

Literacy across Learning Contexts and Languages:

A Study of Three Somali Families Living

in Nairobi, Kenya

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation study investigated how Somali refugee families living in Nairobi, Kenya experience and negotiate their religious and secular identities through literacies. This study provided detailed experiences and reflections of individuals—children and parents about their literacies. The children in this study learned to read in English and Kiswahili in school, and they learned to read in classical Arabic—three languages they do not speak at home. The study explored Qur’anic schools which literacy researchers have long overlooked, yet these are spaces that shape many children’s rich multilingual, multiliterate, and multiscriptural repertoires while, at the same time, shaping and negotiating their fluid identities. Three themes, literacy as social practice, liturgical literacy, and funds of knowledge offered a complimentary lens through which this community was studied. Literacy, as a social practice, demonstrates how certain social groups use specific socially constructed literacies within specific contexts to achieve various goals. The concept of liturgical literacy foregrounds how minority languages, such as Classical Arabic, have great symbolic value for communities, including those who neither speak nor understand the language, while funds of knowledge conceptualize the knowledge and related activities present in homes that have the potential for contributing positively to children’s learning. Using the ethnographic methodology, this inquiry spanned six sites and focused on participants during their interactions with literacy, orality, and text for eight months. The study occurred in three homes, two Dugsis, and one school site. A rich description of the community was achieved by presenting language and literacy practices in a multi-sited ethnography. This dissertation ultimately also offers contemporary relevance: investigating a community whose

literacies are invisible, minoritized, and marginalized, and aimed to inform educational researchers, policymakers, and teachers who are devoted to rethinking what counts as literacy, for whom, in what contexts, and with what kinds of consequences. In a time of increased movement of people across borders, this research has important implications for teacher preparation, theories of language learning, and literacy education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

There are different types of literacy practices in children's lives besides school literacy. School-based literacy is often seen as the defining literacy from an educational perspective (Cruikshank, 2004; Street & Street, 1984). Success with school literacy is important in constructing an academic identity, but out-of-school literacy practices are equally consequential in the overall development of students' identities (Haneda, 2006). Although there have been growing interests in children's out-of-school literacy experiences among literacy scholars in the last three decades, specific out-of-school literacies, such as religious literacies, have not been prominent (Schultz & Hull, 2002). The literacies of Islam, more particularly, have received little attention (Rosowsky, 2008). Nonetheless, many educators are increasingly aware of the value of their students' diverse language and literacy skills but find it challenging to incorporate children's funds of knowledge for classroom instruction in diverse contexts (Karabenick & Noda, 2004).

Little research has explored these challenges, and the divide between out-of-school literacies and school literacy persists. The divide is especially pronounced for English Language Learners (ELLs) because while ELLs engage in a multiplicity of language and literacy practices even before they enter formal schooling (Gregory, 1994; Kenner, 2000, 2004), their homes and other literacy practices are disparate from those of school. Like other ELLs, Cun and Kfoury (2021) discussed the disconnect between refugee students' home literacy contexts and school literacy as leading to their missing out on opportunities to share and tap into their family literacy practices in

classrooms. The disconnect between home and school literacy practices is, in part, due to the fact that school literacy usually relies on the dominant language and only printed texts. In this sense, school literacy privileges a particular form and ignores that learners would already have been exposed to various other everyday literacy practices. Street (2016) posited that literacy was embedded in issues of power relations and argued against seeing literacy as a universal technical skill, the same everywhere and for all people, as this delegitimized all other forms of literacy.

In the U.S., 20% of people speak a language other than English. The number of English Language Learners (ELLs) also continues to grow steadily (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2021). In 2017, the percentage of public-school students in the U.S. who were ELLs was 10.1% higher than in 2000 (NCES, 2020). Recently, the increase in the ELL population in the U.S. has included students arriving with refugee status. A refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR). Most refugee students and their families arriving in the U.S. speak English as a new language (Dettlaff & Fong, 2016) and spend considerable time learning English when placed in U.S. schools. Additionally, differences in cultural practices and educational systems between refugee students' home countries and the U.S. make the transition to U.S. schooling somewhat challenging (McBrien, 2005). Consequently, a vast amount of educational research on refugee students focuses on their educational gaps and limitations, making their experiences less about affordances and assets from educational resources readily available (Allen, 2002; Cheng, 1998). Cheng (1998) and Allen (2002) further addressed

the issue of refugee students' placements in special education classes and lower academic tracks and connected it to a lack of understanding of refugee students' cultures on the part of educators. They noted how some cultural differences, such as "short responses, unexpected nonverbal expressions, and embarrassment over praise," have been interpreted as deficiencies compared to differences (McBrien, 2005, p. 342). Such deficit discourse and prevailing narratives that portray refugee children as having their education disrupted have led to overlooking other spaces in pre-resettlement contexts and during flight, such as non-western-type schooling that might have supported or nurtured children's literacies.

Faith literacy spaces, often overlooked, have played a role in filling the vacuum created by educational disruptions in refugee contexts. Perry's (2007, 2009) study on Sudanese refugee families explained how Sudanese refugee youth engaged with the Bible and how this literacy practice was tied to the youth's lived experiences in the historical and social contexts. Her study found that children learned to read, write, and use language in meaningful ways with parents before coming to the United States and continued these practices in the U.S., but this knowledge was unknown to their teachers. Cun and Kfouris (2021) study with Burmese and Syrian refugees in the U.S. illustrated how nine refugee families from Burma and Syria had arrived already literate in significant and relevant ways. They noted how Burmese and Syrian refugees' Qur'anic literacy could significantly contribute to their reading and writing development if teachers understood refugee students' family literacy practices. They argued that this would help teachers leverage children's resources to effectively foster literacy learning and empower students' voices in formal educational settings.

This dissertation study examined both school and out-of-school literacies of Somali families and described their multilingual repertoires and literacy practices with a focus on literacy practices and language learning, and it illuminated how situated social practices shape the lived experiences of the families.

Literature Review

Home-Based and Community-Based Literacy

During the last two decades, there has been growing awareness about the importance of children's home and community literacies in developing school literacy. Existing research demonstrates strong connections between a child's reading success and their parents' educational level, exposure to print, books, and story reading in the home (Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000). Related to those findings, research in the emergent literacy (EL) framework indicates that children learn a good deal about literacy before they start school. Skills such as concepts of print (Clay, 1998), vocabulary knowledge, and letter-sound relations, for example, often begin developing at home (Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000). Unfortunately, this type of research has often been misinterpreted, leading to the marginalization of family practices that seem different from school literacy. As such, families whose literacy practices diverge from that of school or those from homes that are not White and middle-class are seen as "deficient" (Anderson et al., 2005; Auerbach, 1989).

The kinds of literacy that are valued in school are largely based on White, middle-class ("mainstream") definitions of literacy (Anderson et al., 2005; Heath, 1983). This is evident in how family literacy programs promote and privilege White, school-like, middle-class literacy practices. This leaves unrecognized the multiple ways that

individuals and families use literacy in meaningful ways in their everyday lives—ways that are diverse and often rich (Perry, 2012). Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines’s (1988) study of children’s literacy practices in Black low-income homes served as evidence in disrupting misconceptions about literacy and preconceived notions about non-mainstream families. They found that parents provided literate environments and sufficiently supported their children’s education. By using readily available resources, such as newspapers, notebook paper, and pens around the house, family members, friends, and neighbors acted as literacy supports for the children. Their study demonstrated that a family’s poverty, difficulties, and “broken home” (p. 200) do not exclude them from literacy acquisition and development: “No one can deny that these [homes] were literate homes” (p. 200).

Heath (1983) also provided evidence for the rich literacy practices of black families and how family literacy was ignored in school. Her work with the three communities in the Carolina Piedmont provided a foundation for discussions that drew attention to the complicated relationship between orality and literacy, and the relationship between home-based language socialization processes and experiences of learning in school. Demonstrating how very young children entered school as active members of specific language and literacy practices and the ways teachers and schools responded to the children’s experiences—Heath’s study showed how literacy was both a matter of socialization and not merely of formal instruction only and that success in formal literacy instruction was highly dependent on the acknowledgment and bridging of the language and literacy practices at home with that of school. Although the children from the three different communities all entered school richly socialized as talkers, readers, and writers—teachers recognized them as valid only practices that corresponded closely to their own

and those in the school. This research and related studies found that literacy was linked to power structures and, in this case, showed how school played a role in either boosting or hindering children's cultural and academic practices.

Studies on Immigrant and Refugee Children's Literacies

Ethnographic studies with refugee and immigrant children have highlighted how immigrant and refugee children draw from various practices in their own communities and the mainstream community in their various learning contexts (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Gregory and Williams (2002), in their study of a Bangladeshi community in London, revealed how Bangladeshi children blended the literacies from their home, community, and school contexts. They proposed the concept of Syncretic Literacy Studies, which drew from the work of Duranti and Ochs (1997), who defined syncretic literacy as "an intermingling of culturally diverse traditions that informs and organizes literacy activities" (p. 172) and revealed that people in the middle of two cultures lived "simultaneously in two communities" (p. 171). These bodies of research showed that young children from multilingual and multiliterate communities were involved in reinventing cultural practices as they drew on resources, both familiar and new, from diverse sociocultural contexts. Gregory and Williams made the case that syncretism was not a process of just blending cultures, but one in which young children negotiated the re-creation of cultural practices using processes of creativity and transformation. This approach emphasized the agency and expertise of young children and the mediators who supported them (Gregory et al., 2004).

Gilhooly and Lee (2014) explored resettled Karen refugee youth's home-based literacy practices to show how youth used literacy in online space for various social

purposes, such as “building co-ethnic friendships, connecting to Karen community, and sustaining ethnic solidarity” (p. 391). Engaging in digital literacies provided the students with space free from the restrictions imposed by language and allowed them to express themselves and develop relationships that were otherwise challenging to establish in the classroom setting due to challenges with communicating in the second language. The authors noted that the internet, an alternative space outside the classroom, “will lead to much-needed confidence and a sense of belonging” (p. 394) essential for students’ well-being and academic success.

Oral practices are relevant to many refugees—especially those from Africa, such as storytelling, singing songs, and reciting poetry. Such practices have served important roles in entertaining, teaching traditional values, and passing on genealogy and history in, for example, Somalia and Sudan (Arthur, 2003; Singleton, 2001). Literacy researchers have documented how oral storytelling relates to print literacy development in the context of young children emerging into reading and writing (Dyson, 1993, 2003). Perry’s (2008) study with three orphaned refugee youth from Southern Sudan revealed how storytelling was an important practice for school literacy learning. Storytelling—an important practice among the cultures of Southern Sudan—has been transformed as Sudanese relocated around the world and remains important. Like print literacy, storytelling represents a purposeful sociocultural practice shaped by and closely linked to a community’s beliefs, values, and attitudes (Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1996). Perry’s study sought to understand how storytelling practices shaped the literacy practices of Sudanese youth. The findings revealed that the youth transformed the act of traditional storytelling by changing the purposes, audiences, and media for storytelling that they had

encountered or told before. Transformed storytelling revealed the importance of becoming educated in the U.S. and maintaining a sense of Sudanese identity.

For school literacy learning, Perry (2008) offered important insights for refugee youth. Perry suggested that storytelling could motivate refugee students to engage in print literacy practices by drawing on traditional oral stories or their own experiences to write in school. For the study participants, it gave them legitimate reasons to engage with reading and writing and develop their English language abilities because the youth were motivated to tell and write their stories to educate the wider world and persuade others to act. This study suggested that teachers can serve refugee students well by providing authentic opportunities that allow them to draw on their home literacies and, most importantly, allow students to write for real audiences and real purposes beyond learning to read and write or earning a grade (Purcell-Gates et al., 2001).

Drawing from Cummins and Early's (2011) 'identity text', Bigelow et al. (2017) investigated literacy instruction strategies beyond print-based reading and writing with Somali adolescents in Minnesota. They employed critical media literacy curricula to examine how it served as a context for literacy development in both the native language and English. The students in the study were all in emergent levels of print literacy, but due to their transnational identities, they had strong social media skills, which they used to interact with others locally and globally. The researchers aimed to foster peer-to-peer Somali language communication, but found that despite creating a monolingual, native language workspace for students, their participation was characterized by multilingual, highly inclusive posts. This study's findings suggested that using the native language on social media provided multimodal opportunities for engagement with course curricula

and activities and enabled students to leverage “new literacy” proficiencies to develop both their home language and English literacy.

The authors noted that students could move on to more complex discussions of culture in the second part of the course, partly due to the opportunity to trans-language and use their native language. Their study confirmed the conceptualization made by other scholars about the benefits of blending native languages and digital literacies to provide impactful results in second language acquisition (Carlo & Skilton-Sylvester, 1996). Similar to Perry’s (2008) work with the lost boys of Sudan—who used transformed storytelling to tell their stories with a strong desire to compel the world to act, the Somali students produced ‘identity texts’ that were “not just displays of language of schooling and second language proficiency” (Bigelow et al., 2017, p. 186) on social media. The authors showed that the students created a counter-narrative to what Cummins and Early (2011) call “the implicit devaluation of students’ abilities, languages, cultures, and identities that occur in classrooms where students’ preferred way of meaning-making and home languages are ignored or treated with ‘benign’ neglect” (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 4). One of the students, wishing to offer a counter-discourse, sparked the interest of others when she took to the Facebook group page to problematize how the media represents the Somalis as homeless, refugees, and desperate. Other students respond in similar ways to these stereotypes. The culmination of this writing project was sophisticated collages and writings about students’ various views.

Most importantly, these studies provided data to support the theory of multiliteracies—or the idea that “language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to

achieve their various cultural purpose” (NLG, 1996, p. 64)—and show the ideological nature of literacy (Street, 1984) to be closely connected with issues of power and marginalization (Gregory & Williams, 2002; Perry, 2007; Sarroub et al., 2007).

Somali Children and Qur’anic Literacy

In educational contexts, and more so in the U.S., Somali children, like other refugee families, are often positioned as learners with a singular identity— they are mostly perceived as academically deficient and struggling with language and literacy (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Yet, Somali children have many identities: being multiliterate, multilingual, and Qur’anic literate, among others. In particular, one’s identity as Qur’anic literate is consequential for school-based literacy learning. As emergent readers and writers in English, Somali students could use Qur’anic literacy as a resource to draw upon at school. However, limited awareness exists about the potential of Qur’anic literacy (Moore, 2011).

Somali children across the world attend Qur’anic schooling. For some, it is their only form of schooling; for others, it is a second school that complements secular schooling. For many Somalis, Qur’anic schools represent an experience of stable, organized schooling over time. Qur’anic schools were sustained even during the civil war in Somalia, despite the disruption of many aspects of the educational practices and institutions. The value that this practice holds among Somalis, thus, goes without saying (Abdi, 1998; Bigelow, 2010). This knowledge is important for disrupting what Adichie (2009) called the danger of a “one-sided story,” a story that portrays Somali children as disrupted and deficient in their education. Qur’anic literacy practices of Somali children, while different from school-type literacy, have much to offer. The ability to read and

write texts is a shared goal between the two practices that the children are involved in (Rosowsky, 2008).

Moore (2011) demonstrated the potential of Qur'anic literacy in her work in the context of Somali students in Ohio: "Teachers and their students will benefit from awareness that many of the language and literacy skills developed in Qur'anic schooling are relevant and transferrable to the English-language classroom" (p. 295). However, it is important to also point out that while Somali children might excel in decoding abilities and oral reading fluency due to the transferability of this skill from their Qur'anic school, they may struggle with comprehension (Moore, 2011) as meaning-making of the Qur'anic text is not a goal in the rudimentary phase of Qur'anic schooling.

In an ethnographic study examining the literacies of Danish Somali refugees, Christensen (2019) shared how Qur'anic literacy was part of the everyday literacy practices of the families. He found that the school and Qur'anic literacies the families engaged in had more similarities than differences, contrary to studies that portrayed Qur'anic schools as teaching in ways that hindered school literacy learning (Berglund, 2019). Children participating in the Qur'anic schooling tradition engaged in routine activities that develop concepts, skills, and dispositions that have the potential to support their literacy learning in school settings—yet Qur'anic schooling continues to be misunderstood (Moore, 2012) and less researched. Wagner's (1989) Morocco Qur'anic preschools project found that children in Qur'anic preschools learned to: (1) learn in a structured setting; (2) respect the teacher; (3) use language and recite in unison; (4) encode and decode an alphabet; (5) be a moral person and a good citizen; and (6) do

basic arithmetic (Wagner, 1989, p. 8). These skills and experiences help Somali children be informed rather than deficient when they come to secular school settings.

Intersections between Qur'anic Literacy and School-Based Literacy

Cultural psychologists, Scribner and Cole (1981), in their seminal work focusing on the literacy practices of the Vai people of Liberia, produced fascinating findings regarding the consequences of Qur'anic literacy. They compared the cognitive effects of three kinds of literacy practices among the Vai and found that adult Qur'anic Arabic literates performed better than Vai literates and English literates in memory-related tasks that resembled the everyday practices of memorizing and reciting Qur'anic texts. Their study was further supported by the Morocco Literacy Project, where Wagner (1993) investigated the consequences of the Qur'anic preschool concerning public schooling. With comparable findings to Scribner and Cole, Wagner found that Qur'anic literacy had a positive effect on children's serial memory skills. The Morocco Literacy Project also provided an additional valuable discovery for the field of literacy by showing evidence of a positive correlation between skills learned at Qur'anic and public schools.

Wagner found that Qur'anic preschool experience was correlated with higher reading achievement during the first five years of public school. The children's native language was Berber (a language not used in public school). The children had learned the Qur'an in a second language (Arabic) in preschool and then transitioned to formal schooling in two different languages (Arabic and French) that differed significantly. Importantly, Wagner argued that rote learning at the Qur'anic school provided language minority children in Morocco a basis for building second language literacies. Both the Liberia and Morocco projects show that participation in Qur'anic

schooling was associated with the development of certain skills that were relevant to school-based literacy learning, but the projects lacked in-depth ethnographic analysis informed by second language acquisition research. This research was crucial given the centrality of the second language in the schooling traditions of both communities studied (Moore, 2011).

Farah's (1998) study of Sabaq schools in Pakistan offered an important account of the intersection between school-based literacy and Qur'anic literacy. A major contribution of this study was that it sought to elucidate the kind of teaching and learning entailed in Qur'anic literacy practices and the kinds of second language acquisition processes in play and sought to explore what the educational and linguistic practices, processes, and outcomes meant to participants. Confirming Wagner's (1993) findings, Farah found that for the Pakistani children in her study, Qur'anic literacy provided a basis that they extended to other domains, such as reading in a second language. The Qur'anic script is based on the Arabic language (Classical Arabic-CLA) and uses an alphabet script system for writing. Children learning the Qur'an begin their literacy by first learning the 28 letters before moving on to sounding out the consonant and vowel combinations and joining syllables to make words using a process similar to teaching emergent literacy in early childhood school settings.

In addition to learning the alphabet system, children learning the Qur'an must master a complex diacritics rule system. While the Qur'an is in Arabic, its instruction does not necessarily happen in Arabic. In the Pakistani context, to explain, for example, the teaching of the diacritics system of the Qur'anic script, the child's native language was used to provide scaffolding. Farah provided an example of how the diacritics system

was taught: “alif khali, bai tale jik: the first letter, ‘alif’, is empty, and there is one dot under the second letter, ‘bai’” (1998, p. 252). Farah showed that there was not only learning of a new literacy, but oral skills in the first language were also supported and further strengthened in the early years. Through this process, children were also solidifying their first language. Hornberger (1990) importantly states, in reference to bilingual literacy, “The more the contexts of an individual’s learning allow them to draw on all points of the continua, the greater are the chances for their full biliterate development” (pp. 213–214).

Farah’s study also illustrated how children participating in Qur’anic school were introduced to print and reading before they started school and how the exposure was beneficial for transitioning into learning Urdu, the language of instruction in a secular school. Urdu, she noted, was based on the Arabic alphabet, but its written form was disparate from the Arabic used in the Qur’an because it did not use a diacritics system. The children went into public school already knowledgeable and familiar with most of the Urdu alphabet due to exposure to a similar print and writing system at the Qur’anic school.

Farah also elucidated how, for the most part, reading instruction in public schools mirrored that of the Qur’anic school in that there was teacher modeling and student repetition. However, she pointed out that while at the Qur’anic school decoding skills were taught before recitation and memorization, there was no observed instruction on decoding at the public school. She found that children being assessed to read in English by the teacher relied on strategies and skills learned at Qur’anic school for jogging memory to remember words and used decoding skills in sounding out words. These

findings aligned with those from the Morocco study that showed how Qur'anic schools positively impacted second language literacy acquisition in the initial stages of reading in public schools (Wagner et al., 1989).

Rosowsky (2008), while not advocating for a particular method for teaching literacy in mainstream schooling, pointed attention to the similarities between the methods used by mosque schools and stipulations discussed in an ongoing debate in the U.K. about preferred methods of teaching reading at the time of his research on Muslim children's liturgical literacy. The recommendations were "that systematic phonics teaching be an entitlement for all children learning to read in primary schools" (DES, 2007, as cited in Rosowsky, 2008, p. 226). Rosowsky argued that what was being promoted by the U.K. policy was similar to the methods used in liturgical literacy and argued for its efficiency and efficacy in the liturgical learning space. He argued that the emphasis on memorization that modern schools criticized could have important implications for a child's education. To contextualize the complexity involved in the learning of the Qur'an, he gave the example of how most young Muslim children have, at a minimum, memorized by heart the last *juzu* or 30th part of the Qur'an, noting that "this amounts to approximately 40 pages of closely-printed text, which corresponds to one-third of the Alexander edition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*" (p. 226). These studies, and those presented above, show that Qur'anic schools and other forms of home and community literacies have positively impacted secular school performance.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

This dissertation examined the literacies of refugee children of Somali origin living in Nairobi, Kenya, who engaged in secular and Qur’anic literacy learning. Somali refugee families arriving in Kenya are among the most marginalized in Kenya, that is, economically, politically, and educationally. Outside of their home country, displaced from their national education systems, and in environments with little human and social capital, these families generally have few resources and confront great challenges (Harrell-Bond, 1986). When resettled in western countries, Somali children, like other refugee families, are often positioned from a deficit orientation as learners with only a singular identity (e.g., “refugee, disrupted, poor”; Gilhooly et al., 2019; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Yet, Somali children have had great success engaging with locally- and globally-situated resources to foster and sustain their children’s literacy.

The Somali children that participated in this study were learning to read in English and Kiswahili at school, as well as in classical Arabic—a language they do not speak at home—in their daily Qur’anic classes. Although classical Arabic is not their native language, it is a language in which they attain some degree of literacy. This study explored the experiences and reflections of individuals—children and parents about their literacies. The study documented the literacy practices; ways parents and children see the purposes of their literacies, and the connections between them. The study explored Qur’anic schools, which have long been overlooked by literacy researchers and aimed to privilege children’s other literacies. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the literacy practices of Somali families living in Kenya, particularly those engaged in by children or directly/indirectly involving children?

- a. When do they occur? For what purpose? Who is involved, and how do they participate?
 - b. What languages and what modes are used? What factors seem to influence the choices made? What do participants say about their choices?
 - c. Are there similarities/variations in the literacy practices across families? If so, what are they? When do they emerge? What do participants say about these similarities/variations?
2. How do parents understand the literacy practices that their children participate in or that they engage in with their children?
 - a. What do they see as the purposes of each practice?
 - b. How do they see the practices as relating to one another?
 - i. Specifically, what do parents say about their children's Qur'anic literacy practices in relation to other literacies?
 3. How do children understand the literacy practices that they participate in?
 - a. What do they see as the purposes of each practice?
 - b. How do they see the practices as relating to one another?
 - i. How do children speak about their Qur'anic literacy practices in relation to their school literacy?
 - ii. How do children speak about whether/what their schoolteachers know about Qur'anic school?

There is limited research on how families' religious literacy practices contribute to children's literacy learning (Compton-Lilly, 2016; Duranti et al., 1995; García-Sánchez, 2010). This study helped bridge the gap by exploring how Somali refugee

families use religion and literacy practices. It provided a window into these practices that may benefit educators, researchers, and institutional systems, who could better understand how these practices contribute to children's literacy learning and who might give greater primacy to the range of literacy practices children engage with.

Theoretical Frameworks

A Social View of Literacy

Drawing from studies that embrace a social view of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Heath, 1983; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Street, 1984; Wagner, 1993), this study viewed literacy as a situated social, historical, and cultural practice patterned by social structures, institutions, and power relationships (Barton, 2006; Street, 1984). Such a view of literacy emphasizes literacy practices in everyday life without privileging or excluding certain literacies. In this sense, all types of reading and writing are considered valuable skills (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Mazak, 2008; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). Scholars aligned with this view have brought to the attention of literacy research the local literacies often sidelined by mainstream and institutionalized literacies (Owodally, 2011).

Scribner and Cole (1981), in a study among the Vai people of West Africa, revealed the multiple nature of literacies and demonstrated that different literacies are used in different domains, such as the home, school, and Qur'anic schools. Street (1984), in his study of maktab literacies in rural Iran, documented the interrelatedness of different literacy practices, illustrating how a set of practices could be a stepping stone to other types of literacy practices—for example, a foundation in maktab literacy enabled certain men in Iran to adapt to commercial literacy practices. In the context of young children, it is not uncommon for young learners from multilingual communities to draw on the

knowledge of the different language and literacy communities they belong to when learning in various contexts. To support this important point, Gregory and Williams (2000) incorporated the anthropological perspectives of syncretism and theorized literacy for multilingual children as a process where children negotiated the re-creation of cultural practices using processes of creativity and transformation.

In this approach, children draw from home and community literacies when learning school literacies, but they also draw and apply skills from school literacies towards the learning of home and community literacies, making the utilization of language and literacy resources two-way. Rosowsky (2008) clarified this phenomenon when he stated that the Muslim students, in his study, “draw on their knowledge of schooled practices to inform their learning in the mosque and at home....and learned practices in the mosque influences literacy learning in the school” (p. 17). Hornberger and Skilton (2003) further supports the connection between literacies in multilingual contexts in their revised articulation of the Continua of Biliteracy model, which provided a framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of Somali children’s biliteracy (Hornberger & Skilton, 2003; Martínez-Roldán & Sayer, 2006).

Martínez-Roldán and Sayer (2006) suggested that bilinguals have special linguistic resources beyond what monolinguals have and “are able to employ these resources strategically and with great sensitivity to contextual factors.” Their research provided an understanding of the broader phenomenon in which the syncretic processes of the children participating in Qur’anic literacy often live. According to the Continua of Biliteracy model, the issue at play in the L1-L2 continuum is the “complex relationships between the two languages for learners’ ‘inter-language’ development, as well as the

ways they acquire productive and receptive, oral and literate skills and how the skills transfer from one language to the other,” while also considering the dimensions of power and privilege (Martínez-Roldán & Sayer, 2006, p. 296).

Street (1984) focused on the ideological nature of literacy and called for “bold theoretical models that recognize the central role of power relations in literacy practices...” (Street, 1993, p 2), emphasizing the embeddedness of power and privilege in literacy practices. This study conceptualized the ideological nature of literacy in three ways. Firstly, Qur’anic literacy is marginalized and is an invisible literacy practice when set against mainstream schooling. Qur’anic schooling, while playing an important role in the lives of millions of children worldwide and while research has shown its potential for transfer to other domains, is one of the least studied and most poorly understood educational tradition (Wagner, 1989). For the Somali community, in particular, there is a paucity of research looking at this literacy and schooling tradition (Moore, 2016). Literature on Somali students’ educational background rarely investigates their Qur’anic literacy. Most literature is focused on the fact that Somali children are likely to come to school in their resettlement contexts as disrupted or with limited print and schooled literacy experiences (Moore, 2016).

Secondly, within Qur’anic schooling, the authority commanded by those who teach plays a significant role in transmitting and practicing this literacy. Increasingly, Somali Qur’anic schools utilize fewer native methods to provide literacy instruction. Pedagogical practices from the Middle East have heavily influenced how Qur’anic literacy is taught. While certain aspects of this influence are celebrated, it has equally led to the marginalization of cultural and linguistic aspects of the community for which the

practice is described. Thus, first language use (Somali) and development are increasingly minimalized as instruction is carried out in other languages that are considered “better” (for example, Arabic in this case): The pervasive and dominating nature of secular school cultures and languages (English and Arabic) determines what literacy practices are privileged, bringing our attention to the link between power and literacy. While a change like this can be viewed as a necessary transformation to meet the times, critical attention must be paid to what is lost with the flow of innovation.

Finally, theorizing Qur’anic literacy in the social practice view has to do with how literacy can be described as a social construction, as something which only gets its meaning in a specific context and varies in time and place (Street, 1984, 1997). This means that not only does the definition of literacy change as one changes their location and activity, but also specific definitions of literacy can change over time. This is certainly relevant for the case of Qur’anic literacy, where its participants in different parts of the world have different ways of carrying out the practice yet share the aspiration of a common goal and purpose. In the Somali context, Moore (2016), for example, drew attention to how uncertainties around children’s adherence or embrasure of their Muslim and Somali identity served as one of the core drivers for sustaining Qur’anic literacy practices within the Somali community of Ohio.

Liturgical Literacy

This study drew insights from the concept of liturgical literacy developed by Rosowsky (2013). The concept was useful in responding to the divided views contributing to the marginalization of Qur’anic literacy and other faith literacies. It also foregrounds how minority languages, such as Classical Arabic, have great symbolic value

for communities, including those who neither speak nor understand the language. The Somali community, for example, does not speak or usually understand Arabic (the language of the Qur'an), and for them to participate in the liturgical language of Islam, a considerable investment of time and resources is to be expended. Instruction for children often starts in early childhood and could last until high school. The culmination of this investment is an achievement in decoding skills for reading the Qur'an—a complex skill to achieve. As such, Somali children have immense literacy skills that risk remaining invisible. Gregory and Williams (2000) proposed a model of contrasting literacies to privilege children's 'invisible' literacies:

It is a model based on the belief that contrasting rather than similar home and school strategies and practices provide a child with larger treasure trove from which to draw for school learning. The key task for teachers is to tap into this knowledge and teach children to become conscious of existing knowledge and skills and to enable children to compare and contrast different languages and literacy practices (Gregory & Williams, 2000, p 10).

This study is dedicated to the invisible literacy skills that Somali children achieve through great investments in their liturgical literacy. Qur'anic literacy practice is highly prioritized in the community and deserves acknowledgment and understanding from the dominant literacy structures, especially those of secular schools. Understanding this literacy practice would help Somali children—in a marginalized position—use their literacies to attain equity and confidence in achieving the goals of the privileged literacies—secular school literacy.

Funds of Knowledge

Finally, this study drew theoretically from studies in ‘funds of knowledge’ — a concept developed by Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1990) and Moll et al. (1992), to conceptualize the “strategic knowledge and related activities essential in households functioning, development, and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 139). The concept, while first developed in an anthropological study of households in the US-Mexican borderlands, gained its influence to disrupt discourses of deficit in working-class minority groups when it was applied to educational research. Moll et al. (1992) advocate for teachers doing ethnography in communities positioned as ‘deficient’ and non-mainstream. In the study, teachers worked as ethnographers to explore the students' home backgrounds to learn how families’ knowledge and skills could be brought to the classroom. Findings from the study suggest that the funds of knowledge that were identified represent “a positive and realistic view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential utility for classroom instruction” (p.134).

Following Moll et al. (1992), much educational research—especially those with social justice agendas, has been conducted to examine funds of knowledge of different communities (Oughton, 2010). These studies range from research in the US-Mexico borderlands that applied the funds of knowledge perspective to mathematics teaching (Civil, 2003), studies in the U.K. and Australia where the concept of funds of knowledge have been used in communities with low socio-economic status, including those of ethnic minorities (e.g., Comber & Kamler, 2004; Hughes et al., 2005), as well as many other studies with several pedagogical applications. These empirical studies illustrated how

different home cultures and languages shape children's learning and performance in school and affirm the need for teachers to familiarize themselves with their students' backgrounds to provide them with equitable educational opportunities. As suggested by González et al., the application of the funds of knowledge approach in education can result in "pivotal and transformative shifts in teachers and in relations between households and schools and between parents and teachers" (p.4). Similarly, Comber and Kamler (2004) suggested that the implication of the funds of knowledge approach represented a lasting shift in how teachers perceived students and their communities, from a deficit view to respect and understanding.

This empirical research in the US-Mexico borderlands elucidated the importance of valuing children's home cultures and languages and was, therefore, relevant to this study. Like students in the borderlands, Somali children regularly encounter dominance and subordination in their everyday schooling. Thus, educators need to acknowledge and connect with these children's literacies, for they can become a generating force for creativity and change.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

I conducted an ethnographic study to examine the literacy practices of Somali families. From October 2021 to May 2022, I lived in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, to carry out this study. I structured the design for this study in accordance with traditional ethnographic studies, but it is important to understand that an ethnographic design is not meant to be fully planned or fixed in detail, nor meant to be conducted in a given linear approach (Agar, 1996; Wolcott, 2016). Rather, the design should allow learning and development by moving with the data (Agar, 1996; Wolcott, 2016). Although I did not fully plan out some elements as I started the research, I went into the field with several important principles of ethnography that shaped this study.

First, I did not seek to generalize about all Somali refugees in Kenya, as there may be variations in everyday literacy practices within the same community. Rather than making such generalizations, this study followed George Spindler's advice to Wolcott (1992) to consider comparing specific cases and hypothesizing about the broader scope of phenomena. An ethnographic approach to literacy research provides "... 'telling cases' of what literacy means to different populations of users, focusing on the cultural and institutional locations of such meanings, using analytic induction, and avoiding the ethnocentrism involved in narrow, dominant approaches" (Mitchell, 1984 as cited in Street, 2016, p. 339). I collected data from a wide range of sources (see next sections), yet participants could only tell certain things in depth, and the in-depth conversation helped to develop themes that "map out a culture" (Wolcott, 2010, p. 28). These themes were based on how children and parents conceptualized literacy, which required getting

close to their natural settings and culture. I utilized multiple data-gathering procedures including observations, formal and informal interviews, interpretations of artifacts, and my own experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95). I used the case study genre, a form of qualitative inquiry (Gall et al., 1996) that focuses on a small number of individuals, to explore individual and family literacy through intensive inquiry to elicit details, complexities, and explanatory outcomes.

Yin (2014) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) within its real-life context” (p. 16), and Wolcott (2010) defines it as “an end product of field-oriented research” (p. 36). The case study method is appropriate when the researcher deliberately wants to cover contextual conditions that might be highly pertinent to the phenomenon of the study (Yin, 2003). This study’s methodological choice aligned with Yin (2004), who noted that case studies are useful for studies that aim to provide information for decision-making or to show causal relationships that are complicated and not readily available. The case study method allowed me to answer focused questions with in-depth descriptions over a shorter period.

Entering the Field

My connection with participating parents began with my volunteer work with SOSS, a nonprofit organization working with refugees in Eastleigh, Nairobi. The organization serves mostly Somali, Oromo, and South Sudanese refugees in meeting their essential needs. Through this organization, I met Aliya, who became my friend and connected me to several Somali families. At Aliya’s request, I conducted parent workshops where we shared bilingual books and techniques for reading with the families

at a women's *halaqa* (religious gathering for the study of Islam and the Quran) group. The *halaqa* sessions lasted two hours, in which there was an hour dedicated to a religious topic, and the remaining time was dedicated to eating and announcements. Aliya was a prominent attendant of the *halaqa* and had time dedicated to her in most of the *halaqas*. During her time, she lectured about education-related topics and often shared resources with families on their children's education. She started the *halaqa* 14 years ago with her friend, who had recently moved to Canada and wanted a platform that shared the two most important things: religion and education.

Aliya and I decided that I would lead four workshops over November to develop familiarity with the families. Aliya developed an agenda that aligned with the study's goals, and we developed sessions with topics in literacy, biliteracy, and mother tongue. In these workshops, I met two of the three families that became study participants. The third family was referred to me by one of the two women I met at the *halaqa*.

While recruiting families, I encountered pushback, hesitancy, and a lack of trust. However, as more and more people became aware of my project, I encountered mixed results from people: while some were willing to participate in the study, they were somewhat concerned about allowing me to record their interactions. Understandably, this is a displaced community, with many undocumented people living in the country. Others have cases with UNHCR and the UN Refugee Agency and were not sure of how sharing their stories could affect the humanitarian assistance through UNHCR and other organizations. Therefore, while I met and interacted with many people in the community, I operated under the constrictions of the field and worked with only three families that were willing to accommodate me in their lives and allow me to observe and record their

interactions in their homes, social settings, and their children’s learning contexts.

However, even in the resistance of “non-participants”, I found significance in their very resistance as it constantly reminded me to be aware of my participants' vulnerability.

The Participants

I chose families that represented the spectrum of the refugee experience in an urban Kenyan community. Two families lived within a block of each other, and their children attended the same school. The other family lived about a mile away, and the children attended a different school. The families had 12 children ranging in age from 1-14 years. Eight children attended *Dugsi* (an Islamic school focused on reading the Quran); two did *Dugsi* at home with their mother. Ten of the children attended school (secular schooling). Two of the three families were waiting for resettlement, and one had recently returned from the US after being resettled there for 15 years. The following tables show a general summary of the people who participated in this project:

Table 1

Abshiro's Family Attended Al Abrar Dugsi

Pseudonym	Age and relationship	Dugsi Teacher
Abshiro	45, Mother	
Said**	13, Son	Maalin Abdi
Zeinab**	12, Daughter	Maalin Abdi
Samiya**	11, Daughter	Maalin Abdi
Ali**	9, Son	Maalin Abdi
Ayan**	9, Daughter	Maalin Abdi

Table 2*Qali's Family Attended Home Dugsi, Excel School*

Pseudonym	Age and relationship	Dugsi Teacher	School Teacher, Grade
Qali	42, Mother		
Jamal**	11, Son	Mother	Ms. Jane, 2nd grade
Isa**	9, Son	Mother	Ms. Rose, 1st grade
Umulkheir*	4, Daughter	Mother	Not attending School
Zakariya*	2, Son	Mother	Not attending School

Table 3*Zamzam's Family Attended Al Huda Dugsi, Excel School*

Pseudonym	Age and relationship	Dugsi Teacher	School Teacher, Grade
Zamzam	30, Mother		
Fadumo**	8, Daughter	Maalin Ali	Ms. Tina, PP2
Farah**	7, Son	Maalin Ali	Ms. Anyango, PP1
Suhaib*	5, Son	Maalin Ali	Not attending School

**Indicates children who were observed and interviewed

*Indicates children who were observed only

Research Sites

Over the eight months of this study, I visited the families in their homes, school (four children from two different families attended this school), and *Dugsis* (outside the homes—one in a community setting and another at a mosque—and inside the home).

Al Abrar Dugsi. Abshiro's children attended a *Dugsi* called Al Abrar, and I used data from two months of visiting Al Abrar. I primarily observed and recorded interaction in a co-ed Quran classroom. I observed the teacher, Maalin Abdi, as he taught his 22

students. I had consent for Abshiro's five children, who were my focal students at this site. There was a divided sitting arrangement where the girls sat on one side of the Mosque, the boys on the other, and the Maalin sat in the middle. The sitting arrangement, while decided upon by the teacher, is customary in the Islamic faith, as men and women are forbidden to mix freely. While these are younger people, the socialization to such customs begins early in life and in places like Islamic learning institutions like *Dugsi*. The children did not observe any uniform dress code, but the boys mostly wore khamis or thawb (an ankle-length robe) in varying colors, and the girls wore long dresses or skirts and extra, long jacket-like covering, jilbab, over their dresses. The Maalin always wore a khamis and kofia or kufi (a rounded cap).

Maalin Abdi, the teacher, was in his mid-thirties and observed strict Islamic etiquettes of interacting with non-relative women. He often avoided eye contact with me and was brief with his responses while maintaining a direct way of responding to what I asked. There were no jokes or side conversations outside of what I asked. He was a deeply religious father of two children. Whenever he responded to anything I asked, he would say "bismillah," translating to, I start with the name of Allah. He also read a supplication when we started our conversation, though it was informal. The dua he read was, "O my Lord! Open my heart, make my task easy for me and remove the knot from my tongue, so they may understand my speech"—a supplication that I knew about and was socialized to be something to recite when facing a difficult task of speech (although in practice I had not utilized it). The dua is believed in Islam to have been said by the prophet Moses who asked Allah to expand his heart so he could have the capability and confidence to utter wise and convincing words for the people resisting Allah's oneness.

Over the two months I visited Al Abrar, I interviewed Maalin Abdi and had deep conversations with him. I also observed the classroom enough to get a good sense of their literacy practices. On three occasions, I worked to support the teaching on the girls' side and built a close rapport with the students who supported me in my observations in the home for my focal students.

Al Huda Dugsi. The setup of Al Huda *Dugsi*, where Zamzam's children attended *Dugsi*, mirrored that of Al Abrar, except that it was not in a mosque. Maalin Ali, the teacher, rented the space that the *Dugsi* was operating from and paid the rent from the small monthly fees the students paid. I closely observed three students at this *Dugsi*, the whole classroom, and the teacher as he provided his lessons and how the students engaged in literacy practices. At this *Dugsi*, there was a defined sitting arrangement like in the Mosque, where the boys sat on one side and the girls on the other. The Maalin informed me that his students knew to sit separately and that he never trained any of the students on the sitting expectations. The children did not observe any uniform dress code, although, on the weekdays, several came in their school uniforms as this was an after-school program that started right after school. The girls wore jilbabs over their long dresses, and the Maalin dressed casually but always wore kofia or kufi (a round cap).

Maalin Ali was talkative and easy to build rapport with. I spoke to him every day during my observations. He was not only a willing participant but a very much agentive participant in the research process—often asking me what else he could share and what impact my work would have. He wanted me to share his story, as noted in his words, “I want people to know about how we teach the Quran; we have done a good job because everywhere you go, Somalis are leading in the Quran. Our culture takes the Quran

seriously.” He took pride in his work and was passionate about developing his students’ literacy skills. He had a few students who were hafidhs (students who committed the Qur’an to memory) and took pride in their achievements. He informed me that he was motivated to help students learn the Quran because of the following reason:

All of them are waiting to go abroad (to be resettled), and I don’t want any of them to go to those countries without knowing the Quran very well. The Quran is what is going to give them their bearing.

Excel school. The school is a low-cost private school founded and funded by a church based in the west and serves low-income families in the Eastleigh area. Despite the school’s Christian affiliation, its curriculum was secular and based on the Kenyan national curriculum. According to the principal, the school had a 98% Muslim and 2% Christian population of the 350 students that attended. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and Christian Religious Education (CRE) were part of the curriculum requirements. The school served refugee students from East Africa, with a majority coming from Somalia. Some of the school facilities were rented to humanitarian agencies that worked with the families that attended the school. These humanitarian agencies provided services around housing, case management, domestic violence, counseling, and teen parenting programs. A typical day at the school started at eight in the morning, with students walking to school from nearby neighborhoods. The school day ended at 3:30 pm.

Daily subjects taught included English, Kiswahili, math, science, social studies, and religious education. I observed literacy teaching and learning and took field notes during English, Kiswahili, and IRE lessons over a two-month period. I also interviewed five teachers altogether during my time at the school. I also spoke to a few parents who

dropped food for their children during the break (10 am recess). Dropping food for children at 10 am was common. Children also went home for lunch at noon. The parents informed me that they chose the school because it was near their homes and had a good reputation for rigorous academics. Some parents also spoke about the fact that they liked the school's discipline and character-building focus. One parent pointed,

It is a school for the church, so the children are guided even though we don't share that religion. What I know is the moral values of the two religions are the same, and this is why I brought my children here.”

Another parent informed me that she chose the school because the refugee agency that sponsored her had collaborated with the school, and her school fees were subsidized.

Another parent talked about how the school willingly gave her a sliding scale fee because she was a single mother. Finally, I also found out from both Zamzam and Qali that they opted for the school because the teachers at Excel understood the refugee dynamics they were experiencing, such as the language barrier, and needed to attend various appointments.

Abshiro's home. The family lived in a five-story apartment building on a busy Eastleigh street. The apartment complex appeared fairly new when compared to surrounding buildings. It was a gated community, which was also different from all the other apartment buildings I saw in the area. A security guard manned the gate, and one was only allowed if they knew the house you were going to and the owner was aware of the visit. On my first visit, I had to wait outside the gate for a few minutes as the security guard communicated through an intercom line with Abshiro. Abshiro's apartment was on the third floor. The home was modestly furnished. The children used the dining room as

their eating and studying space. Abshiro spent her time between the kitchen and the living room. The grounds of the apartment were well-kept and paved in concrete. The compound had a children's play area, a preschool, and a mosque. Al Abrar *Dugsi*, where Abshiro's children went, was at the Mosque on this compound.

There were often children playing out in the compound. Sometimes, I arrived and found some of Abshiro's children outside playing with other children. I would spend time with them every now and then before proceeding to their home for my observation. In interacting with the children outside, I found out that many of the residents in the apartment complex were returning from the west after years of being resettled there as refugees. Some of the children I met playing outside spoke Danish, Finnish, and English. Abshiro's close friends, who visited them a few times when I was at their house, spoke Finnish and were learning English in the Kenyan school. Abshiro's children provided them with enough practice as speakers of American English.

I spent the first month of my visits to Abshiro's home getting to know the family and building rapport. We chatted and got to know each other on those days. Then as we got comfortable with each other, I observed the whole family at different times of the day. On the weekdays, I came after school to observe their routines. On Thursday and Friday evenings, they were off from *Dugsi* and remained home doing tutoring with a teacher who came to their home. I observed the tutoring sessions as well. On the weekends, I arrived in the mornings, spent time with them as they prepared to go to *Dugsi*, followed them to *Dugsi*, and observed their routines and practices there. Some days I came when Abshiro was alone with Ali (who was homeschooled). Overall, I visited Abshiro's home at least thrice a week for five months.

Zamzam's home. Zamzam lived in an apartment complex across Excel school, which was a block away from Al Huda *Dugsi*, where the children attended *Dugsi*. The apartment was located on a bustling street in the heart of Eastleigh. There were shops and street vendors right in front of her apartment building. Zamzam told me that many people living in her apartment complex were waiting to be resettled in Germany. She told me that a certain organization affiliated with resettlement processing was paying for their rent and that they had chosen to put them all in the same apartment complex. She was the only one on the waitlist to resettle in the US. Zamzam lived on the first floor, and her apartment, although a studio, was always neat and organized such that you would never know that children were living there. The apartment was modestly furnished, with two beds and a carpet. The main wall had a clock with a picture of Mecca, and next to it was a big wall art with the names Allah and Mohamed inscribed on it. The children spent most of their time on the carpet, eating and doing their homework.

I visited Zamzam twice weekly, alternating between weekdays and weekends over three months. During weekdays, I observed their routines after school around homework and doing projects assigned from school. During the weekends, I interviewed family members. I also spent time listening to Zamzam's poems. She performed a few poems for me and shared some of her recordings every now and then, and we watched them together. Zamzam had friends in the apartment complex that visited occasionally, and I also interacted with them.

Qali's home. Qali's family lived in an apartment next to Zamzam's and was only separated by a wall. The families visited each other quite often. Qali's house was on the fifth floor of a six-floor building. The apartment building was very old and densely

populated. Qali informed me that the apartment building had a mix of Somali, Ethiopian, and Sudanese families. Qali's apartment was also modestly furnished. She shared that she inherited many items in her house from friends that had been resettled. She had a gas stove and a refrigerator that she told me helped change her life. A woman who left for Australia gave her these items for free. Qali made food she sold on the street during the weekdays when her children were in school, and those appliances were helpful. Her husband stayed home with the two younger children while she was vending in the streets. When her two older children were home in the evenings, she spent much of her time taking care of the family and the house.

Qali's family had an open weekend schedule compared to the other two families, for they never went to *Dugsi* outside the home. Their *Dugsi* was in their living room, and their mother taught them how to read the Quran. The home also had a different literacy environment than the other two homes. The literacy-related interactions, resources, and attitudes that children experience at Qali's home were more active. Qali engaged in literacy activities with the children. She read the Quran with them and directly taught her children skills such as linking letters and sounds. Outside Qur'anic literacy activities, they read books and watched literacy shows together with children. She also had a stack of books for beginner literacy in Arabic and English. Qali was actively teaching herself literacy skills in various languages. She was learning Arabic to better her religiosity and was learning English as she was hopeful about resettlement to an English-speaking country.

I visited Qali's house twice every week for a four-month period. While visiting, I built rapport and observed different routines around the home, literacy practices, and

family interactions. I also interviewed family members on their perspectives on literacy practices. I alternated spending time with the family between a weekday and weekend for the duration of my research.

Curriculum in Use

Dugsi: The two Maalins started children with writing and reading using a method they called *hingaad* (spelling). This method focused on teaching encoding and decoding. Students started with learning the Arabic alphabets, and how to read Arabic and write without necessarily understanding the meaning of the words. The different levels of focus within the *hingaad* stage were:

- Learning the Arabic alphabets including learning the short and long vowels of all the letters.
- Learning the Arabic diacritics system with the purpose of providing a phonetic guide and correct pronunciation of words.
- Learning to read short words. Students were exposed to read words from the Quran but not in any sequence. All students in this level used a primer called *Juzu Amma* (a book with the chapters of the 30th part of the Quran).

Once children learned how to read, they moved to *yeeris* (*reciting*). This stage was focused on learning to read the Qur'an. Children in this stage were able to read on their own but their teachers recited the verses of the Qur'an and the children repeated after them. The goal for the modeling and repetition in this stage was to ensure that children were pronouncing the words of the Qur'an accurately. Through the *hingaad* and *yeeris* stages, students were assigned lessons and tested on their fluency on a daily basis.

Within the *yeeris* stage, most children were also doing *tahfidh* (memorization). In this

stage the focus was thorough memorization of the Qur'an with a strong emphasis on daily revision, recitation, memorization and learning of *tajweed* (linguistic and pronunciation rules).

School: Excel school was using a newly instituted national curriculum called competency-based curriculum (CBC). CBC is Kenya's new curriculum which was introduced in December 2017. Early years and middle school were relevant for this study. In the early years, children started school at the age of four and did two years of *pre-primary* (preschool) before moving to *primary* (elementary) school. Children started primary school at the age of six. However, the students in this study did not conform to these age trajectories for enrollment. The students in this study were all older than the grade level age expectations stipulated by the curriculum. The age inconsistency was in part contributed by the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic that had most Kenyan schools close for a year. Students who missed instruction were held back a year. Another issue that contributed to the to age inconsistency was parents' choice to enroll children in school at the age of six as opposed to four. The two families whose children attended Excel decided to start their children with the Qur'an and children spent about two years in Dugsi before enrolling in school.

In terms of content, learning areas in primary and middle school included: literacy (English and Kiswahili), mathematics, environmental studies, hygiene and nutrition, religious education (christian religious education, islamic religious education or hindu religious education) and physical education. Prior and current curriculums have had pro mother tongue (MT) policies when it comes to the language of instruction (LOI),

however, Kenya being a former British colony, English has been given preponderant attention. The CBC curriculum stipulated the following expectations around LOI:

1. Early years LOI as mother tongue for children in rural areas and the language of the catchment area for children in urban areas.
2. From grade 4 onward English as the LOI.

The policies at Excel school were in alignment with the expectation of the national policy but teachers decided to make school level policy amendments that they saw beneficial for their students. Majority of the children at Excel school were Somali. While their language qualified as one of the mother tongue languages in Kenya, the school was in an urban locality hence the designated language of early years instruction was Kiswahili. Teachers at Excel attempted and worked hard to incorporate elements of mother tongue education (MTE) in their pedagogy, but they shared having experienced challenges with it. One challenge that teachers expressed was having no specific formal training on multilingual teaching practices and strategies. Teachers spoke critically of the mismatch between a new movement to revive indigenous languages through policies that encourage mother tongue in LOI but with teacher training program that still only focus only on English teaching methodologies.

Data Collection

Al Huda Dugsi. I visited Al Huda *Dugsi* a total of 16 times between February, 2022 and March, 2022. During these times, I spoke with Maalin Ali and the children at the *Dugsi*. I gathered the following data (some amounts are approximate):

- Nine hundred sixty minutes of observed interactions which led to extensive field notes. Observations were not audio or videotaped due to consent restrictions.

- Sixty minutes of audiotaped interview with Maalin Ali. The interview protocol used can be found in Appendix A of this dissertation.

Al Abrar Dugsi. I visited Al Abrar *Dugsi* a total of 10 times between February, 2022 and March, 2022. I interviewed Maalin Abdi and observed interactions relating to literacy practices. I gathered:

- Six hundred minutes of observed interactions led to extensive field notes. Observations were not audio or videotaped due to consent restrictions.
- Forty-five minutes of audiotaped interview with Maalin Abdi. Interview protocol used was similar to the one used with Maalin Ali.

The homes. I visited each home at least twice a week between November, 2022 and May, 2022. I interviewed each family member, observed interactions relating to literacy activities at home, and gathered extensive field notes. In addition to field notes from these sessions, I gathered the following:

- Seven thousand two hundred minutes of observed interactions that led to extensive field notes. Observations were not audio or videotaped due to consent restrictions.
- Four hundred fifty minutes of audiotaped interviews with each family member from the three homes that led to extensive field notes. Observations were not audio or videotaped due to consent restrictions (interviews excluded for two children – Qali’s four and two-year-old children). The interview protocols used for the parents and children can be found in Appendix B and C respectively of this dissertation.
- One hundred twenty WhatsApp correspondence

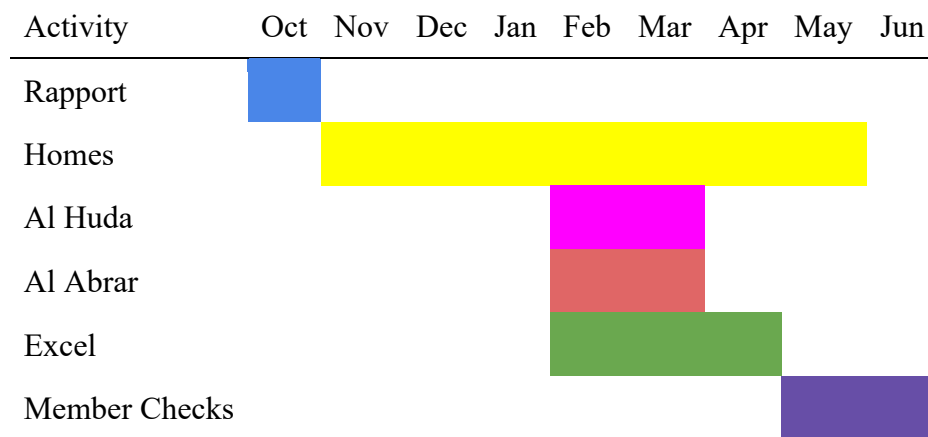
Excel School. I visited Excel school 12 times between February 2022 and April 2022. During these times, I had conversations with five teachers and observed whole classrooms in four classes where four of my focal students were placed. In addition to extensive field notes, I gathered the following data (some amounts are approximate):

- One thousand four hundred forty minutes of observed interactions produced extensive field notes. Observations were not audio or videotaped due to consent restrictions.
- Sixty minutes of audiotaped focus group interviews with four classroom teachers and the principal. The interview protocols used for the focus group interview can be found in Appendix D of this dissertation.

The following table shows the timeline of data collection:

Table 4

Data Collection Timeline (Oct 2021 through June 2022)



Data Analysis

I utilized various ethnographic methods to organize, code, and analyze the data from the various sites. The six sites provided varied and comparative data that fit well

together to build a description of the families I studied. I organized the data into several categories: Physical data (artifacts, books, photos, children's writings, etc.), transcribable data (audio), and field notes. For the physical data, I studied each cluster of data (e.g., children's writings) several times to find patterns of information such as writing conventions, spelling, and language use. I then recorded patterns I observed across the children's learning context, i.e., between school and *Dugsi*.

The transcribable data presented a challenge for me. Like other elements of the research process, it is a theory-laden process in that it is influenced by the philosophical and theoretical positionings of the transcriber (Duranti, 1997). Transcripts based on the same interview data could be transcribed by different people in varying ways and capture differing interaction elements. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) discussed how "the choices researchers make about transcription enact the theories they hold and constrain the interpretations they draw from their educational practice..." (p. 15). In my case, I conducted the interview (with parents, five of the nine children, and *Dugsi* teachers) in Somali, which was a shared language between us. I also conducted interviews in English with four of the nine children and the schoolteachers. I then progressed to convert the audiotaped interviews into texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) refer to this process as conversion from field texts into research texts.

In transcribing the interviews, I conducted in Somali, I generated a great deal of bilingual data. Participants interspersed English words in the conversation and dealing with interview materials in two languages was not simple. While I speak Somali fluently as a heritage speaker, I do not write this language. Therefore, I translated all interview data conducted in Somali into English. I did not transcribe with strict adherence to syntax

or grammatical aspects because I did not want exact equivalence, which was not achievable in my view when translating between two languages, but aimed for inexact equivalence, which was sufficient to convey the messages of the participants. I translated the interview data such that it made sense and conveyed the spirit of the message, and any layperson could read without having to decipher any jargon. The general transcription standards I followed can be found in Appendix E of this dissertation.

I found limited literature to guide me through developing translated interview transcriptions; therefore, I improvised and developed rules for myself and marked them for my audit trail. I generated *transitional texts*, “texts situated in the spaces between field texts and final published research texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 133). These *transitional texts* moved through different stages to the point where I could use them for interpretative analysis and as quotes in my ethnographic text. At that stage, I called the data *mature data*. At every stage, I strived to keep the essence of the data intact.

Finally, field notes helped a lot in my final ethnographic data. In writing, editing, and rewriting my field notes, I followed the guidelines set out by Emerson et al. (1995), who describe four implications for writing field notes:


- What is observed and ultimately treated as “data” or “findings” is inseparable from the observational process.
- In writing field notes, the field researcher should give special attention to the indigenous meanings and concerns of the people studied.
- Contemporaneously written field notes are an essential grounding and resource for writing broader, more coherent accounts of others’ lives and concerns.

- Such field notes should detail the social and interactional processes that make up people’s everyday lives and activities (1995, p. 11)

I understood from the above points by Emerson et al. that what ends up being the research findings is closely tied to the methods used to collect and analyze data, and as such, researchers need to be aware of the cultural meanings within the data gathered. Field notes are important tools for more complex descriptions as this tool aids in recording interactional details of people’s everyday actions. These assertions guided my writing of the field notes. I also followed Emerson et al.’s suggestions to code and memo particular details to access them more easily later to detect patterns and themes. Examples of fieldnote writing, coding and memoing can be found in Appendix F of this dissertation.

The following table shows a summary of methods used for the study:

Table 5



<p>January 2021- September 2021 : Entering the Field Attended halaqa sessions, volunteered with SOSS, visited homes, mosques and schools Chosen sites: 3 homes, 2 dugsis, 1 school Participants: 3 families (12 children & 3 parents), 2 dugsi teachers, 5 school teachers</p>
<p>October 2021- May 2022: Collecting Data Methods: observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, reviewing artifacts Data: 360 pages of fieldnotes from observations, 720 minutes of audio recorded interviews (166 pages of audio recorded interview transcripts), several childrens' writings, wall decor, prayer materials, religious texts, family pictures</p>
<p>June 2022- April 2023: Analyzing and Writing Thematic coding, memoing fieldnotes, written ethnography</p>

Special Considerations in Methodology: The Insider Ethnographer Positioning

Following the notion of the researcher as an instrument in qualitative research (Merriam, 2015), my unique characteristics and cultural positioning had implications for this study. My passion for this project grew from personal experiences as a Somali who experienced Qur'anic schooling and as a Muslim mother sending her children to Qur'anic school. I came into the field with some experiences of both Dugsi and school in Kenya. In the traditional sense, an ethnographer is an outsider who enters the environment of insiders, i.e., the participants of research (Brewer, 2000; Atkinson, 2007) to study their natural environment (Brewer, 2000; Atkinson, 2007). In this study, I studied a group that I shared membership with through language and religion and one that I was somewhat familiar with their schooling traditions. What I shared in common with the participants formed elements of my research agenda. Yet I have had to constantly reflect on my position as an insider ethnographer. An insider ethnographer does not necessarily always share full cultural access as I evidenced in the field. I was learning many things for the first time that seemed both familiar and unfamiliar. Many practices in Dugsi for example had variations from my own experiences.

Despite my feelings of insider-outsider ethnographer, elements of my insider position facilitated the success of this study. Sharing a language with participants allowed me to have deep conversations that were necessary for the ethnographic interviews that I conducted and being a Muslim helped ease some trust issues that emerged when I was recruiting participants for the study. It is no news that Muslims have, in general, received much bad press in the past decades in the west and the countries in the global south have had tendencies to go by trends set by the west. This community had every right to be

closed about their Islamic traditions including schooling traditions, but I believe their knowledge of my Muslim identity made it feel less intrusive to investigate practices. Additionally, having worked in refugee resettlement prior to my research journey also provided me with some understandings of the kinds of challenges refugee students and their families encounter in countries of asylum and resettlement. I also grew up and received my primary, and secondary education in Kenya, thus I was also familiar with the cultures and languages of Kenya, and this provided me access in the school that I researched.

My position, while providing me opportunities to engage thoroughly in this study, made me think of what might be questioned in this research. I worried that the objectivity of my study would be questioned, or my findings would be seen as biased. In anticipation of that, I constantly had to be reflexive to check assumptions and biases. Researcher bias, which is an inherent aspect of the research process, should not be all concerning though—Aguilar (1981) posited, “biases themselves can be sources of insight as well as error” (p. 25). This is something to be pondered on by anyone who doubts the objectivity of insider ethnography. Finally, as Messerschmidt (1981) stated, while the outsider ethnographer struggles with gaining deep insights, the insider ethnographer struggles to withdraw from it. Keeping this balance was something I grappled with. For example, there were instances when I questioned whether my findings were novel or interesting because of my familiarity with some of the information I was gathering. I had to find ways to make what was ordinary to me extraordinary for the reader of this dissertation study, and I often wondered if I did enough of that, and this was not a simple task.

CHAPTER 3
LITERACY PRACTICES

Vignette: Saiid

Saiid is 13 and is in 6th grade in a mixed integrated middle school (a school that combines the national secular public-school curriculum and Islamic education curriculum). He wakes up at 6:00am, goes to the mosque in his neighborhood to perform the morning prayer. He then gets ready for school and leaves the house by 7:30. His house is located on a busy road near the town center and is not far from his school. His day at school is spent following a schedule of English, Math, Science, PE or Art, lunch, and then Geography and Qur'an in the afternoon. The school day finishes at 3:30, and he has been given homework in English and Math. He walks back down the busy street and reaches his home at around 3:45. His mother has a snack ready, and he watches TV while eating his snack. At about 4:30, he goes to use the bathroom, and while in there, makes wudu (an Islamic ritual of purification where one washes the face, arms, then wipes the head and washes the feet with water) and prays the late afternoon prayer. He wears his khamis (an ankle-length robe commonly worn by Muslim men) and kofia (a skull cap) and reaches for his Qur'an that is on top of his dresser. His Qur'an is laminated with plastic and looks well taken care of, yet worn out. He rushes out the door to go to the neighborhood mosque that is about two minutes away from his house. Upon entering the mosque, he finds a place to sit and begins to read his lesson that was assigned yesterday. He is seated next to boys who seem to be around his age. The sitting at the mosque is divided into three sections.

One side has younger children around age 5-7, and the second has what looks like 8-11, and the last section seems to be 12-14. Saiid is reading the 12th Juz (part) of the Qur'an. There are 30 parts in the Qur'an. He is reading surah (chapter) Kahf, which is the 18th Surah of the Qur'an. There are 114 surahs in the Qur'an. Surah Kahf has 110 verses, and the name of the Surah translates to "The Cave", it is considered by many Muslims to be among the most important Surahs in the entire Qur'an for its contents on spirituality and guidance, and the Prophet Muhammad commanded his followers to read it every Friday. Saiid is reading loud but not too loudly, and he gently rocks himself backwards and forwards as he reads to match the rhythm of what he is reciting. Saiid understands the meaning of this Surah as he is in the group of students that are doing tafsir (exegesis or Qur'anic commentary) on the weekends. He has 50 verses (about 6 pages) to recite from memory to his Maalin (Dugsi teacher) today. He appears fluent in part because this is his second time committing the Qur'an to memory but also because he practiced it last night. He had already finished learning the Qur'an and is doing his second round now, which will lead to a complete memory of the Qur'an. Saiid is committed to becoming a hafidh (one who has memorized the entire Qur'an). A hafidh is respected, and his position is recognized by people because, according to Muslims, the position of a hafidh is recognized by God himself. The Maalin asks Saiid to come and sit next to him and asks him to recite his lesson. Saiid closes the Qur'an and recites fluently and accurately from memory. He is corrected for minor pronunciation mistakes. At this point, men are starting to enter the mosque as it is nearing the

time for maghrib (sunset prayer), and I have to go upstairs to continue my observation. I hear the Maalin praising Saiid for his reading, and he returns to his sitting place. It is 6:30 and the adhan (call to prayer) goes. He joins the congregation praying at the mosque. By the time he returns home, it is 7:00. Saiid has dinner and starts working on his school homework at around 8:00. He is done by 9:00 and then watches some TV with his siblings and goes to bed at 10:00

Introduction

The routine described above is familiar to many Muslim children and their families living in Nairobi, Kenya. Nairobi hosts some of the largest Somali refugee communities in Africa, also functioning as a transit point for families waiting for resettlement. Eastleigh, where this research study is set, has become a space of identification for Somalis, colloquially referred to as “Little Mogadishu.” As such, the growing numbers of Somali families necessitate a need for essential aspects of their religion and culture to be sustained and passed on to the future generation. *The Dugsi* (that at times is in mosques and other times in community settings) is one of the foci of this chapter. The secular school that children attend is another, as is the learning that also happens at homes and in the community, and as such, these spaces are equally relevant for this chapter. This chapter deals with the experiences of those most closely involved with the literacy practices of these spaces, namely the children, but also discusses others involved in children’s literacy learning contexts, such as parents and teachers. I begin with discussing the literacy practices that families engage in across four contexts and conclude with a synthesis of the trends in the literacy practices across the spaces.

In the Qur'anic Literacy Practices section, I used data from two Dugsi classrooms where the children of two families—Abshiro's children (Saiid-13, Zeinab-12, Samiya-11, Ali-9, and Ayan-9) and Zamzam's children (Fadumo-8, Farah-7, and Suhaib-5) attended. I observed and recorded students' interactions and teachers' (Maalin Ali and Maalin Abdi) pedagogical practices around teaching how to write in Arabic and read the Qur'an. Next, School Literacy practices present findings from observations of student learning and teachers' pedagogical practices at Excel Academy where Zamzam's children (Fadumo-8 and Farah-7) and Qali's two children (Jamal-11 and Isa-9) attended. I observed literacy teaching and learning and took field notes during English, Kiswahili, and Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lessons. I also interviewed five teachers in a focus group setting and spoke to a few parents who dropped in school at various times of the day, i.e., when they brought food for their children during the break (10 am recess). I was not granted permission to observe Abshiro's children in their school; therefore, the data on school literacy practices did not capture Abshiro's children. Finally, the Family Literacy Practices section reveals findings from data that examined the literacy practices in the homes of all three families during different times of the day.

Qur'anic Literacy Practices: Dugsi

The Qur'an accommodates both oral and literacy practices. The Qur'an is both an oral and a written text. Oral practices, such as reciting and memorizing, and literacy practices, such as reading and writing, are all part of how various Muslim communities commit to studying the Qur'an. The Qur'an is believed to have been transmitted orally from God to Muhammad through the archangel Jibril or Gabriel. The Prophet Mohamed recited the Qur'an to his followers, who memorized the text. The oral transmission was

combined with literacy practices as there were scribes present with the Prophet who would write down and confirm everything that was revealed to him. Therefore, from its beginning, the Qur'an was both an oral and a literate text.

Muslims refer to the Qur'an for guidance on all matters. The Qur'an refers to itself as a complete book, with God himself saying, "This is a Book we have sent down to you so that you can bring mankind from the darkness to the light" (Surah Ibrahim 14:1). Regarding other several references on the topic of the Qur'an being a source of guidance, God states: "We have sent down the book to you making all things clear and as guidance" (Surah An-Nahl 16:89). Muslims across the world commit to learning the Qur'an due to its position as the final arbiter of information and rulings on all matters including jurisprudence. Fundamentally, memorizing the entire Qur'an is and has been considered a noble achievement among Muslim communities from the beginning times of Islam. However, Muslims who are limited in memorizing the whole Qur'an may choose to memorize several surahs (chapters).

At Al Huda and Al Abrar Dugsi, where Zamzam and Abshiro's children attended, there was a mix of students working on different skills considered fundamental for the study of the Qur'an. What follows in this section describes some data and subsequent findings from the two classrooms, based primarily upon my fieldnotes. As I describe these events, I reference my own feelings and perspectives as both an insider and a stranger to this community. While I was privileged to know some information about Qur'anic literacy practices even before entering the two classrooms, I found that my experiences differed to some degree because literacy practices vary in time and place (Street, 1984, 1997). Furthermore, being involved in literacy education outside of the

Qur'anic literacy space for many years after my foundational years in Dugsi and having taught English Language Learners in the US gave me a different lens through which I filtered the data. The data from both Dugsi classrooms came from a two-month observation period between February 6th, 2022, and April 10, 2022.

At Al Huda, the class had 22 students, nine girls and 13 boys. On this visit, I went with Zamzam, whose three children attended the Dugsi. Maalin Ali (“Maalin”) welcomed us and gave me a brief orientation of his classroom. He shared that the students’ age ranged from 4-14 and told me that their competence also ranged from hafidh to emergent Qur'anic literate. The class had two boys who had completed the Qur’an. There was a visible seating division of three groups. Group one had the two students that completed the Qur’an. They also appeared older than the rest. Upon asking the Maalin if all the advanced students were boys, he shared that there was one girl who was nearing completion. The girl was not seated with the students in her level because of the required gender division in Islam. Group two students were at the medium-advanced level. Group three students were mainly younger children between ages 4-7. Most of them were holding writing journals and were reading from these journals, while a few were holding the Juz Amma book (a book that has the last part of the Qur’an comprising the final 36 chapters and most widely memorized by Muslims due to its brief chapters and concise verses). Maalin told me that group three was his most diverse group in terms of their competency. Most of them were learning the Arabic alphabet and others were learning to decode. He pointed to Farah and told me, “Farah finished reading the alif, and he can decode now, so I have moved him to read Fatiha and he will memorize the small surahs. His sister finished alif and knows how to read and write and is working on memorizing.”

He showed me Fadumo's writing book and said, "See how good her writing is?" Her mother, Zamzam, tells Maalin, "Her writing is also very good in school," and Maalin responds by saying, "She is good" (Fieldnotes, 2/6/2022).

Learning the Qur'an at Al Huda involved both literate and oral practices. Children as young as four were introduced to the Arabic alphabet. When I came in, Maalin was working with three of the younger children using one primer; they sat close to each other such that the print on the primer was visible to all three students. Maalin pointed to the letters saying, "alif wax maleh, baa hos kaleh, taa korka labaleh, thaa korka sidaxleh." The children recited after him. This translates to: Alif ^ا has nothing on it, baa ^ب has one dot at the bottom, taa ^ت has two dots on the top, thaa ^ث has three dots on the top. He taught the students how to differentiate the letters with the diacritic marks. He finished reciting the 28 letters using this kind of instruction and the children repeated after him. When he was done, they returned to their sitting area and did a loud chorus of the alphabet using the diacritic attributes taught. He then called four other students and asked them to come with their writing books. He wrote on each of their books, with some getting words and others the alphabet letters. Three boys traced the letters, and one girl copied Maalin's words in the journal. They were each focused on the activity and when done, they went back to Maalin. He checked their work and praised each one of them. They went back to reading some short surahs. The children were reciting the short surahs from memory as they had not yet really mastered decoding skills. Maalin mentioned that he assigned them the short surahs because they needed them for prayers. In the meantime, the older children were reading the Qur'an from the book, at times closing it to check if they had reached fluency with their memorization. Sometimes the students listened to

each other's fluency. They were called one by one to recite from memory. Some of the children were fluent and were given new lessons after being praised for their good work; some were struggling with memorization and were corrected a few times and told to go back and continue reading and memorizing for fluency. I worked with the ones that got new lessons. Maalin instructed me to read and have them read after me while looking at the Qur'an three times each and then having them read on their own five times. This continued until we were done; then Maalin asked everyone to close their books and to pay attention. He asked the younger children to recite together the At-Tahiyat (a prayer recited twice during each of the five obligatory prayers). When they finished, he recited it himself and had them repeat it after him. He then asked the children, "What do we say when we are bending? What about when we are prostrating?" and everyone shouted something. It did not seem like Maalin was checking for fluency but rather reminding them of what he believed was important for them to remember on this day, given that the midday prayer was approaching. He turned to me and said, "I do this every day so that all the children are knowledgeable about how to perform their prayers." I saw this practice as more of a socializing activity to impart knowledge to the children because the Dugsi curriculum focused more on teaching the Qur'an, but Maalin used it also as a space to teach children that which was useful for their practicing of Islam. The call for midday prayer went, and everyone went outside to do wudu (abolution). Maalin instructed the boys to do it first and to give way to the girls after they were done. I left to also pray. (Fieldnotes, 3/12/2022).

At Al Abrar, the classroom sitting arrangement and the literacy practices were akin to those of Al Huda Dugsi. Maalin Abdi ("Maalin") had students who were learning

about letter formation and decoding of simple words. Several students were also in the hifdh (memorization) stage, and their levels varied. Maalin explained to me that he spent about a year teaching each child how to write. I asked what the relevance of learning to write was if they were required only to memorize. In his opinion, this is what writing is for:

It is the most important aspect of learning the Qur'an. I say it is a must. We teach how to write so that children can read the Qur'an. I am not saying you cannot learn to read the Qur'an without learning the hilgad (encoding), but that is just memorizing, and some teachers use that method. It is not good in my opinion. It is good to be able to open the book and read on your own and then you can memorize on your own even if you did not get to finish Qur'an in Dugsi when you were young." (Interview, 3/20/2022)

From the above field notes and interview excerpt, it was clear that both Maalins saw writing fluency as a prerequisite for reading success. Maalin Abdi specifically differentiated between learning the Qur'an from memory or what some might call rote learning and distanced himself from that practice in calling it a "not good" pedagogy. He believed that writing gave one agency in their journey with Qur'anic literacy such that the journey of learning the Qur'an did not stop if one could not continue attending Dugsi. His ideas and belief in the value of writing for reading are quite significant for the Somali community concerning their transnational lives. I was reminded of something Maalin Ali also opined on relating to the way he saw himself as being charged with the responsibility of sending hafidhs (people who have memorized the Qur'an) to the western world where he believed they may not have access to Dugsi. In teaching the children how to write for

reading, they had the end in mind— a scenario where children might need to continue learning and memorizing the Qur'an on their own.

Some of the writing practices at Dugsi mirrored those of the secular school in the early years. For example, tracing the alphabets and simple words was a shared practice. However, I found differences in the learning style and teaching writing between the two settings. Where Dugsi conformed to a rigid practice, early literacy in the secular schools in all my experiences have used flexible pedagogical styles around supporting emergent literacy. Both Maalins had one way of teaching writing, writing the letters and words for the children and asking them to trace them. The children's journals showed consistency in what was practiced. In the secular school classrooms I have worked at, there was a mix of writing activities geared towards supporting the children's emergent writing skills. Practices such as writing by creating drawings, name writing, invented spelling, et cetera were common. Although the writing practices at Dugsi were not diverse, I understood that like a secular school, Dugsi had the goal of teaching the children the conceptual knowledge of the functions of writing: that writing had a purpose and that it corresponded to print.

For the younger students at both Dugsis, including my focal students, the Maalins were focused on ensuring they grasped the important concept of Arabic letters. The ultimate goal of engaging in the writing practices that the children were involved in had to do with gaining access to the Qur'an as a text, and writing was not for any other purpose. Children did not engage in the kinds of writing that were outside of developing conceptual knowledge. The ability to generate knowledge through writing was absent from Dugsi's writing practices. For instance, writing to express i.e. composing a story or

expressing thoughts through writing was nonexistent, whereas, in school literacy practices, the bulk of writing for the same children had to do with generative knowledge. Puranik and Lonigan (2014) describe generative knowledge as children’s ability to write phrases and sentences that convey meaning. In their school literacy learning contexts, my focal students engaged in different forms of writing—they composed simple stories, copied notes from the board, and engaged in dictation. As I reflected too on my own journey with literacy outside Dugsi, I remembered that in language classes that I took in high school and in college, for example, French, my teachers employed various strategies for me to learn, including writing short expository essays, learning about the culture of the French-speaking countries, and, perhaps most notably, learning words and sentences in tandem with their meanings. This was different at Dugsi.

On the contrary, at Dugsi, students spent a considerable amount of time and effort working on grasping the technical aspects of writing Arabic. Writing Arabic involved complex literacy skills, for example, one of the things that the students at both Dugsi learned was the different forms letters took in writing. Depending on where the letter was located in a word, it could look very different from its isolated form. On one of my visits to Al Huda, one of the young boys was working on the letter forms. For example, the letter name he was learning about was ‘haa’, and it took these forms:

Letter name	Forms in a word	Closest English sound
Haa	Isolated: هـ End: ـه Middle: ـهـ Initial: هـ	H

I could not tell if the student understood the concept, but Maalin wrote it in his journal and explained it to him a few times. Another student seated next to him was learning about the letters that could not be joined with other letters in a word. At some point, Maalin joined the lesson of the two boys such that they were each learning about forms of the letters and the rule on isolated letters. When explaining the concept of isolated letters, Maalin sounded out the letters and said “kuwani ma yeelan karaan saaxiibo” (these ones cannot have friends), this sparked some excitement and laughter in the two boys. This was one of the few times I saw a light spirit in Maalin’s pedagogy. He listed the letters in the student’s journals and showed them how they formed a break in the middle of a word and how they were isolated when they began a word (Fieldnotes, 3/13/2022).

Once children mastered the skill of the form that the Arabic letters took and understood that letters of the alphabet represented sounds they moved directly to decoding from the Qur’an. The writing that children focused on was transferred to using it for reading the Qur’an. From my observations, both Maalins were keen on helping the children understand the visual to auditory relationship as well as the auditory to visual relationship— two important skills necessary to achieving fluency in reading and writing. While the children would be considered as having a solid foundation for writing, the children were not using it outside to help them to read the Qur’an as I mentioned earlier. During my visits to the two Dugsis, two younger students were reading Fatiha (the first chapter of the Qur’an). These students graduated to a different group, and their literacy tools changed from pencils, erasers, sharpeners, and writing journals to just the Qur’an book. This described how their learning space had a specific use of literacy.

Outside of learning how to write and decode, I observed a serious and somber classroom environment in both Dugsis. For example, Farah, who I also observed in his secular school, was a talkative child who exhibited a lot of playful behaviors in his school classroom and was reprimanded a few times for not sitting still and for talking out of turn, yet in his Dugsi classroom, he was quiet and timid. He did not talk to anyone and was not redirected for any behavioral reasons. This reminded me of a comment made by one of the teachers at Excel Academy where the children went to school. The teacher appreciated Dugsi for the type of discipline it instilled in children and narrated to me how she could identify which of her students were attending or not attending Dugsi based on how they behaved in her classroom. I was also reminded of a study that I read in the beginning of my doctoral program done by Wagner (1987). Wagner (1987) described Qur'anic preschool instruction in the village schools in Morocco following a specific pattern: authoritarian, teacher-centered, and strict. The kind of literacy was always oral literacy, with a specific emphasis on being accurate and aesthetically pleasing. Furthermore, Wagner indicated that studying the Qur'an in Morocco acted as a socializing activity to impart social and ethical values to the children.

I found Maalin to be following quite a similar pattern as that described by Wagner (1987) in Morocco, although the literacy practices he taught were mixed. The following excerpt from an interview with him illustrates his views on pedagogical practices that worked best for Qur'an teaching and learning.

Saida: Where did you learn the Qur'an?

Maalin: I learned the Qur'an in a village about six hours away from Garissa.

Saida: Did you attend only Dugsi?

Maalin: I attended Dugsi, and I was also herding the animals for my family.

When I finished the Qur'an three times, I moved to the city, and I started teaching the Qur'an in neighborhoods at the age of fifteen. I also enrolled in Madrassah (a more institutionalized type of Islamic schooling where the focus is beyond the Qur'an and includes Arabic, Islamic theology, and Law). I was there for four years.

Saida: Are you teaching your students based on the same way you were taught?

Maalin: Yes and no. I learned the Qur'an in a very strict way. I memorized the first time at the age of eight, then ten, then at thirteen. I became a hafidh at a young age because there was no playing around when I was learning the Qur'an. My teachers were all good Qaris (a person who recites the Qur'an with the proper rules of recitation), and they expected perfection. My teachers did not play around and that is the only way you can produce good Qaris. With my students, it is hard to follow what my teachers did, but I try my best because a child can only learn the Qur'an in a setting where the rules are strict. But my students are also doing school, so at times, I have to bend my own rules. Sometimes I give them a lesson to memorize, but it takes them two days to be fluent instead of one day.

Much like Wagner's findings, the two central factors of Maalin's teaching were, in fact, accuracy and aesthetic sound of the children's recitation. Furthermore, his strict authoritarian, teacher-centered classroom was consistent with Wagner's descriptions of the schools in Morocco. Playfulness was not an accommodated part of the classroom culture. The children were aware of expectations and moved smoothly between tasks

with less direction. Even the younger students spent a few hours seated without moving around except when they needed to go to the teacher to recite their lessons.

In summary, the literacies that children engaged in while at Dugsi were complex and required extensive time commitments. Excellence in Qur'anic literacy is bound up, not with comprehending the words, but with accurate and precise pronunciation and melodious and correct recitation of the sacred words. Hence, teachers focus on this literacy while sharing several similarities with school literacy, taking a different focus when it comes to the—for what purpose it serves. The teachers at both Dugsis focused on writing as a gateway for learning how to decode as opposed to teaching children writing for the wider and more universally known purposes of writing, such as expression or exploration of thoughts. Instead, writing in Dugsi served as an avenue or gateway to attaining agentive access to sacred readings. And finally, reading is not necessarily for comprehension, but for accurate recitation and for the beauty of the sound of the Qur'an. These aspects of literacy make it unique for the culture and context of this community and other Muslim communities worldwide. Lastly, literacy and character building are embedded in the context of Islamic Education. Discipline is viewed as consequential for learning the Qur'an as explained by the teachers of Dugsi. Students are expected to adhere to strict rules that are believed to help them through the learning process. The integration of literacy and character building also seeks to inculcate values such as religiosity, discipline, developing reading habits, and responsibility around becoming a lifetime learner of the Qur'an. Without any doubt, the literacy of the Qur'an is complex, and the complexity is even compounded for such a community like the Somali community that does not speak the language of the Qur'an.

School Literacy Practices: Excel Academy

Literacy practices and cultural embeddedness in preschool. In the preschool classroom where I observed Farah (Zamzam's 6 yr. old son), several literacy activities captured my attention. I came to the school at 7 am and found Ms. Anyango was already in the classroom. She greeted me and gave me a run of what she would be teaching her students. When I came in, she was in the middle of cutting cardboard papers and halving several copy papers. She stapled them together, placing the cardboard pieces at the beginning and end of what appeared like four to five pages of halved copy papers while giving me an overview of the day. She kept the pile of what I believed were the materials for a bookmaking project on her desk and waited for her students to arrive. At 8 am, all students arrived, a bell went, and she started her class promptly. She greeted the children with a song that went:

Ms. Anyango: Good morning, good morning
and how do you do?

Students: Good morning, good morning
I'm fine and how are you?

Ms. Anyango asked the students who stood up when the greeting song began to sit down. Then she told them, "Your culture and my culture say that we must show respect when greeting elders, so we have to stand up when greeting teachers, and visitors like Ms. Saida and ask them how they are doing. Thank you all for showing respect." She then started another song and the students joined.

*Today is Tuesday, mother is Baking,
Baking, Baking.*

Baking a cake for me

It appeared that this was a routine where the class sang a short song about the day of the week to learn about the days of the week. While writing the date on the board, she said to the students, “Today is Tuesday, and how do we say it in Kiswahili?” The students screamed, “*It is Juma Nne,*” and she praised them. She called on one girl to tell the class what Tuesday was called in Somali, and the little girl murmured something inaudible. She then asked the whole class, and there were all kinds of words being shouted. “*Talaado*”, went a few. Ms Anyango said, “I think I heard *Talaado*, that is correct.” Ms. Anyango moved on to teaching about the alphabet sounds. She wrote letter A and drew an apple and then had the students pronounce the sound as they said the word. She went on like this until the end of the alphabet. She, at times, used Kiswahili to check for understanding. Once they were done with the alphabet, she praised all the students and asked all students to stand up for a dance. They then moved on to singing a song in Kiswahili that went:

Swahili Song	English Translation
<i>Sikiliza Mama we Mimi nikuambie, Mkono wangu mdogo we, Hauwezi kufanya kazi, Lakini mpenzi mama we, Nitakua mkubwa Nitakusiaidida, na wewe upumzike Nitazifua nguo, Nitapiga pasi, Nitapika chakula Na wewe upumzike.</i>	<i>Listen mother dear, Let me tell you, My hands are too small, I cannot work. But mother dear, I will grow up and help you, and then you can rest. I will wash clothes, iron and cook, so that you can rest.</i>

When they finished, she asked the students, “Do you help mama at home?” the students shouted that they did. She then used this as an opportunity to explain to them the value of parents and reminded them how parents took care of them. She encouraged them to help at home. One of the students yelled, “But our hands are small,” which was what the song talked about, and Ms. Anyango said to him, “Yes, your hands will grow, and they will be like mine one day.” She then continued to ask the students what kinds of help they could offer their mothers and the students uttered the lines from the song; one student said, “nitapika chakula,” and another said “nitafua nguo.” From the questions she asked her students and the responses the students gave, it was clear that listening comprehension, which is a foundational literacy skill, was being worked on through the nursery rhyme. I found it also interesting that Ms. Anyango infused cultural elements in her literacy teaching where she would remind children of virtues considered important in their culture.

Next, the class transitioned to learning about letter sounds again. Students repeated everything after the teacher. She went back to the ABCs on the wall and, while pointing to each, asked the students to say the sound it made. All students seemed fluent with letter sounds, they went, “a, ba, ca, da, ee, fa.” This specific concept seemed like it was taught many times because everybody had familiarity and fluency. They then moved on to spelling. Ms. Anyango told her students that they were going to do words with one syllable and wrote “ca” and asked students to tell her the sound it made, and they said it in chorus, and then she wrote “t” and asked them to say the sound it made, and the students got it right. She gave several examples, and the students’ literacy skills seemed to be emerging (doing well in beginning reading skills). Ms. Anyango moved away from

combining sounds (phonemes) to saying words and asking students to come forth to draw what she was saying. After trying different one-syllable words and calling different students to draw on the blackboard, she called Farah to draw “tap.” Farah drew something that did not resemble a tap, and his classmates laughed at him. Ms. Anyango said, “That is how Farah draws his tap, well done Farah, we don’t laugh at effort. Does Allah allow that behavior?” Ms. Anyango reminds and models for her students what is considered right and wrong in their religion, although she is not a Muslim. Everyone clapped and sang for Farah:

Good boy,

Good boy,

Try again another time,

Wow wow,

Wow Wow,

Shine like a star

Asanta sana kwa kazi nzuri uliofanya (thank you for the good work that you have done).

Ultimately, Ms. Anyango’s literacy classroom was a space for learning literacy and for enacting cultural virtues considered valuable in the children’s contexts (Fieldnotes, 2/8/2022).

Literacy transfer across Dugsi and school: one teacher’s awareness. In Ms. Tina's classroom where Fadumo (Zamzam’s 7-year-old daughter) was a student, the teaching was also focused on the sounds of the alphabet when I arrived. The students read the alphabet in English and in Kiswahili and then moved to a spelling exercise. They

spelled together on the board and then undertook an assignment where they had to write sentences using the words they spelled. Ms. Tina used Kiswahili interchangeably with English to explain different concepts in her English lesson and to have a dialogue with her students. At one point, I was conversing with some students, and she came up to me to tell me, “It is okay for you to use vernacular if you wish to, it is better in the early years.” Ms. Tina had informed me that the students I was engaging with were recent arrivals from the Dadaab refugee camp during one of my previous visits to her classroom when we talked about how she paired students who spoke school languages with those who did not as a strategy to help students with content learning when she was unable to use her own language resources for instruction. When she saw me having a conversation with them, although I was already aware of their language situation and was speaking to them in Somali, Ms. Tina still felt responsible for advocating and making sure that the students had access to what I was asking them and asserted herself in permitting me to use Somali.

When students finished the spelling exercise, she wrote the word Kiswahili on the board to indicate the transition to the Kiswahili lesson and continued to write “vokali A” and started to list words. She started with the word baba, and students carried on telling her mama, dada, kaka, baraka, karata, paka, and she wrote each word she heard shouted by the students. Students were familiar with the concepts and routines and showed ease in following instructions. Ms. Tina called me to look at Fadumo’s work and told me, “Fadumo writes very well. Her spelling is good, but her work is also always neat, and it is easy to read. I know she writes in Madrassa too (another word people use for Dugsi), and Arabic is like calligraphy and harder than English letters. That might have to do with her

good handwriting. She is also doing better with her shyness these days. These are the kinds of things I know Dugsi helps her with.” The bell rang, and it was time for the students in this class to switch to math, and I decided to leave. I told her that I would be coming back after one week and shared with her my visit plans for next week.

(Fieldnotes, 2/9/2022)

“Ngo and P do not exist in Somali”: Ms. Jane’s access to her students’ multilingual repertoires to teach literacy. The literacy practices in Farah and Fadumo's classrooms were similar, but Jamal’s (Qali’s 11-year-old son) 2nd-grade classroom had different practices. The students in this classroom were doing more independent writing. I visited during their Kiswahili lesson, and they were doing something that Ms. Jane called “imla” (dictation). She asked students to get their “imla” books and to write the date, and she walked around taking a peak at whether students were dating their work. I looked at Jamaal, and he was looking for his book in his backpack. Seeing Jamal not ready, Ms. Jane walked to him and inserted her hand in his backpack and within seconds was able to find his book. She turned to the class and told the students that they would be writing words that started with “ngo” and dictated different words. She started with the word “ngozi” and then asked students for more words. One girl said “ng’ombe” and Ms. Jane nodded her head to indicate disapproval, but another girl responded in defense of her peer and said, “but it starts with ngo”. Ms. Jane tried to solicit feedback from the rest of the class and asked, “is that right class?” The students seemed to be stuck on this exercise of naming words that started with “ngo.” She asked them about what they thought about the word “ng’ombe”, but she was not getting a response. Ms. Jane explained to the students that the word did not qualify because it had an apostrophe between the “ng” and “o.”

They started talking and saying, “oh!” She shared more examples and asked them to raise their hands when they were done. After a few examples, Ms. Jane told students they had enough practice with “ngo” and moved on to dictate other words. One of the words she asked students to write was “peremende.” I looked at Jamal’s writing, and I saw that he had written “beremende” instead of “peremende.” Ms. Jane walked around to check the students' work. When she came to Jamal’s desk, whom I was sitting next to, she explained to Jamal that she understood that there was no “p” in Somali and reminded him that in English, there was a difference between “p and b” and practiced with him for a few minutes. She looked at me and shared that it was a common struggle with other students. Ms. Jane was knowledgeable about alphabet sounds that did not exist in her students’ native languages and told me, “You saw how they struggled with *ngo* sounds, it also does not exist in their language.” While talking to me, she appointed one of the students to collect the books and place them on her desk and then switched to asking the students to read a story that she wrote on the board.

Pointing to the board with her stick, she said, “We are now going to read this story and we will do it one by one.” She picked the student sitting on the first row from her right to start reading the story on the blackboard. When the student read one sentence, she said, “next person” and the next girl read. They read one sentence each until the story finished, but some students were still remaining. She asked them to start the story all over again so the remaining students could also get a chance to read. They did this until all 29 students had a chance to read a sentence each. Ms. Jane told me that this type of reading helped her assess her students' progress. She told me, “My day is busy, so this helps identify students that I need to provide extra support to; I pull them to my desk when

others are doing assignments and help them.” Overall, most students could read the story fluently though two students were decoding a bit slower than the others. Ms. Jane later informed me that the two students were new and their families had recently moved from Somalia. This strategy of reading, where students take turns, was a practice that I also observed in Dugsi. The exercise was called *subac/subcis*, and students took turns reading parts of the Qur’an from memory. Like Ms. Jane, Maalin shared that he uses *subcis* to assess students’ fluency and that it provided him a way of knowing how his students were doing regarding retaining previously memorized chapters (Fieldnotes, 2/18/2022).

Teaching literacy and privileging students' home languages: Ms. Rose's use of Somali to teach literacy in English. In Isa's (Qali's 9-year-old son) 1st-grade classroom, Ms. Rose was teaching her students about occupations. She started by asking students what they wanted to become when they grew up. One student said, “doctor.” She responded to him saying, “I want you to use a full sentence.” She modeled for him what to say and the student said to her, “When I grow up, I want to become a doctor.” Other students shouted, “I want to be a carpenter, a teacher, a driver, a painter, a pilot.” Ms Rose said “all those are good occupations.” She then told the class, “If you study well, you can buy your own car and be your own driver, when your house needs paint you can hire a painter, when you go to the hospital you will be treated by a doctor, and when you travel by air you will meet the pilot.” She used the occupations the children shouted to scaffold how the various occupations functioned. She then wrote the word “butcher” on the blackboard and asked students to read it. A few screamed and said the word, and then she asked them, “What does a butcher do?” and the students said, “Sell meat” in a chorus. Ms. Rose asked them, “Now, who can tell me what a butcher is called in Somali?” The

students looked at each other and one girl said, “hiblib man (meat man)” and Ms. Rose and other students laughed. I laughed too. Ms. Rose told the class that the answer was not correct and said, “I am not Somali, and I know this word, a butcher is called ‘hiilible’ in Somali.” I also did not know what a butcher was called in Somali, and I was impressed by how Ms. Rose was familiar with her students’ language. When I later asked her if she spoke Somali, she confirmed that she did not speak Somali but taught herself some vocabulary that she knew she had to cover in the English and Kiswahili curriculum. She spotted two chatty students and told them, “Butcher is hiilible in Somali and not aabo (dad), okay you two” and she immediately got their attention with that comment, and they burst out laughing. Ms. Rose had a very playful and collegial approach to her students. Her class was never serious, she used jokes to get her students’ attention and her students joked with her. She pointed to a boy sitting in the front row and said, “He needs to go to the barber, what do you call a barber in Somali?” A few students responded and said, “Timajare.” Ms. Rose told the class, “I didn't know that one, you guys need to teach me more Somali.” A girl in the back who usually exchanged more dialogue with Ms. Rose said, “Teacher why do you like learning Somali and you are not Somali?” and Ms. Rose responded by saying, “I want to learn so that I can speak to you” and the student said “But I don't know your language,” and the exchange ends with Ms. Rose saying, “You will use English to teach me because you speak English.” Ms. Rose expressing that her interest in learning Somali is important for promoting positive attitudes toward children’s home languages. Ms. Rose, like the other three teachers that I observed at Excel Academy, strategically encouraged children to use their home languages. This was

crucial for instilling in children that their home languages were equally relevant and important as school languages (Fieldnotes, 3/3/2022).

Overall, it was clear through the choices made by the four teachers that the school literacy practices supported the children's multilingual repertoires. Even where the curriculum and government policy required adherence to specific instructional protocols, teachers chose to value students' home languages and cultural knowledge for teaching and learning around instruction. All four teachers implemented elements of translanguaging such as code-switching, code-mixing or meshing, and hybrid languages to engage students' multilingual repertoires as resources for learning content and language (see García, 2009). Most of all, students were reflected in the content and language of the curriculum as evident from the way that teachers pulled from resources in students' tool kits such as Qur'anic literacy and culture. In response to the practices used by teachers that centered learners, I saw a high degree of student agency requiring teachers to relinquish traditional expectations of classroom control. Students engaged freely with each other, with the teacher, and with the learning content.

Family Literacies: The Homes

The home environment plays an important part in children's literacy practice. The homes had varying literacy practices that were connected by the use of digital technologies. In all homes, children and parents had access to TVs, tablets, computers, cell phones, and the internet. The families used these technologies to stay connected with family and friends in local and global places, and they used them for recreational purposes and for literacy use. Abshiro, for example, stayed connected to her friends in the US through WhatsApp (a messaging app that uses the internet to send messages, images,

audio, or video). She does not write Somali, which is her native language, as she has never received instruction in this language, so she recorded voice messages whenever she corresponded with her Somali friends. When communicating with her non-Somali friends back in the US, she wrote text messages in English with the help of her children. In one of our exchanges, she informed me that she asked for a three-month leave of absence from her work in the US as she relocated her family to Kenya. She overstayed her leave by three months, and when I was doing the family visits with her, she contemplated going back to the US to work for six months and leave the children with a relative.

One observation that stuck with me from Abshiro's home was when Abshiro wrote to her old supervisor asking if she could return to work. She wrote: "Hi Joyce, I need come back in June. You take me again? I need a job." While chatting with me, she called Samiya (11yr old daughter) to check what she was about to send. Samiya read the message and told her mom, "I think your boss will laugh and think it is a child that wrote the message, and you are also not being polite." Abshiro jokingly told Samiya, "Allahu Akbar! What is wrong with my message? This is how I would ask her, and she never had problems understanding me." Samiya grabbed the phone and started correcting her mother's writing. The revised text read: "Hi Joyce, I hope all is well. I am coming back in June, and I would like to return to work. Do you have a position open? Please let me know and thank you." She returned the phone to her mother and rushed to her room where she was playing a video game against her brother on her computer. Abshiro read it and, in a loud voice, thanked her daughter and then in a sarcastic manner, reminded her that there was nothing wrong with her text message. She told her, "Many Americans understand that English is not my language so they should be okay when I use broken

English.” This was an interesting interaction. It was clear that while Abshiro had enough literacy skills that helped her navigate through life in the US, she was also somewhat dependent on her children’s literacy skills, especially when it came to corresponding through writing. Yet Abshiro, as the parent, wanted to show her daughter that she was competent and, while needing her help now, was not entirely dependent on her.

Abshiro expected Americans to understand that English was not her first language and, in a way, demanded accommodation from them. She resisted perfecting her written English even though she gave in to using the polished version of her text message. When I asked her why she did not send the text the way she had written, she said, “I just wanted to sound professional, I know my text message was clear.” Samiya’s understanding of the writing conventions to be used for such communication was impressive for a 5th grader. It was apparent she has had some practice. She knew to begin with greetings, to have a polite tone (one that is requesting and not demanding), and to end with a note of appreciation. This was one incident where literacy support was bidirectional in the home and technology mediated the process. (Fieldnotes, 11/28/2022, Abshiro’s house)

In Qali’s home, the use of technology for learning literacy purposes was common. Qali herself used YouTube to learn the Qur’an and she also used it as one of the tools for her home Dugsi. Qali did not send her children to the traditional Dugsi outside the home and instead taught them the basic skills they needed to read the Qur’an at home. In one of my visits with her, while her two sons (Jamal and Ise) were in school, I found her two little ones (Umlkheir, 4 and Zakariya, 2) watching a show. The children were watching an animated show on YouTube that used *Nasheed* or song to teach the Arabic alphabet with illustrations of objects and things that started with the letter sounds. The

letters were shown in their Arabic forms and in their closest English forms, and it went like:

*Alif, Baa, Taa, Thaa, Jeem, Haa, Khaa, Daal, Thaal, Raa, Zayn, Seen, Sheen,
Saad, Daad, Toh, Thoh, Ayn, Ghayn, Faa, Qaaf, Kaaf, Laam, Meem, Noon, Haa,
Waaw, Yaa*

*We're learning the Arabic Alphabet so we can read and learn Al-Qur'an, Al-
Qur'an*

*The language of our beloved Muhammad, the last Prophet sent from Allah, from
Allah*

Alif is for Allah, Baa is for Bismillah,

Taa is for Taqwah and Tha for Thawab

Jeem is for Jannah, Ha is for Hajj,

Kha is for Khalid and Dal for Dawoud

Dhal is for Dhahab, Raa for Ramadan,

Zain is for Zakat and Seen for Salam

Sheen is for Shams and Saad is for Sawm,

Dood is for Dhaif and Toh for Taharah

Thah is for Thilal, Ayn is for Ibadah,

Ghayn is for Ghafur and Faa is for Fatiha

Qaf is for Qur'an, Kaf is for Kitab,

Lam is for Lateef and Meem is for Madinah

Noon is for Nawm, Haa if for Hidayah,

Waaw is for Wadood and Yaa is for Yawmu Deen

We're learning the Arabic Alphabet so we can read and learn Al-Qur'an, Al-

Qur'an

The language of our beloved Muhammad, the last Prophet sent from Allah, from

Allah

The song, which the two children seemed to be enjoying as evidenced by the way they sang with fluency and their embodiment of a state of tranquility, matched the names of objects and places that started with the letter sounds. There was an interesting theme where all words were relevant to Islam. They were words and utterances that many Muslims are familiar with and grow up being socialized with. Words such as Allah (God), Ramadan (9th month of the Islamic calendar), Salah (prayer), Hajj (pilgrimage), Kitab (book), Madinah (sacred city), Yawmu deen (day of judgment), and the many more that appeared in the song were words that a Muslim regardless of their Arabic language fluency would be familiar with due to the fact of their reference throughout the Qur'an, or their use by Islamic teachers/scholar in the processes of imparting religious knowledge. Most importantly, these words have significance for the practice of the Islamic faith. Another interesting feature of the song was how it repeated the fact that they were learning the literacy of the Arabic language so that they could read and learn the Qur'an. This was consistent with what I observed at the Dugsis where both Maalins emphasized writing, and when students attained fluency, they moved them straight to decoding the

Qur'an. In this sense, literacy in faith has one main role of accessing the Qur'an (Fieldnotes, 2/3/2022, Qali's House).

In Zamzam's home, there were also numerous literacy practices that directly and indirectly involved her and her children. Zamzam stayed home with 5-year-old Suhaib, and they performed various religious literacy practices together. For example, whenever she did her daily prayers while I was visiting, she invited Suhaib to join her, and upon finishing the prayers, she sat for a few minutes, and they recited supplications together—Zamzam modeled for Suhaib, and he recited after her. Another instance where they engaged in literacy together was when she spent time memorizing supplications. This was a practice she engaged in the mornings before her children woke up and in the evenings. Zamzam used a pocket-size prayer book that she always carried in her purse. On one of the evenings when I visited, I found her reading from the supplication book, which she called *Husnul Muslim*. She was also listening to the same supplication on YouTube so that she could get the proper pronunciation of the words. Suhaib was seated next to her, and he was following both his mother and the YouTube recitation of the supplications. She told me that she teaches him the supplications because it helps her also learn them, noting "I like learning duas (supplications) with my children because I can memorize with them faster. We help each other achieve a goal." From further discussions, she shared that her children act as accountability partners or a support system for accomplishing her goal of "memorizing the most important supplications". She told me that she saw the practice of learning the supplications together as a win-win because while she gets to better her knowledge in the religion, she also gets to help her children learn the basic that she did not learn as a child.

Overall, the families' literacy practices included activities that involved providing each other a hand in becoming better at specific literacy tasks. The support provided around literacy was bi-directional in that parents and children took active roles. Helping draft a text message, teaching younger children the Arabic alphabet, and learning to memorize supplications together were all elements of supporting each other's goals and family members were connected through literacy to accomplish these goals. The role that family played around supporting each other's literacy was described by Samiya as "we have to lift each other, for us we are used to it because we used to help our mother interpret." Finally, family literacy practices were connected and mediated by technology such as YouTube and the internet.

Summary of Trends in Literacy Practices Across Sites

Across the three sites—dugsi, school, and home --literacy was part of the fabric of the families' practices. Writing and reading for religious, academic, and communication purposes were some of the families' literacy practices. Specifically, the children spent much time across Dugsi and school learning the alphabet and their sounds and reading with proper recitation. For Dugsi, proper recitation was a central feature of the literacy practice because according to Islamic teachings, reading the Qur'an with Tajweed (proper recitation) is considered an important act of worship, and its reward is regarded bountiful. The Prophet Mohamed said, "whoever masters the Qur'an recitation will be with the honorable angels and whoever reads it and finds it difficult, he will have two rewards." The latter part of the saying accommodates those who might have difficulties with recitation due to not speaking Arabic yet are striving to read. In the secular school, the teachers emphasized the pronunciation of words in English and Swahili and provided the

linguistic accommodations children needed to get access to the languages of school. Across all four classrooms, teachers employed translanguaging as a teaching strategy and drew on students' multilingual repertoires to enable a deeper and more connected understanding of content and language. The teachers spent considerable time in Dugsi focusing on pronunciation which I thought was a skill comparable to the recitation skill that was key in Dugsi. The focus on pronunciation was insightful for me as I had become less accustomed to such an emphasis on literacy education over my 10 years of interacting, participating, and observing literacy education in US classrooms, a monolingual system.

While the children were involved in the literacies of Dugsi and school, their parents were equally involved in communication literacies. The families' literacies were connected in ways that supported each other's use and development of the skills. In the case of Abshiro, her children were the support she needed when her communication needed a professional tone, one that she felt less competent in. Her daughter who was good in English was called to help. It is worth noting how family members take and assign each other roles around literacy practices. In Abshiro's home, Samiya was designated by her mother as the one who was good with writing the types of messages she needed help with. In speaking with her older sister, Zeinab, I learned that "Samiya was good at sounding like an adult and serious" and that the rest of them were not trusted by their mother because of using "language for young people like emojis. My mom thinks we are not serious, but we write cool."

The fact that language and writing conventions are categorized to such categories is telling of how the family has its own specific uses and purposes for language and

literacy. A family with a refugee background and a mother who has not participated in western education is often assumed to be lacking in language and literacy in the eyes of western communities. Abshiro was in tune with her children's literacies as she informed me that she and her children communicated through text messages and knew their different writing styles and competence around writing. The fact that her knowledge of her children's writing capabilities comes from their texting skills is worthy of attention. Increasingly, children's literacies span beyond school as digital technologies play important roles in shaping the literate identities of students.

Through digital technologies and the internet, Qali, who never went to school to learn how to read or write, emerged as a competent teacher for her children. She navigated teaching technologies such as YouTube to teach her children the literacy of Islam. Qali was familiar with the types of literacy education needed to develop a foundation in Qur'anic literacy. Knowing that they needed to learn about letters and their sounds and that they needed to be socialized into the language of Islam was remarkable. Finally, the two Maalin's focus on writing to only read the Qur'an did not waver despite my many conversations and reflections on the different facets of literacy practices in a secular school. They stayed focused on what they thought was relevant to help their students gain access to the Qur'an. As I reflected on what Maalin told me: "The Qur'an is not taught like in school because it serves a different purpose. Right now, my job is not to teach tafsir (interpretation/exegesis), we teach that later after they memorize it", I realized how literacy was deeply embedded in the values and practices relevant for the community it is situated in.

Street (1984) talked about how there are different literacies related to different social and cultural contexts rather than one single literacy that is universal. Although students did not do some of the writing practices of the school in Dugsi, their Maalins were confident that their literacy skills were on point and ready to serve them in time for learning other aspects of Islamic education outside of the Qur'an. One Maalin related his own experiences when discussing the place of writing for his students as "yet to come" when he said, "they will use writing. It is yet to come. I wrote the hadith and reflections of the Qur'an when I joined the madrassah. If you start teaching those things now and focus on writing, then it will take longer for children to memorize the Qur'an, which can best be accomplished when they are still young."

CHAPTER 4

PURPOSES OF THE LITERACIES: PARENTS' VIEWS

This chapter presents how the three parents viewed the purposes of their children's 'Secular' and 'Qur'anic' literacy practices. It makes the significance and centrality of both literacy practices visible and shows how families' aspirations and well-being are attached to both literacies. While each literacy practice serves specific purposes, they are valued equally, and families are similarly dedicated to them. Parents shared the following four themes: parents believed that: a) Literacy is a religious obligation, b) School literacy is relevant for social mobility, c) Qur'anic literacy has cognitive benefits, and d) Religious identity formation is critical.

Literacy is a Religious Obligation

By listening to parents, I learned that parents saw literacy as a religious obligation— something they must fulfill to gain the favor of their creator. For instance, in as much as attending Dugsi benefitting the children to become knowledgeable about their Islamic faith, which, in turn, would guide them to be “righteous”, it was equally about parents feeling a strong conviction about fulfilling a religious obligation. Zamzam shared:

I send them to Dugsi so that they can be righteous children and get rewarded in the hereafter. I want them to learn because the Qur'an is the most important book to teach your offspring. It is what will give my children the guidance they need for this life and the hereafter. Raising children who know the *deen* (religion) is one of the duties required of parents in Islam. When I die, I will be asked how much of the religion I taught my children. I will not be asked about worldly knowledge, but it is also very important.

Zamzam, while focused on Dugsi, viewed worldly knowledge, which to her was what the children learned in school, as also “very important.” Her sentiments on both literacies being valuable were affirmed by Abshiro, who detailed how literacy was an act of worship. Abshiro viewed learning and education in the broad sense from an Islamic perspective. She shared that the Qur’an commanded Muslims to seek knowledge from “as far as China,” adding that what she had shared was an authentic saying from the Prophet Mohamed who she believed “must be emulated in every sense.” She told me that China was considered the furthest land during the early times of Islam. She was precise in her reference to “knowledge” when she told me that it had to do with “learning how to read and write in one’s own language as well as other languages that are relevant for one’s worldly needs.” She, however, held strong opinions about prioritizing learning the mother tongue before moving to learn literacy in other languages. Here is what Abshiro shared:

I think it is important that our children learn the ways of our culture first before they learn about other cultures. The story telling that I grew up with is now dead. Why? Because everyone is fascinated with the stories of the other world than their own. In the Qur’an, Allah says I created you in tribes and in different languages so that we may know each other, not to dominate each other or anything like that. But how will you know about your people and your culture if you don’t speak, write, or read in your language? It is important to accomplish this first before you learn another one.

In the above excerpt, Abshiro shared what she saw as a divine message that discussed belonging to a language/culture and used a religious perspective to value literacy in her

mother tongue, which she believed was the foundation for learning other literacies. She stated that “people who read and write in their mother language find it easy to learn in school.” Abshiro valued the storytelling practices she grew up with and was worried that it was under threat. She shared the following:

Language is the container that carries a community’s knowledge, experiences, and culture. For oral people like us, for example, using *maahmaah* (proverbs) is a big part of our culture, but these *maahmaah* are often connected to bigger stories or contexts that you have to relate to in order for the *maahmaah* to resonate with you. If you don’t know your language and the oral stories that are the foundation, then the *maahmaah* will not have relevance for you. So, you miss a big part of the Somali knowledge often carried and hidden in such mediums as proverbs. So, this is why I say language is knowledge.

Explaining further the significance of literacy from a religious perspective, she discussed the value of using storytelling to help with teaching literacy in school as if she was addressing teachers of students coming from oral cultures. She stated,

a good way to continue story telling is by using it in the classroom to improve how children write and read (...) tell students to write about stories they know, and you will be surprised at how much they will write.

Yet again, she went back to connecting the validity of such a pedagogical approach to teaching literacy by referring to the Qur’an. She shared,

Think of the Prophet Mohamed and the *sahabas* (companions of the Prophet Mohamed), they didn’t write, and they did not read at first, but they had a strong oral culture; the Qur’an came in narrations from Jibril (an Islamic angel), it did

not come in a script. The stories were memorized, passed down and written, and they perfected writing.

Like Abshiro, Qali also saw literacy as adding value to a person's Islamic identity. She told me that this was the reason why the first word revealed to Prophet Mohamed from Allah was "Iqra" (read, learn, understand). Qali also shared a quote from Prophet Mohamed in Arabic that translated to "Acquiring knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim" and emphasized how she viewed reading as one of the important means of gaining knowledge and benefitting from the experiences of others. She added, "I did not go to school, but I taught myself to read. I want my children to read and be fluent in the important languages because seeking knowledge is obligatory on us."

She saw the literacies her children engaged in as supportive of each other. She believed that priority should be given to Qur'anic literacy but also acknowledged that Qur'anic literacy without school literacy would limit what the faith expected of her and her children. This is how she framed it:

The children are learning how to read the Qur'an in Arabic, but if we are to achieve the goal of teaching it to others, then they have to learn how to also spread the meaning of the Qur'an in other languages. I want them to be able to also read in English because it will help them.

Finally, Zamzam saw literacy and religion as connected. She believed that it was through literacy that one achieved religiosity. She gave the example of how Islam was inextricably woven into all dimensions of the human experience and that one would not only be able to understand how to be a Muslim through ritual practices only. She shared,

Even if you are like me and you did not go to school, you need to put an effort to learn now that resources are plenty. You cannot say you are old because you don't need to go to school, you can use the internet to learn, but you have to be determined to learn. I say this because, in order to apply Islam as a way of life, you need to be able to explore what the Qur'an and Hadith say about various aspects of life. For me, that is why am striving to learn how to read every day. I am now able to read everything in Somali. And I want my children to be able to engage with books of Islam.

Zamzam's insights on the theme of literacy as a religious obligation helped conclude parents' views of literacy from a religious angle. As parents spoke of their own journeys with literacy, they also related to their aspirations for their children. They saw literacy as the tool for attaining the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and life. Parents believed that Islam entailed all aspects of life and there was a necessity for one to be knowledgeable about expectations for leading an Islamic life. Specifically, they saw secular literacy as the vehicle for having access to scriptures that provide wider opportunities for exploring the history of Islam, the essence of rituals and practices, and contemporary issues shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts.

School Literacy is Important for Social Mobility

Across all three families, parents saw the purpose of sending their children to school as having to do with getting an education and learning skills that would help the children become "resourceful" individuals. They all talked about their children obtaining individual skills that would make them contributing members of their society. They saw

school as the mechanism for better opportunities for their children. For example, Abshiro noted, “I want them to have a better life than me (...) I really have high hopes for them. I want them to be doctors and successful people.” She believed highly in the promise of schooling and its potential for individual and social possibilities. She related it to her personal experiences when speaking about the value of school for her children:

I never want my children to feel the same way I felt when I first came to America. I felt lost, and every door was shut from me. It is because I didn't read and write English. I do not value English as much as I value Arabic, which is the language of the Qur'an, but the reality of our world today demands that you not only speak but read and write in English. If you do not, you are locked out of progress. I worked in bad conditions in the US because I didn't go to school and could not speak English. I don't want that for my children.

Abshiro's experience fueled her dedication to her children's education. She used her experience to draw strength to support her children's school literacy to the extent that she even moved across continents to pursue better learning opportunities for her children. The other parents also shared the same goals. For example, Zamzam stated, “I want them to help me when I retire by giving me financial support.” Like Abshiro, Zamzam was also keen on the value of her children's school literacy based on her own experiences. The following excerpt tells more about Zamzam's experiences with schooling and how she aspired better for her children:

My mother passed away when I was very young. I experienced a tough life as a young child. My aunt took me in when I was seven, and she did not take me to school. Her children went to school, and I stayed in the house cooking and

cleaning for them. I do not hate my aunt, but she treated me differently. I was taken in by my grandmother when I was a teenager, and that is when I went to School and Dugsi. I was too old to learn the basic concepts, so I had to quit school. I stayed in Dugsi for some time, and that is how I learned how to read and write. In my free time, I always wrote. I often wrote to express my sadness because I had no one to understand what I was going through. I remember writing on the ground when other children were in school or whenever I finished my chores. The ground was my book. Then I started sharing my actual writings later. I wrote poems, and I would recite them, then people started inviting me to do the poems in different gatherings. This is how I became an artist. But if I went to school, I would have been better; I would have had a better life. I know how hard it is to learn to read at an older age, so I want my children to learn both Qu'ran and English when they are still young. It is when the mind is fresh. Even though I am good with words, I used to produce better poems when I was younger. That tells you the brain works better for learning when you are young (Interview, 1/19/22).

Zamzam expressed how, if she had gone to school early, she would have been better and had a better life. I had the opportunity of checking back with Zamzam to gather more understanding of what she meant by those sentiments, and she shared that,

If I wrote well, I would have been able to advertise my services in different platforms, I am not confident with my writing, but I still do it through someone else. (...) I would have also done more written poetry and made money through that.

Zamzam also shared that she struggled a lot when she first moved to Kenya as she could not find work and stated, “I was considered illiterate because I did not know read or write English or Swahili. I was like a deaf human being.” Because of those experiences, Zamzam wanted her children to do better than her economically. I was reminded of a popular African proverb that is translated as: “When your parents take care of you to grow teeth, you should also take care of them to lose their teeth.”

A desire for upward social mobility was also paramount to Qali’s purpose for sending her children to school. Wanting to be out of the precarious nature of urban refugee living was something that Qali brought up as we discussed her children’s school literacy. Qali explained that she is driven by a desire for her children “to have a good education that will get them jobs that pay them well to support themselves and their parents”. She said, “I will do any job to get school fees for my children... I have been doing personal shopping jobs, selling food”. Qali told me she chose to transfer her children from the free public school to a private school to provide them with what she viewed as a “better education”. According to Qali, her children were reading below grade level. This was confirmed by both of her children’s teachers, who told me that they were working with the two boys to bring their reading levels to where they needed to be. Jamal’s teacher, Ms. Jane, told me that she worked with Jamal for thirty minutes every lunch hour per his mother’s request to help boost his reading and writing. This collaboration between the teacher and parent points to the desire to get Jamal to reading fluency and improved writing.

While all the mothers were involved in their children’s literacies, Qali seemed even more involved. She helped the children with reading and writing at home to

augment what they learned at school. For example, she had specific programs on TV that her four-year-old daughter, Ummulkheir, was watching. These shows were geared toward literacy education. Ummulkheir was already reading three-letter words even though she had not started school. Qali also had a whiteboard in her living room that she used to teach writing and foundational Arabic to the children. While books were available in the other two houses, there did not seem to have been a dedicated space for reading. Qali had a section of her living room specifically dedicated to reading. In this space, she had books and writing materials that she told me were handed down or gifted to her by friends. She mentioned reaching out to friends with more resources than her to help with books.

Therefore, the parents, through decisions around school choice, were involved in reading, and through retrospections of their own experiences of disrupted education, garnered the strength to support their children's literacy education. Parents' commitments showed through their actions both in direct and indirect ways as I observed and conversed with them daily, and it was truly inspiring. Their dedication and hopes for their children were shaped by a desire to provide the foundation for what could give them all upward mobility.

Qur'anic Literacy has Cognitive Benefits

All three parents believed that Qur'anic literacy benefits their children's school literacy. Abshiro, for example, shared that "the Qur'an is a miracle for the mind". She discussed the Qur'an as having a complex code that, once mastered, made other learning easy for children. This concept came up a few times during my interactions with Abshiro. It came out precisely when she shared the following in response to my question on when she thought was the best time to learn the Qur'an:

The Qur'an is a miracle for the mind. The language of the Qur'an even surprises the native speakers of Arabic. This complexity is what I believe makes a child brilliant. The child who masters the code of reading Qur'an can master any language. This is why there are engineers, for example, in Minnesota who did not have education in their early years in Somalia and yet have become successful. They learned all this knowledge as older people, but they knew the Qur'an.

Qur'an has to be learned when young, and everything else will fall in place.

Another time when the issue of Qur'an learning aiding the learning process came up was when Abshiro talked about her oldest son. She sent her oldest son to Somalia when he was five years old. While explaining to me this part of her story, she talked about the issue of the Qur'an facilitating learning. This excerpt from my field notes elaborates on the issue on a more personal level for Abshiro:

In sharing about the reasons for sending Saiid to Somalia, she told me that it was not intended for anything but for her to have a break as her children were all close to each other in age and that it was hard to manage everything. She then swiftly moved to tell me how she now feels like it was the best decision she made for her son when she agreed to the offer from a relative to take him to Somalia. With a regretful expression, she explained how she wished she had done it for all her children. Elaborating more on it, she told me that she knows Saiid's learning abilities have benefitted from being in a place where he was learning Somali and Arabic alongside each other. She then told me that of all her children, he was the one who performed the best in school and attributed that to the learning of the Qur'an mostly. She let me know that he was not always like that but that the

environment he was in made him cognitively stronger. When I tried to nudge for more on this issue, she said, “he finished the whole Qur’an and was learning the meaning...that takes a lot of dedication, and if you can do that, everything else is very easy.” (Fieldnotes, 3/19/22)

Zamzam also believed that the Qur’an was the foundation of successful learning in school. She told me that she sent her children to Dugsi because “they get to learn more of their religion and also they get to acquire a good memory which can help them in their studies in school.” Zamzam’s youngest son, Suhaib, who is five, showed me what he learned from Dugsi during my visits with him. I got a window into his literacy learning before attending school from the below excerpt from my field notes:

Suhaib is a talkative boy, and his speech is clear. He knew that we were discussing him, so he joined our conversation and said, “mom, I go to school,” and his mom responded by saying, “you go to dugsi son, but next term, I will take you to school.” Suhaib grabbed his backpack and removed a notebook that was worn out. It was missing the cover pages, and a few pages were not attached. He flipped the pages, and I could see the excitement in him as he worked to get to the page that had his latest *ashar* (lesson). He said, “I read the *alif baa taa* and I want to write it for you”. I gave him the notebook that I was using to jot down notes and my blue pen. He wrote the Arabic alphabet as he sounded each one of them accurately. Suhaib knew to hold the pen; he knew to write from the right going to the left, which he will need to switch when he starts school. He said the letters as he wrote, which means he comprehends that print and reading are connected.

(Fieldnotes 1/23/22)

The above excerpt provides an understanding of how young children build on literacy concepts even before attending school. The skills that children in their early childhood years, like Suhaib, acquired from Dugsi, have the potential to assist in building literacy skills across the different literacy contexts that children participate in. In Suhaib's case, I consistently saw his eagerness to go to school. His eagerness also indicated confidence, which resulted from the feeling of already knowing something about school. The skills that he has learned from Dugsi will provide him with a springboard once he starts school.

The idea that Dugsi literacy was important for school literacy came up as I observed an interaction between Suhaib and his older brother. Suhaib was attending Dugsi only but was finding it easy to pick up what his siblings were learning in school:

I asked him if he wrote at dugsi, and Farah said, “no, he does not because he is a baby”. Suhaib was not happy to hear the word “baby” used on him, and he said, “no, I am a big boy because I go to school and Dugsi”. I wanted to indulge him in the imagination of attending school, so I asked him what he learned in school, and sure enough, he knew something about what is learned in school. He told me he learned “a, b, c, d, f, h ... 1,2,3,4,5,6”. I asked what his teacher's name was, and he didn't respond, but I continued to ask him who taught him the ABCs, and he pointed to his sister. I said to him, “your teacher's name is Fadumo?” and Suhaib nodded in agreement. He went on to recite letter sounds, and it sounded like “a, ba, ka, da, ee, fa,” and when I asked what that was, Zamzam joined our conversation stating, “I hear the ABCs are taught in a different way these days” and I told her I wasn't aware. (Fieldnotes 1/23/22)

Zamzam's view on Dugsi being essential for other learning was connected to what I observed with Suhaib and in alignment with the concept of school readiness as described by the National Educational Goals Panel (McKernan, 1994), which was also echoed in UNICEF Annual Report (2012). These reports highlighted the five domains of school readiness as follows: a) Language and literacy development, b) Cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), c) Approaches toward learning, d) Physical well-being and motor development, e) Social and emotional development. Suhaib showed language and literacy development as well as a positive approach toward learning.

Like the other two mothers, Qali also saw a connection between Qur'an and success in school. She viewed the Qur'an as having "miraculous" potential to aid children's learning in other contexts. Qali told me that she knew this to be true because "if a person learns the Qur'an and does not go to school, they can adapt to any country even if they do not know the language". She used the example of her husband, who she believed "was able to read and write in Oromo, Amharic, Somali, Arabic, Swahili, and English because he was a good student of the Qur'an". She also told me that she taught herself the Qur'an, and now "learning Kiswahili and English is looking easier, because I think of the letters in Arabic and then I write because writing is the same." What Qali was implying is the fact that learning one literacy provides a foundation for learning literacy in another language and literacy. When she spoke specifically of how this was applicable to her children, she said:

I believe that if my children learn to read and write the word of Allah, then everything will be easy for them. The kalam (word) of Allah is not something of a

joke. The Qur'an opens both the hearts and minds of people. The Qur'an opens the brains of children first. You will see children coming from Somalia, and they have never been to school, but the first year they become number one (...) they lead their class, then you ask why, it is because they know the Qur'an. The Qur'an has a way to make children intelligent.

Qali believed that by learning the Qur'an, the children would be rewarded by Allah with ease of learning as learning the Qur'an and reciting it is considered an act of worship, and every act of worship is rewarded. By and large, she added to the assertions that the other two parents said about the Qur'anic schooling providing a foundation for learning other literacies and gave the example of children who had been schooled in the Qur'anic tradition being able to succeed in the secular context.

In summary, while the purpose of the study was not to find out whether or not Qur'anic literacy had cognitive effects on children, it became an important issue of discussion as the study progressed. Parents opined quite a bit on it and were positive that it helped their children do well in their other learning. Research is not conclusive on this belief by the three parents and by and larger, the wider Somali community. However, studies done in the past (see, for example, Scribner & Cole, 1981; Wagner & Spratt, 1987) suggest that specific literacies might influence different cognitive skills. It remains unclear whether what the parents were referring to had to do with the literacies per se or the pedagogy used in Qur'anic school that led to the believed cognitive effects. All in all, the parents were firm on this belief and saw it as a reason why their children needed to be engaged in learning the Qur'an.

Religious Identity is Crucial

All three parents were keen on their children having an Islamic identity. They wanted their children to practice the teachings of Islam in every aspect of their lives. They all opined that it was through being immersed in the literacies of Islam that their children formed an Islamic identity. In one of my visits with Zamzam, she shared that she sent her children to Dugsi everyday because she believed that it guided them from outside influence and helped them form an Islamic identity. As a mother raising her children alone, she relied on Dugsi to help teach her children about the ways of Islam. She expressed the following when talking about the value of Dugsi and the literacies found within it:

You know they could be taking a nap on Saturdays and Sundays because they are still young. They are so busy during the week (...) I chose to take them to Dugsi instead because what they gain from Dugsi is far more beneficial than nap. It helps them to have a strong Islamic identity and knowledge. On the weekends is when they get to learn how to write and read the names of Allah. They read *duas* (supplications), and they get to pray at 4 o'clock in jama'a (congregation) and afterward, they do *subac* (Qur'an recitation where readers take turns after each verse)

From the above excerpt, Zamzam shared how Dugsi played a role in children's Islamic identity formation. She spoke of this identity as supported or encouraged by the literacy practices that the children engage in while at Dugsi. Speaking of writing and reading the names of Allah, she further elaborated on how such literacy practices were important for identity formation when she said, "We as Muslims are supposed to see ourselves in the

names that Allah gave to himself, for example, Al Shakur means Allah is thankful. The children learn that Allah is thank and so should we be.”

Abshiro, who was of the same opinion as Zamzam, shared that Dugsi had helped her children forge an Islamic identity. I learned from her that her children were drawing inspiration from various people at the Masjid and their Dugsi. When I interviewed her children, Ayan shared with me that she wanted to be a Dugsi teacher “because my teacher made learning about religion fun.” In another instance, Abshiro told me that Ali was thinking of only going to Dugsi and not school because he was drawn to the character of the Imam. I became aware that Ali was a neurodiverse child and had often gotten misunderstood by many educators in his educational journey in the US. He also did not do well in the two schools that Abshiro enrolled him in upon arriving in Kenya. However, Ali found an accommodating environment in his Dugsi that was willing to provide the flexibility he needed with his learning. He was allowed to stay and learn for as long as he wanted. Abshiro said that it was because:

Islam is a religion that emphasizes mercy and compassion, and Ali has found an understanding people. This has made him love Islam. You know, unlike the other children, I never have to remind Ali about prayers... he has figured out what to do to be good Muslim.

Qali also saw her children’s participation in Qur’anic literacy as important for their character and identity as Muslims. She shared the following:

I want my children to learn from the Qur’an (...). I want them to know how a Muslim is supposed to live and carry himself in this world. If I teach them the Qur’an, they will have knowledge and good habits. Islam teaches us to be able to

live together in families and communities and to care for our neighbors. It is what will make them upright individuals who will benefit their society.

The learning of virtues that we use every day to make decisions is what Qali was hoping her children would learn from the Qur'an. Such moral virtues as kindness, compassion, and justice are what she believed formed a Muslim person's identity, and she believed that the Qur'an was instrumental in instilling those virtues in her children.

Summary

In this study, parents were allowed to present their views on the purposes of their children's Qur'anic and Secular literacies. A fundamental belief held by all the participants was the notion that literacy was a religious obligation. According to authentic Islamic traditions, *hadiths*, and as presented in the previous chapter, the first verse of the Qur'an that was revealed to Prophet Mohamed was concerned with literacy, and it states:

Read in the name of your Lord, who created- created man from a clot.

Read! And your Lord is most bountiful. He who taught the use of the pen, taught Man, that which he knew not (Qur'an 96:1).

When the angel *Jibril* (Gabriel) appeared before Prophet Mohamed while on mount Hira' in the year 610, he said to him, Iqra! meaning read/recite in Arabic, and Prophet Muhammad replied, ma anna bi qari, or "I cannot read." The angel asked again two more times before completing the verse. The first command given to Prophet Mohamed was to read, and the elevation of the use of the "pen," issues of language and literacy clearly have an important place and value within the Islamic faith. It is for that reason that all the parents were of the opinion that both of their children's literacies mattered, and they viewed it as an obligatory act of worship. This notion of literacy being an obligation is

also supported by another tradition, *hadith*, where Prophet Mohamed told his followers that “Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.”

The parents’ opinions about Qur’anic literacy were vibrant and strong. The strength of their views on what they perceived as the purpose of Qur’anic literacy revealed the centrality of this literacy in their lives. Beyond the question asked, the kind of capital Qur’anic literacy represents for the children is fundamental regardless of its apparent marginalization in mainstream schooling. Across the three families, there was a fundamental belief that Qur’anic literacy had cognitive effects and relevance for school learning. All families strongly opined about Qur’anic literacy instilling a sense of identity and providing children with guidance and a purpose-filled life, all of which are important for school learning. Research shows a relationship between a strong, positive sense of identity and academic achievement among youth.

Parents have also expressed their views about the importance of secular literacy mainly to provide the children with a pathway to a better life in terms of their socio-economic status. From this, we learn that the two literacies complement each other, and the families in this study see the literacies as not mutually exclusive of each other but as complementary and dependent on each other. It is upon those individuals charged with teaching children from multiliterate backgrounds to nurture and support children’s out-of-school literacies, such as religious literacies, due to their overlapping nature and the strong values that the parents attribute to such literacies.

CHAPTER 5

WAYS IN WHICH CHILDREN SEE THEIR LITERACIES

This chapter presents how the children spoke of their ‘secular’ and ‘Qur’anic’ literacies. They presented their ideas about how they saw their literacies contribute to the different facets of their lives and the kinds of efforts involved with becoming literate. In this chapter, I discuss the themes that emerged from analyzing interview and observation data. I begin by describing how children spoke about the purposes of their literacies, then discuss how they saw the two literacies relate to each other, and end with what they believed their teachers knew about their two learning contexts. Finally, I conclude by synthesizing themes across the three topics that relate to the chapter.

The Purposes of Literacies

Qur’anic literacy is for Islamic identity. The children, like their parents, valued reading and memorizing the Qur’an and believed it served a vital societal function. They saw their knowledge of the Qur’an as part of their Islamic identity. Isa (Qali’s 9-year-old son) stated, “I learn the Qur’an to be a good Muslim; I never saw a Muslim who does not know Qur’an,” as an example of how he considered knowing the Qur’an as a component of what made him a Muslim. “If I am unable to read the Qur’an, how would I pray?” Isa told me that to be a Muslim, one needed to carry out several obligatory rituals, such as the five daily prayers, where reading from the Qur’an was required. Without Qur’anic literacy, one cannot participate in these basic acts of worship. In another related instance, Suhaib (Zamzam’s 5-year-old son) shared with me his reasoning for why he was learning to memorize the Qur’an. He stated that his Maalin (Qur’an teacher) placed a condition for his participation in the evening group prayers at his Dugsi and noted:

My Maalin said I must read sura (chapter) Fatiha, Nas, Falaq, and Ikhlas everyday so that I can pray with him. He said I can learn the alif baa taa (Arabic alphabets), but I must also read these suras without help so that I can pray with them. I told my Maalin I want to pray every day.

Suhaib assimilates Islamic customs under the influence of his Dugsi and Maalin, who operate as facilitators of religious socialization. Qur'anic reading opens the door to involvement in Islamic rites such as the daily prayers that Suhaib mentioned in the above excerpt. Suhaib listed a few of the Qur'an's smallest chapters, which are frequently recited throughout the five daily prayers. Suhaib was being taught the Arabic alphabet by the Maalin at the time of my visit to the Dugsi, besides being taught how to memorize these small chapters.

Saiid (Abshiro's 11-year-old son) reflected that learning and reading the Qur'an helped him stay guided on the right path. According to him, the Qur'an was revealed to lead Muslims as he shared the following argument, "the Qur'an was given to mankind to guard against heading in the wrong route." Saiid also mentioned that as his Arabic improved, he came to appreciate the Qur'an as a source of wisdom and wished for all Muslims to study Arabic. He stated the following:

I am happy that I understand the Qur'an because I reflect on it more now because I got better. I know many people don't understand Arabic, but it is important that people understand the meaning. Somehow it gets easy to understand if you love the Qur'an. If you can learn the translation in Somali and English, it is okay, but for me, it is better to understand it in Arabic, and I hope everyone can learn Arabic for the sake of getting closer to the Qur'an.

As the oldest child, Saiid had far more mature beliefs and provided detailed explanations of his position on the goals of Qur’anic literacy. He recognized that the meaning of the Qur’an had to be pondered and expressed how “the wonder of the Qur’an rested in the way it was written in Arabic; no translation could display the beauty of speech the way it was revealed in its original form.” He clarified that studying the meaning of the Qur’an in Somali or English was not less when he said that “some meaning is lost in the translation to the two languages.”

Additionally, Saiid mentioned that his Dugsi had taught him about Islamic value-based character education, which he said was based on reading and meditating on the Qur’an and the Sira (the biography of Prophet Mohammed). The following conversation demonstrates how he saw Dugsi education as promoting character development.

Saida: What is the purpose of what you learn in Dugsi?

Saiid: In Dugsi, we are taught rules and regulations. I think these are important.

Saida: What kind of rules to be specific?

Saiid: For example, we are taught to apologize when we wrong others.

Saida: How is that taught?

Saiid: From lessons in the Qur’an. There is teaching for everything in there, and Islam helps you be a good person. You need to read and reflect on the Qur’an. All the rules that are good for being a good person, my Maalin teaches us. For example, we are taught to be kind to our parents and to be good to our neighbors from the Qur’an.

Saida: What else do you learn?

Saiid: We have a separate teacher from the Qur'an who teaches us Sira studies.

When reading the Sira you read about how the Prophet approached life so that you can follow his footsteps.

One of Saiid's perspectives on using his Dugsi literacy was evident in the abovementioned conversation. Saiid shared that with the aid of his Maalin, he got to read and reflect on Islamic virtues and gave examples such as apologizing to those wronged, obeying parents, being kind to neighbors as some of the values that he learned from the Qur'an. Samiya (Abshiro's 11-year-old daughter) added to what Saiid shared regarding Dugsi offering them moral instruction. I was able to get a window into the types of teachings geared towards character education that the children got from their Dugsi while doing home visits with Abshiro. My fieldnotes below reveal further detail:

On this day, I visited in the afternoon because I wanted to observe the private tutoring session at home, but the teacher did not show up. This would have been my second session at their tutoring. I chatted with Abshiro while the children were having an afternoon snack and as we were waiting for the tutor. About 30 minutes later, she called to inform Abshiro that she was held up and would not make it for the session. The children were happy that there was no tutoring as it meant TV time. Ayaan screamed, "I call watching my show first." Samiya was the only one with homework. She went to sit at the table, and she was talking loudly, asking for Saiid's help on an assignment that she was given from Dugsi. She said, "Maalin told me to write about the story of Prophet Yusuf, and I know it, but it's long. Can you help me?" Saiid said, "I can tell you the story, but I cannot write for you" and that did not please Samiya. Ali joined the conversation

and said to Samiya, “why don't you just google it?” Samiya’s desperation was getting intense, and she responded to Ali by saying, “that is the dumbest thing dude.” I wanted to come to Samiya’s rescue, but when I joined her at the table, she had changed her mind and did not want to write the story anymore. She resolved to give an oral narration to her class and said, “it is allowed.” I learned from Samiya that every week they learn about one prophetic story. She shared that, “the Maalin has a theme every week, and this week’s theme was about jealousy. It’s like in my language arts in the US, we had units, and we had units about animals, transportation, it’s like that.” Samiya shared that she was very good with this story because her mom had them watch a YouTube video when they were younger about Prophet Yusuf’s story, and she knew about how his siblings had thrown him into a well out of jealousy. Samiya told me that she was going to give a brief story and then share the moral of the story with the class, which she framed it as being “Forgive and show mercy to those who offend you because even after what his brothers put him through, Prophet Yusuf forgave them. (...) that is how you become honorable in front of Allah.” (Field notes, 2/14/2022)

The assignment demonstrates how Qur’anic literacy’s primary goal is to develop a religious value-based character in children, as well as how character education is integrated into its curriculum. Another element that I noted in the fieldnotes is how Samiya connected her two learning contexts when she matched the story themes at Dugsi to those of language arts class in her previous US school. Another element that was interesting to note was the role that family literacy practices played in fostering children's

Qur'anic literacy. In this case, Samiya was familiar with Dugsi content as her mother had previously educated her using digital literacy resources that were available at home.

School literacy helps with getting a job. Children talked about getting jobs as one reason they were engaged in school literacy. While some of the children were unsure of what their proficiency in school reading would qualify them for, they were clear that they needed to master it to obtain at least a decent job. They believed that literacy in English and knowledge of math were necessary to be competitive in the labor market. Jamal (Qali's 11-year-old son) expressed that he enjoyed everything he learned in school, but was especially interested in math and writing since he regarded them as the keys to his desired job. When I probed him a little further, he shared, "I hope to find a great job. I need to get an A in math if I want to become a pilot." He discussed how he also needed "to write properly" to get his dream job. He also spoke about how his younger brother, Isa, needed to do well in art and math to become an architect.

I understood from Jamal that writing proficiency was crucial to passing the KCPE and KCSE—national exams administered at the conclusion of elementary and secondary school. Jamal excelled at math, as he shared, and was a tad bit not confident with his writing. While not overly worried about his writing, his teacher remarked that it could be improved and was keen to support him. She gave me the example of a time when he struggled to distinguish between the letters 'p' and 'b' in both his English and Kiswahili writing. The letter 'p' does not exist in Somali, so Jamal wrote 'beremende' rather than 'peremende' while doing a dictation test in Swahili. Jamal was aware of this, which is why he mentioned the need to work hard on writing. He understood that even though math and the sciences, in general, would qualify him to be admitted into an aviation

program, he knew it would be difficult to go to high school and, subsequently, university if his writing was weak because his national exams involved “a lot of writing.”

Others who had specific professional objectives were also aware of the kinds of academic literacy abilities required for such occupations. For instance, Zeinab (Abshiro’s 12-year-old daughter) was certain that she wanted to teach English and knew exactly what steps she needed to take and what school subjects to prioritize. In this conversation, she demonstrated her thought process:

Saida: What about what you learn in school?

Zeinab: It will help me in the future, like getting good grades, a good job. I want to be an English teacher, and I must get good grades in English.

Saida: How will what you learn in school help you become a teacher?

Zeinab: Because I love literature and English, it's my best subject. I believe everything is about reading, so I want every child to be a good reader.

Zeinab mentioned how much she enjoyed reading and wished to work as an English teacher. She knew that to become an English teacher, she needed to do well in the English subject. She believed that reading was an important skill to have, and she wanted children to be able to read well. In subsequent discussions, she shared her vision of becoming an English teacher and having a classroom “packed with many books” and “making sure that every child can take the books home.” She acknowledged that her educational experiences in Kenya and the US had influenced her choice to become a teacher while reflecting on the differences between schooling in Kenya and the US. She said, “My second-grade teacher was great; she gave me books to take home, but my current teacher does not. We have few books in our classroom.” From these transnational

experiences, it makes sense that Zeinab chose a profession in teaching and making a difference by making reading accessible to children.

School literacy as the gateway to getting a job was a consistent theme across all three families. This was particularly, but not exclusively, connected to economic arguments, i.e., “to get a high-paying job.” Through this, children also talked about getting skills that would make them do better economically. For example, Fadumo (Zamzam’s eight-year-old daughter) talked about learning to read and write to “get a good job to help my mother.” When I probed further as to how school literacy would get her the “good job,” Fadumo was sure that reading, writing, and speaking English was a requirement for a job. Fadumo’s view was echoed by Farah (her younger brother), who said, “even if you want to be a taxi driver, you have to speak English.” Responses from these two siblings also brought attention to the issue of language hegemony, where English, while not the language used by the majority, remains the advantaged language and the medium of instruction in the Kenyan educational system.

Finally, outside of the two themes mentioned above for which children appropriated the purposes of their literacies, they also discussed acquiring knowledge and skills for various facets of life from their two literacy contexts. Saiid, for instance, mentioned knowing about international leaders and enjoyed reading autobiographies. He admitted that he had read a few autobiographies in school, and he read about international leaders in history classes since he was studying it. He further demonstrated his political literacy when he discussed his preferred candidate for the impending Kenyan elections and said, “I read the newspaper at school when it is on the teacher's desk.” Jamal talked about using his reading skills for hobbies. He loved soccer and followed famous players

on the internet. He shared how he used his mother's phone to read, yet his mother thought he was gaming. He said,

I use my reading skills to update myself on soccer, and my mom complains I finish her internet units for playing games, but she does not know am reading about soccer. If I don't become a pilot am going to become a soccer player.

Overall, while this final theme was not widely elaborated on by all children, it came up in the data and supported the other two themes on the purposes of the two literacies.

Relationship between Qur'anic and school literacy practices in the eyes of the children

Differences

The ultimate end goals of literacies are different. The children thought of the goals and principles of their two literacies as distinct. When asked about their objectives for the two literacies, the differences stood out clearly. For Dugsi, the children across the three families shared similar aspirations that were connected to the idea of learning things that would help them to perform Islamic rituals and live a life that would help them achieve good rewards and gain paradise in the afterlife. The Children discussed how the Qur'an was like the curriculum to educate them for everlasting existence and were conscious about the notion of a temporal vs. an eternal world. Their perspectives on school literacy focused on achieving success in the *dunya* (temporal world). Saiid said, "We have to work hard in the *dunya* (temporal life), but we should work more for the *akhira* (afterlife)." Learning for the *akhira* vs. the *dunya* came out clearly when I asked Abshiro's children about their understanding of the purposes of their two literacies:

Saida: How do you compare what you learn in Dugsi to what you learn in school?

Ali: I learn the Qur'an in Dugsi, and I learn many subjects in school. The Qur'an will help me be good, respect my parents, pray, and I can go to paradise.

Saïid: What I learn in school is for the dunya (temporal world). What I learn in school will help me get a good job in the future.

Zeinab: I learn the Qur'an in Dugsi so I can have a good akhira. In school, I learn English, Math, and science. I need them to do well and to get a good job.

Sumaya: I agree with them. You also need to be literate to teach others the Qur'an. It is important stuff. What I learn in school will help me become a teacher.

Ayan: Because I want to be a Dugsi teacher, I must read the Qur'an well; also in school, I want to be a teacher, so I must be good in Math.

The children were aware that it was a balancing effort since both literacies were important to them and their parents and that they both fulfilled important functions. From the children's responses, the reasons for learning the Qur'an have to do with learning morals and virtues that will support their akhira, and learning in school had to do with facilitating success in the temporal world, i.e., getting good jobs.

Fact-learning vs. memorizing. The children also discussed the various learning objectives and expectations for the two literacies. They discussed how expectations and outcomes for literacy differed across the two contexts. The objective for Dugsi, according to them, was to memorize religious texts, but the aim for schools was to "understand" and "retain facts." When Jamal replied, "You are remembering for the Maalin or for your

parents today, but it is for Allah,” he referred that all Muslims were supposed to memorize the Qur’an. All children discussed “reading to comprehend” in school. Saiid, for example, told me that he found school easier than Dugsi because he did not have to memorize anything when he said, “School is easy because you do not have to memorize anything; it is a relief for someone like me.” Although he spoke of relief, he also told me that there are many facts to be retained and Saiid believed his Dugsi memorization skills helped to “keep many ideas and information in the head.” There is a fine line between memorization in Dugsi and the “many ideas” children must keep in their minds from school. Except for the Abshiro’s children, the other two families are not fluent in English, and from my classroom observations, although the teachers employed multilingual teaching practices and scaffolded a lot of learning for the children in the language of their catchment area as per the requirement of the Kenya Ministry of Education’s Early childhood education policy, a lot of learning and teaching that I observed mirrored the practices of Dugsi where students did the verbatim repetition of texts.

Qur’anic literacy is more challenging than school literacy. To varying degrees, all children thought that learning the Qur’an was more challenging than their literacy lessons in school. Saiid, who held the firmest views on the matter, believed that he was a more knowledgeable student of the Qur’an than his siblings regarding the material he was studying at Dugsi. He shared how “keeping the Qur’an in your brain is not simple; it needs a lot of effort.” Additionally, he thought Dugsi was becoming more difficult for him and hoped his school’s teachers would ease up a bit so he could continue to maintain the necessary harmony between the two literacies. It is also important to note that he wanted his school instructors, not his Dugsi teachers, to modify his assignments. He was

certain that the school should be the source of the load adjustment, not Dugsi. When I inquired more into this, it became evident that Saiid was aware that it was impossible to have Dugsi reduce his reading load. For him, Dugsi is predestined in this way, but he still held out hope that his teachers at school might be able to intervene. Saiid believed that the Qur'an had divine authority and that its instruction method was unquestionable. This exchange revealed Saiid's thoughts on the issue:

Saida: Any other reason why you think Dugsi is harder?

Saiid: The Maalin gives me a lot of work, and in school, I have a lot of homework. You know it is not that bad, but some days I just want to watch Netflix and play Fortnite only. I don't want to think about Dugsi and school sometimes.

Saida: What about Maalin? Can he give you less readings?

Saiid: No. This is how it is now in Dugsi. It cannot be changed.

Saida: Why do you think so?

Saiid: We cannot negotiate about what we learn in Dugsi because it is a religious obligation.

Saida: Can you negotiate what you learn in school?

Saiid: Not exactly, but you know that knowledge is flexible because it is not for Allah.

Saiid was sharing his feelings of overwhelm due to his heavy homework load from both his learning contexts. While he stated it was not totally unbearable, he wished he had time to do other activities. I knew from my interactions with him that he was an avid gamer. However, he shared to have not had time to enjoy games because of homework.

While he hoped for a lighter load of homework, he believed that the adjustment needed to come from school. It was interesting how Saiid is socialized to not question the ways of the religion, as seen from his comment on not negotiating around Dugsi learning due to it being a religious practice.

Similarities

Dugsi and school share common literacy practices: The students also mentioned that both literacies needed them to read and write. Reading was a required practice in both learning contexts, albeit for different purposes. Except for the younger children learning to decode, all reading at the Zamzam Children's Dugsi was done through memorization. Although Farah and Suhaib were still learning to read and write, Fadumo was a member of the memorization group and could read. This conversation provides more detail:

Saida: What are the similarities between Dugsi and school?

Fadumo: We read in both.

Saida: What else?

Fadumo: I am in the hifdh (Qur'an memorization group), and in school, I read notes

Suhaib: (singing) I also read.

Farah: We have teachers in both, and we read and write in School and Dugsi

Saida: What do you write?

Suhaib: I write abcs.

Farah: He is lying; he doesn't read or write anything because he is not going to school, and Dugsi he is only doing alif baa taa [Arabic alphabet].

Saida: What about you?

Farah: I read and write real things, in school, I write after teacher, and at Dugsi, I am writing dammah [diacritic representing a short /u/ in Arabic].

Common literacy practices in both children's learning environments came up also with the Qali children who do their Dugsi at home. My field notes from the second evening I visited Qali's home Dugsi reveal a little more on this theme. The children were engaged in reading and writing and viewed the practice of writing as familiar to them:

This is my second day observing Qali teaching her children the Qur'an. She is mostly focused on teaching them to decode. The green book she is using is familiar to me, but she is also using some workbooks that she mentioned buying from the maktab or bookstore on 3rd street. I was curious as to whether Qali's children were all in the beginner reading stage of the Qur'an, but she shared that Jamal could recite some chapters from the last juzu but was still struggling with decoding. She told me even though it was covid that made them opt for home Dugsi, she and her husband had been dissatisfied with the way the Maalin was not keen on teaching her children how to read the Qur'an properly. Qali shared that "Reciting only from memory is not good enough, I want my children to read any part of the Qur'an." As I sought clarification, she shared that she believed that children needed to decode properly first, then read and memorize. She was trying to explain that the Maalin who was teaching them was not following the common trajectory for getting children to become Qur'anic literate. I also spoke with Isa, who was writing on one of the workbooks, and he told me, "This workbook is like my handwriting workbook at school." Jamal was doing his reading using his

electronic Qur'an. This was not a tablet per se but a gadget that looked like an actual Qur'an, except that the pages were plastic as opposed to paper. I asked Jamal if he could read without the pen. The pen has audio and tells him what the word he is pointing to is. Jamal told me he could not read that well and continued to share that he would have gotten away with the way he reads if it were school, but because in the Qur'an, he must be precise, his mother considered him not a good reader, and works a lot more with him. (Field notes, 3/3/22)

In the above excerpt, the theme of reading in Qur'anic literacy also emerged. Following rules for correct pronunciation of the letters and applying melody meant proficiency in reading. Also, memorization had to be achieved after learning to decode, and what Qali and her son were experiencing had to do with not achieving proficiency in decoding but being able to recite.

Abshiro's children also discussed reading and writing as a shared practice across their two schools. Ali, for instance, presented an intriguing perspective on the parallels between Dugsi and school. He saw an opportunity to discuss how difficult it was to complete the two literacies in three different languages while responding appropriately to the question. As he shared, Ali suggested that students be excused from learning Swahili and start with Dugsi as their first literacy.

Saida: What are the similarities between Dugsi and school?

Ali: You write AND read in both. In Dugsi, you do it in Arabic and in school, in English and here in Swahili, but I am not doing Swahili.

Saida: Why are you not doing Swahili?

Ali: I told my mom that it was hard, and because I am home school now, my mom told the tutor I leave Swahili.

Saida: What else is similar between Dugsi and school?

Ali: It is hard to read and write in Arabic and English at the same time. You did that?

Saida: Yes, I did. Do you have any ideas for how to make it easier for children?

Ali: I think they should do Dugsi only first.

Ali, while sharing how reading and writing were shared in both of his literacy contexts, discussed the challenges they posed for children like him who had to navigate literacy learning in different languages. He suggested having children learn one literacy at a time due to the language differences, and he suggested they start with Dugsi.

Both literacies support each other. Finally, the children discussed how both of their literacies supported the skills they were working towards learning. Saiid offered his opinion on this by citing that Dugsi assisted in developing the reading skills required in school, and he considered the memorization skills learned at Dugsi to be equally relevant for maintaining facts learned in school. Except for the language difference, he believed that the literacy practices at school are comparable to those in Dugsi. Saiid talked avidly and confidently about this theme, as shown in this exchange:

Saida: Do you think someone who has gone through Dugsi finds school to be easy?

Saiid: Yes, he will find it easy.

Saida: Why do you think so?

Saiid: Because if you go to Dugsi, you are already good at reading. You have been doing so much reading;so, you can read better in school. Also, you practice memorizing, so in school, you find keeping facts in your head easier. In school, you must keep many ideas and information in your head. If you keep a sura like Baqarah (longest chapter in the Qur'an) in your head...you can keep all you learn in school in your head.

Saida: What about the other way round, if someone goes to school, will they find Dugsi to be easy?

Saiid: Yes.

Saida: Tell me more about it.

Saiid: Because they are the same, you are reading something and keeping facts in your head and then sitting for a test instead of reciting from memory. It is just the same thing but in different languages. So, you can be good at both, and both make you smarter. It is just that some people put more effort in one than the other, so they tend to excel in one more than the other.

He connected literacy practices and the notion that both call for topic mastery before administering a competency test. He explained how the two literacies differed in examining knowledge: one through accurate recitation and the other through written examination. He did this by creatively framing how checking for competence was the dividing point between the two literacies. Both literacies, in his opinion, had the potential to make one “smarter,” and he suggested that one might have performed better in one than the other depending on the amount of focus they placed on that specific literacy.

His sister, Zeinab, was also of a similar opinion. She shared that she did not spend as much time studying for school because she “is really good at remembering.” When I probed for further clarification, she told me it was because “my brain is trained to retain the Qur’an.” Although a little tangential and more relevant for language transfer than literacy transfer, she also shared how she had occasionally used her Arabic knowledge from Dugsi to “survive in Swahili lessons.” She stated, “Half of the time I am ZONED out, but surprisingly I do well in the quizzes because I think of those words in Arabic because I found some are similar.” Swahili is a lingua-franca used by several East Africans. It has great influence from Arabic and has many loanwords. It makes sense that Zeinab found ways to leverage her funds of knowledge to position herself as capable in Swahili even though she was new to learning Swahili. When it came to the other way around— on how school skills were relevant for her Dugsi success, she shared the following:

Saida: Is there anything you learn from school that helps you in Dugsi?

Zeinab: I never used to write in my Dugsi in the US, so I was embarrassed here because the little children wrote better than me.

Saida: Did you learn how to write?

Zeinab: We used to practice cursive writing in the US at school; I think that helped me a little here, but I am still working on writing Arabic.

Saida: So, did writing in school help you in Dugsi?

Zeinab: Yes.

These comments show that Saiid and Zeinab believed that each literacy offered helpful cognitive support for mastering the other. Although it was not clearly defined for the

other children, they all, in varying degrees, expressed ideas that echoed what Saiid and Zeinab had said before.

Whether/What School Teachers Know about Qur’anic School

Most of the teachers at Abshiro's children's Islamic school are Muslims. At their school, there are few non-Muslim teachers. All five of the children admitted that both their Muslim and non-Muslim teachers knew they attended Dugsi, but they were not sure how much these teachers understood about the kind of learning that took place in Dugsi. For example, Saiid spoke of his Muslim teachers as having attended Dugsi at a different time when he said, “They went to Dugsi during the old times” and believed that things have changed in the way learning happens at Dugsi. He recounted that times have brought different foci to what is learned in Dugsi by stating, “Now people don't only read the Qur’an in Dugsi, teachers now know that only the Qur’an cannot give you all the knowledge you need so we study more stuff.” This conversation with Saiid provided further context into his views on whether/what teachers know about Dugsi.

Saida: Do your teachers at school know you go to Dugsi?

Saiid: Yes. All our teachers know that we go to Dugsi.

Saida: All of them?

Saiid: Most are Muslim, but even the non-Muslim know. Everyone in my school goes to Dugsi. I don’t think the non-Muslim teachers know what we learn.

Saida: What would you like them to know?

Saiid: I would explain to them that I do a lot of reading. I must memorize the Qur’an and hadith books. All the reading I do at Dugsi is demanding. I don’t think even my Muslim teachers know.

Saida: What would you like them to know?

Saiid: That it is not just memorizing the Qur'an. It is understanding and practicing it. I also must read the big hadith (sayings of the Prophet Mohamed) books and know all the hadiths and their meanings = the Sira ((biography of the Prophet Mohamed) too I must know it all and the duas (supplication).

Saida: You learn many things in Dugsi?

Saiid: (h) If they know the things I do at Dugsi, they would not give us a lot of homework.

Saiid, in the above exchange, discussed how his Dugsi education entailed more than memorizing the Qur'an. He talked about memorizing, understanding, and practicing what was in the Qur'an. He also wanted his teachers to know that his Dugsi education went beyond the Qur'an and that he also memorized the sayings of Prophet Mohamed and Islamic supplications. Reading about Prophet Mohamed's biography and understanding it was another of his tasks in Dugsi. His point was that while his teachers might have familiarity with his Dugsi education, they might not be aware of the complexity involved due to having to read and understand more texts. He made this argument to illustrate his thinking about what he thought was how Dugsi was done in the time of his Muslim teachers. Saiid also shared in further discussions that while he found the Qur'an memorization challenging, he also found it enjoyable and stated, "I like to memorize the Qur'an, it is hard, but I am good at it, and I love it." He showed confidence in his abilities and further showed me one of his books while saying, "These books have more than 7000 hadiths. Right now, I have memorized like 100, but my Maalin wants me to memorize more." He wished to have time for the screen when he shared the following:

The Maalin (teacher) gives me a lot of work at Dugsi and in school I have a lot of homework. You know it is not that bad, but some days I just want to watch Netflix and play Fortnite only. I don't want to think about Dugsi and school sometimes.

Saiid had a smartphone that he watched YouTube and Netflix and played games. What he stated above revealed his wish for a lesser load. In addition to what Saiid had about how complex and intricate Dugsi literacy was, Ali and Ayan also contributed. When it came to what their teachers should know about them as students at Dugsi, these twins had a similar way of thinking. Their confidence in their academic abilities was at the heart of what they discussed. Although the interviews took place on two different days, the information they provided about their Dugsi going identity was identical. Ali believed in his ability to memorize “100 pages” demonstrated his intelligence and competence. I interviewed Ali when his siblings were in school. Unlike his siblings, Ali did not attend school. A teacher visited his house to assist Abshiro in teaching Ali at home. Below is how he framed what he wanted his school teacher to know about Dugsi:

Saida: Does your teacher know that you go to Dugsi?

Ali: Yeah, she does because I told her.

Saida: What do you think she knows?

Ali: I have told her I go to Dugsi. That is all she knows because she is not Muslim.

Saida: What would you want her to know about Dugsi?

Ali: That it is like a school.

Saida: What else?

Ali: That we read the Qur'an and learn Arabic alphabets.

Saida: Why would you like her to know?

Ali: Because she would know that I am smarter.

Saida: That is right, you are smart. How will she know you are smart?

Ali: She would know that I already read three juzus (parts) off the top of my head. I used to only read a few surahs (chapters) before.

Saida: Are those many pages?

Ali: Yes, like 100 pages.

Saida: Wow!

Ali: Yes.

Like Ali, Ayan believed that she was smarter due to Dugsi. She spoke of her ability to read the Qur'an and write Arabic as worthy knowledge for her school teachers.

Saida: Do your school teachers know that you go to Dugsi?

Ayan: Three teachers know that I go to Dugsi.

Saida: Would you like all your teachers to know that you go to Dugsi?

Ayan: Yeah, they would understand me better, and they would know I am smart.

Saida: What else do you want them to know?

Ayan: I tell them I can read the Qur'an and write the Arabic alphabets, and they will know I am even smarter. My Maalin likes us to learn writing Arabic. We spend all Saturday morning practicing writing.

Like Abshiro's children, Zamzam's children believed that their teachers knew that they attended Dugsi. The children learned Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as a subject at school, and Fadumo mentioned that her IRE teacher checked students' existing

knowledge of Islamic education content by asking them whether they had already learned it at Dugsi. She also revealed that her homeroom teacher, Ms. Tina, knew she went to Dugsi. Here is what Fadumo shared about what her teachers knew about Dugsi:

Saida: Do your teachers in school know that you attend Dugsi?

Fadumo: Yes, they know I go to Dugsi.

Saida: What do you think they know about Dugsi?

Fadumo: They know we learn the Qur'an.

Saida: Did they tell you that they know about the Qur'an?

Faduma: Teacher Yusuf knows because he teaches me IRE. He asks me, did you learn this in Dugsi?

Saida: What does he ask?

Fadumo: One day, he was teaching us about the family of Nabi (the Prophet), and he asked if I learned (it) in Dugsi, and I told him no.

Saida: What about Ms. Tina, does she know?

Fadumo: She knows. I leave early to go to Dugsi. She says hurry up.

Ms. Tina's (Fadumo's homeroom teacher) knowledge of Fadumo's Dugsi is not only shown in her providing accommodation for Fadumo to leave on time for Dugsi, but also in what she shared when I visited Fadumo's classroom:

I was helping grade the students' Swahili imla (dictation) assignment and Ms. Tina wanted me to look at Faduma's book. She pointed to how Fadumo wrote well and shared that her spelling was always good both in English and Swahili. She particularly wanted my attention on Fadumo's handwriting stating, "Her work is also always neat, and it is easy to read." This was, in fact, true. Fadumo

wrote smoothly and clearly. Ms. Tina thought it was because “she writes in Madrassa (another word people use for Dugsi) and Arabic is harder than English letters.” Ms. Tina was connecting Fadumo’s areas of excellence to Dugsi. (Field notes, 2/9/22)

Farah also believed his teachers knew he attended Dugsi and learned valuable skills.

When I interviewed him, he reminded me that Ms. Anyango, sometimes, used the Arabic alphabet to teach them the alphabet in school. Here is what he shared about his teacher’s knowledge of Dugsi:

Saida: Do your teachers in school know that you attend Dugsi?

Farah: Yes, they know I go to Dugsi.

Saida: What do they know about Dugsi?

Farah: That I go after school, and I cannot be late.

Saida: What do you think Ms. Anyango knows about Dugsi?

Farah: She knows the alif because sometimes she says A is like alif, B is like baa

Saida: Really?

Farah: Yes, she has a song also.

I remembered observing in Ms. Anyango’s classroom some of what Farah talked about:

They move on to singing songs, she starts with the Alphabet song. Each letter has two words that have the beginning sound of the alphabet. For example, she started with A for Apple, A for Ant, and then did the A sound. Then she told the student what else sounds like A, and students gave different examples. She then concluded with A by telling them that A sounds like alif too. She continued but did not use the Arabic alphabet on all the letters (maybe she does not know all the

Arabic Alphabets). When they are done with the alphabet song, they move on to a song about fruits, and Ms. Anyango asked students to tell her about the fruits they eat. She asked in English, then asked in Kiswahili. Farah screamed “banana” and the teacher said to him “inaitwa nini kwa kiswahili?” (What is it called in Kiswahili?) and another student screamed “ndizi” (banana). She looked at the class and said, “Now let's say it in Somali,” and there is an immediate chorus that went “mos” (banana). She didn't take a break to confirm correctness, it appeared second to nature for Ms. Anyango to check for understanding in the three languages, and so she moved on to asking a follow-up question that asked about the color of a ripe banana and the students responded with the word “yellow” in chorus form. She asked for yellow in Swahili and Somali, and the students responded with the words “njano” (yellow in Swahili) and “jaale” (yellow in Somali), respectively. The ones in the back have been playing and not participating as much in the responses. The last row had the youngest children.

(Field notes 2/9/21)

Ms. Anyango used all the languages that the children in her classroom were familiar with. She checked for understanding using Swahili, Somali, and Oromo and made connections with the Arabic alphabets when teaching the English alphabets. She was also familiar with what children learned in Dugsi. She shared the following when I probed her about it:

Saida: Do you know the type of things your students learn in Dugsi?

Ms. Anyango: I know how they learn in madrasa. They focus on the two things that I also focus on as an early year's teacher. What I know is that what they do in

Dugsi is very helpful for reading. When they attend madrasa, they are also disciplined.

Farah's point about his teacher's knowledge of Alif (Arabic alphabet) was clear from Ms. Anyango's comment in the above excerpt. She was familiar with the types of literacies her children were engaged in their other school and how they connected with the learning in her classroom. She mentioned that Dugsi complimented the two things that she was working on with her students, and it appeared that those two things were reading and discipline, which she believed Dugsi was instrumental for.

Like Abshiro and Zamzam's children, Qali's children also shared that their teachers were aware of their Dugsi. Isa shared that he made his IRE teacher aware that he attended Dugsi but was not sure whether his homeroom teacher knew about his Dugsi going identity. However, I was able to glean into what Ms. Rose knew about Isa and his Dugsi. Ms. Rose knew that children engaged in reading at Dugsi. Although she did not mention Isa by name, she appreciated the reading the children at Dugsi were engaged in. When most Kenyan schools were closed for a year due to Covid, Dugsi was crucial to her. Their school adhered to the Kenya Ministry of Education's directives, which called for complete school closures for a year. She admitted that she was relieved that her children who went to Dugsi kept reading. She said, "Reading is reading."

As for Qali's children, Jamal is the one who shared what his teacher knew about Dugsi. Like the other children, he thought that his teachers knew about Dugsi. He recalled, "They even release us early so that we attend Dugsi." Jamal was speaking about the general student body in his school that was majority Muslim. Jamal's Dugsi is at home, and his mother, who spends the evenings teaching them to read the Qur'an, does

not follow a strict schedule. She started teaching about an hour after school on the two days I visited them in the evenings. Jamal's statement hints at a larger picture regarding the school's accommodative policies regarding the students' out-of-class learning schedules. What Jamal shared was also shared by all the teachers, especially Mr. Oloo, who told me, "As the headteacher, I have to respect the children who go to Madrasa (A name for a different type of Islamic schooling that people in Kenya often interchangeably use when referring to Dugsi) in the evening, so I tell teachers to be strict with release time." Dugsi on weekdays started at 4:30 pm, which was right after the Asr (midday) prayer; a very close time to when school was dismissed at 3:45. Students went home, changed, and then headed to Dugsi. Others needed to do their prayers at the mosque before heading to Dugsi. Jamal shared this about a time when he attended Dugsi outside the home, "If our Maalin did not see us in the Mosque praying at 4 and if we were not sitting in Dugsi at 4:30, we would get punished". This explained why teachers had to accommodate the children's schedules— there was just not much time to transition to another whole school.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided insights into the practices, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of the young people involved in the acquisition and practice of Qur'anic and school literacies. It demonstrated the rich but complex nature of the ways the children think about the purposes of their literacies, the relationships between their literacies, and whether and what their school teachers knew about their Qur'anic school. An important theme in this chapter is how the children saw the Qur'an as part of their identity and connected that to why they were learning it. They also saw it as a source of guidance and

a means of attaining success in the afterlife. Like their parents, they saw their school literacy as necessary for helping them increase their opportunities for getting a good job.

When it came to how their literacies related to each other, they spoke of viewing both literacies as having distinct purposes but the practices as being comparable across their two literacy practices. They saw Qur'anic literacy as serving the goal of achieving success in the afterlife and school literacy as relevant to the temporal world. The children across all the families were keen on this purpose of their literacies. They saw comparison in the way that writing and reading were shared by both of their literacies. In addition, the children opined that their literacies supported each other in equipping them with skills to use for the other. All the children felt that their Qur'anic literacy was more challenging than their school literacy and, to varying degrees, hoped for less work from their Dugsi teachers. Finally, the children believed that their teachers were familiar with their Dugsi-going identity and discussed how each teacher allowed them to attend their 'other school' in the evening.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Using the ethnographic method, this study examined the literacies of refugee children of Somali origin living in Nairobi, Kenya, who were engaged in Qur'anic and secular literacies. It explored the experiences and reflections of the children and their parents. The following overarching research questions guided this study:

1. What are the literacy practices of Somali families living in Kenya, particularly those engaged in by children or directly/indirectly involving children?
2. How do parents understand the literacy practices that their children participate in or that they engage in with their children?
3. How do children understand the literacy practices that they participate in?

Summary of Key Findings

The study findings highlighted how literacy was part of the three families' everyday life. Some of the families' literacy practices were writing and reading for religious, academic, and communication purposes. In *Dugsi*, children spent a few hours during the weekdays and several hours during the weekends learning how to read and write in classical Arabic (CLA), the language of the Qur'an. Outside reading the Qur'an and reciting supplications, neither the children nor their parents used CLA in their everyday lives. *Dugsi* literacy involved quite a bit of writing for the younger children, and it served one purpose: getting access to the Qur'anic text. Once children mastered writing and could decode it fully, writing was no longer part of the *Dugsi* literacy practices. For the older children, a key feature of *Dugsi* literacy was memorization of the Qur'anic text and reciting it with *Tajweed* (proper recitation). According to the

participants, memorizing and reciting the Qur'an with *Tajweed* were two of the end goals of *Dugsi* education.

Comprehension of the Qur'anic text was not a basic element of *Dugsi's* literacy. Of the 10 children that were engaged in learning the Qur'an, only one was actively learning the meaning of the Qur'an. This child had finished the Qur'an once and was doing it again for the second time while also reading other Islamic texts, such as the biography and narrations of Prophet Mohamed. The Qur'an teachers shared the opinion that learning the meaning of the Qur'an was not an immediate focus of *Dugsi*. They believed their role was to teach the children how to write so they could read the Qur'an and aid them in their memorization journey. They believed that once children memorized the Qur'an, they could pursue learning its meaning on their own or in other Islamic learning institutions. While majority of the children were not actively involved in learning the meaning of the Qur'an, it was expected that the mere act of reading and memorizing the Qur'an would provide them with the “*submissiveness*,” “*tranquility*,” and “*guidance*” they needed to practice Islam and to have an Islamic identity. The teachers and parents believed that Islam was a way of life, and children learned this way of life through socializing in environments that promoted Islamic values, such as *Dugsi*.

In their secular school, children learned how to read and write in English and Kiswahili, two languages that were new to them. Like in *Dugsi*, they wrote and read texts. Writing in school involved various tasks such as learning the alphabet, spelling words, drawing, and taking tests. In this sense, writing had more uses in secular schools when compared to writing in *Dugsi*. Reading practices and the purposes of the practice were also different between the school and *Dugsi*. Whereas *Dugsi* teachers focused on

students memorizing what they read, schoolteachers were keen on students' understanding of meaning and engagement with texts. However, one area where the two literacy learning contexts shared similarity was how teachers emphasized proper pronunciation of words in the reading practices. The focus on pronunciation was noteworthy and justifiably necessary as the languages the children were learning in both their learning contexts were additional languages that children rarely used outside their learning environments. An added effort was needed on the part of both the teachers and learners to gain articulation fluency.

Regarding what parents saw as the purpose of their children's literacies, they generally viewed Qur'anic literacy as a religious obligation and were committed to supporting their children's efforts to acquire Qur'anic literacy in order to fulfill the obligation. In addition, they believed Qur'anic literacy had cognitive benefits and relevance for children's school learning. Mostly, they believed that Qur'anic literacy was important in instilling a sense of identity and providing children with guidance and a purpose-filled life. In contrast, they viewed secular literacies as valuable for providing their children a pathway to a better socio-economic status. Ultimately, they saw the two literacies as complementary and dependent on each other to provide their children with a wholesome life.

As for the children, they saw Qur'anic literacy as a very important part of their identity and connected that to the reason they were learning it. Like their parents, they also viewed Qur'anic literacy as necessary to provide them with guidance and a means for success in the afterlife. They also shared similar views to their parents regarding engagement with school literacies. They saw school literacy as necessary for helping

them improve their lives in terms of wealth and prosperity. Regarding how their literacies related to each other, they spoke of viewing both literacies as having distinct purposes but shared practices and, like their parents, opined about their literacies supporting each other in that it equipped them with skills to use for the other. They thought Qur'anic literacy was more challenging than their school literacy and, to varying degrees, hoped for less work from both their *Dugsi* and school teachers. Finally, children believed that their schoolteachers were familiar with their *Dugsi*-going identity and discussed how each of their schoolteachers provided certain accommodations for them to participate in the literacies of their religion.

Interpretation of Key Findings and their Significance

Findings from this study demonstrated strong parental involvement in children's literacy education. Parents took a strong interest in the types of literacy education they wanted for their children. The parents' priorities around their children's literacy education were varied but united around the pursuit of valuable literacy for worldly and religious goals. For example, Abshiro, who moved back to Kenya after 16 years of being in the U.S., had strong opinions about what she deemed good literacy education for her children. For her, school literacy needed to support the children's identities and integrate the home language and their religion into the school curriculum. She imagined and worked to achieve an education that embraced her children's full identity as Somali and Muslims. She enrolled her children in an integrated school and shared with me her contentment with the decision during our interactions. Qali was also quite involved in her children's education, as evident from accounts given by her children's teachers. Specifically, Isa's (Qali's 9-year-old son) teacher, Ms. Rose, was fond of Qali and

appreciated her involvement with Isa's learning. Ms. Rose shared that, on some days, she had been helping Isa after school because his mother had observed that his reading fluency was not as good as she wanted it to be. Qali also shared about moving her children from a different school before enrolling in their current school. She told me that they were not reading at their grade level, and when she moved them to their current school, she asked the administration to hold them back a year. In addition to these acts where she actively engaged teachers about choices she desired for her son, she often supported her children in activities and showed up for them consistently. Qali's involvement proves a contrary point to held beliefs in education that often paint a picture of refugee background families as less involved in their children's education. Even though Qali had not received formal schooling herself, she knew she played an important role in her children's educational success.

Zamzam's involvement in her children's education was also steadfast. One of the things that Zamzam did was to spend four hours each day on the weekends sitting in *Dugsi* with her children as they learned the literacy of their religion. Her 5-year-old son, Suhaib, had recently started *Dugsi*, and she told me that she wanted to make sure that he did not disrupt the classroom but also wanted to ensure that he learned the Arabic alphabet. Zamzam was in a position to teach her son at home, but she shared wanting him to be in an environment where he was exposed more to religion. Zamzam was keen on giving her child what she felt was a more rounded religious literacy experience. In this sense, she understood that literacy in an environment like *Dugsi* played a role in socializing children to the ways of Islam through language.

A second key finding indicated how literacy for all three families was tied to identity and culture. The beliefs, values, and norms the families identified with were tied to the meaning and consequences of being literate. Ferdinand (1990) argued that cultural identity derives from and regulates literacy's symbolic and practical significance for individuals and groups and in the societal context, literacy education involves imparting reading and writing skills and teaching values. I specifically found this to be true in the literacy education of the three families in this study. At Dugsi, for example, while the students practiced reciting the Qur'an, their literacy activity was affected by their Islam and Somali culture. Their Islamic culture, for example, influenced how they communicated with their Maalin, sat in the classroom, handled the Qur'an, and much more. For example, they were all practicing the Islamic culture around handling the Qur'an with respect and care. While there are no textual requirements on how to handle the Qur'an, the Islamic culture that has been practiced over many years and passed over generations places importance on how the Qur'an has to be handled.

Aspects of cultural education were also intertwined with literacy education at school. For example, teachers provided opportunities to teach cultural values through literacy in the nursery rhymes and their morning greeting routines. The notion that culture is fused with literacy is part of what drove Abshiro (parent) from the U.S. and made her seek education in Africa for her children. Abshiro believed her children were being lost to an outside culture as they were not getting such practices at their American schools. She talked about wanting her children to be in a place where their Somali, African, and Islamic identities were part of their literacy education. Literacy education that is reflective of students' backgrounds is beneficial. Giroux (1987) discussed how a person's

individual “stories, memories, narratives and readings of the world are inextricably related to wider social and cultural formations and categories” (p.177). In the context of children’s literacy education, what is experienced by the students through texts and writing makes the difference.

Ferdinand (1990) argued that literacy activities that mirror elements of children’s culture were more likely to have them engaged. This was true for this study also. Teachers implemented various practices that were reflective of their students’ out-of-school literacies. For example, Ms. Jane assessed her students’ reading progress using a read-aloud method that she borrowed from *Dugsi* and reported finding students to be engaged and enjoyed reading during this specific reading practice. Ms. Jane took elements of *subac/subcis*, a Qur’anic reading practice where students sit in a circle and work on reading parts of the Qur’an from memory. This example shows how cultural practices and identity mediate the processes of becoming literate and the types of literate behaviors people engage in or find more meaning.

A third key finding was how parents and their children were united in what they saw as the purposes of their literacies. They saw literacy as part of their Islamic identity. As my data showed in chapters four and five, families spoke of learning the Qur’an as tantamount to being Muslim. Isa (Qali’s 9-year-old son) spoke of not knowing any Muslim who did not know the Qur’an and talked about needing the Qur’an to perform daily prayers. In his mind, he would not be able to perform practices of the faith if he did not read the Qur’an. Isa’s sentiment is supported by narrations in Al-Bukhaari (756) and Muslim (394) hadiths (books on narrations) of the Prophet Mohamed when he stated, “*There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the opening of the Book (chapter al-*

Faatihah).” The five daily prayers are one of the most critical aspects of the Islamic faith, and their performance is obligatory. The act of prayer is considered to give someone a differentiating identity from a non-Muslim. For that reason, even though the *Dugsi* classrooms were mostly focused on the literacy of the Qur’an, there were some elements of socializing children into proper practices of prayers. The reminders that *Dugsi* teachers gave on reciting appropriate supplications also pointed to the parallel of this literacy to an Islamic identity. Further, Muslims believe that it is not valid to recite Qur’an in any language other than Arabic because Allah himself stated the Qur’an “*as an Arabic Qur’an*” (chapter Yousuf 12:2) and says of its revelation as being revealed “*In a clear Arabic language*” (chapter al ash-Shu’araa’ 26:195). Ultimately, Muslims have to learn Qur’anic literacy and classical Arabic for important and obligatory acts of worship such as prayers and making supplications. These acts give one the entrance and belonging to the Islamic faith.

The families were also unified in their beliefs about the cognitive effects of Qur’anic literacy. Abshiro (parent), who represented the other two mothers’ views, discussed the Qur’an as a miracle when discussing its cognitive potential for her children’s other literacies. She had more knowledge of the Qur’an and spoke more elaborately about how she saw Qur’anic literacy as relevant to literacy in other domains. She talked about how, for instance, the Qur’anic text guided Muslims on how to write eloquently while also pointing me to the linguistic aspects of rhythm, style, and genre, as well as the scientific contents of the Qur’an, to further explain its richness and complexity. She argued that children ought to learn the Qur’an first as a way of hypothesizing the potential of the Qur’an in providing an introduction or a head start to

concepts deemed relevant to the literacy and educational journeys that children undertake in school. The children also believed that their Dugsi literacy helped with their learning in school. They believed memorizing the Qur'an had taught them the skills to master content in school. This finding supports what Scribner and Cole's (1981) study that compared the cognitive effects of three kinds of literacy practices among the Vai of Liberia found. They found that adult Qur'anic Arabic literates performed better than Vai literates and English literates in memory-related tasks resembling everyday practices of memorizing and reciting Qur'anic texts.

Although this study cannot prove the validity of the participants' believed cognitive benefits of Qur'anic literacy, it aligns with Wagner's (1989) studies with Moroccan preschoolers that language performance of children pre-schooled in Qur'an was higher as compared to those of children with no Qur'anic pre-schooling. Similarly, Street (1987) found that adult students of Qur'anic literacy acquired skills to keep accounts, write notes, create ledgers, and sign their names and labels. The Qur'anic practices of the Iranian community he studied were much like the Qur'anic literacy practices of the *Dugsis* in this study (more oral practices such as reading, memorizing, reciting, and minimal writing), yet the adult students still learned valuable literacy-enhancing lessons. Despite this, Street found that their skills were labeled according to international literacy standards as "illiterate." Thus, Street argued that what is considered literacy is very much ideological. Like Street's study, this dissertation showed that communities like the Somalis studied in this research possess many "literate" skills that allow them to function socially and commercially in their communities.

Finally, the children were learning languages they rarely used outside *Dugsi* and school. Teachers were instrumental in facilitating the learning of these languages. At school, teachers employed fluid language policies and remained sensitive to the children's linguistic needs. They enacted a micro language policy that made content accessible by using languages that students had in their repertoires. Kenya's language policy stipulated using the mother tongue for students in rural areas and the language of the catchment area for those in mixed urban neighborhoods during the early years. Compared to some western countries with monolingual policies, Kenya's language policy would be seen as more equitable. Yet, it left out the language needs of refugee students. Eastleigh, where the study occurred, is classified by the Kenya ministry of education as a mixed urban neighborhood, and the catchment language designated appropriate for instruction is Kiswahili.

The assignment of Kiswahili as the designated language of instruction did not factor in the changing demographic of the area that had become populous with refugees, mainly from Somalia. The teachers at Excel felt that the designation of Kiswahili as the language of instruction was unfitting for their students and enacted language practices that matched the needs of their students. All teachers used Somali, and others contextualized learning using concepts from *Dugsi* in basic Arabic that they knew their students were familiar with. The fact that these teachers were not Somali nor Muslim, yet made the efforts to learn these literacies to provide literacy education, was telling in their regard for equity. In this sense, the teachers were committed to the academic success and revitalization of children's home languages. As Ricento and Hornberger (1996, p. 417) noted, teachers were positioned here to be "at the heart of language policy" as they made

their classrooms semi-autonomous spaces where they had the power to make room for marginalized languages through translanguaging (Vogel & García, 2017), code-switching (Arthur, 2001), and curricular revisions (Brown, 2008) all in an effort to make literacy content accessible to students who spoke a language that was not part of the school language and whose languages were considered marginal to be captured in government demographics for purposes of macro policies.

The teachers at *Dugsi* did not engage children in the languages they were actively learning in school, even though they spoke these languages. They only spoke Somali to their students. At Al Huda, for example, Maalin believed success in learning the Qur'an was achieved if students were taught in a language that he and his students had full access to and his philosophy was supported by empirical studies that advocate for a mother tongue-oriented approach to classroom practices related to literacy acquisition and argue for adequate pedagogical support in the students' first language (L1) as crucial during the early acquisition process of literacy skills (Mizza, 2014). Similarly, at Al Abrar Mosque, where Abshiro's children attended *Dugsi*, the language practices were similar to those of Al Huda. As my data showed in chapter three, the Maalin at this *Dugsi* was also determined to make his *Dugsi* classroom an only-Somali space because the parents whose children attended his *Dugsi* moved from overseas to teach their children Somali. This is important because we see yet another instance where language policy was designed in literacy spaces not to serve the curriculum but to serve the students and the families for whom the literacy was meant to benefit. The teachers were committed to helping families maintain and revitalize their languages while providing access to literacy. I was shocked by this finding as I had gone into the field thinking that pedagogical practices from the

Middle East had influenced the way Qur'anic literacy was taught. I thought that the increased movement of people between Africa and the Middle East had led to the use of Arabic in teaching Islamic literacy and caused the marginalization of cultural and linguistic aspects of the community for which the practice of *Dugsi* was central.

Limitations of Study

This study, like other ethnographic studies, was limited by the size of participants it involved. The study did not seek to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the literacies of a few families through an in-depth and intensive study of a few particular, well-chosen, and representative cases. The transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is the reader's responsibility. Readers can determine similarities, fits, or connections between this study and other similar contexts. A second limitation of this study is inherent in all research. I came into the research with my own biases and subjectivities. I took measures to safeguard the research from negative biases and subjectivities and the imposition of theory on real-world data that did not fit. As the researcher, I had many questions and ideas about Qur'anic and school literacy, and there were instances where I questioned practices or held bias about how I felt learning needed to be done. These biases arose from my perspectives in using my lens of literacy and language learning to measure the quality of deeply cultural learning models.

Finally, as an "insider" ethnographer, I often thought I understood the cultural meanings and religious significance of the Qur'anic literacy, yet I realized I held different meanings. It is possible that the meanings I held resulted from my experiences as a transnational scholar. An important question is whether there is a spectrum on being an

“insider” in a given community. Aminy (2004), while concurring with Aguilar (1981), discussed how one could be a cultural insider to a community, yet a social stranger. I felt this best described my positioning in the Eastleigh community and specifically with the three families I researched. I entered the field with much cultural knowledge about Somalis, refugees, Muslims and Muslim communities, but as I soon learned, I was a social stranger to many of the practices and customs of the *Dugsis*, school, and the halaqa. Despite all this, this ethnography was a worthwhile journey as it helped me gain a rich and nuanced understanding of one community’s literacy practices as I deeply engaged with myself and my knowledge. Ultimately, I believe this study contributes to the growing field of “insider” ethnography with its rich data, methodological, and theoretical frameworks.

Recommendations and Opportunities for Future Research

Given the diversity in places where refugees have formed communities—such as Eastleigh, where this study took place and where many refugees from East Africa have formed transnational lives—the literacy and linguistic range should not be ignored. At the time of this study, the Kenyan government had a language policy that, while not monolingual, had not considered the changing demographics of urban areas resulting from globalization and evolving migration trends. Excel schoolteachers responded to this by enacting a language policy that challenged what was instituted. This study showed how teachers could choose to be intentional about the choices they make about their teaching practices and how as a result, literacy and language learning can be facilitated. Findings pointed to students engaged in learning and parents who felt a sense of belonging to a school community. The multilingual practices used at Excel are supported

by research (see García's [2009] theory on translanguaging practices). I recommend educators and schools resist language policies that exclude marginalized communities and become their students' advocates by enacting micro language policies that make learning accessible to those excluded deliberately or unintendedly by policies.

Two families that participated in this research were hoping for resettlement, and one had already been resettled to a western country. This study could provide western communities welcoming refugee families a window into how one community successfully supported children's learning through multilingual language practices. It is time for the west to look into knowledge and practices produced in the global south that advance learning. The teachers at Excel school did not share a language or religion with the community but were aware of families out of school literacies and made efforts to learn aspects of the community's cultures and languages. I am fully aware that it might not be easy to recruit a teaching force that fully represents the demographics of newcomer communities, but through the findings of this study, I recommend schools in the west to provide ample opportunities for teachers to get to know their students' communities and form relationships with the families. By forming such relationships, educators would know what families value, and they could learn how families' knowledge and skills could be brought to the classroom to leverage learning. This recommendation is supported by Moll et al. (1992), who advocated for teachers to do ethnographies in communities positioned as 'deficient' and non-mainstream so that they could explore the home backgrounds of their students.

Teachers familiarizing themselves with students' families benefit learning. Young children might not be vocal or be in a position to articulate the different skills they bring

from their other learning contexts. Learning in children's other learning contexts holds immense value, as I showed in chapters four and five. It will serve teachers and schools well to connect with parents so that they are informed about what values their children's literacies hold for them. This, in turn, will allow teachers to nurture, sustain, and support children's other literacies. Such literacies have overlapping natures, the potential for transfer to other learning settings, and, most importantly, the strong values that the parents attribute to such literacies are worthy knowledge for educators.

This study focused on a community that was in a transitional lifestyle. All three families were uprooted from their home country, and while they found asylum in Kenya, they did not see themselves settled yet and, thus, were leading a semi-permanent lifestyle. One family returned from a western country where she was resettled due to challenges sustaining her children's literacies, culture, and language. Two families were hopeful for an opportunity to be resettled in a western country. Given the ongoing prevalence of mobility and displacement in a growing number of geographic and political regions, it will be important to continue to examine the literacies of refugee and Muslim students in the countries where such families will or typically resettle in order to add value to both the literature base and policy around education.

Another area that would be a natural progression to the study is examining how culture and religious identities shape literacy in schooling. Given contemporary migration patterns and the diaspora, diversity is bound in all schools worldwide; specifically, Qur'anic schooling is no longer found only in primarily Muslim countries. Qur'anic schools are a part of the learning ecology in many countries and are shaping the lives of many children worldwide. Research is needed to document the interaction between

children's Islamic religious identities and the dominant literacies they encounter and acquire at school and in the wider community.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR DUGSI TEACHERS

1. Please tell me about learning in your Dugsi Classroom.
2. How long do your students take to complete the Qur'an? How many have completed?
3. What kinds of areas are you working with the students?
4. Do you have priorities in terms of areas of curriculum such as writing, reading, memorizing, learning the meaning of the Qur'an?
5. What languages do your students speak? What language do you use for instruction?
6. Your students attend school, what do you think about that? Are there any skills that you think they bring from school that are useful for learning in Dugsi?
7. How involved are the parents in Dugsi?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time today.

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS

1. Your children attend Dugsi and school, please tell me more about your purpose for sending them to both.
2. How would you describe the types of skills your children learn in Dugsi? What about school?
3. What do you see to be the benefit of the skills your children obtain from Dugsi?
4. How do you see what they learn in school as compared to what they learn in Dugsi?
5. What do your children say about their attendance of both Dugsi and school?
6. What are your goals for your children when it comes to learning the Qur'an and learning in school?
7. Do you know if your children have their own goals when it comes to Dugsi and school? If yes, what are their goals?
8. Do you think that the skills that your children acquire from Dugsi is known to their schoolteachers?
9. What would you wish your children's teachers to know about the learning that your children are engaged in Dugsi?
10. Is there anything I missed that you would like to tell me about?

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR CHILDREN

1. You attend dugsi and school, please tell me more about your two schools.
2. How is it like attending dugsi and school?
3. What do you like about dugsi? And what do you like about school?
4. Please tell me what types of things you learn in dugsi and what types of things you learn in school?
5. Are the things you learn in dugsi and school the same or different? Tell me how they are the same? How are they different?
6. How does/will what you learn from dugsi help you? What about what you learn in school?
7. Do you think that your teachers at school know that you attend dugsi? If yes, tell me what they know. If no, what would you like them to know about dugsi?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW WITH TEACHERS PROTOCOL

1. In this school you have many Somali students. Please tell me about their learning.
2. Most Somali children attend dugsi or madrassa whereby in the foundational years they spend a considerable amount of time learning to read and write in Arabic which is the language of the Qur'an. Given your experience with these children who have had this prior or additional educational experience- what can you say about their learning in your school?
3. I noticed that when you teach you use different languages. For example, when you teach English, you explain to the students in either Kiswahili or Somali and when teaching Kiswahili, you use English or Somali. How and why did you decide to do that?
4. Can you tell me about parental involvement for Somali children in this school?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time today.

APPENDIX E
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

I have kept the transcriptions simple for the text of this dissertation, so that a layperson with little knowledge of transcription and conversation analysis theory could read the representations of the speech with ease. The conventions presented here are adopted from Sacks, Shegloff, & Jefferson (1978), with some slight modifications. I used the following punctuation marks to signify specific characteristics of speech delivery. These punctuations do not necessarily mark grammatical meanings.

Punctuation Marks

- . A period indicates a fall in tone, usually but not always at the end of a sentence.
- , A comma indicates a slight rising inflection, usually followed by a brief pause.
- ? A question mark indicates rising intonation, usually but not always at the end of a sentence.
- ! An exclamation point indicates an animated tone, usually louder in volume.
- A dash indicates a cut-off or a sudden stop in the flow of talk.
- : A colon indicates a lengthening of a sound or syllable. The more colons are used, the longer the sound:
- Italics* Italics indicate emphasis
- CAPS** Capital letters indicate talk that is louder
- XXX** When dialogue is not audible or comprehensible to the transcriber

APPENDIX F

WRITING, CODING AND MEMOING OF FIELDNOTES

Date:1/23/2022

Time: 3:00pm-6:00pm:

Location Qali's House

Present Participants: Qali (mother), Jamaal (11-year-old son), Issa (9-year-old son), Umu (4-year-old daughter)

I met with Qali at the gate of her apartment. We had planned that we would meet at 3pm. Qali and Zamzam live on the same street. When I was done with Z, I took a 30 minute stroll along the street. The street is filled with shops, hawkers selling stuff by the road and several merchants selling fruits on the street side either on a table or wheelbarrow. There are lots of fruits of different colors sold but my eyes mostly caught mangoes, oranges and bananas.

This street is also filled with children playing outside their apartments.

I walked towards Q's house while admiring the vibrancy of the street. Qali met me at the gate of her apartment. She gave me a hug and asked me about my grandmother. She had called me during the week while I was traveling to Garissa to see my ailing grandmother. She told me that she had a prayer meeting yesterday and that they made prayers for my grandmother. I thanked her. Qali is aware of the relationship I have with my grandmother; we had chatted about this the last time I was at her house. She went on to tell me that her prayer group usually meets on Fridays and that this week they met both Friday and Saturday. We proceeded upstairs. She warned me to lift my clothes because there was water on the stairs. I noted the water last time but didn't think too much of it. Today when Q mentioned the water, I paid attention and noticed that the water was coming from the clothes hanging on the rails of the various floors.

We got to her apartment and her two older boys and daughter were sitting in the living room. The TV was on and there was a children's show on YouTube. Jamal was on his mother's phone. She asked them, "aren't you saying Assalamu Aleikum to Auntie Saida?". Umu stood up to hug me and then the boys followed and they all gave me a hug. [Here we see how culture is intertwined with the liturgical language. Referring to older people as auntie and uncle is cultural and greeting them with the Islamic greeting is symbolic of the value of the liturgical language] Q invited me to sit and she offered me water. Q stated that she was tired because she had been washing clothes. I asked her where Zakariya went and she shared that he went with his dad to the mosque. It was in between dhur and asr prayers and I was wondering why they went to the masjid at this time so I asked and she shared that her husband usually does "darsa" (lessons) on Saturday afternoons with Sheikh Umul (I happen to know who Sheikh Umul is. He is well known and followed by many Somalis both in Kenya and in the diaspora). She said "my husband usually takes Zakariya with him" [literacy practices are connected in this family- father takes Zakariya who is 2yrs old to his mosque lessons] and went on to say, "it's good for children to be introduced to the masjid at a young age, are you close to a masjid?". I responded by telling her that there was no closeby masjid where I live and she said "if at all you came all the way from America with your kids, you should move to a house that is close to the masjid so your kids can be closer to their deen". [her advice to me regarding the importance of being close to teh masjid is a reflection of her value for the masjid and the value of raising children "in the masjid" as some would say] I told her, "I should have, now am about to leave" and Q asked "why, are you going back to America?, it would have been nice if your boys were close to a masjid, will you have that

in America?”[continued value of masjid/islamic learning institutions for raising children]

I told her that I lived many miles from a masjid and that we only went on the weekends because the kids did dugsi at the masjid. Her body expression showed that she was concerned or maybe worried for me.

She told me that she wants to always live in a place where her boys will always rush to the masjid upon hearing the “adhan (call to salaah)” and went on to say “you know the world has so much negative influence on our kids, it is good for children to grow up going to the masjid” and I nodded with agreement. She then asked Jamal to bring her phone because she wanted to show me something. She showed me a video of a girl reading the Quran at a Quran competition. She stated “you know this girl, her parents moved her from America when she was little, and they did something good. Now she won the national Quran competition that was held here, and sheikh Ali Sufi (this is a well respected Sheikh) gave her \$1000”, I told her that I too think that it is easier to prioritize Qur’an education for children in Kenya because there was more access to Dugsi and masjid than in the US. Q then told me that she knows many people who have moved their children from “dhibada (western countries) and didn't even go to live in Kileleshwa (a higher income suburb of Nairobi). They brought those kids to muddy Eastleigh because they are parents focused on giving their children an Islamic upbringing, they want their children to be people of the Qur’an and Masajid”[Educating me on the reverse migration happening among Somali diaspora in the attempt to prioritize Qur’anic literacy, Islamic identity. In a way reflecting her beliefs while also encouraging me to prioritize what she believed was important].

I turned to her and sought her thoughts on her getting resettlement prospects. She let me know that sometimes she wishes that only her husband gets resettled so that they can have an income because that is the only thing they are missing right now. She went on to tell me that her husband had even tried going to Uganda to see if resettlement “luck” would be better there but that there was really no movement in his case. From my previous interactions she she seems to want to be resettled to get a chance to better her life from an economic standpoint, but she shared that she has deep connections with Kenya and said “I know everywhere in this city and I have so many friends, I will never get stuck in Nairobi but I am afraid of getting stuck if I leave”. She has severally reminded me that she doesn’t have a family and that she holds on to her children dearly. We chatted a bit and then I asked permission to interview Jamal on the audio recorder and she said “he is ready, this guy can talk”.

I explained to Jamal what I was going to do, I told him why I needed to record, and he appeared to comprehend everything. Jamal is a quiet child. I have seen him help his mother with chores. He helps his baby brother with potty training, gets water whenever I come and Q has shared that she leaves him with the kids when she goes to the store and that he always does a good job taking care of his siblings. I asked him what grade he was in school and he responded with “am in year 2, but I was taken back when I came to this school. I am supposed to be in year 5”. Q interjected by saying, “he used to go to an Islamic school but they were not good”. She explained to me that the previous school was not as rigorous as the current one academically. involvement in her children’s learning. Making choices around where they go I was always curious about her decision to enroll the children in a Christian school– I noticed the school had a Christian name and

she informed me that she chose the current school because they were cheaper and that they were willing to do a payment plan with her on the tuition. She continued to inform me that they don't teach the muslim kids anything about Christianity and that the Christian children have one lesson called CRE (Christian religious education) and muslim children get one lesson called IRE (Islamic religious education)[Religious tolerance/accommodations for all despite learning of institution of choice being different from their own].

My interview with Jamal resumed after the long interjection from Q and then I moved on to Isa. Isa is reserved too. He doesn't talk much whenever I am around. Qali told me that he is shy. Isa was nervous but responded to all the questions. I thanked them both.

Umu wanted to be interviewed but I told her that we would do it next week. Umu is attending preschool at the same school as the boys. I asked if Umu was also learning the Quran and Qali pointed to the white board on the wall. Saying, "do you see it has the alphabet that I wrote last night? I am teaching her that alif corresponds to A and baa corresponds to B, isn't that right?" I nodded in agreement. She said that umu now knows that the alif baa taas have a connection to what she also learns in school [teaching her daughter the relation between school and Qur'an literacies even though this child who is 4 is not yet attending school or DUGSI. This was powerful to hear- Q has not gone to either school or dugsi as a child, taught herself how to read Somali on her own, and is currently learning the Quran and teaching her own children the Quran].

It was time for me to leave and I scheduled to visit them again next weekend on Sunday. Qali mentioned that she wants me to meet to visit them on Friday when her prayer group is meeting. I told her I would love to and that she can text me the details.

APPENDIX G
IRB APPROVAL

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

[Katherine Bernstein](#)
 Division of Teacher Preparation - Tempe -
kbernstein@asu.edu

Dear [Katherine Bernstein](#):
 On 10/12/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review: Initial Study	
Title:	A Study of Somali Families' Literacy Practices: Three Somali Families living in Nairobi, Kenya
Investigator: Katherine Bernstein	
IRB ID: STUDY00014640	
Category of review:	(5) Data, documents, records, or specimens (6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding: None	
Grant Title: None	
Grant ID: None	
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHILD ASSENT FORM.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • PARENTAL CONSENT (for Children's participation)_10_16_21.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM 10_16_21.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • PHOTO RELEASE CONSENT FORM.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • RECRUITMENT SCRIPT 10_16_21.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Saida Dissertation IRB -10_16_21.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Semi-structured interview protocol for children.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Semi-structured interviews for Parents.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB approved the protocol from 10/12/2021 to 10/11/2022 inclusive. Three weeks before 10/11/2022 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 10/11/2022 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

REMINDER - All in-person interactions with human subjects require the completion of the ASU Daily Health Check by the ASU members prior to the interaction and the use of face coverings by researchers, research teams and research participants during the interaction. These requirements will minimize risk, protect health and support a safe research environment. These requirements apply both on- and off-campus.

The above change is effective as of July 29th 2021 until further notice and replaces all previously published guidance. Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring a healthy and productive ASU community.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Saida Mohamed Saida Mohamed