your kids at the beginning stages, then it's so easy for other people to come and like, you know, distract them and for like to influence them easily. (AZ,2022)

AZ also noted the importance of children knowing and maintaining their cultural and religious identity (i.e., *rule*). AZ said that she would want her children to have good characteristics and be "firm in who they are and what they believe in." The general sentiment was that being grounded in their culture and values would diminish the possibility of their children being easily influenced by their current environments, where they could lose their sense of self. AZ shared that if children have a strong foundation from the beginning, then they are less likely to be susceptible to losing or questioning their identity:

Good characteristics include knowing where they came from, helping out the community, and not easily adapting and losing who they are as human beings. I want them to stand firm in who they are and what they believe in, have their culture, have their *Dhaqan*, and pass on what is important to their children so that generational knowledge can continue. So, the culture doesn't get lost, no matter where you're at, like the teachings and values that I want to pass on, just like my parents passed it on to me. (AZ,2022)

Yasmin believes that it is essential for her children and families to have a solid connection to *Dhaqan* (cultural heritage) and essential values (i.e., *rule*). She explained that the older generation, such as parents, had the privilege of growing up in Africa, so they have a stronger connection to Somali culture. At the same time, her children are being raised in a different country. Yasmin aspires to pass on her cultural values to her children without returning them to Africa for *cultural rehabilitation* (*dhaqan celis*). Yasmin believes having a strong cultural identity is vital for children and families to thrive:

As Somali people, you know our parents *Masha Allah* (*God has willed it*) they have the *Dhaqan* 'cause [sic] they all grew up in Africa. They were all born in Africa, but it's like with us, like I was raised here, you know, I was here since I was a kid. It's like I think it's very important for me to pass on Dhaqan to my kids 'cause [sic] I don't plan on taking them to *Dhaqan Celis* (when a Somali person gets taken back to Somalia to learn about the culture, also known as cultural rehabilitation)... I don't want to take them to Africa for *Dhaqan Celis*. (Yasmin,2022)

Preservation of dhaqan

The theme of the preservation of dhaqan (Somali culture and traditions) emerged as a prominent topic as the mothers discussed their hopes and dreams for their children. Astan articulated that she wants her children to hold on to their *Somalinimo* (the cultural, social, and political identity of Somali people (i.e., rule), which encompasses Somali people's history, language, traditions, and values. Anchoring Somali children in their culture requires maintaining ties with their families' home country (i.e., community). Astan is concerned about her children's future and the generations that will follow if they live outside of Somalia. She fears they will lose their Somali identity because, over time, Somali children may lose touch with their roots due to the loss of family connections. Astan further expressed that she wants her sons, when they get older, to marry in Somalia to preserve the culture. She describes her desire for her sons to stay in Somalia with their wives to ensure their children learn about their cultural heritage. Astan wants her sons to return to the United States only for work to support their families but hopes they

would consider employment in Somalia and contribute to its development: This exemplifies the vital impact that community has on the child.

Wallahi, the faith of Islam, is number one...to hold onto their culture. To not let go of their *Somalinimo* (national Somali identity), to recognize that they are Somali. My worry for the future is with the understanding that this land is a land that we came to (are not from). For example, if my four-year-old son Khalid grows up here (U.S.) and has children and continues to live here, I'm afraid his Somali identity will be erased. Today we are good because we can travel back home to visit families. The day that I leave, and I will because this world is temporary, and my parents leave, what will become of Khalid? (Astan,2022)

Mama Jannah expressed that culture (i.e., rule) is essential because it is essential to a person's identity. She believes that having culture helps someone to maintain values, such as Somali families being respectful to elders (i.e., community). She emphasized that it is vital for children to connect to their culture by allowing them to visit Somalia:

Allah made it so that everyone has a culture they come from. Even we, as Somalis, have different practices in Somalia. So, it's important to have a culture because if you don't have a culture, you end up lost. Like back in the day, if an elder walked in, you got up out of respect. So, it is important to show our culture to our kids, and children should be taken back for a vacation to see how their people are living. It is good for their mind. (Mama Jannah,2022)

Dunyo discussed the importance of children learning and knowing about their cultural background and language (i.e. tools). She expressed that this is essential for them to understand and preserve their culture and language. She also highlighted and critiqued that Somalis are not preserving their language and culture and she sees other children, such as Chinese children born in the United States, fluent in Chinese and English:

A Chinese kid who was born here knows how to speak Chinese and knows English. It's Somalis that love to go after other cultures (Dunyo here means that Somalis assimilated and adapt too quickly to other cultures and in return lose their own starting with the language (This is my interpretation of what she is sharing). You can go back – everyone has a country, culture, foundation, and relatives. The culture and the Somali language learning and knowing about them will allow a person to know where they come from; knowing who you are and where you come from is essential. We Somalis don't preserve who we are, most other (cultures) hold onto their language and roots. (Dunyo,2022).

AZ shared how her experience of being sent back to Kenya, where many Somalis have immigrated and settled, impacted her decisions in her personal life. This instance illustrates the impact that community has on the individual. AZ shares how returning to Africa enhanced her cultural grounding as she was immersed in her people's traditions and culture. AZ described learning about cultural practices in Kenya, such as the *Buraanbuur*, a traditional form of poetic dance from Somalia (i.e., tool). She learned more about her heritage and lineage. She shared how

her experiences of being immersed in the culture helped her to learn more about it and implement it in her life.

AW: Yeah, so do you think that being sent back to Kenya impacted the decisions you made in your life?

AZ: Yeah, definitely.

AW: In what ways?

AZ: Because I feel like when I went back to Africa, first of all, I didn't even know *buraanbur* until I went back to Africa. I learned *buraanbur* in Africa. AW: really?

AZ: Yea, my aunt taught me. I learned lineages, you know, tribes and all that, in Africa. My parents did a good job trying to teach me, but it wasn't until I went to Africa that I got what they were trying to teach me.

AW: Why do you think that was, though?

AZ: Because I've [*sic*] seen it. Everyone around there was mostly Somali. Like 90% were Somali. And then the culture is *being* there, like the culture is in front of you. You don't have to learn about it, you're seeing it for yourself now. And then you start to adapt more, and it becomes much easier than actually reading about it, or watching a movie about it or actually trying to implement it here. (AZ,2022)

Language as a Connection to Family and Culture

The mothers shared how language (i.e., tool) is vital in preserving Somali culture and as a way for their children to be connected to their roots and to Somalia (i.e., community). which again, emphasizes the role tools of knowledge play in Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children, and the importance of intergenerational communication. AZ highlighted how she enrolled her children at the Somali Dual Program(SDP) dual language preschool to ensure they learn Somali and see representation outside the home in spaces like school where their culture might not always be celebrated. She wanted her children to be proud of the culture rather than hide their rich cultural identity:

I wanted them to learn Somali but then also to learn English. That's what Somali Dual Program was providing. It was like, you speak English on these days, and then you speak nothing but Somali on these days. So, for me, that works 'cause [*sic*] I wanted them to learn Somali. I want them to learn the independence anthem. I wanted them to be cultural, like, eating Somali cultural food. I wanted that for them, and I wanted them to know that that exists in a school system, like they're able to do that. (AZ,2022)

Salma highlighted that it's essential for Somali children to know the language (i.e., tool) to help the community and maintain their cultural identity. Salma also emphasized that knowing multiple languages allows children to broaden their thinking. In addition, Salma, like the other parents, also mentioned the importance of language as a bridge between different communities, again emphasizing the importance of intergenerational communication:

A child who knows two languages has a better mind and understands more than a child who has one language. For example, if your child knows Somali, English, or Spanish, it is a child who knows multiple languages, so their way of thinking is broader. It's not good for a kid to have only one language. Coming from another country and knowing our language (Somali) and the new language, both people can be brought together, and in the future, you could help your community. You have seen that these interpreters help their communities. I will get a Somali interpreter if I do not speak English well. If that person does not know how to explain in Somali and only speaks English, how will that person help me? Our children need to know their language so they can help their community. (Salma,2022)

Abyan expressed how she wants her children to have pride in their cultural identity. She said that knowing the culture without being exposed to the Somali language is challenging. Abyan emphasized that it is essential for children to have a solid connection to the culture and language is essential to building deep connections with their culture: This finding emphasizes the culturally specific parenting goal of language as a tool that is vital for not only intergenerational communication but also as way to sustains children's Somali identity.

I believe that without the language, you can't really know the culture. You know you can't interact with people on the same level because you have that language barrier. (Abyan, 2022)

Riyan articulated how her children need to know Somali (i.e., tool). She described her effort to support her five-year-old daughter learn Somali. She was sad that her daughter knows more English than Somali. Riyan described how Somali mothers in their 20's and 30's struggle to teach their children the Somali language. Riyan shared how it is essential to know the culture and language and hopes that by teaching Somali to her daughter, her younger children will also learn the language.

I've noticed the first couple of years, I would just speak English with her, and she speaks English more than Somali. It makes me sad because, when I would go out and see, like Hispanic kids three (or) four-year-olds, ...they're speaking Spanish, and they're translating from English to Spanish, and we see a lot of Somali, especially younger, moms in their 20's and early 30's their kids, they can only speak English. (Riyan, 2022)

Abyan also mentioned how vital it is for her children to know Somali since most of her family still lives in Somalia (i.e., community). which highlights the importance of language as a tool for strengthening family ties. She shared that her children speaking the Somali language was a priority for her before she even had children, so they can have a relationship with their extended family members in Somalia. However, Abyan also expressed the challenges of language loss and shared that her children are constantly exposed to English because of their environment:

The fact that, you know, my parents, my mom, and you know, all of my family and relatives live in Somalia, so I want them (my children) to have a relationship with their, you know, extended family. Even before I was married, even before I had kids, I knew that I wanted my children and my, you know, my spouse, to be able to communicate with my family. That was very important to me. (Abyan,2022)

AZ also expressed how the Somali language is essential to children communicating with grandparents, which demonstrates the value of intergenerational communication and creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and learning across generations, in this case between *ayeeyo* (grandma) and the children. "In our culture, this is what it is, and this is why our language is important so that we are able to communicate with our elders because if you don't understand Somali and *ayeeyo* (grandma) doesn't understand English how you guys gonna [*sic*] communicate with each other?" AZ discussed the impact of her children's language loss, noting that even though her family lives nearby, her children have difficulty understanding them. She also pointed out that the language loss stemmed from her own experiences growing up, where she was made fun of for not knowing the language, which hindered her from speaking it comfortably. She shared that she now sees the same pattern with her children:

Growing up, I got made fun of for my Somali, so it kind of became a thing where I just used the language that I'm good at because if I spoke Somali, the elders would always make fun of me...So, I figured it just became easy for me to speak English, you know, and not even try. But I understand Somali, and with my kids, it's more like they understand it, they just don't speak it. I see the pattern in that. (AZ,2022)

Obtaining Formal Knowledge

In addition to being educated in their Deen (Islamic faith) well rooted in their dhaqan (culture), the mothers' hopes and dreams for their children included receiving a good formal education (i.e., a tool for supporting their worldly success). Fahmo explained that she would want her children to get ahead in life, and be educated, "We live in a country of opportunity, I would love for him (her sone) to be a doctor or engineer." Fahmo also shares that she hopes her children, "have a good life, to be educated, to be self-sufficient, and get somewhere with their education." Abyan stressed that she would also want her children to be educated. Her definition of an educated person is someone pursuing a degree or higher education. Still, she also states that it entails someone who knows Somali and is knowledgeable in their religion and culture:

Abyan: I would want them to be, uh, you know, educated.

AW: What do you mean by educated? Educated in what sense?

Abyan: As in, you know, either pursuing a degree or, you know to have a degree or like have plans to have some kind of, you know, higher education.

Fahmo shared that she wants her children to take from this country (i.e., community) what is good, and she described education (i.e., tool) as good. Fahmo expressed that it is not tied to whether the person that her child is learning from is Muslim, but rather that the person has good character and is teaching good value [*sic*], such as working hard:

I want them to adopt whatever practice is good here, such as education and building themselves up in life. You should follow good practices. It does not depend on if the person is Muslim or non-Muslim. If they have a good life practice, it is good practice. If the children they are in class with are children who work hard and learn, they should follow them. (Fahmo,2022)

Riyan relayed how she believed education (i.e., tool) creates opportunities and a sense of security in life. She wants her children to get an education. Riyan mentioned that she would encourage them to have a backup plan if they want to follow a passion that's not formal schooling. Riyan emphasized the importance of education and shared that her parents have instilled in her the importance of earning a degree, even if she is not utilizing it for a professional endeavor, the degree provides an element of security. She wants security for her children, especially her daughters, whom she does not want to be limited by traditional gender roles. She stresses that she will ensure that her children are learning something, even if it means completing one degree because it will provide a strong foundation for their future:

I want them to get an education. I want them to finish school. Honestly, if they don't want to go to school and they have a passion, obviously, I'm gonna [*sic*] be ok with that. But at the same time, I will always encourage my kids to have a backup plan. There's nothing wrong with getting an education, even if it means you're not using that degree right now and you wanna [*sic*] follow the cash, and there's nothing wrong with getting that degree. When you know something and are educated, you always have something to

fall back on. Especially my girls. I want to make sure that you know they're educated. (Riyan, 2022)

All the mothers agreed that worldly education is important for their children. They believe that the United States offers a good opportunity for their children to achieve academic success. All the parents in this study wanted their children to have at least one higher education degree to ensure financial security and the ability to positively contribute to society (i.e., community) The parents understood that it is difficult to achieve success without formal education.

Children's Overall Well-Being

After discussing what the mothers wanted for their children regarding learning the deen, preserving their culture, and hoping for their children's success in formal schooling, the Somali mothers emphasized the importance of children's mental and emotional well-being (i.e., rules). They expressed the need to support their children in a nurturing environment that fosters growth and learning. The mothers shared that parents must provide supportive, positive relationships with their children to have well-rounded children and ensure their social and emotional development. They believed these factors, related to parenting, could contribute to the child's sense of belonging and give them positive self-esteem. The parents believed that if their children received adequate support from family, community, and caregivers, it would positively impact how they navigate society, strengthen their social skills and enable them to build healthy relationships with others (i.e., division of labor).

A Healthy Child

AZ believed that a healthy child is a happy child curious about the world and their identity. She shared that children should be encouraged to ask questions and articulate their thoughts. According to AZ, responding positively to children's curiosity could lead them to become healthy and well-rounded in their identity, culture, and religion. Abyan agreed with AZ and added that a healthy child was a mentally well-rounded individual who was proud and confident in their identity. Abyan and AZ emphasized the importance of nurturing children's curiosity and supporting their personal growth to promote a holistic sense of well-being:

I take beauty in, that because when a kid asks questions, that means they are curious, and like, how you feed, that curiosity determines how that child will become... a healthy child or not... to grow and be very aware of his identity, his culture and in a healthy manner. (AZ,2022)

Maha articulated that she wants everything for her children. She hopes for her children to grow up, to be honest, intelligent, cautious, and nice but not allow people to exploit them:

I think as a parent, you don't think about specific things. You want everything good for them. I want them to be honest, but at the same time, I want them to be smart. I want them to be, let's say, be social, but at the same time, I want them to be more careful. A lot of things can happen especially living here. There are a lot of things here, but at the same

time, I want them to be nice, but I don't want people to take their kindness as a weakness. (Maha,2022)

Riyan explained that her aspirations for her children include them being kind and respectful individuals who can set boundaries with others (i.e., community and rules). She emphasized that she wants to change the ideas around traditional gender roles enforced in some households. Riyan aspires for her children to be in partnerships where they are equal. She envisions a life where her children have confidence, love, and value themselves and do not participate in activities that make them feel uncomfortable:

I want my kids to be respectful people and kind people who know how to put themselves first, not selfish, but to have boundaries with people. I want them to have confidence in themselves, value themselves, and not do anything that doesn't make them feel good. (Riyan,2022)

While Riyan shared that it was necessary for the Muslim Somali community to have an Islamic school, she emphasized the importance of the community coming together to realize this dream:

You know, one thing that I do wish that we had is, I feel like there's so many of us, there's a lot of Muslims, and there's a lot of Somalis that live here 20 to 30 years, and I wish that we could, you know, all could all get together and actually build an Islamic school. (Riyan,2022)

AZ also concurred and shared that it would be necessary for Islamic schools to have the same resources as public schools. She voiced that this needs to happen so the children can be at schools where they can strengthen their education and not lose out on their deen and Dhaqan. She pointed out that this is vital because of the intersectionality of Somali Muslim children--they can only blossom in spaces where their whole, authentic selves are welcome and not feel like these spaces sacrifice the full resources of secular public schools a decolonial lens:

Having resources that are the same as public schools and opportunities for our children to grow and succeed while keeping their principles and values intact...would be the best outcome, you know, where they're not lacking in education, and they're not lacking in their Deen (Islamic faith) and their Dhaqan (culture). (AZ,2022)

In summary, the analysis of hopes and dreams expressed by Somali mothers revealed four key interrelated themes: deen (Islamic faith), dhaqan (culture), which are (i.e., rules) formal education, (i.e., tools) and the mental health and well-being of children. These themes reflect the values and aspirations of mothers for their children. The data showed that deen and dhaqan are integral to Somali mothers' hopes and dreams for their children's futures. Many mothers stressed the current dilemma of lacking access to an Islamic school for their children after completing their preferred early learning program. They shared concern that their children lacked access to education without compromising their faith. One of the ways they hoped to instill these deeply held values (i.e., rule) was by having their children attend Islamic schools that are academically on par with public schools (i.e., tools). This would allow parents to foster the need to teach the deen, preserve their culture, and achieve their goal of providing excellent formal education for

their children in early learning and beyond. Mothers held to the decolonial idea that Islamic schools would help their children succeed in this world and the hereafter. Additionally, they envisioned an inclusive and culturally diverse environment at Islamic schools that would contribute to their children's mental health and overall well-being starting in the early learning years.

Research Question 2: How do Somali Families Cultivate Their Children's Development, Identity, and Learning?

Three themes emerged when discussing the various ways that Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning and identifying what tools they used: obtaining and utilizing Islamic education in the upbringing of Somali Muslim Children, enrolling their children in early learning programs where their language and culture mirror home, and essential characteristics mothers employ to teach their children. Through their responses, the mothers highlighted how their faith, culture, familial and personal knowledge evolved to inform how they nurture their children's learning, identity, and development.

Obtaining & Utilizing Islamic Education in the Upbringing of Somali Muslim Children

Sending Children to Dugsi to Learn Arabic and Qur'an

All the mothers shared that they send their children to Dugsi (Qur'anic school, i.e., tool and community) to support their learning and Islamic identity because they want their young children to have foundational knowledge in Arabic. They believe that Dugsi not only gives their

children a head start in learning to read and write in Arabic but also helps to build the foundation of Islamic knowledge which is also an example that is derived from the rules and norms of this Somali community. Astan shared that Somali Muslim children have to find a balance between attending their traditional schools and having to attend Dugsi. Astaan shared that her child who has a learning disability was able to learn and memorize two chapters of the Qur'an, yet, when the child attends public schools, he is treated as *other* and is labeled. She emphasized that she supports her children and encourages the school to keep supporting them and believing that all children have the capacity to learn: Astaan challenged the traditional educational paradigms that categorize children based on perceived limitations. She used the Qur'an at home to support her child's learning. She refused to let the schools label and define her child's capabilities and encourages the school to adopt the same belief in her child's potential.

After they come (home) from school, eat food, play, and relax, we take an hour and a half, sometimes an hour a night, where we try to understand each other. Also, our children go to Dugsi (Qur'anic school). They get no favors. They need to work on their faith and education. They need to prepare their school homework and Dugsi (Qur'anic school) homework. My kids take Dugsi classes five days a week, an hour each. They are taught online by a teacher from Somalia for five days, and they are off for two days. It is often in the evenings, around 7 pm, after they have finished their homework. At the same time, they want to do what other kids do--they go to soccer, they need to play, there is no area we do not participate in. They (teachers at school) say, 'How did this child learn the Qur'an'? I have a young child who is sick

(inferred meaning: learning disability), yet he is currently in the second juz (part) of the Qur'an. The struggle he went through to read it, yet I tell him, 'No, we won't stop, we must keep reading and reciting.' The school tells me, 'This kid is this way,' and I say it does not matter. You have to keep trying; I was my child's teacher and taught them this much. You can teach them too. (Astan,2022)

AZ shared that attending Dugsi (Qur'anic school, i.e., tool and community) helped her sons feel grounded, which has supported them. AZ believes that this was especially supportive for her eldest son. She shared that her sons were not only able to learn the Qur'an but also received modeling from the teachers, peers, and community about manners and customs. At Dugsi, children were taught about girls wearing the hijab, praying and its designated times, and washing up for the prayers. She believes that the teachers were able to instill good manners too. She also shared that every Friday, they attended *Jumah (Friday prayers)* together, and she told her sons it is a mandatory practice for them, in addition to going to mosques to attend community lectures: The practice of attending the Fridays prayers prepares the young boys for the way that they are expected to participate in the community.

They prayed the prayers then it's like, oh Dhuhr(Afternoon Prayer), Asr (late afternoon prayer), Maghrib (sunset prayer) , Isha (nighttime), they know how to make wudu. The Macalins (teachers) are teaching, but then the Macaalins (teachers) are also like showing them manners and stuff, you know? So, I feel like it really grounds them. Every Friday, they go to Juma (Friday prayer) with me. I told my son, 'Now you're 7. this is obligatory for you.' (AZ,2022)

Abyan, like the other parents, started to teach her child the Qur'an (i.e., rule and tool) at home at the age of 3. She would support him by using repetition and audio lessons that he could listen to and repeat. Her son is now enrolled at an Islamic school where he learns Duas (supplications), is exposed to the call of prayer, and learning to memorize the Qur'an.

We started memorizing the Qur'an when he was 3, I would just read it to him, and then he would repeat it. We used to do like one ayah (verse) a day and we just repeat it. I also had him listen to a Sheikh (Islamic scholar) repeating it throughout the day. Sheikh Mishary and there would be kids who would say it after him, and then he would say it. Now that he attends the Islamic school, he's remembering them and reading them more often. (Abyan,2022)

Riyan started taking her child to Dugsi (Qur'anic school) at 5 years old. She shared the value of teaching children the Qur'an. Riyan shared that her upbringing influenced her since her father was a Dugsi (Qur'anic school) teacher, which helped her to teach her own children the Qur'an at a young age at home. She shared how her children were able to benefit from her since she's well-versed in the Qur'an and that they are now ahead at Dugsi (Qur'anic school). Riyan also pointed out how children have different learning styles. She shared that she found it more challenging to teach her son, who is turning 4, than her daughter, who was learning Qur'an at 3.

I told you my dad is Maalin (Qur'anic school teacher), and I was able to, like, learn the Qur'an. I started her (my daughter) at three years old. Alhamdulillah, (Praise be to God)

I'm able to teach that like, I'm able to like, teach her the Qur'an. I told you she just turned 5 in June, that's my oldest and MashaAllah (God has willed it) because of that, she's really way ahead. I have my second boy, and he's turning 4 in October, and I'm having a really hard time having to just sit down for a little bit so I can teach him, you know? (Riyan,2022)

Fahmo shared that she teaches her children the Qur'an and sends them to Dugsi (Qur'anic school). She shared that it's a practice at home from her youngest child, who is 5, to her eldest, to pray together. In addition to praying together, she taught her children how to greet each other in the Islamic greeting that should be used when Muslims see each other, saying *Assalmu Alaikum* (peace be upon you), which is intended to teach them about a way that is believed to spread peace and goodwill. Fahmo continues to employ these teaching techniques as she found them beneficial with the older children:

Anytime I go for prayer, from the 5-year-old to the eldest, we pray together. I show them. I spend time with them learning the Qur'an - they take classes five days a week. I teach them Dugsi (Islamic school). From 5-8, we prepare for lessons; we turn off the tv and other distractions. I teach them about salat (prayer) and how to greet each other, saying Assalamu Alaikum. As it benefits one, I continue with the younger ones. (Fahmo,2022)

Ways Parents Use the Prophet Stories, Qur'an Chapters and Islamic Teachings

To support their Muslim identity, the mothers shared that they teach their children through the biography of the prophets which illustrates an example of a tool that they utilized. Abyan shared that she uses stories about the prophets and the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to help her children understand the root of their names. She shared that it was also a way for them to have examples of role models. Abyan shared that this practice will allow her children to be solid in their Islamic identity and knowledgeable about Islamic history. Abyan shared an example of how her six-year-old shares these stories with his younger siblings, which shows that he is listening, grasping, and finding pride in the stories:

I use stories of, you know, the *Anbiya* (Prophets) or the *Sahaba* (companions of the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) for my children to have as an example. Both of my son's are named after two companions, you know, and so I tell them stories of who they're named after. I think by telling them those stories it solidifies their identities that they are Muslim and they were born Muslim. It's funny, my six-year-old he's the oldest, and he'll retell the story to the younger one, so, I think that's so cute. (Abyan,2022)

Riyan shared how her father would tell stories (i.e., tool) about Prophet Mohamed (*sallallahu alayhi wa sallam* [SAW]) to her and her siblings when they were younger. She described how her father taught her through these stories about this practice to engage children and help them learn. Riyan expressed that her father instilled in her a deep love and enhanced understanding of her faith. Now, she carries on this tradition with her children. Initially uncertain if her children would enjoy it, Riyan discovered that they were actively engaged and would even

remind her if she forgot. Riyan firmly believes that consistency in such practices is key to children's learning and development.

We read every single night, and they actually look forward to that. If you forget it one night, they will remind you [*sic*]. I've noticed that...if on the days that I'm really exhausted, especially when I was pregnant, and sometimes I'm like, oh my God, tonight I don't feel like reading, they're like, 'Mommy, you forgot to read.' (Riyan,2022)

Maha shared how she utilized the Qur'an (i.e., tool) and learning prayers to help her child feel safe and secure when he feels anxious or scared. Maha emphasized how this approach of teaching her child to recite the Qur'an and the Duas supported him in gaining self-soothing skills and allowed him to learn about this religious and cultural practice: Which exemplifies an example of how prayer and the Quran were utilized as a tool to support the child in his self-regulation skills.

For me, it's because my son comes to me at night, and he's like, 'I had a nightmare I cannot go back to sleep,' and then I would come and read the dua, read the *Qul Huwallahu Ahad* and all the three *Al- Muawwadhat* (last two chapters of the Qur'an), and then I'll be like *Insha'Allah* (God willing), if you read it like three times each one, and then you're gonna [*sic*] feel better. You can go back to sleep. So, he got used to it whenever he had a nightmare. He repeated the dua, he reads the A-Muawwadhat, all three of them three times, and then he goes back to sleep. (Maha,2022)

Maha also shared how she and her husband have been teaching their children about money and the value of giving to charity and the community (i.e., community and rule). She explained how they incentivized their children to do chores around the house and to read the Qur'an; for doing this, they would receive \$20 at the end of the week. They were encouraged to save half, and choose an amount to give to charity, and the rest they could spend as they wished. Maha noticed after a while that her children, especially her daughter, who was reluctant to do this at first, were now stopping and giving money to those in need whenever she saw them on the streets. Maha believes that after she helped her daughter understand that giving charity to the community would bring blessings from Allah to her, she changed her mind and is now eager to give what she can. Along with her siblings, they stop their father whenever he is going to the Mosque to pray and give him money to donate on their behalf. This is an example of how Maha and her family are helping her children understand the importance of being financially responsible at a young age and instilling in their children a religious value of giving charity, one of Islam's five main pillars. Here we are also seeing an example of not only the tools (i.e., rules and community) the family is using to support their children but also the importance they are stressing in regard to the role they want their children to take up in the community and society.

If you guys like, clean your room, read your Qur'an, and everything by the end of the week, I will give you \$20 for working hard. They clean their room and read their Qur'an before even me telling them so [*sic*]. I give them the \$20, now we need half of the \$20 as a savings [*sic*] and you can put it in your piggy bank. For the other \$10, choose the amount you want to give to the community for *sadaqah* (charity). You can take it to a *masjid* (mosque) or give it to a homeless person you see outside. If you give good to the

community, to the people in need, Allah will give you back ten times more. My daughter used to hate it at first, but then we kept telling her, and then she started doing that. She's like, 'it's ok. I'll give them \$5. Allah will give me more in the future.' (Maha,2022)

Enrolling Their Children in Early Learning Programs Where Their Language and Culture

Mirror Home

All ten mothers in this study indicated that representation and cultural education were important factors in their children's upbringing. They wanted their children to learn Somali and be around other Somali people, whether they were teachers, administrators, or community elders. Somali Dual Program(SDP) gave them the opportunity and platform to achieve this goal (ie.,rule and tool). Mama Jannah shared that she chose the program because it made her feel like her children were safe and at home. Fahmo also enrolled her children at SDP because of the religious and cultural match, stating, "I chose them because the people are Muslim, they practice the same religion, they talk to you in the same language. Most schools here don't teach about our religion and culture. I've seen an improvement with my daughter, and she speaks more Somali." The mothers saw SDP as a way to support their children's identity, learning, and development (i.e., tool and division of labor).

AZ described how SDP provided her son with a supportive environment that helped him build confidence and self-worth (i.e., tool). She explained that the program provided materials representing his culture and food that mirrored what he ate at his grandma's house (i.e., community). The preschool allowed her son to connect with his culture and feel at home by allowing him to dress as he did at home, see others from his community, and hear others pronounce his name correctly. AZ added that these early experiences positively impacted her

son's identity. She gave an example of how he could advocate for himself in kindergarten and corrected his teacher about the pronunciation of his name, which was a result of the confidence he gained from attending Somali Dual Program preschool. AZ expressed pride in her son for learning to advocate for himself at a young age instead of accepting a mispronunciation of his name and changing his identity:

They have visual posters, they spoke the language, did the singing and stuff, so the culture was implemented that way, and the food that he would eat at his *ayeeyo*'s (grandma) house, he was eating there. You can have your *bariis*, (rice) you can dress the way you wanna [*sic*] dress, and whatever you see at the house you were able to see at the preschool too. People were saying his name the right way. Nasir gets really mad about that because, at the school system, they are like Naseer, and then he's like, 'my name is not Naseer, it's Nasir,' and they can't say, Nasir, you know?

AW: How did that make you feel as a parent witnessing all that?

AZ: It made me feel proud, especially when he is correcting his teachers about his name. I was like, yeah, don't be scared. Don't let them switch up your whole identity now. I feel like Voice of Tomorrow helped with that Because I feel like the preschool started it first, so for him, he saw that you could pronounce my name the correct way, you're just not trying to do so. I think Somali Dual Program helped him accept his identity and who he is and know where he comes from, you know? (AZ,2022)

Riyan shared that one of the main reasons she enrolled her daughter at the SDP preschool was to change her daughter's environment. She believed the environment plays an integral role in normalizing experiences or ideas for children. Riyan shared that when her daughter was 3 years

old, she enrolled at a preschool in Kent, Washington. Her daughter was curious about the hijab because her aunts, who are close in age to her, wore it. So, Riyan bought her some but never forced her to wear it. Riyan noticed a change in her daughter's behavior. Her daughter, who was interested in wearing the hijab, was no longer interested and was hiding it in her backpack after being at the school for one week. Riyan emphasized that her daughter's experience at the Kent preschool influenced her decision to wear the hijab. When her daughter attended SDP, she happily wore her hijab even if other Somali children chose not to, because she was still seeing the teachers and some students wearing the hijab, which positively impacted her. Riyan highlighted how this experience showed her that the environment plays a significant role in shaping children's behaviors, attitudes, and actions. Riyan shared that the environment and the overall surroundings are what she thinks shape children's behaviors:

You know everything that's around them, if they see kids around their age, they're aware and stuff. So, when I took her to Somali dual program, she was happily wearing the hijab. She didn't mind...she actually wanted to wear it, never even forced her. ...The fact that, you know, within just a week of being there her behavior changed that really scared me and I was like, 'oh my God.' So, it's definitely the environment. (Riyan,2022)

Riyan also explained that since she couldn't teach her daughter Somali at home, she decided to enroll her at Somali dual programs preschool so that she could learn Somali, even though the dialect taught there differs from the one spoken at home (i.e., tool). Riyan shared that it would still expose her daughter to Somali culture despite the dialect difference. She expressed the significance of her daughter being around peers who resemble her, as it influences the young

child and her eagerness to learn about her culture and incorporate it when interacting with others who share her appearance and dress (i.e. community). Riyan emphasized the crucial role of representation in fostering children's connection to their culture:

That's why I switched over to Somali dual program, because I'm like, OK, at least if she's not getting the Somali from me, she will be getting it from school because they had a Somali course. There are a lot of kids that, even though they are five years old, they wear the hijab. When she was going to that other preschool, she didn't want to wear the hijab. Still, as soon as she saw these other kids, she said, 'Mommy, I want to wear the hijab.' So, it's all about representation and making sure, you know, kids are around people that [sic] look like them. (Riyan,2022)

Astan shared that she enrolled her child at SDP because of *Somalinimo* (national Somali identity, i.e., rule). She shared that her children are represented in the program as they see people who look like them and share the same language. She also shared that they would have access to materials, such as books in Somali (i.e. tool). Astan believes this is far from an everyday experience that children get elsewhere; at SDP the children can use their home language in the classroom setting. Astan expressed the hope that SDP could expand into an elementary school:

The number one reason I chose them is for Somalinimo (national Somali identity). I took my other child when he was (a) three-year-old to another program but took him out. The first difference (between SDP and other preschools) is that my children see other women that look like me and will talk to them like me. I was asked if my child can understand

Somali and if they (the teachers) can read Somali to him. You do not get that elsewhere, you won't see a book in Somali or people speaking Somali to them. So, I figured, let my child learn in addition to what I am teaching at home. If they would increase it to elementary school, it would be great for our children to be taught by people from the community. (Astan, 2022)

Salma shared that she registered her daughter at SDP to support her efforts to learn Somali as well. She mentioned that her older children went to a Head Start program, but she wanted her child to benefit from a program that could support her in the various subjects in her home language(i.e., tool):

The school my daughter goes to now is SDP. Whatever help preschool children receive, she receives. She learns a lot, Masha'Allah, and she has a lot of help. My older kids went to a public Head Start, not SDP. I chose Voice of Tomorrow because children can learn two languages, the language they practice at home is supported in class. They provide them with math and language assignments written in English and Somali. Because, if the child knows two languages, it is a benefit to the child.

Abyan explained that her knowledge of how young children learn was shaped by her schooling and personal experiences (i.e., community). According to Abyan, it is crucial for children to feel welcomed and have their heritage celebrated within the classroom (i.e., tool). She strongly believes that this celebration plays a significant role in the development of their identity. Abyan shared that not being allowed to speak Somali in elementary school profoundly impacted her understanding of her own culture and beliefs (i.e., division of labor). This experience made her self-conscious and uncomfortable utilizing Somali in school settings as she got older.

Recognizing how children are influenced by their early experiences as they grow, Abyan decided to enroll her children in Somali Dual Program(i.e. tool). She desired for them to become bilingual, enabling them to communicate with family members in Somalia while also being aware of the broader benefits of such an experience(i.e., tools and community):

I wouldn't say that I know very much about it. I mean, I get some readings and I took some classes in college on education, but from what I understand of it, I think that it's really important for children to feel welcomed and just celebrated to have their heritage celebrated in the classroom. It is really important because, you know, that contributes to their identity building. (Abyan,2022)

Maha shared that besides enrolling her children at SDP, she and her husband discussed teaching their children Somali and Arabic at home (i.e., tool). They started teaching them when the youngest was 2 years old and the oldest was 5.. Maha's husband utilized Somali books to teach his children words and letters (i.e., tool). Her eldest son also learned Somali by watching the Somali channel on television with his grandmother, who lives with them and helps care for the children (i.e. Community):

Their dad teaches them Somali, so he got them the Somali notebook and teaches them the words, the letters, and how to write them.

AW: What age did you start that?

Maha: Oh well, I teach one differently. My oldest, we started early, he was two years old and used to speak full Somali. He used to understand Arabic, and he knows a few Arabic

words. For my second one, we got a little bit lazier, but now even my youngest Ali, who's five years old, can read a few words in Somali because my mother-in-law lives with me, so she watched the Somali channels, yeah, and he sees the news and all that. He could read the names like if he sees Somali, when they write the names, he would read it.

Essential Tools Mothers Employ to Teach Their Children

Generational Influence: Familial Knowledge

Dunyo, who was raised abroad in Somalia and Egypt, highlighted how children raised in America are completely different. She mentioned that in her culture, she grew up believing that elders were always right, and she could not imagine that an adult could be dishonest. She pointed out that she was taught to be considerate of others. However, in the U.S., she perceived people to be more self-centered. She also noted other differences, such as children here witnessing their parents constantly working and doing chores around the house and the children not helping them. Dunyo shared how she and her husband have different perspectives due to their contrasting upbringings. Although both are Somali, their environments have shaped them differently because Dunyo grew up abroad, and her husband was raised in the States. Dunyo emphasized the impact of one's upbringing on their outlook and perspective in life:

For example, right now, my husband, he's kind of a religious person, and at the same time, how we are raised and how people are raised here is totally different. Do you know what I mean?

AW: What is their difference?

Dunyo: They're different because, we understood, for example, with elders and your parents, that whether they're right or wrong, they are always right. There are a lot of differences - like the parents (of the kids raised here) not sitting down all day and (the kids) watching them work. How we grew up, and these kids are growing up is not the same. Even though there are some things that this culture is better in, I want them to have a balance of both. It's how I was raised. If I were riding the bus, I would never sit if an adult was standing. But here, I live here, I work, if I work two days, I think about giving to someone who is struggling back home, even though my parents are here safe. A kid raised here is not going to think about someone else – they're going to say, 'it's my money, I don't care.' My husband, who came here at a young age, will say, 'Who put that person's life on me?' So, we are not the same (either). As humans we were taught to look at those who are less fortunate when you have something. But here, it's 'I don't care.'

Astan shared her parents' influence on her understanding of how young children learn. She shared that her parents taught her everything that was good for her when she was young, such as the Qur'an, the culture, and practices that are informed by the religion and culture, like how to deal with other people and how to dress (ie., rules and tools). Astan emphasized the importance of passing on the values and teachings that she got from her parents. Astan also highlighted how her children are growing up differently from her, so it's important to incorporate the values from their current environment that she deems important for her children's well-being:

AW: What or who influenced your knowledge about how young children learn?

Astan: I had parents, so I learned it from my parents.

AW: What did your parents teach you?

Astan: They teach you everything that's good for you when you are young, whether it is the Qur'an, the culture and how you interact with other people, other children, cleanliness, how to dress, all that our parents taught us, we must pass it on to our children. Everything extra that is different here, we take and mix the two because there is a difference between how we lived back home and how we live here. Extra values that are necessary for your children, here you must add.

Fahmo shared that passing down traditions and values to your children is important. She wants her children to be brought up as she was and learn about their culture, language, and religion (i.e., rules and tools). She shared that her responsibility as a parent is to pass on generational knowledge when children are young, allowing for the children's beliefs and values to be guided and shaped by the adults until they become independent thinkers and no longer depend on their parents:

I'm the person raising them, (and I) was raised in a (specific) culture, this is the culture I have that my mother and grandmother passed down and taught me. ...every person walking believes in something (has faith in something). They need to know that the faith I follow is Islam and that they are Muslim, which is different from other faiths. We need to prioritize learning the Somali language and the religion (of Islam). It is part of raising them.

AW: Why is it a part of raising them?

Fahmo: It's a part of raising them because when the child is born, up until they are an adult, they're in your hands, so whatever you instill in them is what they will do. They depend

on you guiding them until they are independent thinkers, they listen to what you tell them, so you must tell them, ‘We have this religion,’ ‘We are this way,’ you tell them the correct things you grew up on through your culture.

Utilization of a Positive and Supportive Approach to Parenting that Prioritizes their Children's Education and Well-being

Many mothers in the study shared that in supporting children in their learning and development, it's essential to employ supportive approaches that prioritize the child's overall well-being (i.e., tool). This could look like individualizing parenting styles and activities for kids, encouraging children to build their self-esteem, spending quality time with them, and raising children according to the time and society that they are in emphasizing the importance of generational and environmental influences on children.

Astana articulates the importance of guiding children from an early age. She stated that “children are a blank paper” and that they learn based on what the parent writes for them. Astana emphasized the importance of love and links love and literacy and believes shaping a child’s mind begins with love (i.e. tool). Astana also shares in order to contribute to the early learning of one's children she recommends teaching children how to write to prepare them for education (i.e., tool). She is very intentional about the significance of starting at a young age. She discusses how she will instill in them her views of life while teaching them basic knowledge of the alphabet, colors, and other general knowledge children should know: This emphasizes the importance of love and early education in a child's development.

As they come to find out about life, I first give them my love so they can know everything I do for them is from love. Once their mind is developing and they think critically, one thing that builds a child's mind is for you to pick up a pen and help them handwrite, so the child understands early that it is important for them to write, that they are preparing for an education. I would start there by saying that the person who loves them the most is me; I am closer to them than anyone else, even the father.

Astan also highlighted the importance of individualization for children and stressed that parents should not be critical of their children's education. She suggested that parents should build a relationship with their children by spending time with them. It is essential to follow the child's lead and understand that every child is not the same and will require different forms of support. Astan emphasized that children need to be encouraged and supported throughout their learning. When things get difficult, a parent's role is to remind them of the importance of education and that they can get through it. Astaan highlighted the importance of supporting your child and what that could do for children's self-esteem, motivation, and overall well-being:

When the kid is behind, spend time with them. They will get better with time. The parents must give them support. Every kid is not the same either. Some are ahead, and some are behind. You must not treat them the same. The one who is behind needs encouragement. You have to say, ...you are the best in the world. Your education is important, everyone goes through difficulty, keep going.' You do not nag them and say, 'Why do you have that F?' The kid will keep going and overcome.

Abyan shared that patience was important in supporting children in their learning. She shared that if you were frustrated by teaching your child, the child would pick up on it and focus more on trying to decipher your feelings rather than on the task you wanted them to learn. Abyan shared that she had been supporting her six year old with counting by fives, and although her daughter was not successful, Abyan used every opportunity as a learning one.

Abyan also shared that building a trusting relationship with children is essential, especially in the formative years (i.e., rules and tool). She emphasized that these early connections could lead to a strong bond between the child and parent, potentially strengthening their relationship.

Building that communication with your child early on, like in this very like these formative stages, you know. So that you build that connection and that bond with your child, and then as they grow, they learn to trust you, like they learn to trust you early on so that trust just grows and grows. You know, hopefully, *Insha'Allah (God willing)*, we all, you know, build that bond and that connection with our children.

AZ highlighted the importance of understanding that every child has a unique learning style. She shared that to teach them, you have to know about their individual needs and understand what works best for them (i.e., tool). She described how her two sons have different personalities and learning styles, and as a parent, she's had to adapt her parenting to meet the need of each child. She shared how her son learns best by physically touching things, whereas

her other child learns best by listening. AZ also shared that as a learner diagnosed with ADHD, she's attentive to each of her child's unique needs.

AZ described being more focused on building the foundation for her children now so that, as adults, they will have leadership skills. AZ believed she needed to be present and encourage her children's thoughts and ideas. She emphasized instilling leadership values and encouraging her children to stand up for their beliefs (i.e., tool). She hoped she could pass the values and principles that her parents instilled in her to her children.

praising them...being so present with them that they're able to also create the memories of like man, my mom listened to me...my mom implemented these kinds of values in me, like don't be a follower...to be a leader or stand up for what you believe.

Yasmin shared how consistency and schedules are important for children. She shared that being present and involved in children's learning is essential, especially for her, since her husband is a truck driver who is often on the road. As a mother, she had to be consistent by ensuring she spent at least an hour a day with her children, without distractions. Typically, before bedtime, Yasmin would read books with her children, talk to them, and laugh. Yasmin shared that this quality time with her children is important in supporting their learning and development.

You can't, and you don't want to be that absent parent. Like, one day you just teach them something and then the next day you don't...focus on them and don't look at your phone.

Mama Jannah emphasized the importance of life experience in helping children learn and how learning goes beyond the classroom. To support her kindergarten son with his daily assignments, she shared her reading strategy with him(i.e.,tool). According to her, not all learning comes from books; life experiences can also be used to teach children. When children are young, questions can be asked regardless of whether the person attended formal schooling. For instance, her son asked about Allah, which is not typically taught in school. Mama Jannah answered in a way her son could understand. She used examples from his everyday experiences to make it easier for him to grasp the answer to this complex question.

AW: Tell me about a time when you helped your young child learn something.

MJ: My son is in kindergarten, so I help him every day. He gets new material every day, they're not playing all the time like the year before....I read the books with him and help him every day. Also, life cannot be taught through books only. You must gain life experience. When the child is young, you ask them questions when they wake up. Those questions are not based on whether you went to college or not. It is based on how you live and what you practice in life...The other day my son asked me a question. He said, 'Mom, didn't you say Allah is watching us 24/7? Don't his eyes get tired?' Questions like that do not need a college education to be answered. You must use your intellect to answer him in a way he understands. My kid is obsessed with superheroes...so, I tell him

that Allah is taking care of us while we sleep, in the day, and when we eat...If you explain it to them, they will understand.

Riyan shared that she believes approaches to learning should be fun. She highlighted that she made learning fun for her children while teaching them the Qur'an, the ABCs, and how to write their names by including their cousins and her friend's children in the process (i.e. tool and community). Riyan shared that she believes children learn better with their peers, and to keep them engaged in what they are learning, you have to make it enjoyable for them.

Maha shared how she taught her daughter about embracing diversity and self-love by using encouragement and freedom of choice. To do this, Maha used words of affirmation to support her child's sense of self and the unique aspects of her physical appearance, like her curly hair and religious ideas to support acceptance of her identity (i.e., tool). Although Maha's daughter continued to occasionally straighten her hair for her days at public school, where she didn't see other Muslim children, when going to the park, where she was sure to see Muslim children, she would voluntarily wear her hijab. Maha gave her daughter the opportunity and space to make her own decisions. She encouraged her daughter but never forced it upon her.

The mothers discussed the appropriate timing for talking with their children about how society may perceive them and preparing them to navigate racism this is called racial socialization (i.e. division of labor, i.e. community). (Baquedano-López et al.,2013; Burton et al., 2010; Doucet,2008; White et al., 2010). They held differing opinions on when it was suitable to

have these conversations. AZ strongly believed in initiating these discussions during the early years. Abyan disagreed, feeling that their children were too young to be exposed to a potentially negative worldview at their tender age. Abyan held the belief that she could influence and shape her young children's beliefs and understanding; her concern was around adolescence and adulthood in the States. She recognized the necessity of discussing their racial identity as Black children and how society would perceive them. However, at their current young age, she wanted to foster a positive perspective of society. Abyan emphasized the importance of instilling confidence and self-worth in her children during their early years, choosing to fill them with affirmations (i.e., tool). Abyan planned to address the realities of society and engage her children in conversations about how Black males are perceived when they reach elementary school. But for now, she aimed to provide them with a positive outlook and create a foundation of self-assurance:

...I do have to have that conversation with them and how they have to, you know, carry themselves in public. You know, society doesn't think you know...it has a negative view of Black males and you have to conduct yourself in a certain way. Right now, at 3 years old and 4 years old, no, I don't think they're ready for that. I think I'm going to teach them that they're smart. They're beautiful....they're perfect, perfect in every way...when they get, you know to elementary school age...I will have to say to them, 'You know, the world doesn't view you in this way.'

Providing Love and Utilizing Reasoning Instead of Fear and Strict Rules

AZ highlighted the generational difference between when she grew up in Washington and as a parent raising her kids today. AZ shared an example of how when she was a child, her parents told to wear the hijab without further explanation as to its importance. Now, as a parent, instead of just telling her children to do something, she provides the reasoning. AZ emphasized that she, unlike her parents, gives her children space to speak and listen, and encourages her children to ask questions.

Maha also agreed with the other mothers and added that the older generation of children who grew up in the States was raised to be fearful of their parents. This fear was based on having respect for their parents. However, Maha believes it is more important to show love to children and build a close relationship with them. She wants to establish a relationship with her children based on open communication and trust. This way, her children can feel comfortable and freely share with her without seeking outside guidance.

Riyan emphasized that when you teach children the reason for religious practices and cultivate a deep understanding, they are more likely to internalize and adhere to the rituals (i.e., tools). Riyan wants to develop a positive, supportive relationship with her children. Her parents did not encourage questioning, whereas she wants to promote channels of communication in which questions are welcomed and dialogue respected:

I want my kids to trust me, I want my kids to come to me, and they can talk to me about anything.....I want my kids to feel like I'm a safe place.

AZ shared that she wants to create a safe environment for her children to be themselves without any judgment. AZ believes that her role as a parent is not to dictate to her children what's right or wrong but to help them navigate the world from their perspective and not from how other people want them to see it (i.e tool and rule).

Like it's about creating that safe space for my kid to be a kid and to be himself, you know, with no judgment or nothing. As a parent, my role is not to tell my kid. What's right and what's wrong, or like? do this. This way or that way, or like none of that, my role as a parent is just to navigate my kid. Like I'm just a compass navigating my kid, I want my kid to see the world how he wants to see the world, you know what I mean, and letting him be? Just that and seeing the world from his own perspective and even having a perspective where he can see it for himself and not how other people want him to see the world, you know.

Abyan shared that building a trusting relationship with children is essential, especially in the formative years. She emphasized that these early connections can lead to a strong bond between the child and parent, potentially strengthening their relationship as they get older (i.e,tool and rule).

So that you build that connection and that bond with your child, and then as they grow, they learn to trust you...hopefully, *Insha'Allah* (God willing), we all, you know, build that bond and that connection with our children.

Leading by Example: How Parental Modeling Impacts Children

The Somali mothers talked about their responsibility in preparing their children for academic success and religious practices by being role models (i.e. tool and community). They also mentioned how their upbringing influenced their parenting style (i.e., community). They emphasized the importance of modeling behavior for their children, particularly today, where certain situations may clash with their religious values and principles.

Yasmin shared how she models for her daughter how to pray and dress appropriately for prayer (i.e., tool). During Ramadan, Yasmin's daughter fasted with her until noon. She shared that her daughter wanted to do this for Allah. Yasmin also shared the story of when her daughter inquired why her mother was dressing in certain clothes when praying but not dressing like that the rest of the time. Yasmin had to teach her daughter about modesty. This conversation with her three-year-old daughter made Yasmin more aware that she needed to set a good example for her children. She shared that this impacted her decision to go back to school. Yasmin shared how families shape their children's values and beliefs and that it's the responsibility of the families to show the children good habits and teach them about their culture.

I don't want to force anything on them, but it's like it all starts at home. It all starts with the mom and the dad, right? They need that, so, we try to show them Dhaqan, good habits, and good culture...like praying...praying in front of my daughter. She knows she can't pray without having a hijab on, so she runs and gets her scarf.

Az stresses the importance of not just telling children what to do but showing them through actions what you value and what you want them to learn. She explained that her decision to go back to school was influenced by her desire to set a good example for her sons and encourage them to pursue higher education as well. She believes in bridging the gap between what she tells her children and what she practices by modeling it for them. For instance, she takes her children to Jumah prayers, demonstrates how to pray, and takes them to Dugsi (Qur'anic school). AZ illustrates the importance that not only the community plays but the tools that she utilizes to support her children and highlighting collectivism.

I'm not just saying it just to say it to you, but then I'm also implementing how we move as a family. We're all making wadu, and we're all praying together. That's what it is.

Dunyo shared that her daughter copies her when she is praying. When her daughter forgets the supplication to say before entering the bathroom, Dunyo starts it out for her, and the daughter completes it on her own. Dunyo stated that “when it comes to children, there are things they pick up from you and how you model it for them” showcasing how important it is to consistently model the behavior one wants to see in their children.

Riyan discussed her aspirations to be a better Muslim to be a good example for her children. She shared that her parents taught her the deen and were patient with her. She highlighted the importance of not forcing your beliefs on children but instead being a positive role model for them and explaining the reasoning for prescribed rituals.

And like my parents *MashaAllah* (God has willed it), they are such good people, and they took the time to help us understand deen and all that stuff. I really wanna be like, you know, a better Muslim myself and show my kids 'cause I feel like kids, you know, you can tell them something, but you can't force them. It's almost like if you force somebody to do something; they don't wanna do it. So I just wanna mirror, like I wanna be an example for them and just, you know, everything that I'm telling them to do. I wanna do the same. (Riyan,2022)

Somali mothers support their children's learning, development, and identity through diverse methods incorporating practices and skills derived from their cultural, religious, and everyday experiences (i.e. rules, tools and community). It is evident that these young Muslim Somali mothers carefully consider their present circumstances and how it influences their parenting approach. Each mother acknowledged how their upbringing has influenced their parenting style. The data has revealed the interconnectedness of context, culture, and faith, providing insights into how these mothers facilitate their children's acquisition of skills to navigate life. They achieve this by instilling religious and cultural values during their children's formative years, helping them adapt to new environments, enrolling them in early learning programs that shape their identity, and prioritizing their Islamic education through Dugsi (Qur'anic school) enrollment. These mothers also advocate for diverse approaches to positive parenting, ensuring their children's overall well-being remains a focal point a decolonized approach that prioritizes diverse parenting methods that incorporate both wordly and spiritual spaces. Despite the generational differences between themselves and their parents, these mothers share the same worldview and goals for their children, remaining true to their culture and

religion. While they employ different tools and approaches, the underlying objective remains consistent. These younger parents recognize the importance of building closer relationships and fostering trust to support their children. Each generation strives to improve upon the previous one, building upon the foundations laid by their elders (i.e. rules and community). They want to ensure that the sacrifices made by their families are not lost and that their children can continue to progress and thrive.

In supporting their children's development, identity, and learning, the mothers in this study emphasized the essential role of family and community in fostering their overall well-being. They recognized the importance of building and supporting their children's foundation, giving them confidence in their various identities, and ensuring their cultural and religious beliefs are affirmed, validated, and sustained. The mothers understood that, given the current context, they would need to adopt a blended approach to support their young children. They not only focused on their children's learning, development, and identity in this world but also viewed their responsibility as extending beyond this life. The mothers had hopes and dreams of cultivating successful children who would excel academically, contribute to and lead the Muslim *ummah* (cohesive Islamic community), and give back to the community. They also endeavored to prepare their children for the afterlife by fulfilling Islamic duties, such as praying, fasting, giving to charity, and performing Hajj, thereby continuing the legacy. All ten mothers in this study unanimously agreed that Dhaqaan (culture) and deen (Islamic faith) must be integral parts of their children's lives. As practicing Muslims, themselves, they could not envision a life for their children without the foundations of deen and Dhaqaan. To nurture their children's Muslim and Somali identities, the mothers highlighted the importance of instilling religious and cultural

values during their formative years. This approach was intended to equip them with the necessary tools to navigate the challenges of new environments that the mothers themselves had faced as adults or children. Many of Somali Muslim mothers in this study had to navigate unfamiliar territory when they first arrived, as refugees, without much support. With their increased experience and knowledge, they were determined to ensure their children did not face the same struggles. They viewed their role as parents as an opportunity to chart a different path and support their children in their present and future endeavors.

Research Question 3: How do Somali families Reimagine Schools?

Four themes that were identified related to this research question: Theme number one was Barriers Experienced in Public Schools, The second theme focused on Reimagining public schools: Establishing reciprocal partnerships with families, The third theme was Exploring new horizons: Islamic schools in Washington, Minnesota, Texas, and beyond. Lastly the fourth presents a Solution: Reimagining Islamic Schools.

Study participants considered public and Islamic schools as they reimagined education options available in Washington. In general, they felt that both school systems had significant flaws in serving their children, communicating with parents, and fostering relationships with the families. The Somali mothers shared that they were not pleased with the public school's pedagogical and curricular choices, considering them to deviate substantially from their values and norms. The Somali mothers reported challenges negotiating their religious beliefs and practices with school regulations and policies.

Barriers Experienced in Public Schools

Lack of Family Involvement in The Decision-Making Process

Several mothers voiced concerns about public schools not meeting their needs, prompting them to consider withdrawing their children. They believed that public schools should focus on educational content, such as language arts, mathematics, science, social studies. Instead, they covered topics the mothers considered unsuitable for their young children such as various ways to express gender identities and holiday celebrations associated with Christmas, Halloween, and birthdays. Gender identity discussions elicited especially strong feelings from the study participants. Mothers shared that gender identity was addressed during pre-k story time gatherings at public libraries. They shared that the difference was that at public library events, parents have the choice to decide whether to take their children or not, whereas, in public schools, Abyan states, “You can't control what happens in school and what kind of conversations they're having at school.” This sentiment illuminated the study participant’s sentiment around feeling a lack of agency in the school arena--feeling they have no choice over what their children are exposed to at public school, whether anchored in discussions or experiences. In addition, many mothers stressed that they want public schools to respect their parenting decisions. For instance, Yasmin highlighted that if she does not want her children to learn about specific topics, such as sex and gender discussions, the school should respect her decisions, which are influenced by her culture and faith.

Riyan, in agreement with Yasmin, expressed that she would not want her children to learn about sexuality as those subjects are not appropriate for young children in grade school. She believes that such topics be discussed with older children who are mature enough to give

consent. This issue has inspired Riyan to seek alternatives to her children attending public schools or any educational institutions not aligned with her core values and beliefs.

When I asked the mothers if these factors influenced their decision to enroll their children at Somali dual program, Abyan shared that one of the main reasons she chose SDP was because it gave her more control over the curriculum. She shared that SDP reassured her that her children would receive an education aligned with her family values. She also shared that they could interact with others with similar backgrounds and observe teachers wearing the hijab.

Abyan acknowledged that topics around gender identity are not currently built into the public-school context, if a child has a question about gender identity or expresses their identity differently, teachers will discuss the issue. Abyan highlights that these conversations can happen at any age, and the parents should be notified; however, in her experience, they are not. So, Abyan feels that ultimately, public teachers and schools take responsibility for addressing and educating children about gender identity and not the parents which she finds problematic.

Other parents shared this concern as well. They felt uninformed regarding discussion of gender topics at school, especially with young children. Lack of communication from the school resulted in parents feeling they lacked essential information and were left out of important conversations related to their children's education.

Study participants also shared that much of what went on in the public school was beyond their control. They felt that there was not a balance or cultural sensitivity around the celebration of holidays in public school. For instance, the mothers in the group were not comfortable that their children celebrated Christmas and birthdays at public schools. Riyan highlighted that since she doesn't observe these holidays, it makes it hard when her children go to school and see other

children receiving gifts and discussing these celebrations. She shared that it makes children feel left out. Riyan reflected on her own experiences in middle school, where she longed to celebrate birthdays and other celebrations despite knowing that such celebrations were not aligned with her religious beliefs. She shared that if children are surrounded by peers with the same spiritual and cultural background, it helps them feel like they belong. She emphasized that the environment impacts and influences children's perceptions.

The mothers addressed the challenge of continuously explaining to their children why they could not participate in these celebrations. In addition, the Somali mothers believed their cultural and religious backgrounds were not being prioritized in school. Muslims only have two annual celebrations that are not considered public holidays. The Somali mothers stressed that the lack of acknowledgment of the holidays was disappointing since this country has a sizable Muslim population.

Microaggressions and Inequality

Mama Jannah and Salma highlighted that their children experience unequal school. Mama Jannah expressed her desire to change racism and her frustration with inequality, and stated, "I cannot change it, the racism, I would want that to change." Mama Jannah yearns for a transformation. Salma shared that she would reimagine schools as a place that treats children equally. She pointed out that there is unequal treatment of children in schools. She shared that some children have expressed they feel neglected, that teachers ignore them, whether related to requests to use the bathroom or express their concerns about other children bothering them. Salma shared that she's heard a lot of parents who have also expressed their dissatisfaction with the treatment their children are receiving.

The mothers also discussed how they are conscious of how the presence of White privilege functions in the education system. They witness this taking place when they see the difference in opportunities available to students depending on their home zip code. They addressed their perception that schools in predominantly White neighborhoods have better teachers, materials, classroom ratios, and resources which is systemic.

Despite being aware that schools in predominantly White areas are generally considered to be better academically, the mothers pointed out that they would instead enroll their children at more diverse schools, even if that meant they would be at an educational disadvantage. AZ shared the experience of her child being the only Black child in his class and the disturbing way the educator dealt with her and her child. AZ gave the example of when her kindergarten child, who loved fashion, cut up his clothes to create different looks. One day AZ spontaneously decided to visit her child's classroom. She saw that the teacher refused to allow the child to participate in the art activity where they were using scissors, leaving her son isolated. When AZ asked the teacher why she had done this, the teacher responded:

Teacher: I don't know if you know this, but he's been cutting his t-shirt.

AZ: Of course, I notice he's been cutting his t-shirt. He's coming home with the t-shirt that's cut. But did I ever approach you and make it seem like it's a problem? And she's like, 'no, you didn't.' So then, why do you feel the need to take away his learning and ...learning his fine motor skills? Because of the fact that he's cutting t-shirts? I can get 100 t-shirts for him to cut. It's not that serious for me. Teacher: No, but I just don't want him to cut his T-shirt and for you to, like, have a problem because I know how expensive it could be.

AZ felt insulted that the teacher was making assumptions about her feeling about her son's creative endeavor. She was also upset that the teacher did not make her aware of her concerns but instead made decisions for her and her child. AZ expressed that this was not the only example of the teacher not respecting her or her child. The frequency of these sorts of incidents resulted in AZ deciding to take her child from this school which was perceived to be academically pristine. Summarizing her experience, she states:

At the end of the day, as a parent, I think about the education system. I think...Do I take my kid to a good school, like a good academic, a great academic school, or do I take them to a school that's mediocre in the academics, but it has diversity where he's around people that look like him?...I would choose to take him to the diverse one.

AZ also expressed concerns about how schooling presents a one-sided worldview. She highlighted the lack of inclusive materials in public schools and believed that this perpetuated an incomplete perspective that ignored the narratives and histories of Black and non-dominant communities. AZ emphasized the importance of having conversations at home, to support children in navigating these issues. By making children aware that schools provide a limited perspective, they could develop a more critical understanding of society, gain confidence, and adopt a broader worldview. AZ also believed that there was intentionality behind the content taught in schools and the shaping of young minds.

If they're going to public schools, then the books that they're reading is different from, like people that look like them. Even history in history classes they're not gonna talk

about the history of Islam. You know what I'm saying, like these stories and these things that they pick up on school at an early age, because like these gaalo (non-Muslims) know what they're doing. You know what I'm saying, they know that the brain is a sponge and that's why early on in elementary and stuff, they're already guiding our kids to have a certain mindset, you know what I mean so like, they just think that we're oblivious to it, but we're not... It's from one perspective, and it's from one like race. You know what I'm saying, but it's not the full picture. It's not the full story

Reimagining Public Schools: Establishing reciprocal partnerships with Families

The mothers emphasized that mutual support between families and the education system is essential. They stressed the importance of having a reciprocal relationship where families share their child's needs with the educators and the school supports them in learning. AZ highlighted how she expects the school system to be a part of the support system of the village that is supposed to support her and her child. She highlights her belief that raising children is a collective responsibility. Her expectation is that the schools should be a supportive community that aligns with her priorities for her child. She noted that since her children spend many hours at school, trust needs to be established between families and schools since school is also a part of children's learning and development. However, she shared that schools need better ways of ensuring that families feel supported and that there is an alignment between what the families want for their children and what the education system is prioritizing: This emphasizes the disconnect between schools and families.

You help me by teaching my kids what it is that he needs to be learning at this age and what's appropriate for them right now. They say it takes a village to care for the

kid...That village is like my support system, like my family, the school system. At least I'm supposed to trust that the school system is that village for me because my kids are there, in their hands for at least 8-9 hours. So that's why the school systems have to change in making the parents feel comfortable to say that that's my support system. I think that's the problem right there.

Abyan also shared that she feels a disconnect between parents and schools. Abyan stressed the importance of communication between families and educators and how they need an individualized student plan. To have this in place, she believes there needs to be an alignment between home and school, which could happen through building a stronger partnership. Abyan highlighted that she wishes every child had personalized education plan that caters to their learning needs. Study participants were in agreement that they would appreciate school faculty respecting their decisions and parenting style. If educators and families partnered and had a reciprocal relationship, they could provide children with the best quality education. They emphasized the importance of attending to the concerns and priorities of the parents to ensure that their child's specific needs are being met. Abyan highlighted that families are the experts regarding their children because they possess invaluable knowledge about them. Abyan shared her experience working at an agency that addresses the needs of children, birth to age 3. Her agency works with parents to create an individualized education plan for each child . This ensures that the child's learning at the agency and at home are synchronized. Abyan stated, "We are not going in telling parents, you know, hey, this is what your child needs, right? It's more like, tell us what your child needs, and we'll help you get there." This approach is reciprocal and empowers families while maximizing outcomes for the child. The type of relationship she envisions, if established, would bring about the betterment of the education system.

The mothers expressed several ideas that they wanted schools to incorporate, aiming to establish a reciprocal relationship. They emphasized the significance of faith and culture to the Somali community. They suggested offering the Somali language as an elective, providing spaces for students to pray, and celebrating Islamic holidays to foster inclusivity among students. In addition, they also emphasized the importance of having culturally relevant materials for children and having teachers from the same cultural background.

Riyan shared that she would like an educational environment that prioritizes academic and religious aspects. She dreams for children to have an experience where their *deen* (Islamic faith) and *Daghan* (culture) are always present as an example of the mothers delinking from the traditional school in hopes of creating environments that are aligned with their values and purpose for schooling. Riyan envisioned a school that would incorporate not just the Somali language but also incorporate Islamic teachings with regular academic subjects. The mothers also reimagined public schools that provide children a space for daily prayers and to attend Friday prayers as a community.

Astaan shared that she would want schools and governments to promote the freedom of practicing one's faith and culture while ensuring respect for individuals. Astan shared that it is essential to allow students to pray while at school by providing those breaks without making them feel like they are missing out on their education. Astaan highlighted that she wants her children to have the same educational opportunities as others while still having the space to practice their faith: She pushes back on the messages received from schools that Somali families don't value education for their children by sharing that she does value education and wants even more for children.

We don't want our kids to feel like they are missing out. They shouldn't look at us as if we don't want education for our children; we want what they want for them and more. We want our children to have a place to pray at school and to be respected.

Maha shared that the Muslim and Somali families at her child's elementary school came together and advocated for an *Eid al-Fitr* (the feast of fast-breaking at the end of the holy month of Ramadan (i.e., tool, rule and division of labor) celebration to occur at school after observing their children continuously being left out. Maha shared that these changes occurred after the school hired a Somali teacher:

My kids used to feel left out whenever they celebrated Halloween, Christmas, and all that because at the school, there is a lot of Somali community in there and a lot of Muslim communities, Asian and Arab, all that, so we kept asking for the celebration of our holidays. After both Eid, we bring food, get some candies and bring small gifts. We have a small celebration and share it with the whole school. Our kids do a project, and they explain the reason behind the celebration to the whole classroom. It's been like that for the past four or five years.

This experience was unique to the school that Maha's children attended. Maha shared that this practice of inclusivity was possible because the school hired a Somali teacher who advocated on behalf of the families. The school also hired two additional Somali educators, which Maha sees as a way that the school is supporting them.

The mothers in the study want children at an early age to have a more inclusive and culturally relevant educational experience. They all addressed how essential it is to create classes and activities and have materials (e.g., books, games, and meals) that reflect children's identities.

They emphasized that schools play a significant role in shaping children's lives so, incorporating elements reflective of children's identities enrich the environment for children.

Where they feel like they can be themselves and find themselves in the school. You know, they're (children) at school for 8-9 hours. (AZ, personal interview)

Study participants agreed that their vision for reimagining public schools would create a more inclusive and cohesive educational experience for their children and make parents feel their opinions, and religious and cultural values were respected. More inclusive contexts could build better relations between parents and public schools, possibly minimizing parents' inclination to remove their children from public schools.

Exploring new horizons: Islamic Schools in Washington, Minnesota, Texas, and Beyond

Challenges in Washington State

Mothers in this study considered several alternative options related to their and their children's challenges in school. They first considered enrolling their children in Islamic schools. Parents realized that the existing Islamic schools do not support Somali children and families. AZ shared that Somali parents have been taking their children out of public schools and enrolling them in Islamic schools in the Northwest area; however, children and families were having a hard time adjusting because of how they were being treated due to their race specifically the challenges of dealing with anti-Blackness in the school setting. In addition, to tuition costs at Islamic schools were prohibitive for many families, so, parents sought scholarships schools offered. Receiving financial support, however, created a sense of fear—advocating for their children or bringing concerns about programming seemed risky as families worried that they

would lose scholarship support if they made waves. In general, accepting financial support left parents feeling powerless. In addition, administrators, teachers, other students, and other parents assumed that all the Black children were receiving financial aid and were not from the Northwest community. AZ suggested that the Northwest Islamic school was using economic hierarchy to segregate because there was no confidentiality regarding their financial status. Somali children and their families felt isolated and segregated due to the anti-blackness sentiments from the Southeast Asian majority community. AZ critiqued that the Muslim community has adopted the American mindset (colonialism), has become segregated, and is not united. She emphasized that they forgot that they should be operating as the *Ummah* (cohesive Islamic community) since the religion of Islam is based on the inclusivity and equality of all races and all economic classes:

Northwest *Masjid* (Muslim place of worship) is for only people that look like this, and these Islamic schools are only for people that look like this and could afford this. If you're not affording it, then your kid is going to know that he doesn't even belong here. I feel like that's a mindset that, as Muslims, we should not adopt. Like, I feel like that's an American mindset, and we're easily adapting into the American mindset, forgetting to go back to the root of things where it's like we are one *ummah* (cohesive Islamic community).

Riyan agreed with AZ's viewpoint regarding segregation in Islamic schools. She shared how when trying to enroll her children at an Islamic school, she noticed the lack of diversity, particularly the lack of Black and Somali children. Riyan emphasized that she was saddened by the segregation she witnessed and wished the Muslim community would unite. Riyan expressed that other parents choose public schools because of the diversity that allows their children to feel

comfortable in a space. Riyan wishes for the Muslim community to work on addressing these issues to have a more inclusive educational environment for children:

You know my kid, last year I tried to enroll them into the Islamic School, and I went, and there were not many Black and Somali kids there. So, my daughter felt so out of place, and I felt so out of place, and I'm like, oh my gosh, I can't. I hate that segregation...Abyan agreed that Islamic schools may be costly and challenging for single parents or parents with multiple children. She expressed that the Seattle area offers limited Islamic school options. Abyan also expressed concern about the children being taught outside of Islamic schools. Abyan shared her frustrations and believed there needs to be a different way to ensure Somali children can learn without compromising their beliefs. She mentions that Islamic schools in the area currently meet different standards than public schools. She expressed that she wants to avoid exposing her child to certain behaviors in public schools but is concerned about compromising academic standards that result in her children falling behind:

You know, we do have Islamic schools here, but I don't feel like they're up to the standards of even public schools, to be honest, and so I felt like, you know, I never put him in public schools, but you know, hearing about what is acceptable in public schools right now, I didn't want him exposed to that, so I felt like I was being forced to choose between *deen* (Islamic faith) and education.

Beyond Washington State

After sharing their dissatisfaction with the Northwest Islamic school and the lack of better options, the mothers revealed that they have considered moving out of Washington State and have even considered moving to other states or abroad to find communities that are better aligned with their beliefs and values. However, moving presents other challenges for some families, including financial stability. Other parents had the hope to settle and plant roots in Washington and create the type of school they envisioned for Muslim children

Using Minnesota as an example, Riyan pointed out that regardless of location, one still must navigate implemented policies. Riyan preferred moving to a Muslim country, where her children could grow up in an Islamic environment, rather than moving to another state where the same concerns would eventually arise. She shared that because of these worries, she diligently pursues higher degrees here in Washington so that she might have better professional opportunities when she finally settles in a Muslim country where she can ensure her children reside in a place that does not expose them to situations that conflict with their values and beliefs.

Relocating to Texas was another option, the mothers indicated they had been considering, citing the belief that the Muslim community there is strong and offers numerous resources and Islamic schools. Texas was appealing not just because of affordable housing but also because the Islamic schools serve children through high school and provide a comprehensive education. However, despite the attractiveness of Texas, most of the mothers preferred establishing roots in Washington State, where they already have an established community, and desired opening an Islamic school. They desired to build and nurture a community in Washington state rather than start anew in a different location.

Solution: Reimagining Islamic Schools in Washington State

While there was no consensus on a solution, the mothers, strongly gravitated toward reimagining Islamic schools here in Washington and cultivating an inclusive environment for their children to thrive. They envisioned a school providing cultural and religious, allowing students to maintain their complete identity. The mothers also wanted high academic standards for their children.

AZ stated that achieving this goal would require mothers, like the ones in this community design circle, and Somali educational professionals to come together to achieve the goal. AZ recognized each parent's value and individual strength in creating something meaningful. She emphasized the importance of collaboration and collective effort, driven by shared purposes centered around children. She highlighted the need to lay a strong foundation, plant roots, and foster growth. To do this, she shared, involves engaging with nonprofits, Islamic schools, and public schools and gathering data to determine the best approach for building exemplary Islamic schools locally instead of seeking alternatives in different states or countries.

The mothers also stressed that the current Islamic schools have long wait lists and are very expensive. These new reimagined schools would have multiple sites to avoid waitlisting and would be free to stop the economic segregation in the Islamic schools. To create this school, the mothers view programs like Somali Dual Program(SDP) as promising, as AZ noted, SDP is a space that pushes back on the narrative that Somalis, minorities, and Blacks do not belong and are not visible, “We have a place that says we exist now. It's no longer just the system that you had running for you. It's like breaking the mold. I feel like it's a start of the process of

...changing”. AZ went on to describe what it feels like for her to be made invisible and how the SDP preschool gives her and others like her visibility. Feeling that SDP has already made her community visible, she hopes SDP mothers suggested that Somali Dual Program already has a platform to host an event organized by the mothers. This event would engage the families in the community and other organizations to gather their input and discuss how to create a more solid plan for a more expansive Islamic school. The mothers held varying viewpoints regarding the accountability of those responsible for the school's management, as well as their preferences for the most suitable group of individuals to oversee the school's operations. Abyan expressed that establishing something in Washington would be meaningful and essential, given its sizeable Islamic community. However, she noted a challenge where those who initiate Islamic schools often develop a sense of ownership rather than embracing the idea that the schools belong to the entire community. To ensure accountability, she suggested having a group of board members who would uphold the school's mission. AZ agreed and believed that making this vision a reality would require assembling the right group of individuals. AZ emphasized the importance of Islamic principles for mothers, whether it pertains to raising their children or guiding their values and principles in all aspects of life. She pointed out that for their reimagined school to succeed, it must be entrusted to individuals who genuinely understand and prioritize Islamic principles. Prioritizing these principles will enable the establishment of a supportive community that can help fulfill their aspirations and dreams for their children. AZ highlighted the significance of the people who will come together to create a reimagined Islamic school and stressed the importance of leaving a lasting legacy transcending worldly matter. She firmly believed that the ultimate guiding factor should be for the sake of Allah, as what truly matters, in the end, is pleasing Him, and these reimagined schools would help parents achieve their worldly goals for the hereafter.

AZ stated, "It's more like knowing that you know your purpose in life is to educate the future *Ummah* (cohesive Islamic community), its legacy." These schools will provide an ideal solution to the ongoing confusion, imbalance, struggles, and conflicts that parents have been experiencing with the existing public and private school options available to them.

Discussion

This study endeavored to capture Somali families' familial and cultural knowledge while exploring their experiences and perceptions of the early learning programs and public schools their children attended in Washington State. The objective was to identify families' priorities, goals, and aspirations for their children while highlighting their cultural and religious practices and identifying strategies they used to sustain them. Given the limited research about Somali families with young children, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences and the effects of those lived experiences on their children and their schooling. The three research questions of this study are: 1) What are Somali families' hopes and dreams for their children? 2) How do Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning? 3) How do Somali families reimagine schools? The findings from this study could potentially drive transformative actions that reinvent and reshape the engagement of Somali families in their children's education.

Research question one examined the hopes and dreams of Somali families, focusing on the influence of *Deen* (Islamic faith), *Dhaqan* (culture), and formal knowledge. The mothers who participated in this study expressed their desire for their children to have a strong understanding of their faith, be deeply connected to their cultural heritage, and receive a great formal education

that aligns with or complements their cultural and religious values; all three components were considered highly important to all mothers. These authors also found similar findings on the importance of formal education for Somali children. (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Basford, 2010; Bigelow 2007; Bowie et al., 2017; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Additionally, the mothers emphasized the importance of prioritizing their children's overall well-being.

The mothers firmly believe that by providing a solid foundation in religion, their children will acquire the necessary skills to navigate the education system and their daily lives, which is consistent with the literature that discusses religion as an asset for Somali families and children (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Basford, 2010, Roubeni et al., 2015). A profound knowledge of *Deen* (Islamic faith) stood out as one of Somali mothers' overarching hopes and dreams. They expressed their desire for their children to establish a strong foundation in their Islamic identity, take pride in their Muslim identity, and foster a deep connection with Allah (SWT). They envisioned their children as future leaders who would embody the Islamic values ingrained in Islamic teachings, such as respecting elders and parents, being disciplined and empathetic, and discerning between what is beneficial and what should be avoided. The mothers firmly believed that supporting their children in practicing prayer and fasting and instilling an understanding of the importance of these religious practices from a young age would provide lifelong guidance.

In contrast, while prior research has addressed the significance of religion (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Basford, 2010; Bigelow, 2007; Bowie et al., 2017; Oikonomidoy, 2007; Roy & Roxas, 2011, 2012; Roubeni et al., 2015; Thomas, 2016), the discovery that religion serves as the foundational source influencing family decision-making for their young children is a novel insight because while the previous studies mentioned above have mentioned it the focus of the studies didn't identify the specific practices and how it was shaping Somali mothers' priorities

and goals. Navigating parenthood, especially concerning education and various other aspects, has not received such pronounced emphasis until now, where my study specifically illuminates how intricately interwoven it is for Somali families in their culturally specific parenting practices, aspirations, and goals for their children.

Study participants shared the view that a successful child is rooted in their *Dhaqan* (culture), a perspective also found to hold importance in previous studies exploring Somali families' aspirations for their children (Abdi, 2021; Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Bigelow, 2007; Kaptejns & Arman, 2008; Thomas, 2016). During community design circles, the mothers in the present study expressed a desire for their children to take pride in their heritage, background, and culture, as they believed these elements would be a fundamental part of a healthy personal identity (Iruka, 2022). The mothers emphasized the importance of preserving their culture, particularly in their current environment. They believed that culture plays a crucial role in upholding values (Awokoya, 2020). As they no longer reside in Somalia, the mothers believed that without adequate support in learning and understanding their culture during the formative years, their children's culture would be at risk of fading away, resulting in a loss of generational knowledge. Moreover, they viewed the preservation of *dhaqan* (culture) as a means for families to maintain connections with their communities and relatives in Somalia. Families in Thomas (2016) Studie would also send their children to Somalia from Norway during the summers. This was seen as a way for the children to strengthen their cultural identity and support intergenerational connections.

The preservation of language was deemed vital for safeguarding Somali dhaqan, and the mothers expressed hope for their children to learn the Somali language. They saw language acquisition as a way for their children to contribute to the community and maintain their cultural identity. The mothers believed that knowing multiple languages broadens children's perspectives. Language was considered a crucial link to the shared culture, and without it, there would be a barrier preventing children from forming a deeper connection with their cultural heritage. The mothers expressed concerns about the sustainability of *Somalinimo* (national Somali identity) in the future, primarily if no longer family members were residing in Somalia. They emphasized the importance of sustaining their culture, particularly in their current environment, as they believed it played a vital role in upholding values. Given that they no longer reside in Somalia, the mothers were concerned that a meaningful sense of cultural identity would gradually diminish without adequate support in learning and understanding their culture during the formative years, resulting in generational knowledge loss. They also viewed the preservation of dhaqan (culture) as a means for families to maintain connections with their current communities and relatives in Somalia (Thomas, 2016). The mothers expressed their hopes for their children to learn the Somali language, as it would enable them to contribute to the community and maintain their cultural identity. The Somali language was seen as a conduit for establishing a solid connection with the shared culture (i.e., a tool). Without it, children would face barriers to deeply engage with their cultural heritage. This has been emphasized in various literature that discusses children who could not utilize their home language. (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Currently, this is a challenge facing the US educational system in meeting the needs of children who are dual language learners (Park et al., 2018).

As seen in the findings, a significant revelation stems from this study as it showcases the intricate interplay between religion, dhaqan (culture), and their collective influence on identity, values, and the fundamental mindset that guides Somali mothers. Previous research efforts have also highlighted similar findings. While the existing literature predominantly centers on the experiences of the first and 1.5 generations of Somalis in the diaspora, a captivating avenue for exploration lies in observing the evolving dynamics across generations, particularly with the emergence of the second generation now on the verge of birthing children and taking on mother roles. It remains intriguing whether this new wave of mothers will be able to sustain their cultural and religious values.

In this study, obtaining formal knowledge through quality education emerged as a theme of paramount importance for Somali mothers. This aligns with the findings of Bigelow (2007), who found that Somali families believed education was the path to success in the U.S. The mothers shared their hopes for their children to leverage the educational opportunities available in America, pursuing what they considered prestigious fields such as medicine, engineering, and other esteemed disciplines. The mothers firmly believed that education could unlock doors to opportunities, provide a sense of security, and foster stability for their children. Having left war-torn Somalia in search of better prospects in America, they desired for their children to benefit from pursuing higher education.

Another theme that emerged is that the mothers emphasized the significance of children's overall well-being. They stressed the importance of supporting their children's mental and emotional well-being. To achieve this, the mothers expressed the need to provide nurturing

environments that facilitate their children's learning and development. They discussed their roles as parents and underscored the importance of establishing trusting relationships by having open and honest communication with their children to support their social, emotional, and overall well-being. These findings challenge the negative stereotypes often associated with Somali families, suggesting they don't value education. They also critique the school-centric view of what constitutes valuable contributions and endeavors. Recognizing these findings is crucial as they highlight the importance of immigrant families' home-based engagement. Their priorities and goals deserve acknowledgment (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). Moreover, these families are making decisions not just about their children's education but also their overall well-being. These findings show that Somali mothers are instrumental in creating a more responsive and equitable learning environment for their children (Souto-Manning, 2013).

Research question two focused on how Somali families cultivate their children's development, identity, and learning. The Somali mothers discussed the driving force behind their decision-making regarding supporting their young children. Rogoff (2005) argues that the progress of human development is intricately tied to the collective heritage individuals inherit as both members of their species and their communities. The mothers' accounts highlight the role of their personal cultural and historical development as the fundamental influence in shaping their children's development, learning, and identity. Particularly for Somali mothers, instilling their cultural and religious values in their children was extremely important, especially in the current context and environment where they shared their many worries that their children would be unable to sustain their culture and faith. This aligns with Black families having to purposefully parent in ways that cultivate resilience tailored to their specific contexts(Bocknek et al., (2020).

The importance of religion as an asset for children and families is touched on in the literature (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Basford, 2010; Roubeni et al., 2015). These studies demonstrate that immigrant groups, such as Somali families, primarily situate their identity in their faith and actively uphold religious traditions within their households. Within the present study, a similar theme emerged: Obtaining and Utilizing Islamic Education in the Upbringing of Somali Muslim Children. Through our conversations, the mothers shared how they incorporated Islamic teachings into their parenting. They enrolled their children in Islamic programs that taught the Qur'an and Arabic language and emphasized acceptable manners, with educators, peers, and community members serving as role models.

Additionally, many mothers personally taught their children the Qur'an at home. They utilized prophetic stories to instill Islamic values and strengthen their children's Islamic identity. The mothers continued the tradition of sharing their parents' stories with their children to meaningfully engage them and foster a deep love for their faith, which aligns with research that has found that religiosity is a unique strength for Black families (Bocknek, 2020). Somali mothers also provided practices to help their children regulate their emotions, teaching them *duas* (supplications) to recite when frightened to aid in calming their nerves.

Furthermore, the mothers explained how they used Islamic teachings to help their children understand the importance of charity and community, emphasizing individuals' responsibility toward the community's overall well-being and promoting interconnectedness (Bocknek, 2020)—a fundamental principle among the five pillars of Islam. Awokoya (2020) would concur that these Somali mothers are demonstrating the significance of cultural integrity by instilling traditional values, expectations, and practices in their children. The *Dugsi* system

(Qur'anic school), a tool that the families utilized, is often seen as preserving Somali culture and heritage and passing on religious knowledge to the next generation. Dugsi is a part of the social networks that families use to support their children and the community in fostering a robust positive connection (Bigelow, 2007; Huraibi, 2014). The use of dugsi in parenting is not addressed in the literature; dugsi challenges the dominantly individualistic approach in schools because children are taught values rooted in collectiveness. The mothers in the study, using dugsi as a tool and Deen as a (rule), teach their children that their actions, good or bad, impact society. Opportunities to research the family engagement practices that utilize dugsi and how the effort could be translated to education spaces would be beneficial. Overall, the data highlights the importance of Islamic education in the upbringing of Somali Muslim children. The mother's efforts to expose their child to Quranic verses at a young age and their subsequent attendance at an Islamic school or dugsi illustrate a commitment to prioritizing/the importance of providing a strong foundation in Islamic practice and knowledge. Similarly, parents in Thomas' (2016) study felt strongly about the sense of obligation to uphold specific standards, as failing to do so would make them think that they had failed in their parental duties.

It's essential to recognize the specific roles and expectations placed on women, particularly in the context of motherhood. In many cultures, mothers are expected to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, often leading to the portrayal of mothers as superwomen. This is especially evident in Black and immigrant communities (Bocknek et al., 2020). During community design circle meetings with mothers, we did an icebreaker activity where we delved into their perceptions of motherhood, or "*hooyonimo*," uncovering both the joys and challenges of the role. Mothers shared that within the context of Islam, they are elevated above all. They

cited an Islamic saying by the prophet Muhammad (SAW), "Heaven lies beneath the feet of your mother," highlighting the esteemed status of mothers in Islam. This reverence for mothers and the fundamental duty of honoring parents, particularly mothers, is supported by the Quran and hadith.

While mothers understood and appreciated this elevated status, the conversations often circled back to the challenges posed by societal expectations for women to embody a superwoman persona. There is societal pressure for mothers, especially Black women, to be strong, resilient, and capable of managing everything without faltering (Bocknek et al., 2020). Mothers in the study acknowledged the impossibility of fully meeting these expectations. While they value their role as mothers, they desire to maintain their identities beyond motherhood and share responsibilities rather than bearing them alone. They emphasized the importance of financial and emotional support from their families and extended communities. When discussing sources of knowledge on child development and parenting, many mothers credited their mothers or grandmothers. This generational wisdom is invaluable in helping them navigate the complexities of motherhood.

In the context of maintaining family unity, mothers voiced concerns about the challenges of deciding to move abroad, citing socioeconomic constraints that could prevent the entire family from relocating together. They expressed fears of disrupting the family unit and reluctance to become single mothers by choice if they had to go abroad while their partners stayed back to send money to the family. They drew from the experiences of their mothers and others in the Somali community who were often forced into such situations due to war and displacement. This

generation of mothers are determined to break free from similar constraints. They emphasize the importance of keeping their families together and leveraging community support whenever possible. Their goal is to share parenting responsibilities collectively, highlighting the significance of community support in their parenting journey.

The mothers in this study stressed the crucial reasons for choosing the Somali Dual Program (SDP) language preschool for their children's education. The theme, Enrolling Children in Early Learning Programs Where their Language and Culture Mirror Home, emerged. Cultural match and cultural education were key factors in the mothers' decision to SDP's preschool program. This aligns with the research on the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in promoting young Black children's academic outcomes and their self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Curenton et al., 2022; Rasheed et al., 2020). The Muslim mothers had a collective aspiration for their children to preserve their religion and culture, and they believed that SDP would support their hopes, dreams, and goals. This finding aligns with Iruka's (2022) emphasis on the necessity for Black children to have access to high-quality, racially-affirming early learning environments. Iruka (2022) underscores how critical it is for Black children to be provided with the appropriate support and resources specific to their various cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and physical needs. Iruka (2022) advocates for Black children to have genuine integration "that does not include moving of their bodies in white spaces, but one that recognizes that racial integration of thought, resources, and supports is necessary for affirming and healthy space" (p. 40). This aligns with the importance that the mothers placed on their decisions to enroll their children in this dual-language preschool program.

While SDP isn't a religious school, parents still felt at ease sending their children there due to the school's ability to maintain religious values. This created a unique blend, resembling a mix between a public and religious school. The program was viewed as an environment that fostered their children's multiple identities and instilled confidence in those identities. Not only did SDP use materials that represented the Somali culture, but it also had teachers, administrators, and community elders who were actively involved in the school; this finding aligns with Basford's (2010) study where Somali families came together and opened up a charter school that was culturally sustaining and community-driven. The mothers expressed that SDP felt like a space where their children did not have to conform, thanks to the alignment between home and school. The mothers have Identified examples of a framework of equitable sociocultural interactions that has various elements, defined by Crenson et al. (2022) as having the following elements that support critical thinking skills and implement equitable discipline measures:

- (a) Open classroom dialogues that encourage children to express their knowledge and cultural or racial-ethnic identities;
- (b) connection between children's home and school language traditions;
- (c) a nurturing and affirming classroom climate in which children can express their unique personalities, emotions, abilities and ideas;
- (d) instruction that is connected to children's lived experiences at home and in the communities and grounded in peer collaboration and a sense of communal effort;
- (e) intentional and explicit emphasis on building positive cultural and bias-free interactions between teachers and children and between peers)
- (f) that values diversity and strives for social justice;
- (g) equitable discipline based on redirection and encouragement for positive behavior and that uses Social-emotional problem- solving rather than judgmental chastising; and

incorporation of intellectually- stimulating instructional content, curriculum, and viewpoints (p.683)

Curenton et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of "socially and academically affirming interactions" (p.683) for children. Mothers reported that teachers and administrators at SDP preschool demonstrated affirming interactions, which greatly benefits families and children. The environment at SDP supported young Muslim children and contributed to shaping their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about themselves and their community. All study participants deemed learning Somali essential, leading them to enroll their children at SDP to acquire the language. The program facilitated the children's educational development while establishing a connection to their home culture. Recognizing the influence of early experiences on children, the mothers shared the importance of selecting a preschool that would help sustain their various identities.

Within the context of essential characteristics employed to teach their children, the mothers highlighted how their upbringing and early experiences influenced their current parenting methods. They expressed that their understanding of how young children learn was shaped by their family members, the community, and society. They derived their knowledge from the cultural and religious perspectives on the importance of teaching and supporting their young children. The mothers emphasized the significance of passing down traditions and values to their children, considering it their responsibility to educate, shape, and guide them. However, they also recognized the generational differences and the need to adapt specific teaching methods. For example, many mothers shared that when they were growing up, they were often

given a firm "no" or told to do things without explanation. They expressed a desire to take a different approach with their children, encouraging them to ask questions and supporting them by providing explanations and helping them understand the reasoning for certain decisions. They hoped their children would adhere to their teachings out of an understanding rather than feeling compelled to do so just because they were told to.

The mothers also emphasized the importance of utilizing approaches that prioritize their children's overall well-being. This included individualizing care, supporting social and emotional development, spending quality time with their children, and considering the context in which they are being raised (Iruka,2022). They highlighted the significance of building a trusting relationship with their children through open communication during their formative years. The mothers viewed children as blank slates upon which parents wrote what they would learn. This understanding informed how they shaped and guided their children from an early age, recognizing their significant impact on their development. Parental modeling was seen as a crucial concept in supporting their children's academic and religious success. The mothers believed that to raise well-rounded and emotionally healthy children, they needed to exemplify the values and principles they wished to instill. They particularly emphasized the importance of leading by example for their children, especially given the broader societal context in which they live. They hoped to inspire their children and convey that these values were not just empty words but tangible actions to be practiced daily. Consistently, the mothers underscored how children learn by observing and modeling their parents' behavior. They understood that their active involvement in the community and the practice of cultural and religious values were essential in positively impacting the world.

The third research question: *How would Somali families reimagine schools?* Inspired a conversation among the mothers that took a surprising turn. The mothers reimaged public and Islamic schools, revealing their focus on supporting their children's academic, religious, and cultural needs. They shared the barriers and challenges they experienced in both types of schools. Sustaining their children's faith seemed to be a main priority.

Regarding public schools, the mothers expressed concerns about the lack of family involvement in decision-making regarding what was being discussed in the curriculum. In their children's education. These concerns led them to consider withdrawing their children from public schools. The mothers proposed reimaging public schools by establishing reciprocal partnerships with families, emphasizing the importance of mutual support between families and the education system. They envisioned a relationship where families and educators support each other to provide their children with the best education. The mothers also advocated including Somali as an elective, giving prayer spaces, celebrating Islamic holidays, offering culturally relevant materials, and having educators who understand their children's backgrounds. They highlighted the need for an educational environment that prioritizes academic and religious aspects.

The discomfort expressed by the mothers regarding public schools suggests that they had concerns about the schools' intentions. Consistent with Abdi's (2021) and Thomas' (2016) findings, the mothers in the present study believed that schools were imparting values contrary to their own. In Abdi's (2021) study, the structural aspects of schools were explored in depth, revealing how they can possess colonial characteristics and represent the goals of coloniality.

The mothers in this study observed that public schools did not prioritize what was important to them as Somali mothers. Instead, they felt the schools focused on reproducing colonial and Western objectives. To find a place that would prioritize their children's academic, cultural, and religious priorities, the mothers discussed options such as enrolling their children in Islamic schools in Washington State, moving to Texas, or even considering a move abroad. However, they shared that existing Islamic schools in Washington are not academically on par with public schools and present their challenges, such as racism and socioeconomic prejudice.

The mothers identified a solution for reimagining Islamic schools in Washington. They wanted to create an environment where their children could thrive (Basford,2010). To support their children's identity and well-being, the mothers emphasized the need for the community to come together and collaborate on a collective effort driven by a shared purpose centered on the children. They proposed involving community organizations, Islamic schools, public schools, and other families and communities to determine the best approach for locally building an exemplary Islamic school. The mothers stressed the importance of creating within their community and establishing solid roots instead of seeking alternatives in different states or countries. They believed that having individuals who adhere to Islamic principles at the forefront would help make this goal a reality and support them in leaving a legacy that transcends worldly matters.

While reimagining schooling, the mothers discussed how they perceive Arabs and South Asians as typical members of the Muslim American community who have access to and control of Islamic schools known for their high academic standards. The mothers in the study were

aware of the marginalization they faced within the non-Black Muslim community concerning their children's Islamic schooling. They also shared their awareness of the prejudice and discrimination that are part of the racist experiences inherent in living in America. The mothers often discussed the challenges they faced as young children growing up in the United States or as young adults navigating various systems, as well as the blatant racism they encountered inside and outside the classroom. Nevertheless, through their experiences, the mothers developed resilience, enabling them to persevere and adopt a different perspective where they refuse to let it hinder their advocacy for themselves and their children.

During the community design circles, an interesting finding emerged when the mothers discussed the appropriate time to talk to their young children about how society may perceive them as Black children and how to cope with racism. This process is called racial socialization (Doucet,2008). At the same time, while this isn't a Somali-specific concept, the Somali mothers here were both raised in Washington state and draw from their personal experiences in how to address this. Doucet (2008) notes that Black parents commonly use two distinct approaches when discussing culture, race, and racism with their children, which was consistent with my findings as well. Some lean towards a mainstream viewpoint, equipping their children with skills to fit into the dominant culture and emphasizing that they are equal with everyone rather than on racial issues. Other parents prepare their children for potential discrimination based on their race and teach them strategies to address racism.

Additionally, Black families often employ methods to foster a sense of racial pride in their children for support and empowerment. In my study, the mothers had differing opinions on when it was suitable to have these conversations, their role in shaping their children's

understanding of their racial identity, and the challenges they might encounter. AZ strongly believed in starting these conversations early, while Abyan disagreed and preferred to preserve her children's innocence during their formative years, shielding them from such discussions. Abyan, who had difficult experiences in public schools where her teacher discouraged her from speaking Somali, felt the need to balance preserving her children's innocence and preparing them for the reality of societal perceptions. This discussion among mothers also aligns with the findings of Basford (2010), where families came together to create charter schools to protect their children from being targeted and discriminated against.

The mothers believed nurturing and supporting their children's religious identity would contribute to their resilience and growth. Whether through community involvement or enrolling their children in a Somali dual program, the mothers recognized the importance of providing role models such as themselves, educators, religious teachers, administrators, and peers who would significantly influence and shape their children's sense of self and support their Somali Muslim identity. The mothers aspired for their children to have a strong foundation in their religious identity, believing it would help them combat internalized messages of marginalization and support them in the afterlife.

The mothers were mindful of the impact of the environment on their children's development, identity, and learning. They acknowledged that the nature of the environment, whether nurturing or not, indicated which values and principles should take precedence for their children. This was evident in their hopes and dreams for their children and how they nurtured their children's development, learning, and identity. The mothers emphasized the need to support

their children based on the current context, understanding the shifts that have occurred since their own time in school. They viewed *deen* (Islamic faith) as a central role in the lives of Muslims. The mothers believed cultivating their children's religious foundation would support their overall sense of self, ethics, morality, integrity, and behavior. Deen was seen as a framework for life, providing a spiritual foundation for developing character and values. The mothers believed that deen represented a foundational lens through which they wanted their children to navigate the world. They considered Islam as the core system that supported them and offered guidance on how to help their children.

Implications for Research

This dissertation emphasizes the importance of providing a nuanced and accurate picture of how Somali mothers and communities utilize various resources, strengths, capacities, knowledge, cultural and linguistic practices, spiritual beliefs, priorities, and aspirations within U.S. educational contexts. By centering on the lived experiences of Somali mothers with children in the early learning years, the study sheds light on these mothers' familial and cultural priorities and goals.

While much of the current literature focuses on Somali mothers with older children in higher academic spaces, my study particularly highlights the perspectives, dreams, and goals of Somali mothers with children in the early learning years. Not only does this study touch on the ways the mothers challenge colonial and Western expectations of families, but it also emphasizes how they prioritize their indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. Families possess invaluable expertise, yet the perspectives of Somali mothers and families still need to be

improved in early childhood education (ECE) research and practice. Incorporating their insights can help us better understand and address their priorities. The existing literature on Somali families needs empirical data that highlights the mothers' aspirations to nurture their children physically, emotionally, and spiritually within an Islamic framework. As researchers, we need to expand our perspectives beyond the limitations of the global North and embrace diverse epistemologies and approaches (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017) to truly understand and support the needs and aspirations of Somali and other Muslim families.

The results of this study have important practical implications for partnerships with immigrant refugee families and emphasize how critical it is to see families as agents of change (Ishimaru, 2020). This study demonstrated how the community's rules, tools, and norms are primarily shaped by families influenced by environmental, spiritual, cultural, and historical factors. The mothers drew from their upbringing, communities, and the political landscape when guiding their children's identity, learning, and development. For instance, the mothers in this study frequently reflected on their experiences growing up as young Muslim women, navigating various environments. As adults, they recognize the importance of not repeating their parents' approach, which often deferred to adhering to the dominant cultures' ways of knowing by not challenging the Western knowledge systems regarding schooling. Similar to the way in Abdi (2022) when the mothers had to reimagine what *hooyinimo* (an indigenous African worldview on motherhood) meant in their new context, where it went from harmony to having to fight back against the oppressive school environments by collectively coming together and advocating for their children. Similarly, the mothers in this study also advocate for actively supporting and

advocating for their children, challenging stereotypes and contradictions present within educational spaces.

Community design circle

The Community design circle methodology has been an enriching experience for my study and has implications for how we conduct research with Somali families. This methodology fostered a sense of trust and relationship-building in the exchange of knowledge. It provided a platform for mothers to collectively make sense of their experiences, hopes, and dreams and explore possibilities for collective action. Unlike other research methods where I may have been considered the expert (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016), starting with their hopes, dreams, and priorities fostered a greater sense of comfort and sharing of ideas. Traditional research methods can reinforce power dynamics, which can inhibit genuine dialogue. Surveys or focus groups with predetermined questions may limit the insights gained, potentially overlooking important nuances and perspectives of Somali families. In contrast, the community design circles allowed participants to freely express their thoughts and ideas without seeking validation, as there were no predetermined questions. This approach, particularly valued within the Somali community's oral tradition, emphasizes collaboration and mutual learning over a hierarchical expert-led dynamic.

Through the community design circles, the mothers collectively envisioned the future for their children. The iterative nature of the community design circles, meeting several times and providing recaps, facilitated ongoing conversations and collective reflection. This continuous

engagement empowered participants to see themselves as experts and explore collective action possibilities.

This collaborative approach ensures that the reimagining of educational futures is informed by diverse perspectives and rooted in communal values (Ishimaru et al., 2018). Community design circles promote collaborative efforts to transform aspirations into tangible realities within both the community and educational spaces (Ishimaru et al., 2018). Ultimately, community design circles prioritize the agency and expertise of non-dominant families, recognizing their unique knowledge and lived experiences as invaluable contributions to the research process (Ishimaru et al., 2018). By embracing a more collaborative and inclusive approach that is not extractive, we can meaningfully engage in a process of change-making (Ishimaru et al., 2018) that identifies and leverages transformative solutions and actions that put at the forefront the needs and aspirations of Somali families and communities.

Implication for Theory

The intertwining of Somali families' identities with religion and culture makes distinguishing practices stemming from either belief system challenging. To understand such communities comprehensively, developing a theoretical framework that utilizes a global south framework becomes crucial. By doing so, we can effectively unravel the complexities and nuances inherent in their functioning. This approach will pave the way for a more insightful and nuanced understanding of these closely interconnected dynamics.

Based on the research and findings of this study, it is clear that the identity, hopes, and dreams of Somali communities and their perspectives on schooling are deeply intertwined with themes of religion and culture. Further investigation is necessary to fully comprehend the extent to which religion and culture influence the Muslim Somali community. It is plausible to hypothesize that these dominant themes impact education, as demonstrated in this study, and other aspects of their lives, such as health, livelihood, and various dimensions. A comprehensive exploration of these interconnections will provide a more holistic understanding of the community's dynamics.

The decolonial lens was vital in understanding the dynamics of culture and religion within family structures. It highlights how perspectives from the global South, often marginalized in dominant discourses led by the global North, shape parenting practices and values (Barajas-López & Bang, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this context, CHAT served as a tool to identify and analyze these diverse perspectives. Through the decolonial lens, we recognize that the rules and norms guiding families originate from varied cultural backgrounds, influencing their goals, priorities, approach to parenting, aspirations, and the reimagining of schools. My findings show it's about more than just recognizing these differences but prioritizing them. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating diverse perspectives by utilizing the decolonial lens to foreground knowledge and pathways from the global South. This lens was not an add-on or a phase within the research process; it was a constant presence, guiding every aspect of analysis and interpretation. It underscores the need to question whose voices and experiences have historically shaped education discourse. It's about acknowledging the limitations of conventional frameworks and centering the voices and lived experiences of

families often excluded by the dominant narratives (Barajas-López & Bang, 2018; Ishimaru, 2020; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Ultimately, the decolonial lens served as a guiding principle, ensuring that our research and recommendations resonate with the communities' lived experiences, priorities, and goals. Therefore, the results of this research underscore the significance of centering research on the global South. In addressing all three research questions, the mothers in this study express distinct approaches, priorities, and aspirations distinct from those typically advanced in the global North.

Implications for policy practice

In conversations encompassing their hopes and dreams, whether centered on reimagining public education or considering Islamic private schooling, all the mothers shared a common desire: to safeguard and honor their beliefs and values. Their aspirations were geared towards fostering an environment that would steadfastly uphold their children's religious convictions and cultural heritage. The looming fear of these essential principles diminishing held a prominent place in their thoughts, perpetually motivating the concepts they aimed to illuminate.

What's particularly intriguing is the profound significance these mothers attributed to enhancing the spaces in which their children spend six to eight hours daily. This perspective is intricately interwoven with preexisting Somali cultural proverbs and religious values. Notably, the proverb "Laga bartow laga badi" springs to mind. While its literal translation is "the educators have been out-educated," it encapsulates that individuals tend to adopt positive or negative behaviors when exposed to them for prolonged periods. This aligns with the notion that

prolonged exposure influences adaptation. Another Somali proverb that comes to mind is “Biyo fadhiow biyo socda aya kiciyo” its literal translation is “Still water is moved by moving water.” In this context, the meaning resonates deeply within the Somali community, considering its relatively small size. This close-knit nature leaves them susceptible to significant influences from the broader community.

Regarding religious values, there is a hadith that subtly highlights the significance and impact of one's environment. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look at whom you befriend" (Sunan Abu Dawood). This hadith underscores the crucial role that our surroundings play in shaping our development, beliefs, and identity. The core concern among the mothers is that this external influence could alter their religious and indigenous identity, thus prompting their fervent desire to preserve their cultural values and traditions.

Looking at the findings, Formal and Islamic schooling practices need to be more accepting of Somali family values. Schools and programs can showcase this by allowing parents to share their ideas freely (Souto-Manning, 2013); schools can practice more actions, such as acknowledging Eid holidays as official holidays and having official prayer rooms for people from all faiths. This would exemplify the schools' efforts to support parents, diversity, and equity in the school space. These policies would give Somali families a stronger sense of belonging and help build a more inclusive environment for all children.

This research also highlights language loss, particularly evident in the experiences of the first generation and generation 1.5 Somalis. Motivated by a sense of determination to bridge the

educational gap for their children, first-generation Somali parents often prioritized providing opportunities they hadn't had. While this led to significant achievements in higher education for Somali children, preserving the Somali language was frequently overshadowed. However, the dynamics have shifted with the 1.5-generation Somali mothers. While striving to equip their second-generation offspring with the tools for success, these mothers now grapple with the challenge of not possessing the fluency in Somali necessary to ensure language retention. This has spurred efforts to mitigate the potential consequences of language loss within the Somali community. Addressing this crisis requires a multifaceted approach. Solutions could include funding dual language programs, fostering intergenerational connections that facilitate language transmission, and creating accessible resources for language learning.

Securing funding for more dual-language schools is crucial. It's not merely about the acquisition of another language; it's a gateway to hope. For example, the Somali language serves as an entry point to intergenerational communication, understanding culturally specific parenting goals and religious beliefs. Looking at this broader perspective, it's essential to consider how we can support a workforce that reflects and represents these diverse communities (Iruka,2022). The Somali Dual Program provides a great model. Each classroom has teachers representing their community, addressing the common misconception that there aren't enough teachers from these communities. The issue often lies not in the lack of qualified teachers but in barriers related to funding, access (Tobin et al., 2020), or credential recognition from their home countries.

In addition to broader workforce issues, there's a specific need to support programs like SDP dual-language preschools. Replicating successful models like the Somali Dual Program

requires nurturing strong community leaders who advocate for these initiatives. How can we empower these leaders to take charge and drive change within their communities? Investing in professional development and pathways for credential recognition can pave the way for more community members to become educators.

Limitations

Including only mothers in this study presents a limitation in terms of perspective. Although recruitment was open to all families, only Somali mothers chose to participate. This means that the experiences shared in this study provide only a small glimpse into the lives of Somali mothers. Therefore, any conclusions drawn from this study should be understood as specific to the participants involved. A more comprehensive understanding would include more fathers, grandparents, and other family members and more participant voices. By expanding the participant pool, it would be possible to gain diverse perspectives and render the findings more generalizable. In the following steps, it would be beneficial to include direct observations to triangulate and increase the creditability of the data by observing families at home, communities, and schools and seeing how they are implementing practices. While it is essential to acknowledge that these mothers may not represent the experiences of all Somali mothers, their insights would still contribute significantly to the existing literature on Somali mothers and the experiences of their young children.

Another limitation arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants expressed discomfort with meeting in settings outside their homes due to safety concerns. As a result, the

community design circles had to be conducted virtually. While this approach allowed for personal engagement with families within their specific contexts, it is essential to acknowledge that the virtual format may have influenced the dynamics and interactions compared to in-person meetings.

Conclusion

My study has highlighted the strengths of Somali mothers as agents of change. Exploring their aspirations, parenting practices, and the ways they reimagined schooling for their children provides a nuanced perspective on the intersection of culture, faith, and education within the Somali community. This study underscores the significance of recognizing and valuing families' diverse cultural practices and priorities. (Abdi, 2020; Basford, 2010; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; González et al., 2005; Hallgunseth et al., 2009; Ishimaru, 2020; Mapp & Hong, 2010; McWayne et al., 2016).

Somali mothers face unique challenges within the U.S. public school system, as documented by Basford (2010), Biglow (2007), Bowie et al. (2017), Magan (2020), and Roxas & Roy (2011). These challenges underscore the urgent need for a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. In response, Somali parents are reimagining schooling to better align with their values, hopes, and dreams. They aim to establish partnerships with schools and advocate for decolonial changes that foster inclusivity and equity. This reimagining is shaped by their experiences, their parenting practices, and aspirations for their children.

Reflecting on these insights, it is evident that Somali parents are not passive recipients of the educational system but active shapers of it. They prioritize nurturing their children as caring individuals capable of caring for themselves and others. This emphasis transcends mere productivity; it strives to cultivate whole human beings capable of positively contributing to society. As Somali parents navigate the challenges of cultural preservation and integration, their experiences provide valuable lessons on recognizing and valuing diverse cultural practices and beliefs in educational settings.

The implications for Early Childhood Education and schooling at large are multifaceted. While certain aspects within existing models may be supported, it is crucial to directly engage with families and communities to understand their unique needs and aspirations for their children. A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate, given the diversity of individual circumstances (Souto-Manning, 2013). For instance, educational experiences and perspectives may vary based on generational differences within Somali families. Conversations with a grandmother may offer different insights than those with a younger mother. While common themes may exist, their perceptions and roles in their child's life can differ significantly.

In this study, mothers illustrate a shift from previous generations who often followed educational norms without question. This younger generation of mothers acknowledges that they have resources that previous families didn't have. They demand that their children's needs be met and seek alternative solutions when necessary. Despite these differences, the underlying foundation remains consistent: parents want what's best for their children. However, the approach and lens through which they view education, and their involvement can vary greatly.

We must move away from deficit school-centric approaches. Instead, we should adopt a bidirectional approach to acknowledging and sustaining the strengths in children's homes and communities (Moll et al., 2005; McWayne et al.,2021). This looks like an educational setting for Somali families that prioritizes their cultural and religious values.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize that expertise and knowledge should not be confined solely to perspectives from the Global North (Souto-Manning, 2013; Pérez et al.,2017). While much of the ECE research and practices may originate from this viewpoint, we must actively make room for and learn from insights from the Global South (Grosfoguel,2008). Incorporating these diverse perspectives into our policies and practices is crucial. True partnership and support extend beyond merely assigning tasks or conducting assessments; it involves empowering families based on their priorities and goals and ensuring that diverse communities are sustained.

In summary, our approach should support families respectfully, empoweringly, and aligned with their understanding of family-centered and sustaining priorities (McWayne et al. 2021). We must critically assess the knowledge we incorporate and ensure our actions reflect a sincere commitment to supporting families during the early learning years and beyond. Embracing a more inclusive and collaborative bi-directional model that values and incorporates the knowledge and experiences of families from diverse backgrounds is imperative for fostering a holistic education system (McWayne et al.,2021).

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Appendix

Interview Guide English

1. Can you tell me your name, the name and ages of your children, and how long you've lived in Washington?

- What have your parenting experiences been like living in Washington?
- Tell me a little about where you grew up, your immigration and settling experience, adjusting to American life?

2. Can you tell me about your learning experiences growing up with your family at home/community and or at school?

What languages did your parents speak, and how did they share this with you?

What did your parents do to make you feel supported in learning about your Somali culture?

What experiences/messages did you get about speaking Somali and sharing your culture in school and in other places?

3. Imagine your child is an adult. What do you hope they will be like?

What influences your aspirations for your children?

What cultural values do you want to preserve and how do you maintain them?

What do you want your child to learn from these values?

What do you hope your child takes away from these experiences?

4. Now that you have children of your own, what values are important to you in raising your child? Why is it important to pass on your culture, values, and heritage language to your children?

Could you share with me stories or an example of when it became important for you to pass down your culture and language to your children?

What values from the ones you mentioned differ from how you were raised?

5. Tell me about a time when you helped your young child learn something.

What or who influenced your knowledge about how young children learn?

What do you believe/think are the best or most important practices for supporting children in learning?

Do you engage in those practices with your children? If so, could you please describe it in further detail? Do you engage in other practices? If so, please describe it in further detail.

6. When you need support or advice as a parent, who do you talk to? Why do you talk with them? Who have you relied on for seeking parenting wisdom, advice, guidance, and support?

Who is involved in caring for your child? Is this similar to or different from other families in your community?

In your community, in what ways do you see other family and community members supporting your child's development, identity, and learning?

7. Can you share how you decided to enroll at SDP dual language preschool program?

Do you have other children? Did they enroll in this program or other preschool programs?

If not in this program, would you consider enrolling your child in other programs?

8. What are some of the things that you have enjoyed about your child(ren)'s preschool? Do they do anything particularly well?

What do you want your child to learn at preschool?

What is most important to you about what your child is learning at preschool?

Did you learn anything new about your child by his/her participation in preschool?

9. Can you tell me about your children's educational experiences?

What are some of the challenges you have faced as a parent with a child(ren) in the program/school?

How is the communication process with your child(ren)'s program/school?

How do you feel when you interact with staff or administrators at the program/school?

What practices have the program/school used that have been effective in communicating with you and your family?

Do you feel that the challenges you discussed are unique to the race or ethnicity of you and your child?

10. How would you want schools to change?

11. Considering all that you have shared, what strategies, principles, and values help you feel supported, valued, and respected?

12. Do you have any concluding thoughts that you want me to know about your experiences as a parent of a young child(ren)?

Thank you for your time!

Interview Guide: Somali

1. Ma ii sheegi kartaa magacaaga, magaca iyo da'da carruurtaada, iyo inta aad ku noolayd washington?

- Waa maxay waayo-aragnimadaada waalidnimo ee ku noolaanshaha Washington?
- Waa maxay waayo-aragnimadaada ku noolaanshaha Washington waalid ahaan?
- Wax yar iiga sheegay meeshaad ku soo kortay, waayo-aragnimadaada socdaalka iyo dejinta, la qabsiga nolosha Maraykanka?

2. Ma ii sheegi kartaa khibradaada waxbarasho ee aad qoyskaaga kula soo kortay guriga/bulshada ama dugsiga?

- luqadaha ay ku hadlaan waalidkaa, sidee ay adiga kula wadaageen?
- Maxay waalidkaa sameeyeen si aad u dareento in lagugu taageerayo barashada dhaqankaaga Soomaaliyeed?
- Waa maxay waayo-aragnimada/farriimaha aad ka heshay ku hadalka Soomaaliga iyo wadaagga dhaqankaaga dugsiga iyo meelaha kale?

3. Ka fakar canuggaaga qaangaarka ah Sideed u rajaynaysaa inay ahaan doonaan?

- Maxaa saameeya hamiga aad u leedahay carruurtaada?
- Waa maxay qiyamka dhaqameed ee aad rabto inaad ilaaliso sideese u ilaalisaa?
- Maxaad doonaysaa in ilmahaagu ka barto qiyamkan?
- Maxaad rajaynaysaa in ilmahaagu ka qaado waayo-aragnimadan?

4. Hadda oo aad leedahay carruur adiga kuu gaar ah, waa maxay qiyamka muhiimka kuu ah korinta ubadkaaga? Maxay muhiim u tahay inaad u gudbiso dhaqankaaga, qiyamkaaga, iyo luqadaada dhaxalka ah carruurtaada?

- Ma ii sheegi kartaa sheeko ama tusaale markii ay muhiim kuu noqotay inaad u gudbiso dhaqankaaga iyo afkaaga carruurtaada?
- Maxay yihiin qiyamka kuwa aad sheegtay oo ka duwan sidii lagugu soo koriyey?

5. Ii sheeg wakhti aad ku caawisay ilmahaaga yar inuu wax barto

- Maxaa ama yaa saameeyay aqoontaada ku saabsan sida carruurta yaryar wax u bartaan?
- Maxaad u malaynaysaa inay yihiin hababka ugu fiican ama ugu muhiimsan ee lagu taageerayo carruurta xagga waxbarashada?
- Ma la qabataa dhaqamadaas carruurtaada? Haddii ay sidaas tahay, fadlan ma si faahfaahsan u sharaxi kartaa? Ma ku hawlan tahay dhaqamo kale? Haddii ay sidaas tahay, fadlan si faahfaahsan u sharax?

6. Marka aad u baahan tahay taageero ama talo waalid ahaan, yaad la hadashaa? Maxaad ula hadashaa? Yaad u cuskatay raadinta xikmad, talo, tilmaan, iyo taageero waalidnimo?

- Yaa ku lug leh daryeelka ilmahaaga? Kani ma la mid yahay mise wuu ka duwan yahay qoysaska kale ee beeshaada?

- Bulshadaada, siyaalo nooc ee ah ayaad u aragtaa xubnaha kale ee qoyska iyo bulshada oo taageeraya horumarka, aqoonsiga, iyo waxbarashada ilmahaaga?

7. Ma wadaagi kartaa sida aad u go'aansatey inaad iska diiwaan geliso barnaamijka SDP

- Ma leedahay caruur kale? Ma iska diiwaan geliyeen barnaamijkan ama barnaamijyada kale ee dugsiga barbaarinta?
- Haddi aanu ku jirin barnaamijkan, ma ku fakaraysaa inaad ilmahaaga ku qorto barnaamijyo kale?

8. Maxay yihiin qaar ka mid ah waxyaabaha aad ku raaxaysatay ee ku saabsan dugsiga barbaarinta carruurtaada? Wax si gaar ah ma u qabtaan?

- Maxaad doonaysaa in ilmahaagu ku barto dugsiga barbaarinta?
- Maxaa adiga kuugu muhiimsan waxa ilmahaagu ka baranayo dugsiga barbaarinta?
- Ma ka baratay wax cusub oo ku saabsan ilmahaaga ka qaybqaadashadiisa dugsiga barbaarinta?

9. Ma ii sheegi kartaa khibradaha waxbarasho ee carruurtaada?

- Waa maxay caqabadaha qaar ee aad la kulantay waalid ahaan ilmo (carruurta) ku jira barnaamijka/dugsiga?
- Sidee buu u yahay habka wada xidhiidhka barnaamijka/dugsiga ilmahaaga?
- Sideed dareemaysaa marka aad la fal gasho shaqaalaha ama maamulayaasha barnaamijka/dugsiga?
- Waa maxay dhaqamada uu barnaamijka/dugsiga isticmaalay ee waxtarka u yeeshay in uu kula xidhiidho adiga iyo qoyskaaga?
- Ma dareentay in caqabadaha aad ka hadashay ay gaar u yihiin jinsiyadda ama qowmiyadda adiga iyo ilmahaaga?
- Sideed u rabi lahayd in dugsiyadu isbedelaan?

11. Marka la eego dhammaan wixii aad ka hadashay, waa maxay xeeladaha, mabaadi'da, iyo qiyamka kaa caawinaya inaad dareento taageero, qiimee, iyo ixtiraam?

12. Ma haysaa fikrado gunaanad ah oo aad rabto in aan ogaado waayo-aragnimadaada waalid ahaan ilmo yar (carruurta)?

- ma jiraan wax kale oo aad rabto in aan ogaadoma jiraan wax kale oo aad rabto in aan ogaado
- Ma leedahay fikrado u dambeeya oo aad rabto in aan ka ogaado waayo-aragnimadaada waalid ahaan ilmo yar (carruurta)?
- ma jiraan wax kale oo aad rabto inaad iiga sheegtid waxa kugu dhacay waalid ilmo leh

Waad ku mahadsan tahay waqtigaaga!

Code Book:

Participant Characteristics:

- Parental Teaching Methods: Anytime the parents mention values or teaching practices utilized with their children.
- Educational Background: Capturing the educational background and schooling experiences of the parents.

Cross-cutting Codes:

1. Somalinimo: Cultural, social, and political identity of Somali people.
*Example: "To not let go of their Somalinimo."
2. Challenges: Any challenges mentioned by parents or their children.
3. Collective Dreaming: Hopes and dreams for all children.
4. Dhaqan (Culture): Any reference to Somali cultural practices.
5. Decolonial: References outside of the dominant western gaze or lens.
6. Deen (Religion): Any mention of religion.
*Example: "Teaching children to pray and read the Quran."
7. Hooyonimo (Motherhood): References to the role of motherhood.

8. Muslims and Somali Identity: Mention of children's Islamic and Somali identity.
9. Community: References to the value and importance of community.

Research Question 1 Codes: What are the hopes and dreams of Somali families

10. Rules: Discussion of parental norms and values.
11. A child with Deen: Desire for a child with a religious upbringing.
*Example: "I want a child that is strong in their faith."
12. A child that is educated: Desire for an educated child.
13. Meaning of Education: Clarification on what education means for them.
14. A child who knows Somali: Desire for children to know Somali.
*Example: "I want my child to speak fluent Somali."
15. Success for Children: Desire for children's success.
16. Aspirations: Parental aspirations for their children.
*Example: "I dream of my child becoming a doctor."
17. Hereafter (Akhirah): Hopes and dreams concerning the afterlife.
*Example: "I want my child to pray for me in the afterlife."
18. This Life: Hopes and dreams for children in this life.
19. Raising Leaders of the Ummah: Values related to raising religiously-practicing children.
And how they see their child's role as a Muslim adult.
*Example: "I want my child to be a leader in the Muslim community."
20. Parent-Child Relationship: Desired type of relationship with children.
*Example: "I want a close and trusting relationship with my child."

Research Question 2 Codes: How do Somali families cultivate their children's learning, development, and identity?

21. Tools: Used to highlight the tools mentioned to be used.
22. Building Trust with Children: Importance of meaningful relationships with children.
23. Cultivate Learning: Support for child's learning.
24. Cultivate Development: Support for child's development.
25. Cultivate Identity: Support for child's identity.
26. Community Role: Role of community in children's lives. (social network and connections)
27. Decisions that informed school choice: Factors influencing school choices.
28. Dugsi (Qur'anic School): Mention of Qur'anic school.

*Example: Sending my child to Dugsi for...
29. Extended Family: Mention of extended family and their role.

Example: Ayeeyo(grandmother) teaching Somali to child.
30. Familial Values: Ancestral and communal values.
31. Generational Differences: Contrasts in upbringing between generations.
32. Language Importance: The importance of Somali Language
33. Parental Modeling: Importance of parental modeling.
34. Parental Role: Perception of parental roles.
35. Safety and Wellbeing: Concern for children's safety and wellbeing.
36. Teaching through Seerah: Teaching through stories of prophets.

*Example: "Learning from the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)."
37. Early Learning Participation: Learnings from children's early learning participation.

38. Guidance Seekers: Seeking guidance for parenting.

*Example: Consulting with elders for parenting advice.

39. Influences on Parental Thinking: Influences on views of young children.

*Example: Doctors, parents, grandparents, the community. Lived experiences.

40. Why Preschool: Why did they enroll their children in preschool or take them to early learning programs

41. Early Foundation Importance: Importance of early years' foundation.

Building a strong foundation at an early age. *Example: "This is when the brain is developing, so when you're not developing the principles and values that are core to you as a parent for your kids at the beginning stages, then it's so easy for other people to come and distract them and influence them easily."

42. Parenting Influence by Upbringing: Influence of upbringing on parenting decisions.

*Example: "I want my kids to trust me, I want my kids to come to me, and they can talk to me about anything.....I want my kids to feel like I'm a safe place.

43. SDP Choice Reasons: Reasons for choosing SDP preschool program.

Research Question 3 Codes: Reimagining Schools

44. Divisions of Labor: Roles and expectations regarding school.

45. Children's Educational Experiences: Discussion of children's education.

46. Islamic School: Mention of Islamic schooling.

*Example: "Enrolling children in an Islamic school for religious education."

47. Lack of Agency: Mention the lack of agency when it comes to conflicting school practices.

48. Family-School Partnership: Relationship between families and schools.

49. Representation at Schools: Discussion of the importance of representation at schools.

50. Delinking: Pushing back or breaking away from traditional norms, expectations, and systems.

*Example: Mothers discussing alternative education models that challenge conventional schooling.

51. Strategies, Principles, and Values for Support: Factors that help parents feel supported and valued.

52. Intentional School Policies: Mention of school policies or procedures that conflict with family values.

53. Spiritual Capital: The concept of “deen” as an asset and its role in beliefs, values, and practices regarding children is mentioned.

54. Transnational: Discussion of identity linked to a larger international community.

*Example: Teaching Somali to my child so they can connect with family back home.