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Reading Success Stories: Case Studies of Somali Elementary Students

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READING SUCCESS STORIES:

CASE STUDIES OF SOMALI ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

By

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This capstone is dedicated my amazing and beautiful daughters:
Amy, Erica, and Claire, who supported, encouraged, and loved me through this process.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

<u>Guiding Question</u>

A major challenge that elementary ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers face is that of helping students achieve reading competency. There are many factors that play a part in learning to read in a first language. English Learners (ELs) have additional challenges as they learn to read in a second language. These factors and challenges are investigated and reviewed within this study. In this chapter, some of the issues and questions concerning successful Somali elementary students are introduced. As a result, my research question for this study is, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students?

As an ESL teacher and a grade-level interventionist, I not only work with students who are non-native speakers but also with students who are native English speakers and not reaching proficiency in grade-level standards. Many students in our schools come from similar backgrounds, yet there is often a wide range of ability levels and academic success among them. The context of this case study research is very specific to our school's EL population, that being mainly Somali. This school's EL population also includes many Hispanic, East African, and Asian students. The study is motivated by my curiosity over the success that many of our Somali students have gained in the area of reading when English is not their first language. Equally motivating is the knowledge

that some Somali students struggle as they learn to read in English and wanting answers to questions about how best to help them learn.

Role of the Researcher

During the past six years, I have taught at a public elementary school in a small urban school district. The school where I teach has approximately 20% of students designated as ELs and over 12 different languages spoken by various student populations. For three years, I was a mainstream classroom teacher. I now have the position as an ESL teacher and interventionist within our building of over 800 students. As an ESL teacher, I may be asked to work with individuals or small groups of ELs that are new to the country. As an interventionist I work with small groups of learners, some of whom are not ELs. Interventionists at our school will often work with a combination of ELs, special education students, and any students falling significantly behind on grade-level standards.

Within the six years I have been at this school, positive interaction with Somali families has taken place during formal meetings such as parent-teacher conferences, along with informal conversations during their visits to the school. Through these interactions there has developed a relationship of trust and mutual respect between myself and many of the parents of Somali students at our school. With help from the cultural navigator, parents were well informed of the nature of this study, why I chose to focus on their child, and what I hoped to accomplish through this research.

As the researcher of this study, I interviewed Somali families within our school who have at least one student who is experiencing success in reading, based on formal

and informal assessments. Additionally, I met informally with the teachers of these students to discuss reading levels, their perception on parent interaction and support, and the amount of reading the student does at home and at school. I did observations during the school day to collect data on each of these student's reading behavior and experiences. Documents relating to their reading experiences at home and at school (e.g. reading response journals) were also studied.

Background of the Researcher

Thinking back to my own home literacy experiences, there was never a time I did not remember loving books. My love for reading began when my mom would read to us before bedtime. From the time I learned to read, I could not get enough stories. There was always a thick Sunday paper strewn on the living room floor, parts being read by various members of the family as a way to relax on Sunday afternoons. Many of these same reading practices remain in my life as an adult, both for practical purposes as well as an enjoyable hobby. My own children also enjoy reading in the same way that I did as a child.

I was first introduced to the field of reading research while taking a class called Development of Literacy Skills at a local university. Through writing a paper focused on family literacy, I learned about the importance of early literacy events and the effects of parent involvement in literacy. Family literacy courses were a new and interesting concept for me. The research for that particular paper made clear to me the importance of empowering families as they experience literacy in their homes. An intriguing topic

for me from that point on was the influence certain experiences or resources have on reading development in a second language.

Three experiences this past school year have placed this topic on the forefront of my thinking. First, early in the school year our administration and faculty adopted a new reading intervention curriculum, Level Literacy Intervention by Fountas and Pinnell (2008). One of the components in this curriculum involves students bringing home paperback books they can reread at home. Many times my students would return the book the next day without ever having taken it out of the reading pouch. They made comments that led me to believe there was little reading support for them at home. Some students told me their parents are too busy to read with them and/or do not speak English. There seemed to be other factors, such as disorganization, lack of motivation, or forgetfulness on the part of the student that may have contributed to them not reading this book at home.

The second experience occurred when I taught an after school program aimed to support struggling readers. Many of the ELs in my small groups were invited to join the program, which provided an after school snack, supportive and fun reading activities, and bus transportation back to their homes. Very few of my Somali students who struggle in reading were signed up by their parents. There were, however, four Somali students who did not receive invitations for the program from their mainstream classroom teacher because of their high reading levels, yet were allowed into the program at the parents' request. The cultural navigator in our school was also very encouraging of them being in the program, despite knowing that they did not need the remedial services. There seemed

to be many factors involved in some students not joining the program and others really wanting to be included. Not knowing exactly what these factors were was yet another reason to do these case studies.

A third experience involved seeing some of our Somali students in the hallway each morning with their library books, on their way to return them and check out more. One fifth grade student shared that she likes to go to the library so she can check out some books for her mom. She was trying to teach her mother to read and used books from our school library to share with her.   This impressed me and helped me understand that family literacy experiences vary from culture to culture and within families. It also increased my curiosity about factors that motivate these Somali students to read and strive to be successful at it.

Early reading experiences in my home as a child, as well as learning about family literacy and second language acquisition in university courses have created a strong interest in researching what enables some Somali students to rise to the top of the class in reading English. The experiences I have mentioned involving students shed light on the differences that are present among Somali students in the area of reading. It is my hope that through my research and findings on this topic, I may assist Somali parents, as well as teachers of Somali students, as they help children achieve greater success in learning to read in English.

The Somali Context

Given our school's large Somali population, gaining an understanding of background information regarding Somali culture, history, views on education, and

literacy practices enables me to better understand the needs of Somali students and their families.

   Background and history from an oral culture. One of the most important cultural traditions Somalis brought with them to the United States was their ongoing sense of orality (Bigelow, 2010). Orality is defined by the online Oxford Dictionaries (2014) as "the preference for or tendency to use spoken forms of language." In Somalia's nomadic society, poetry, tales, and drama carried the culture and were the basic means of communication used to pass on history and traditions (Mezei, 1989). Nomadic populations transmitted cultural norms and moral values through the spoken word (Kahin, 1997). Even though Somalia was united by one language, Somali, and one religion, Islam, the country was left deeply divided by tribal clans fighting for power (Masny and Ghahremani-Ghajar, 1999).   At various times prior to Somalia's independence from Britain and Italy, English and Italian were used for schooling. Arabic was used for the Koran, the Muslim religious text, but the Somali language had no written script.   The Somali language had been passed on from generation to generation orally, without written form (Mezei, 1989).

       Education developed quickly as Somalia became independent in 1960 (Abdi, 1998). Hundreds of schools were built, tens of thousands of teachers were trained, the Latin script for written Somali was adopted, and literacy programs were implemented across the country. All these systems of learning were destroyed in 1991 when the civil war began. With no organized education system in Somalia, millions of children, young adults, and adults were faced with limited formal education.

Limited formal schooling and low literacy. Bigelow's (2010) research provides informative background into educational experiences of many Somali people. Some Somali parents or grandparents have had formal schooling in Somalia or abroad. After 1990, however, few Somalis attended school as large numbers of people were resettled into refugee camps.   If children were able to attend school during resettlement, the quality of the schooling was poor. This sheds light on the circumstances common to many Somali families which have caused low levels of print literacy and limited formal schooling. Death, injuries, hardships, and the struggle for survival in refugee camps has led to the high incidence of low print literacy and limited formal schooling which characterizes many recently-arrived Somali young people.

Because of the low print literacy and limited formal schooling many Somali students experience, they are too often viewed as having deficits when it comes to learning. Bigelow (2010) stresses that students with limited formal schooling and low literacy levels have "cultural and religious characteristics" they bring to their new school setting (Bigelow, 2010. p.42). She adds that many young people come with strong oral language traditions, formal Qur'anic schooling experiences, prior language learning experiences, appreciation for the power of language, and abilities to create and reproduce oral texts. Additional research shows that Somali students coming from a culture with a rich oral tradition may very well have memorization and oral skills that are not measured by today's educational standards (Farid and McMahan, 2004). People from print-oriented cultures may not be able to fully grasp the great importance a culture like the Somali's place on oral language. These experiences and abilities often go unnoticed to

overwhelmed educators who have not been trained to meet the learning needs of these students.

    <u>Views toward education.</u> At times, Somali parents may need help in understanding the expectations of their children's school here in the U.S. Some parents have minimal contact with the school because of linguistic, cultural and practical constraints. They may not understand the homework their children bring home, yet they feel pressured to help them (Farid and McMahan, 2004). In Somali culture, parenting is seen as distinct from the teaching role; they leave much of the educational decisions to the school so they can avoid being intrusive (Kahin, 1997).

       Somali parents may appear indifferent about their children's education due to the lack of contact between home and school. Kahin (1998) supports the idea that their language barriers and lack of experience with the school system may prevent them from taking an active role, which may seem inappropriate to them in the first place. The school experience Somali parents may be used to was formal, disciplined, and teacher-centered. They do, however, recognize the value of education and strongly desire to contribute to it; a change in cultural values and attitudes is seen in the number of parents that attend school events. Nilsson, Barazanji, Heintzelman, Siddiqi, and Shilla (2012) add that among Somali mothers' greatest hopes for their children is for them to get an education.

    <u>The Somali community.</u> There is a relatively large concentration of Somali people living in the community in which this case study research is being done.   This fact makes the study relevant as results could benefit a large number of Somali students.

Bigelow (2010) sheds much light on the Somali immigrant group in this area. The Somali community in the large metropolitan city nearby is one of the largest Somali communities in America. Somalis are a visible presence with the large numbers in our schools, basic adult education programs, and literacy classes. A 2011 article in the local newspaper states that according to 2010 census data, the Somali population in this state is the largest in the United States. The estimate of more than 32,000 people of Somali ancestry includes people born in Somalia and their descendants (Williams, 2011). Estimates of the population are often hard to calculate as changes in location from one state to another occur. Some estimates of the Somali population in the state are as high as 50,000, with large numbers of Somali children in the public school system, as well as adults in basic education and literacy classes. The exact numbers are hard to determine due to various factors including changes in refugee policies, families relocating from and to other states, and inaccuracies in reporting of official census information (Bigelow, 2010).

Gaining insights into Somali history and culture through information such as this can guide educators as they consider a family's previous experiences, and family values and beliefs associated with education. Students from Somali families may carry a rich history of orality that may be a factor to their development as readers. Their families' experiences in Somalia, their immigration, and their views on education may also play a part in their learning to read. Information about these experiences, transitions to a new location, and oral traditions within the families I visited was written in the interview notes.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduce some of the issues and questions concerning successful Somali elementary students. As a result, my research question for this study is, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students?

This research project focuses on factors that influence Somali students' reading acquisition, particularly students who experience success in reading. I will investigate Somali cultural norms and attitudes toward education to better understand beliefs within the families of my students. An important consideration of this study is the primary oral culture which characterizes many Somali families. Because of the large numbers of Somali students who are struggling readers, gaining greater understanding of factors that influence their reading development, along with doing case studies with Somali students who are proficient in reading, ELs may benefit from a more successful learning experience. An additional benefit could be for school faculty and staff to have a greater understanding of our Somali students' backgrounds and learning needs to further support our ELs and their families. Because the topic of reading success for Somali elementary students has received so little attention in literacy and EL research, I believe it is an area that merits further study.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter One, I introduced my research by presenting key concepts, the purpose of my work, and the significance to English learners (ELs). I explained the context of the study and the role, background, and biases of the researcher, as well as the cultural norms

and attitudes of Somali families in regards to the education of their children. In Chapter

Two, I will review literature pertaining to this study. Some of the questions will include:

What is involved in learning to read? How does one learn to read in a second language?

What are some of the challenges in learning to read in a first language? What are some of

the challenges in learning to read in a second language? In particular, what challenges do

Somali students encounter as they learn to read in English? What are factors that affect

reading success? I will include research which addresses these questions. Chapter Three

describes the research design and methodology, including my plan for data collection and

analysis using multiple case studies. I will discuss the qualitative nature of this research

as well as the rationale for using it. In choosing to do qualitative case studies, I hope to

gain an understanding of factors that contribute to reading success for Somali elementary

students. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four. Findings, limitations,

and implications of the study, as well as recommendations for further research are

included in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

My research question in this study is, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students? First, literature will be presented to focus on the process of learning to read, both for native English speakers and English Learners (ELs). Literature will explore what researchers have found to be challenges in that learning process. Understanding these challenges will be applicable to this study as considerations are given to what some successful reading students have overcome and how to provide needed support for those who are falling behind their peers in reading. Next, a summary is made of what researchers say are important considerations for Somali students, in particular, as they learn to read. Before identifying the gap in research to explore, there will be a focus on influences, both linguistic and non-linguistic, that lead to reading success for some students.

Learning to Read

What is reading? It can be defined as "the interaction between a reader and a text" or "giving meaning to written information." When we sit down to read a book, our eyes move across and down the page as we understand the message without conscious effort. Like many of the mental activities we do, reading seems simple, but is actually quite complex as we consider its details. As an active, fluid process, reading involves a reader

and reading material in order to build meaning (Anderson, 1999). Mikulecky (1990) defines reading more specifically as the process involving the recognition of distinctive features in letters, words, and meanings, prediction of meaning, and application of the reader's understanding of the world and the topic. This process, as explained by Birch (2007), is complicated because of the large amount of precise knowledge that needs to be learned and the many processing strategies that must be practiced until they are automatic. As I researched the basics of reading, there seemed to be a general consensus among the scholars that reading is a complex process involving models, stages, and processes in which the reader interacts with the text.

<u>Reading Models</u>

Various researchers describe reading in terms of metaphorical models of the reading process – bottom-up, top-down, and interactive (Aebersold and Field, 1997; Anderson, 1999; Birch, 2007; Gunderson, 2009; Lems, Miller, and Soro, 2010; Reutzel and Cooter, 1996; Tracey and Morrow, 2006; Vacca, Vacca, and Gove, 1995). Bernhardt's (1991) model presents a dichotomous view of reading as both a cognitive and a social process. Gaining an understanding of these models is important to my research because it impacts the learning of my EL students and guides my instruction.

<u>Bottom-up model.</u> Bottom-up models of reading focus on information in the text. This data-driven model, according to Anderson (1999), emphasizes that it is sometimes known as lower-level reading processes, where information is processed from letters to words to meaning. Gunderson (2009) describes this model as the skills approach and states that advocates of this approach believe students can learn to read and comprehend

by acquiring a large set of skills in a particular sequence. This model is defined by Reutzel and Cooter (1997) as the traditional approach to reading instruction that relies on teacher-directed instruction. It uses a part to whole approach with skills instruction first, followed by authentic reading.

   Top-down model. The top-down model is at the other end of the spectrum. Top-down theorists believe students should read meaningful print, through which they acquire basic skills such as phonics. Meaningful reading materials can include good books or their own written stories.   As Reutzel & Cooter (1997) point out, this approach puts emphasis on background knowledge the reader brings to the text. An example of this model is the "whole language" approach which values relevant material, prior knowledge and experience, prediction, understanding meaning from context, and inference.

   Interactive model. The interactive reading model suggests that students use a combination of bottom-up and top-down strategies as they read. This approach uses both prior knowledge and print in the process of translating print to meaning. Birch (2007) calls this the balanced or integrated approach and emphasizes the interactive nature of reading, using both top-down and bottom-up processing strategies. Understanding these three models impacts what the teacher does in the classroom and has a direct effect on students. Teachers can plan effective lessons that meet the needs of students when he or she knows what language-specific bottom-up skills and top-down comprehension skills are needed.

  Sociocognitive model. There are often sociocultural and cognitive differences between native readers and those learning to read in a second language. Bernhardt (1991)

maintains that a dichotomous view of reading includes both cognitive and social processes. In the cognitive view, reading is an individual act made up of separate and measureable, though interdependent, processing steps.   In contrast, the social view sees text as a manifestation of culture and the processing of text viewed within the context of the culture.

The sociocognitive model (Bernhardt 1991) supports that the acquisition of literacy skills is influenced by the context or social background of the learner. Cognitively, a native speaker of English has competence in rules of English which are applied to linguistic activities; this cognition becomes hardwired to accommodate input information in a certain way. For second language learners, the input is very different from the cognitive wiring of their native language. Cognitive restructuring is necessary to understanding the anticipatory rules that are involved in reading second language texts. Within this view, comprehension of text is seen from a reader-based perspective. Text is made up of a series of features that represent not only its linguistic elements but also features such as structure, pragmatic nature, content, and topic. This researcher states that the second language reader approaches a text from their first language framework. In processing text, features are selected as readers change and react to the text. In the end, how the reader interprets or reconstructs the text is based on what the individual decides is important. From a social view, second language readers must gain access to the implicit information that is possessed by native speakers of English.

Reading Skills and Strategies

      While there is much research in the area of metaphorical models of reading, other researchers present reading as a set of skills and strategies to be learned (Lesaux and Geva, 2006; Nation, 2009; O'Donnell and Wood, 2004; Pressley, 2006; Sousa, 2011). While each researcher might present their theories in a different manner, what is evident is that there are components that readers need as they progress through reading development in either their first language or a second language. For the purpose of this study, I have included a limited number of studies on this topic in order to give an overview of the different approaches to reading. The focus on skills and strategies as components in reading development can help me understand where my ELs may need added support. These components, highlighted in research by Nation (2009) and O'Donnell and Wood (2004), include:

- Phonemic Awareness – hearing, identifying, and manipulating sounds in spoken language.

- Word Recognition/Decoding – understanding the relationships between written letters and spoken sounds; phonics knowledge.

- Fluency – reading text accurately, smoothly, quickly, and expressively; includes skills such as decoding, sight word recognition, and appropriate use of stress, pitch, and phrasing.

- Vocabulary – understanding meaning of individual words.

- Comprehension – the active process of constructing meaning from text; understanding what is read.

Important Considerations for ELs Learning to Read

A balanced approach, as described in the research above, stresses that the reader must use both bottom-up and top-down processing as reading develops. For second language readers, many researchers support the balanced or interactive model (Aebersold and Field, 1997; Anderson, 1999; Birch, 2007; Eskey, 1988; Lems et al., 2010). Eskey (1988) states that second language readers need more bottom-up strategies than first language readers due to weaker linguistic competence. In response, the second language reader would not use different strategies but receive support to strengthen their current linguistic and background knowledge. The focus on bottom-up skill development is also supported by Lems et al. (2010) as they point out that these skills are the ones that may cause the greatest challenge for ELs due to interference from their first language and the skills being language-specific. These skills need to be learned by ELs at whatever age they begin to learn English. In the interactive model, ELs benefit from learning a variety of word-level skills for decoding (bottom-up) as well as analytic and cognitive skills needed for comprehension (top-down).

In terms of comprehending text, Bernhardt (1991) points out that ELs, as any reader, may have systems in place that provide text input, such as phonological, lexical, or syntactic processing systems. Simultaneously, ELs may have a knowledge base to potentially fill any gaps in texts and to make sense of what is read. What is critical about this viewpoint is that as a second language learner attempts to read, all systems operate but with varying degrees of success. What this researcher stresses is the error in thinking that learning to read a second language is the same as in monolingual settings; that

learning is just in another language. In monolingual settings, there is often an extensive

oral vocabulary; children learn to read words that are already familiar to them. In

learning to read a second language, students need time to learn oral vocabulary first and

then learn the written forms.

Reading Challenges for Native Speakers of English

General. As I consider the reading challenges for a native speaker of English, as well

as ELs and specifically Somali students, I hope to gain a better understanding of the

needs of my students in the area of reading. This information will also shed light on what

the subjects of the case studies may have encountered in their reading development, and

subsequently have overcome.

Keeping in mind the reading models, skills, and strategies mentioned previously,

it is important to this study to investigate challenges that are encountered by students as

reading develops. When considering children who experience problems in learning to

read it is not surprising to me that skills from "lower-level" reading processes within the

bottom-up reading model are mentioned first by researchers. Challenges in phonologic

awareness at the outset of reading may be due to problems of perception, cognition, or

memory; any breakdown of this process can hold back early success (Cramer, 2006).

Decoding. Pressley (2006) claims the most salient problem for children learning to

read is learning to decode words. Instead of sounding out words, struggling readers may

have difficulty hearing or saying the sounds represented by the constituent letters. They

find it hard to segment words into their constituent sounds and then blend the sounds to

say the word. Instead, lower readers rely on semantic-contextual cues to identify words,

potentially creating several problems as a result. These problems include guessing the word, inaccuracy, lessening the likelihood of making an unknown word a sight word, slowing down the reading pace, and consuming short-term capacity needed for comprehension. Stronger readers occasionally rely on context and picture clues to decode words, but will often combine this strategy with their ability to analyze words into their sounds and blend them.

Fluency. Fluency is often a challenge to struggling readers, making reading slow, inaccurate, and requiring conscious attention to individual words. Research done by O'Donnell & Wood (2004) found young readers that were referred to their university's reading and writing clinic lack fluency and accuracy. The students' strategies were often limited to sounding out words letter by letter. Students in this study were stuck in the transitional stage, characterized by slow and laborious reading due to lack of automaticity. Excessively slow reading can be linked to poor comprehension, frustration for the reader, and overall poor reading performance (Marshall and Campbell, 2006).

Vocabulary. A challenging area of reading for students can be new vocabulary. Students with limited vocabulary have a harder time making connections between words and concepts, ultimately limiting their comprehension of what they are reading. Knowledge of vocabulary is regarded by Chiappone (2006) as critical to successful reading comprehension. Interestingly, she points out that limited vocabulary can be both a cause and an effect of a student's poor reading ability. A major source of new words is in reading, however when a student reads less because they don't understand the words, they further limit their exposure to new and rich vocabulary.

Comprehension. Comprehension depends significantly on word-recognition skills. Struggling readers that I know focus much of their attention and effort to word identification rather than on the meaning of the text. It is apparent in teaching struggling readers that fluency level and comprehension of text are also interrelated. By the time a student slowly makes it through a passage, they have spent much of their energy on trying to say the words correctly, impacting their fluency level and lowering their ability to remember or understand what they just read. Research supports the idea of lack of fluency leading to problems with comprehension (O'Donnell and Wood, 2004). It is understood that readers who are unskilled in decoding words spend most of their attention on word identification which lowers the fluency level. When decoding becomes more automatic, fluency and comprehension levels improve as students can concentrate on more of the meaning of the text and less on accuracy.

Reading Challenges for English Learners

Although an EL learning to read uses essentially the same process as a native speaker of English, the task may be more difficult. The resources that ELs and non-ELs bring to the process are often different. Many researchers point to differences in background knowledge and second language proficiency as being two of the most important differences in terms of reading development between first language and second language readers (Aebersold and Field, 1997; Anderson, 1999; Lesaux and Geva, 2006; Medina and Pilonieta, 2006; Nation, 2009; O'Donnel and Wood, 2004; Peregoy and Boyle, 2005; Sousa, 2011).

Some of the skills and strategies students learn within the bottom-up model of reading can be part of the limitations in language proficiency ELs experience. First language readers already know a lot of the language they are beginning to read, whereas second language learners may not; learning to read in a second language involves a great deal of language learning (Nation, 2009). Phonemic awareness can be a problem for ELs as some phonemes may not be familiar to them and phonemic awareness in their first language may not be developed (Cramer, 2006). There are differences in ELs' ability to perceive and produce English speech sounds (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005).   The lack of sound-to-letter correspondence in the English language, as Sousa (2011) points out, makes it difficult to recognize patterns in the language. According to Marshall & Campbell (2006), limitations in second language proficiency, can also affect fluency and cause reading to be slower and more challenging. If the level of the text does not match the level of English language proficiency there can be a barrier to comprehension (Sousa, 2011). These are just some of the ways researchers have noted how bottom-up skills and strategies are difficult for ELs who have limited language proficiency.

Prior knowledge. The prior knowledge and previous experience each of us brings to a learning situation can help us in understanding a new skill or strategy. Anderson (1999) notes that background information can include all the experiences a reader brings to the reading process, including life and educational experiences, cultural background, knowledge of how texts are organized and how the second language works. Limited or interrupted prior educational experiences as well as cultural differences may contribute to ELs lacking background knowledge necessary for comprehension of English texts

(Sousa, 2011). Medina & Pilonieta (2006) shed further light on schema theory by presenting schema processing as a top-down procedure in that you first think of a big idea, and then you think about the details. They compare the mind to a filing cabinet with the big ideas in a file folder along with all the details you already know about the big idea inside the file. ELs will have many files in their cabinet, but may have limited information and details within their files that support English language learning.

Aebersold & Field (1997) differentiate schema, or the background knowledge readers bring to the text. Linguistic schema includes the features we need to recognize words and use them in sentences. Content schema provides more of the features of comprehension and ways to understand what we read. Even when ELs have learned basic English skills, grasping new concepts in content areas may be a struggle because of limited prior knowledge (O'Donnell & Wood, 2004).   Lesaux & Geva (2006) summarize the differences in language proficiency and background knowledge ELs experience in learning to read:

> For language-minority children and youth, the development of literacy skills in a second language is arguably even more challenging than for native speakers. The same array of word and text-level skills must be learned, although such learning may begin at a later age, perhaps without the same level of foundation in the cognitive and linguistic precursors to literacy or with sociocultural presuppositions that differ from those of native speakers and often by children facing social, fiscal, and familial challenges. (p. 58)

The term background knowledge is often heard when a discussion of second language reading takes place, yet Bernhardt (1991) provides specific differences in the kinds of background knowledge that ELs possess. Individuals or groups may possess local-level knowledge, or the idiosyncratic knowledge that is often specific or relevant to the individual or group. Domain-specific knowledge is seen in the form of social and natural sciences, art, music, and language and is often provided by formal schooling. Lastly, culture-specific knowledge includes cultural-historic as well as ritualistic knowledge. This type of knowledge is passed from generation to generation and reflects the values of the culture.

Being aware of the knowledge ELs possess, how they gain knowledge that is culturally appropriate, and how knowledge is applied to text can be used to guide research and influence instruction. The role of prior knowledge and language proficiency is important for understanding the challenges ELs have as they learn to read. This understanding can guide educators as they work to provide the best possible instruction for ELs.

Aspects That Affect Reading for Somali Students

While many of the reading challenges for ELs that are highlighted in the previous section are true for Somali students, this group has aspects that are unique to them. In addition, the aspects included are generalizations and may not cover all of the experiences held for every Somali student learning to read in a second language. This section is not meant to list deficiencies or negative qualities that Somali students possess, rather it is meant to shed light on aspects that may influence Somali students. Rather

than present a negative focus, I want to take a realistic look, knowing that all students, no matter what challenges they face, have potential to become successful readers. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, my goals are to understand factors that lead to Somali student success in reading in order to help all Somali students. Looking at two aspects that Somali students may experience as they learn to read in English will help me in this understanding and meet the goals of my study.

Immigration. The first aspect is that many of the Somali students in our school have known a great deal of instability due to experiences in refugee communities prior to immigrating and then during post-immigration adjustment. Researchers have studied the impact of these experiences on Somali students (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Bigelow, 2010; Farid and McMahan, 2004; Nilsson et al., 2012). Within this aspect of immigration come these two areas of focus that change the learning experience for Somali students: interruptions or limitations in formal schooling and changes in family structure.

Despite gaps in education, hardships, and trauma faced by many refugee children coming to our schools in the United States, many have adjusted very quickly and remarkably well. Others, however, have experienced the trauma of war and hardships in refugee camps and have not adapted as well. Farid and McMahan (2004) describe the refugee culture and point to the day-to-day struggle for survival that has impacted some traditional Somali families and has weakened the family structure. In many cases, civil war has changed the family structure as some men have died or have sent their families out of the country, leaving the responsibility of supervision and discipline of children,

values education, and religious training to single mothers. The family unit has also

changed as extended family members move into limited but affordable housing. Somali

students in this environment might be unable to find a quiet place to do homework or

read independently without interruptions.

Schooling is regarded by Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) as one of the most critical

integration measures. Her study of some of the challenges and obstacles encountered by

Somali youth in a school in Finland support that these obstacles are universal to most

students having immigration experience. While this study does not focus on students

learning to read in the educational system in the United States, the researcher describes

some of the barriers Somali students faced in Finland in the 1990s that many immigrants

experience in the U.S. in our present day. Threatened identities, acculturation stress of

the family, cognitive overload, and limited support and control provided by adults are

some of the many ways that immigrant students are limited or distracted as they learn a

second language.

For many of the Somali parents with children attending our school, support of

their children and concern for their future are evident.   A study done by Nilsson et al.

(2012) sheds light on concerns of Somali parents for their children's adjustment to living

in the United States. Post-migration trauma and changes in behavior due to resettlement

have affected family life and relationships as well as their educational accomplishments.

Other aspects regarding their children's adjustment include the many differences between

cultures, loss of parents' disciplinary authority, and feeling unsupported and

misunderstood by the school system. Each factor may have the potential to influence

Somali students' learning, including learning to read in English.

Aspects of life in refugee camps and survival in the midst of civil war can result

in low print literacy and limited formal schooling for Somali children immigrating to the

U.S. (Bigelow 2010). In her research, Bigelow points out that a low level of formal

schooling is often, but not always, associated with low levels of print literacy, and can

make learning academic content more difficult. Beyond the interruptions to formal

education caused by civil war, Farid and McMahan (2004) also add that limited formal

schooling may be a result of the former nomadic lifestyle of some of the students. This

can also result in pre-emergent or undeveloped literacy skills. Bigelow (2010) also notes

that educators may know little about how to educate Somali students with limited formal

schooling and may feel overwhelmed by the needs of the students.

   Oral language tradition. The second aspect that may influence Somali students as they

learn to read in English is the rich oral tradition within their cultural background**.** In her

extensive studies done with Somali immigrants, Bigelow (2010) writes, "It seems that

one of the most important cultural artifacts of Somalis in the Diaspora is their ongoing

and exuberant sense of orality" (p. 35).   Somali learners bring strong oral language

traditions to their school experience. Watson (2010) presents the differences between

cultures or societies in relation to oral versus literate as an abyss. This describes the way

in which the experiences of an individual living in, or coming from, an oral culture is

dramatically different from the experience of an individual living in a literate society.

The process of moving from oral to literate moves in one direction, making it impossible

for a literate person to return to a primarily oral way of communicating. However, as Bigelow (2010) adds, despite Somalis adapting to a highly literate society, there may still be a preference for oral communication.

The way this may impact Somali elementary students learning to read is in the way they navigate the differences between home and school cultures and ways of communicating. Masney (1999) writes that school-based literacy practices are often less accessible to some students because home-based ways of communicating are often not represented in the culture of the school. These differences may contribute to a negative sense of identity or a lowered level of school success.

Somali culture is extremely social and interactive (Farid and McMahon, 2004). Interdependency in this traditionally nomadic culture has been important to survival. Bigelow (2010) supports this fact by noting that teachers often comment on the highly interactive nature of their Somali students. Social interaction is important to Somali people and some prefer talking over reading. This observation is true for many of my Somali students. Using collaborative activities, with some guidance, would benefit Somali students who are coming from an oral society (Farid and McMahon, 2004).

In this section, I took a closer look at what some researchers feel are important aspects of reading challenges for students in general, and then at factors that influence learning for ELs and, more specifically, Somali students. Educators can benefit from knowing certain aspects of the students' cultures that will influence their teaching and their students' learning.

Factors That Influence Reading Success

When considering the Somali students in our school who are experiencing great reading success, topics of second language acquisition (SLA) and what factors influence individuals as they learn a new language come into focus. There are interesting similarities in the research found between second language acquisition and learning to read successfully. This section of the literature review will focus on what can influence learners, either native-English speakers or ELs, in their experience of learning to read. Much of the research is found in SLA studies but crosses over into characteristics of what makes a successful reader. For the purpose of this study, I will differentiate, when possible, between factors that enable SLA and those that are general influences on reading success. Reviewing these factors and characteristics of successful readers is important in order to better understand the influences that affect not only the Somali students involved in these case studies but also the struggling readers in our school.

In finding a large amount of research on this topic, it was necessary to limit this review by distinguishing between two categories: Linguistic (academic) influences and non-linguistic (psychological/personality) influences. The information found and reviewed seemed to fall into one of these two broad categories. Several aspects from each category will be included that may provide insight into what might influence the students in these case studies.

Linguistic/Academic Aspects

Emergent literacy and early literacy experiences. As an ESL teacher, it is important for me to learn how my students, particularly my Somali students, use literacy in their

lives and how it impacts them as learners. Unfortunately, much of the focus on early

emergent literacy programs has not given attention to families within linguistic and racial

minorities and tends to have a deficit view of these homes. The rich oral culture that

often exists within Somali families that has been mentioned previously in this study will

be kept in focus. This knowledge may enable this study to build upon practices and

experiences learned and used at home to enhance learning for students who encounter

difficulties as they learn to read.

The teaching of literacy often happens indirectly, occurring in the daily routines

of families from the time children are born. Many young children begin formal schooling

with literacy practices and experiences learned from their home and cultural communities

(Purcell-Gates, Melzi, Najafi, and Orellana, 2011). According to Whitehurst and

Lonigan (1998), the term "emergent literacy" is used to highlight the idea that acquiring

literacy follows a developmental continuum that begins early in life, not something that

starts when a child enters school (p. 848). It consists of the skills, knowledge, and

attitudes that come before reading and writing. From the perspective of emergent literacy,

children should learn much about reading and writing prior to formal schooling through

literacy-based behaviors. From an early age, children can be exposed to interactions in

social contexts; the literacy activities of reading, writing, and oral language development

can happen concurrently and interdependently, yet in the absence of formal instruction.

Some researchers point out the importance of the literacy environment within the

field of emergent literacy. In research done by Wasik and Hendrickson (2004), emergent

literacy refers to a child's emerging reading behaviors at home rather than seeing the

school as the first setting for literacy development; reading and writing can begin during

the preschool years at home and through parent-child interaction. Getting children ready

to learn is not the issue, rather it is creating literacy environments so that learning

experiences can include emergent literacy concepts that are needed for success in school

(Purcell-Gates, 1996).

The research of Wasik and Hendrickson (2004) also organizes variables in family

literacy practices and view these as influences which can predict children's literacy

outcomes. Parental characteristics that can affect literacy are family culture and identity,

parental beliefs about education, and socioeconomic status. The home literacy

environment has a strong impact through shared book reading, making print materials

available, and maintaining a positive attitude toward literacy. Interaction with others and

the quality of the parent-child relationship influences the acquisition of literacy skills.

Barkon and Avinor (1995) interviewed five Ethiopian university students in a

low-level class. The interviews were based on a questionnaire that gathered reading

background information.   Students were asked questions about early reading activities,

parent literacy, and current reading experiences in order to explore any possible

connections between early reading experiences and academic difficulties. In the findings

of this report, the authors connect academic difficulties with early literacy deprivation

and show the need for early reading experiences, including early access to texts.

ELs entering school may bring literacy experiences and beliefs which are shaped

by their culture. However, many of our ELs who have had refugee experiences may not

come from a background of early literacy experiences. Many Somali students who were

born in the US have parents who may not have had much formal education and have dealt

with fleeing a civil war and then lived in a refugee camp. The important literacy skills

being taught at school do not always match their previous experiences (Purcell-Gates et

al., 2011). There is a great deal of knowledge each student brings to their learning

experience when he or she begins school. It is pointed out by Weinstein-Shr and

Quintero (1995) that when schools can focus on funds of knowledge, along with what can

be done and shared in the community, then literacy skills are developed and relationships

are nurtured. To summarize this topic of emergent literacy as a factor to reading success,

Taylor (1993) encourages educators to understand these extraordinary funds of

knowledge from the perspective of individual family members and what they bring to the

learning situation.

    Metacognition. It is understood by educators that readers have skills and strategies

they use that make them successful. Lems et al. (2010) review some of the components

that are needed to create a "syndrome of success" for an EL: oral proficiency, decoding

ability, word formation processes, fluency, and comprehension (p.170). Good readers

can combine strategies while reading. A large number of studies have shown that

metacognition plays a key role in reading success (Anderson, 1999; Block, 1986; Lems et

al., 2010; Paris and Meyers, 1981; Sinhal, 2001). Anderson (1999) states:

"Metacognitive awareness of the reading process is perhaps one of the most important

skills second language readers can use while reading" (p. 72). Cognitive and

metacognitive reading strategies are used more by successful readers than less successful

readers, and are used more frequently to enhance their awareness of what they know

(Singhal, 2001).

Students categorized as successful readers seem to have the ability to make

connections with what they read and be able to monitor their reading comprehension.

Paris and Meyer's (1981) study investigated the differences in comprehension monitoring

between good and poor readers. Their research found successful readers engaging in

accurate monitoring, adjusting reading rates, and deriving meaning for difficult

vocabulary. In addition, highly proficient readers used cognitive, memory,

metacognitive, compensation, and social strategies to a far greater extent than lower

proficient readers.   The research presented suggests that successful readers are able to

think about their thinking. Because of this portion of the literature review, I am

interested in investigating the level of metacognitive strategy use of the students in my

case studies.

   Comprehensible input and extensive reading.   In my experience as a teacher, what

seems to be of great importance to successful readers, beyond any early literacy

experiences and reading skill development, is that they are purposeful in what they read,

that what they read challenges them, and that they can read with stamina. My

assumptions are supported by two researchers that write about input and extensive

reading. In his Monitor Model of second language acquisition, Krashen (1982) describes

comprehensible input as necessary for language acquisition. This input refers to

language a learner can understand. In his *input hypothesis* ($i + 1$), not only is a learner

exposed to comprehensible input (i), representing the level of language already acquired,

but also the language (+1) a step beyond that level.   Although some have criticized Krashen for developing theory without empirical studies to back them up, I believe this model has relevance for my study.

In research on second language reading, Anderson (1999) advocates *extensive reading*, defined as reading a large amount of text for general comprehension. Extensive reading can facilitate learning new vocabulary and content, becoming familiar with syntactic structure, gaining knowledge of genres, and increasing reading rate.   Strategies learned in the classroom can be followed up when students have opportunities to do a great deal of reading. Krashen (1982) is one of the biggest proponents of extensive reading in the field of second language acquisition; he argues that extensive reading leads to language acquisition, provided that certain preconditions are met. These include adequate exposure to the language, interesting material, and a relaxed, tension-free learning environment. The students involved in these case studies always seem to be reading. What they choose to read, or comprehensible input, seems to both challenge and interest them so that they want to read extensively.

While many educators may think of early literacy experiences, alphabetical knowledge, phonemic awareness, and comprehension strategies as critical components in learning to read, one must not overlook factors in readers' personalities that contribute to reading success. For my literature review, I will categorize these factors as non-linguistic or psychological aspects.

<u>Non-Linguistic/Psychological Aspects</u>

<u>Affective filter.</u> As a learner, when I feel relaxed, confident, and hopeful, I am more

engaged and receptive to new ideas and information. It is understandable then, that ELs

would find greater success in learning to read when their affective filters are lowered.

Krashen's (1982) Monitor Model of second language acquisition accounts for language

learning success in his affective filter hypothesis.   Even when appropriate input is

available, feelings, motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states may put up a barrier

that prevents learners from acquiring language. In this hypothesis, when anxiety is

lowered, better language acquisition can result. Lems, et al. (2010) support this by stating

that language learning outcomes are closely associated with affect, or emotional state.

Some of the influences on affective filter highlighted in their research are learners'

attitudes about their culture, the second language, the classroom, and feelings about prior

learning experiences. Where these attitudes originate, whether learned or inherited, or

what influences of culture, age, or classroom environment exist, we can know that

affective factors play a role in students' literacy learning.

<u>Motivation.</u> An intriguing topic in second language acquisition is motivation. What

motivates a person to learn a second language? What are the purposes behind their

learning? Dörnyei (1994), who has done extensive research on motivation and language

learning, states that motivation is one of the key factors influencing the success of second

language learning. Motivation, pointed out by Lightbown and Spada (2006), is a

"complex phenomenon" and has been defined with two factors in mind: the

communicative needs of the learner and their attitudes toward the second language

community (p.63). These two factors are explained in depth by well-known research done by Gardner & Lambert (1972) who coined the terms instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to language learning for immediate or practical purposes and integrative motivation is learning a language for the purpose of personal growth and enrichment.   Students have different motivators in their language learning. The same types of motivation could apply to learning to read in a second language. Some students want to read well in order to be part of a book club, get better grades, or avoid having to be given special help in reading.   Others want to read well in order to enjoy some of the harder, more interesting chapter books that classmates check out from the library. Another type of motivation less specific to language learning is intrinsic (Lems et al., 2010).   In this type of motivation a language is learned simply because the student loves to learn or is curious.

McGeown, Norgate, and Warhurst (2012) examined how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differs, in relation to skill level, between children who are excellent readers and children who are poor readers. It should be noted that the study does not specifically focus on second language learners, but learners in general. A child may choose to read simply because it is enjoyable (intrinsic motivation) or may be motivated to read because of some type of reward or positive outcome (extrinsic motivation). The study shows a significant difference in intrinsic motivation between the two groups. Compared to the difference in skill level, however, there was a relatively small difference in reading motivation.   There are so many variables in the language learning process and in what might be the motivating factors for children learning to read; however, it is evident that

motivation plays an important role in the language learning process. This study is particularly important as it helps educators understand what can motivate both good and struggling readers.

   Resiliency. A personality trait that can play an important role in language learning and can influence a student's ability to learn to read is resiliency. This is defined as a person's ability to overcome possible obstacles (Lems et al., 2010). Academic resiliency is needed to continue overcoming learning challenges and possible failure as beginning readers encounter stumbling blocks (Wawman, Gray, and Padron, 2003).   Evidence indicates that development of early socioemotional skills can promote future success in literacy (Duncan et al., 2007).

        The importance of fostering academic resiliency is what motivated McTingue, Washburn, and Liew (2009) to research how socioemotional development should be paired with learning literacy skills as a student begins to learn a new language. Their study provides a base for the role of socioemotional development in literacy by highlighting the following terms that interrelate with the topics of motivation and affect-filtering mentioned previously: self-efficacy (believing one's actions can produce desired results), academic resiliency (not giving up and believing that effort and challenge lead to success), and self-regulation (an approach to learning involving forethought, purpose, and reflection).   To effectively help all students become successful readers, a holistic approach to literacy instruction that nurtures socioemotional skills in addition to language skills may be most effective.

<u>Research Gap</u>

Some of the questions I attempted to address in this chapter included: What is involved in learning to read? How does one learn to read in a second language? What are some of the challenges in learning to read in a first language? What are some of the challenges in learning to read in a second language? In particular, what challenges do Somali students encounter as they learn to read in English? What are factors that affect reading success?

In my study of relevant literature, I have found there has been little research done to investigate why some Somali students are finding great success as readers. My research will attempt to address that gap by providing insights into the following question: What factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students?

<u>Summary</u>

Research shows there are many influences on students learning to read. In this chapter, I looked specifically at research that explains reading models. Research was examined which focuses on skills and strategies necessary to reading and looked at studies that discuss important considerations for ELs learning to read. Discussed were the results of studies which examined challenges non-ELs, ELs and Somali students encounter as they develop reading skills. Important research summarized influences, both linguistic and non-linguistic, that lead to reading success for some students. The gap in research was identified, as well as the research question which is, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students?

The next chapter focuses on the methodology of this study. The qualitative research paradigm and case study research characteristics are discussed. Data collection techniques used in this study, interviews, observations, and analyzing documents, are included. Also presented in Chapter Three are overviews of data organization, the data analysis process, the methods of data verification, and the ethics safeguards considered in the study. The procedural aspects of this research study are presented and will include the setting, participants, and materials needed to conduct the research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The goal of this study was to research factors that contribute to reading success for Somali students. As noted in chapter two, there are many challenges encountered in reading development, as well as many factors that can be attributed to reading success, both for non-English Learners and English Learners (ELs). Also previously noted, however, is the lack of research that has been done to investigate the factors that lead to success in reading for elementary-aged Somali students. The purpose of this study was to address that gap, and to find the answer to the question, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students?

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the methodologies used in this study. First, the rationale and description of the research design are presented along with a description of the qualitative paradigm. Second, the data collection protocols are presented, including information on the participants, setting, and data collection techniques. Third, the method used for data analysis is described and methods of data verification are discussed. Finally, ethical considerations are presented, along with a description of how those considerations were dealt with in this study.

Research Paradigm

Qualitative research. Research for this study was conducted within the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research was appropriate for this project because my ultimate goal was to increase my own knowledge of best practices in reading, with particular focus on the factors that influence Somali students as they learn to read.

In qualitative study research, Merriam (2009) pointed out that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The process of data gathering is inductive, rather than deductive, in testing a hypothesis. Data is gathered and organized into larger themes, working from specific information to general categories. As the researcher, I gathered data to build a hypothesis regarding factors that lead to reading success for Somali elementary students.   Information from interviews and conversations with participants in the study were analyzed into themes and categories that shed light on Somali culture and reading practices within Somali families.   My hope was that this study would result in a rich description of these Somali students' reading experiences and practices.

In this qualitative study, there was a purposeful, limited number of participants. Research was flexible and emergent as I gathered information from students, families, and teachers. McKay (2006) noted that the purpose of a qualitative study is to use descriptive language in interpreting, categorizing, and sharing results which was a focus when I analyzed the data collected.

Collective case studies. Case studies fall into the qualitative research paradigm. Case studies are often hard to define because of the varied focus and many types of research

data gathered (McKay, 2006). McKay provided this definition: "A case study is a single instance of some bound system, which can range from one individual to a class, a school, or an entire community" (p. 71). Case studies are not only used for exploration, but also for description and explanation, with case studies being used most often when the researcher has no control over the studied behaviors (Yin, 1994) . It was my goal to not only explore the factors that lead Somali students to reading success, but describe this data and provide an explanation that could guide students, teachers, and parents. As I gathered data from multiple students using a variety of techniques, I understood that this data would emerge as information that was beyond my ability to control.

 Case study research. Stake (2000) described three types of case study research: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. My research involved qualitative case studies and was instrumental because I hoped to provide insight into an issue by investigating why some Somali students excel in reading and others do not. This research can also be considered a collective case study as I gathered data from multiple students in order to build a stronger understanding of what factors might influence reading success for all Somali students. An appealing aspect of multiple case studies noted by Merriam (2009) was that the interpretation of the data from multiple cases may be more compelling, and the findings have the potential for greater external validity or generalizability (Merriam, 2009). Barone (2004) also noted the credibility that is present in a collective case study as a result of observed patterns across multiple cases.

Case study research can be used to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation in order to improve practice. A reward to case study work, according to Barone (2004) is

that it is applicable to real life, relating directly to the experience of the reader and facilitating an understanding of complex situations. "Research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 1998, p. 3). For these reasons, I chose to do a collective case study. I wanted to understand why some Somali students are proficient in reading and to promote the same kind of success for all Somali students.

Data Collection Technique 1

 Interviews. Data collection for case studies can come from many sources. Yin (1994) discussed six sources of evidence: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. An exemplar in literacy research was a study by Compton-Lilly (2003) that focused on students and parents, the importance of reading, and how reading was enacted in their homes. What made this research stand out were the multiple sources of data used in the study, including student and parent interviews, many forms of classroom data, and daily field notes. For the purpose of my study I included three sources in my data collection: interviews, direct observation, and documentation.

 Family contact. The procedure for approval for human subjects research from Hamline University and the school district was granted in November of 2014. The documents for the Human Subjects Protocol are found in Appendices A through D. I wrote a letter to families on November 11, 2014, explaining my research study and requesting volunteers to be interviewed. I wanted to have three students (and their

families) participate in this research.   Our cultural navigator phoned each family or parent to clarify any pertinent questions they might have about the study.   I realized the importance of carefully relaying the purpose of the interviews and ensure families of the voluntary nature of the interviews.

   Interview questions. Wording of the interview questions may determine the success of an interview in obtaining quality information. Phrasing the questions at a linguistically appropriate level and with sensitivity to cultural differences is of great importance (McKay, 2006).   Before actual interviews took place, I discussed the interview questions and procedure with the cultural navigator at our school. We discussed the purpose of the interviews, pertinent cultural aspects, appropriateness of the questions, and the importance of gathering relevant and useful information.

   Interviewing families. The family interviews consisted of a series of questions divided into three areas. 1) back-ground questions, 2) questions about their home literacy practices, and 3) questions about the children's experiences with reading in school. Interview questions can be found in Appendix E.

        Two of the interviews were held in the homes of the families being interviewed; one interview took place at school. Much research in the field of family literacy has utilized home visits to observe literacy experiences and gather valuable information firsthand. A study by Huss (1995), which gathered data centered on young children's beginning second language literacy learning, relied on parent input to indicate out-of-school and home literacy learning to dispel teachers' misinterpretations about in-school literacy learning. These valuable insights gathered through interviews with parents shed

light on multiple literacy learning experiences that are unique to each family. Studies on family literacy practices (Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaff, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Purcell-Gates, Allier, & Smith, 1995; Quiroz, Snow, & Zhao, 2010; and Van Steensel, 2006) used interviews, questionnaires, and observations during home visits to gather relevant information about family background, home-language use, types and frequency of literacy activities, and literacy activities of varying members of the family.

The interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Two of the interviews were done with one of the parents from a family and one was done with both parents. One parent interview required an interpreter; even though they speak some English, there was concern they would not be able to understand and respond to the questions comfortably or successfully. Questions were rephrased or repeated in each of the other interviews as needed. My goals in interviewing the families of three Somali students were to answer my main research questions, as well as gain a greater understanding into Somali culture and what kinds of literacy experiences Somali students bring to school when they begin.

Interview format. Semi-structured interviews with the interview guide approach were conducted with each of the participants in my study, keeping early literacy practices in focus. The semi-structured, or focused, interview approach is used when researchers want more specific information on a topic but have a flexible format (Rubin, 1995). Merriam (2009) added that qualitative interviews are more open-ended and less structured, guided by a list of flexibly-worded questions to explore. As described by McKay (2006), the interview guide approach involves a series of questions that is asked of each participant in the study. While the order and phrasing of the questions may vary,

the same topic is explored by each interviewee. Some questions in my semi-structured interviews were specific, seeking a definite answer, while other questions were open-ended, allowing respondents to elaborate on individual experiences with reading in their homes. The order of questions was not determined ahead of time, allowing me to respond to the interviewees' views and ideas on the topic.

  Qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviewing is an academic tool for research, yet practical as well. It is a versatile method in gathering data (Rubin, 1995). Interviewing Somali students and their parents enabled me to have a glimpse into their world and better understand cultural reasons for their success in reading.

According to Rubin (1995), qualitative interviewing allows one to find out what others feel and think about their worlds. Through these interviews, experiences can be better understood. McKay (2006) stated that interviews can be used to find out more about participants' background and knowledge of a topic, their reported behavior, and their opinions or attitudes about language learning.

Interviews are used in research, as a tool to learn about experiences and feelings of interviewees. This information can later be analyzed and shared in various ways. Another distinction of interviews is that they take place between strangers as well as among acquaintances and are guided by the researcher. Questions are intentionally introduced and the interviewee is asked to reflect and answer the questions (Rubin, 1995). Using the interview format allowed me to gain an understanding of literacy experiences within Somali families. The information was analyzed and shared in this capstone and with my colleagues.

Data Collection Technique 2

Observing students. In data collection, observations and interviews are often closely tied. Merriam (1988) used the terms fieldwork and field study to refer to both activities and stated that observations are the best technique to use when one wants to see an activity or situation firsthand, when looking for a new perspective, or when participants are not able to have a discussion about the topic. An observer can notice things that have become routine for teachers and students. The purpose of doing observations as part of my field study was to see settings, behaviors, and activities of successful Somali readers firsthand and to gather information that students were not able to articulate during the interviews. The focus during the observations was to gain insight into factors that contribute to reading success for these Somali students.

Merriam (2008) suggested some elements that can be present in an observation: setting, participants, activities and interactions, frequency and duration, and subtle factors. I observed successful Somali readers in their homes during home visits, but the majority of my observations were done in the school setting. The participants during my observations were the Somali students that were part of the study, their classmates, and their teachers. Observations took place mainly during their scheduled reading times in the school day, but also included library times and free-choice activity times. I observed how the students interacted with the activities and other participants, as well as the frequency and duration of reading activities and behaviors. Subtle factors within the observations included nonverbal communication and any informal or unplanned activities within the school setting. The observation form I created is found in Appendix F.

Data Collection Technique 3

    Analyzing documents. Documents, according to Merriam (2008), refer to a wide

range of written and physical materials, most of which are produced independent of the

research study. Advantages to using data from documents include the low cost and ease

of obtaining it as well as it being objective and not altered by the researcher. Yin (1994)

added that the use of documents can be stable, in that the evidence can be reviewed

repeatedly, as well as unobtrusive with documents not being created as a result of the

case study. All types of documents can assist the researcher in finding meaning,

understanding, and insights that are important to their research. During my study, I

reviewed documents containing quantitative data that supported the focus of my research.

Much of this data came from the students' test records and was initially used in the

selection of research participants. This information is included in Appendix G.

Additional documents came in the form of student reading goal sheets, reading logs, or

reading calendars, and were provided by the classroom teachers.

Procedure

    Participants: Teachers, parents, and students. The third, fourth, and fifth grade

teachers who expressed interest in learning about Somali children's reading success

helped me obtain an initial pool of potential participants who are proficient in reading at

school. Each teacher has worked with ELs in the mainstream classroom. The teachers of

each student represented in the study agreed to collaborate with the research as necessary.

Teachers provided feedback through informal conversations with the researcher

regarding students' reading experiences at school and other relevant information helpful to the study.

After contacting families about the study, three Somali families participated in the research. The time they have been in the U.S. varies from family to family. All of the parents speak Somali. Other demographic information I collected for each participant is included in Appendix H.

There were three students participating in this study. The students were all English Learners and all spoke Somali as their first language. Each of these students received EL services prior to my becoming an ESL teacher within the school. One student was recently exited from the district's EL program based on his high ACCESS score (English language proficiency test); the other two students scored very high, resulting in them only needing consultative EL services. The small number of students chosen for this research was due to the nature of the study as well as the limited number of Somali students receiving high scores in the reading assessments. The criteria for inclusion in the study are found in Appendix G.

Location/Setting. The students were enrolled in a large public elementary school in a mid-sized urban city in the upper Midwest. Out of over 800 students enrolled, approximately 70% of the students in the school qualified for free and reduced lunch. Approximately 20% of the students in the school received EL services.

Locations for two of the three interviews occurred in Somali participants' homes which were located in close proximity of the school. One interview took place at the school upon the parent's request. Observations took place at school and in homes during

visits with the families. The classroom settings for the students in this study were self-contained, grade-level classrooms with approximately 25 students in each class. Each classroom had a book library of leveled books that students can read while in school. An inviting school library housed an abundant supply of books for students to check out on a weekly basis. Students checked out books more frequently; if time was allowed by the classroom teacher, students visited the library independently. Document research and information-gathering was done within the school setting.

Materials. To collect and analyze data during interviews, I used audio equipment in the form of an application on an iPad that recorded the interviews. Video recording was not used in order to avoid adding pressure on those I interviewed and to make them feel at ease within their homes. I used a computer to transcribe interview data following the home visit. The school's cultural navigator assisted me by participating in one interview, discussing interview questions prior to the interviews and reviewing the content of the discussion following the interview. Informal conversations regarding relevant cultural information were ongoing throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

The preferred way of data analysis in qualitative case study research is to do it simultaneously with data collection. There are often challenges in making sense of the great volume of data that is collected during case study research. The researcher does not know what will be discovered or what the final analysis will be, but without ongoing analysis the volume of data can be overwhelming (Merriam, 2009). Data management and organization is a necessity to make data easy to retrieve. An organized case study data base allows the

researcher to quickly locate specific data during the analysis phase. Another challenge Merriam (1998) pointed out is that data can be unfocused and repetitious if ongoing analysis is not done during the data collection process.   In addition, the tedious and time-consuming work of data analysis can also challenge a researcher. The work of intensive analysis takes at least twice the time spent in data collection.

Data analysis should begin with the interview process, looking for key themes as interviews are conducted (McKay, 2006).   In data collection, I took audio recordings of two out of three interviews conducted with families during home or school visits. During the interviews, as well as the observations, I took notes to record specific responses relating to my research questions and included any pertinent information related to the research topic that would be useful in data analysis. Making notes of emerging themes during data collection began the ongoing analysis which made the process less overwhelming later.

After completion of each interview, I listened to check on the quality of each recording. Any necessary translation by the interpreter was done prior to my transcribing the interviews onto the computer as another way to generate insights about what was going on in my data. The transcription was done shortly after the interviews were completed so that everything was fresh in my mind. Notes from any observations or documents were also typed up. All data was organized into separate student files and within the files, notes were organized into the three types of data collection techniques: interviews, observations, and documents. I read the transcripts and my notations repeatedly and made notes and comments as I studied them in order to identify similarities between the responses from the interviewees and to extract similar themes in the data analysis. "At this stage the researcher is virtually

holding a conversation with the data, asking questions of it, making comments, and so on"
(Merriam, 1998, p.131).

Coding, or assigning certain designations to aspects of data to make retrieval easier, is
an important task in creating an inventory of the data. It is important, however, to code the
data according to relevancy of the study so that it makes sense to the researcher (Merriam,
2009). Interview transcripts, observation notes, and any relevant documents in my research
were read carefully. Categories began to emerge as I grouped comments and notes together.
Themes were highlighted with different colors. Some of the themes relating to factors that
influence reading success for Somali students were identified. The coding process used in
this study is detailed in Chapter Four, along with a narrative, including quotations and any
other relevant information, for each interviewee.

Verification of Data

Researchers often judge the credibility of qualitative work by its transparency,
consistency, and communicability (Rubin, 1995). To promote transparency, the basic
processes of my data collection were clearly evident. As an interviewer, I maintained
careful records of participants' responses to make research transparent to others. To gain
greater credibility in my research I have shown concepts and themes consistently
throughout the cases being studied. As a researcher, I have attempted to effectively
communicate in a way that allows readers to see the evidence and the logic that led to my
main conclusions.

Yin (1994) stressed that the case study researcher must include the following four
aspects of qualitative design: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and

reliability. Construct validity in my study is seen in the collection of multiple sources of evidence and by having teachers of the students involved in the study review the process and the evidence collected.

I ensured internal validity and credibility as well as added to transparency in research by keeping careful notes, recordings, and transcripts. In qualitative research, internal validity is achieved by recording and analyzing all data and presenting it in a fair and unbiased manner (McKay, 2006). Discussions with teachers of the students involved in the study, along with their review of the data and my analysis of it has guarded against researcher bias. External validity is evident in my study by the rich narrative descriptions of participants and the context of the research. Research that included vivid, detailed evidence is carefully documented in order to communicate the interviewees' experiences; this effectively enables the reader to determine whether the findings of my study can be generalized.

Reliability in this study is evident in the details reported about the data collection procedure. This is done by not only providing a rich description of the students and context, but also the steps involved in the study. Credibility can also be earned by exploring any inconsistencies or contradictions in the data collected.

Ethics

This study utilized safeguards to protect the rights and anonymity of the participants. The Human Subjects Review process was completed through Hamline University and the local school district, thus ensuring ethical considerations were appropriately addressed. The study was described in a letter to participants. Written

consent for participation was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of each student involved in the research. The letter and consent form were written in simple English as well as translated into written Somali by our school's cultural navigator. Research objectives were clearly explained to parents, legal guardians, and children involved in the study. In cases where potential participants did not read English or Somali, the cultural navigator, a native Somali speaker also proficient in written and oral English, acted as interpreter. The cultural navigator also agreed to have parent contact on my behalf when necessary. Parents and legal guardians were informed that their child's participation was optional, and that if they chose not to have him or her participate, there would be no adverse results for the child.

All participants, including interpreters, involved in the study were informed of the confidential nature of the research. Confidentiality of all participants was protected by the use of pseudonyms on all data and in my published capstone. Student names on any documents were changed and these documents will be destroyed after one year. The interview recordings did not contain students' actual names; recordings will be destroyed after one year. The names of the school and the school district were not used.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed the methodology of my research. I have discussed the qualitative nature of this research as well as the rationale for using it. In choosing to do qualitative case studies, I hoped to gain an understanding of factors that contribute to reading success for Somali elementary students. My plan for data collection and analysis using multiple case studies was presented. Data was gathered and organized into larger

themes and categories that shed light on Somali culture and reading practices within Somali families.   In this chapter, I described the participants, setting, and data collection techniques for my research. In conducting interviews, my goal was to obtain relevant and useful information in a culturally sensitive manner. Classroom observations allowed me to see the research participants' reading behaviors firsthand. Document review assisted me in finding meaning, understanding, and insights important to my research question. The methods used for data analysis and verification, as well as ethical considerations, are also noted.

In Chapter Four, I presented the results of this study, including data collected from interviews, observations, and document review of three Somali students. These students, Owen, Mina, and Adam, are successful readers based on informal and formal assessments.   Information from parent interviews, teacher interviews, classroom observations, and review of relevant documents are summarized and grouped by study participant. Four general themes emerged that addressed the research question, which was, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students?

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

In the previous chapter, I detailed the methodology of my study and discussed the

data collection techniques and procedures used. In Chapter Four, I summarize the data

collection process and the results, present the findings obtained during this process, and

analyze findings from the data. To gain a full overview of each student's data in a

cohesive manner, I present the findings by study participant rather than by data collection

technique. The research question for this study is, what factors lead to reading success

for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students? In this chapter, I

present the results from my case studies and discuss these findings as they relate to the

literature connected to my topic.

Interviews and Results Obtained

Reasons for using interviews as a tool for data collection in my study are outlined

in Chapter Three. Using the interview format allowed me to gain an understanding of

both the home and school literacy experiences and practices of the Somali students in my

study. My purpose in conducting interviews with the Somali parents was to gain an

understanding of possible family literacy practices as well as cultural reasons for their

child's reading success. It was also important to the study to interview teachers in order

to obtain information about each student's reading levels, progress, and activities.

Informal student interviews aided me in understanding some of each student's own

feelings about reading and their reading level.

   <u>Parent interviews.</u> Parent interviews were used to collect data on participants'

background, home literacy practices, and experiences with reading in school. My goals

in interviewing the families of these three Somali students were to answer my main

research question, as well as gain valuable insight into Somali culture and what literacy

experiences Somali students might bring to school when they begin.

   <u>Teacher interviews.</u> As I set up interviews with the teachers of the students in the

study, I explained my purposes and intent to focus on reading activities and behaviors.

Each of the teacher interviews took place in the classrooms after school. The teachers

gave details about their classroom routines and reading schedule which were helpful later

in the week as I did observations for each student in their reading classroom.

<u>Observations and Results Obtained</u>

     Observations took place at scheduled reading times during the school day. I

observed how the students interacted with the activities and other participants, as well as

the frequency and duration of reading activities and behaviors. Subtle factors within the

observations included nonverbal communication and any informal or unplanned activities

within the school setting. Summaries of the observations are found in Appendix C.

<u>Analyzing Documents and Results Obtained</u>

     During my study, I reviewed documents containing quantitative student data that

supported the focus of my research. Much of this data came from the students' test

records and was initially used in the selection of research participants. The participant

data is found in Appendix E and includes reading performance scores. Additional documents came in the form of student reading goal sheets, reading logs, or reading calendars, and were provided by the classroom teachers, along with their comments. The documents referenced in Appendix E may also be referenced in the summaries that follow.

<u>Student 1: Owen</u>

  <u>Interview with Owen's mother</u>. The first parent interview was conducted at our school, rather than in the family's home, at the parent's request. Our school's cultural navigator served as the translator. Owen's mother is a single mother of six children, with Owen being the youngest at age 10. Owen was not born in Somalia, but in a neighboring East African country. He was only four years old when the family immigrated to the United States after his father died. Owen's mother was born in Somalia and received a middle school education. She can speak, read, and write in Somali, but says that she cannot speak, read, or write in English very well. She has attended ESL classes for adults that are offered in our school district and self-reports that she is at level three. She does not use much English in her workplace, but is able to understand most of what is said to her.

Owen's brothers and sisters speak Somali in their home, but usually just when conversing with their mother. The children speak only English to each other; the mother tries to understand what they are saying. She reports that all six children can read Somali, although they only do so occasionally. Owen's mother reads print in Somali more than the children do; she will read to them in Somali, usually children's books containing folk tales. She notices that Owen and his brothers and sisters are always

reading in English when they are at home. Owen's mother reads to him in Somali; in turn, he reads to her in English. She notes with a smile that he sometimes falls asleep when reading to her.   There are many children's books in their home; too many to count, she reports. On average, the family visits the public library once each week. Owen will read between two and four hours each day and likes to read sitting next to his mom in the living room. She estimates that he reads four to five chapter books each week.

When asked school-related questions, Owen's mother states that she feels Owen does a good job in school and reads well. She has contact with the school at open house and during conferences, pointing out that she likes the school environment and the way the teachers instruct her children. Library books are seen coming home from school in Owen's backpack, and Owen's mother states that she understands the reading program at school along with the expectations Owen's teacher has for reading at home. She feels Owen understands the expectations and only has to remind him and repeat the expectations from time to time.

Interview with Owen's teacher. Owen's teacher explained that the reading activities in her classroom begin with a whole group read-aloud that lasts 15 to 20 minutes, followed by reading stations. These may include small group work with the teacher at a table, "read to self" time where students read independently at a spot of their choosing, and seat work that may involve a partner. The class then gathers as a whole group to do an interactive read-aloud, a standards-based mini-lesson, or a focused lesson in the reading anthology. This is followed by another round of stations.

Small group work in this classroom gives the teacher the opportunity to hear students read and to gather information that guides not only her small group instruction but the whole group lessons as well. During this small group time, Owen's teacher observes his high reading fluency and comprehension skills. During his "read to self" station, Owen goes right to his spot and begins immediately. The teacher pointed out many examples of Owen's high level of engagement in reading activities, both in small group and whole group activities. She says he is extremely focused, "glued" to the discussion, and fully engaged. The class enjoys lots of discussion as part of reading lessons; Owen is quick to respond, knowing most of the answers that are asked. Owen's teacher feels that he, like many of her students, responds well to praise and wants to please her through careful listening and frequent participation. She added that his mind is like a sponge and he remembers everything.

Owen's teacher reported that he spends a great deal of time reading, has outstanding reading skills, and checks out books from the school library at least once each week. Owen has told her that it is loud at his house and hard for him to do homework; he will often use morning work time to complete his homework at school, which she allows. Her only concern is in regards to the completion of his monthly reading goal sheets. On this sheet, students are assigned a genre and the following five goals: 1) read an entire book in that genre, 2) complete a project to accompany that book, 3) read an AR (Accelerated Reader) chapter book and complete the test, 4) read an AR Non-Fiction book and complete the test, and 5) read 400+ minutes. In the six months Owen has been in this class, he has worked on his goals but never reached them, often

needing reminders to record his reading minutes. The monthly reading goal sheet has a place for the parent signature; Owen knows one of the requirements is that his mother needs to sign the sheet. His mother was told (through an interpreter) about the reading goal sheet at the first parent-teacher conference held in the fall, but she does not consistently sign it. A few phone calls were made by the school's cultural navigator, a Somali interpreter, in regards to the reading goal sheet. The teacher reported that things got a little better after each phone call, but Owen was still not consistent in completing the goal sheet.

   Owen's classroom observation. What I observed in Owen's classroom during reading confirmed everything his teacher mentioned about his reading behaviors; he was fully engaged during whole group instruction and followed behavior expectations during independent reading work. In the course of the 20 minute whole group lesson, Owen raised his hand seventeen times to answer questions or add to the discussion. At one point in the lesson, he quietly got up from his spot in front of the carpet and walked to the back of the room to blow his nose. As he returned to his spot, he made a face and said a sentence to his friend sitting behind him. Even through that interruption, he stayed engaged in the discussion and quickly raised his hand again to give an example of how to change a metaphor to a simile. In a later whole group lesson, he listened and participated in an interactive read-aloud of a book. Though Owen was seen to be engaged throughout both of the whole group lessons, he was moving around and fidgeting quite a lot. Several times he had his arms in and out of his sleeves and his legs straight out in front of him and back to being folded.

As the teacher announced the start of reading stations, Owen seemed happy and quietly said, "Yay!" He asked the teacher, "Are we going to play BINGO?" She replied, "We will play tomorrow (Thursday) since that is our last day this week." To dismiss students to their reading stations from the rug, the teacher simply makes eye contact with individual students. When Owen was excused, he got up and went immediately to his reading box to get a book; he then picked up a portable reading chair from the corner of the room, positioned it on the front rug, and was sitting down, reading within one minute of his teacher dismissing him. He read independently for approximately three minutes, during which the teacher reminded students to mark their reading logs. On hearing that reminder, Owen got up from his reading chair, sharpened his pencil and went back to his reading, though he did not record anything in his reading log. After only one minute, Owen went to a classroom computer to take an AR test on the nonfiction war book he took from his reading box. This would have fulfilled the fourth reading goal, but it was not recorded on his goal sheet.

When he was asked later about the test, he quietly reported that he did not pass the 10 question test. He felt he should have reread the story before taking the AR test on it. Before going back to his reading chair, he stopped at his reading box, replaced the non-fiction book and took out a new book. He quickly changed his mind, returned the book to his box, and instead chose a book from the class bin nearby. After only another two minutes of reading, the teacher transitioned the class to begin seat work on similes and metaphors.

As he worked on the worksheet, Owen chatted with tablemates about answers, which the teacher explained was allowed. This interaction did not slow him down; he understood the assignment, thoughtfully and thoroughly completing both pages when most of the students only finished (or partially finished) the first page. At the table, he was not square on the chair, his legs were sprawled out to the side, and his body moved around for the majority of the thirteen minutes of work time.

Owen was quick to tell me that he likes to read nonfiction, with books about animals being his favorite. He first knew that he could read well when he was a kindergartener and heard his mom talking about it. He knows his reading levels are high and thinks this is because he checks out books that are a little bit hard for him and only plays educational video games. He says he does these things in order to get better at reading. Owen says he often reads to his mom or siblings; sometimes they read to him. He explained that when he comes to a word he does not know, he will go right to the computer at home and look up the meaning. There are times when he says his whole family is in one room, all reading something different. Owen reports that he reads every night and sometimes uses a flashlight in his room to continue reading after everyone is asleep. When asked specifically about his reading goal sheet, Owen admits he doesn't often record his reading minutes or complete his goal sheet because he just wants to read and not have to write anything down.

Student 2: Mina

Interview with Mina's parents. Mina's parents welcomed me into their home for the interview; however, they requested that the interview not be recorded. They shared with

me that Mina was born in Kenya and was three years old when she immigrated to the

United States in 2007 with her father and three siblings. Her mother immigrated two

years prior to the rest of the family in order to secure employment. There are now ten

children in the family; nine children live here in the U. S. while one lives in Africa. Both

of Mina's parents were born in Somalia and received a high school education; neither

received any post-secondary education in Somalia due to the civil war. Mina's father

earned an associate degree at a local technical college.

Mina's parents explained that they can read, write, and speak Somali, English,

and Arabic. English was offered as a class for grades 9-12 in their public high school in

Somalia; in addition, both of them had private English classes. At home, the parents

speak Somali with each other and with the children; whereas the children only speak

English to each other. Mina's mother uses her English skills in her job as a medical

interpreter. At his job, Mina's father uses English on occasion when he is interacting

with his supervisor regarding job related issues or questions. Each is able to effectively

use English to shop, take care of family medical needs, and interact with others in the

community when necessary. The family rarely reads any print materials in Somali due to

limited availability. They read English print materials every day in the form of mail,

children's homework, newspapers, and internet text. They read to the younger children

each day and share that they have hundreds of books in the home, either purchased from

the school book fair or picked up at the free book table at school. In the past, the family

has checked out books from the public library, but now they rely on the children to bring

them home from the school library.

Mina typically reads two to three chapter books each week and enjoys reading them in her favorite spot on the couch in the living room. She is able to block out all the distractions in this busy household and amazes her parents at how she can stay focused on her reading with lots of brothers and sisters around her. Mina often talks to her mom about what she is reading, adding how she feels about the books. Mina's parents feel she is doing very well in school, is independent when it comes to reading homework, and brings library books home each week. Communication with the school comes in the form of the weekly Wednesday folder, as well as parent-teacher conferences and monthly Somali parent meetings. The notes from the teachers and administration help Mina's parents understand the school's expectations and procedures.

Interview with Mina's teacher. The daily schedule for reading activities in Mina's classroom include whole group mini–lessons, a read-aloud, independent reading, and partner reading. Each student is part of a small reading group that meets with the teacher once or twice each week. The teacher reports that Mina is engaged and listens carefully during whole group mini-lessons and read-alouds. Mina is said to participate in partner discussions appropriately, often with short, thoughtful responses. During independent reading, she chooses books appropriate to her level, begins reading immediately, and shows expected behaviors the entire time. In general, Mina is said to be rather quiet, serious, and self-sufficient. At the end of independent reading, the teacher may ask students to rate themselves (on their reading behavior and/or their use of time); Mina almost always rates herself modestly, holding up three fingers out of a possible four.

Mina's teacher also mentioned that Mina enjoys partner reading and does not mind choosing to read with friends that are at a lower level.

The reading homework is to read independently each night; there may be an occasional assignment from the reading curriculum in which students read a story and answer questions or complete a project. Mina always completes this homework and does quality work; she uses her time well and often completes the assignment before leaving school. This teacher does not require students to keep a record of how much they read; she observes Mina checking books out each week, which Mina brings home each night and returns to school the next day. Mina sometimes asks to go to the library in the morning to check out more books. The only contact the classroom teacher has had with Mina's parents has been at open house night and fall parent-teacher conferences. Mina is extremely responsible; therefore the teacher does not feel the need to contact her parents for any academic concerns. At conferences, Mina's parents confirmed that she reads at home every night.

  Mina's classroom observation. During whole group lessons Mina would sit very still, listening carefully and responding appropriately. Only once did she raise her hand to answer a question or share in the discussion. She did whisper an answer to her partner when directed to do so the first time, but did not "lean and whisper" the second time. Following the whole group lesson, students were asked to complete a page in their reading workbooks. Mina immediately went from the rug to her reading bin for her workbook, and then quickly got started at her table. She remained focused during the work and finished the work before the rest of her class. Without any direction from the

teacher, Mina got out a book and began reading independently. In her small group time that followed, Mina joined in to act out a portion of their reading story. She was cooperative, but did not provide any group leadership, offer suggestions, or share her opinions about the activity.   Mina read her part of the readers' theater accurately and fluently.

The class took a bathroom break in the middle of their reading block. Students each brought a book to read in the hall while waiting for their classmates. Even though students walked back and forth in front of her in the hallway, and the girls on both sides of her were talking, Mina was able to concentrate on reading her book as though no one was around.

Mina says she learned to read in preschool and remembers knowing a lot of sight words when she was younger. Her favorite genre is mysteries; she thinks she is a good reader because she reads a lot to try to solve the mysteries. She mentions having lots of books at home and remembers mostly reading with her mom. Her favorite spot to read is as mom reported: on the couch, even with lots of siblings around.

Student 3: Adam

  Interview with Adam's mother. Adam's parent interview took place in the family's home with only his mother present. Adam's father was not available at the time. Both of Adam's parents were born in Somalia and immigrated to the United States in 2004, shortly before he was born. He has lived in this city all of his life. There are nine children in the family: Six were born in Kenya; three, including Adam, were born in the U.S. Adam's mother went to school in Somalia through 7th grade; his father finished

high school in Somalia and later went to technical college here in the United States. Both of them can read, write, and speak Somali but share that the children can speak only a small amount of Somali, with the levels varying by child. Adam can only read and speak a little bit of Somali yet is able to understand Somali when he hears it. The parents speak Somali in their home; the children can listen to and follow directions in Somali. Adam's mother rarely speaks English in their home; however, Adam's father will speak to the children in English, asking questions about their school and grades. Adam's father can also speak Arabic but typically does not use it at home.

Adam's mother does not have employment outside the home, but helps take care of her father at her parents' home in the city. She has attended local adult ESL classes and self-reports that she is at a level four in her English skills. She feels she can understand most of what is being said when people speak to her in English. Adam's father works in a hospital as a cardiovascular technologist in a neighboring state during the week and comes home to spend time with the family on the weekend. He reads science textbooks (in English and Somali) and spends considerable time studying to improve his skills and increase his job opportunities. He also reads online news in Somali each day.

Every evening, Adam's mother reads English children's books with her younger children. She reads online news in Somali only once each week. When the question regarding the amount of time Adam reads at home was asked, he was eager to answer for himself. He was proud to say he reads 30 to 45 minutes before school and 30 to 60 minutes after school. He explained that he likes to read on his bed, but it is not always

quiet since he has to share a room with two brothers. He and his mother both agreed that there are hundreds of books in their home, many of them received at the free book table at our school. Adam brings library books home from school each week and keeps them right by his bed. His mom knows that he loves to read science books and books about basketball. Adam also reported proudly that in a typical week he reads six to nine small chapter books, and if they are "thicker" he can read five.   Adam goes with his family to the public library an average of one time per month. When asked if Adam talks about his reading, his mother said, "Yes! We ask him what he is reading and he tells us about the stories." She asks Adam what he thinks or feels about the books.

In discussing Adam's schooling, his mother feels happy with how well he is doing and knows he is doing his best. She sometimes asks the teacher if he needs more help in any areas of learning. Adam is doing his homework independently, so she feels he does not need her help. She looks to see that he is doing his work and only needs an occasional reminder to complete the work. Contact with the school is made at open-house night, parent-teacher conferences, and the monthly Somali parent meetings. She has very positive feelings about the school and likes the teachers. The teachers have been helpful to her in understanding the expectations of his home reading program. She signs Adam's reading list before he returns it to school each week. She feels all of her children have had a good experience at the school. Adam smiled at that statement and interjected that he likes the healthy lunches they serve.

  Interview with Adam's teacher. Adam has both a homeroom teacher and a reading teacher that shared with me insights into his reading activities and behaviors. In his

homeroom, Adam's teacher does a daily read-aloud for approximately 15 minutes. This teacher explains that at the beginning of the day students have morning work, followed by independent reading time. Rather than "read to self," Adam often likes to chat with his friends and needs reminders to do the independent reading.

Adam's monthly reading calendar is assigned by the homeroom teacher; however, Adam has not been consistent in returning this calendar, often giving questionable reasons for not bringing it back to school completed. The teacher feels that he does his assigned reading at home since he is able to write about the reading assignment in class the next day. The teacher often has to draw more out of him as he responds to literature in writing assignments; he usually gives brief answers that lack detail. She states that he is full of details when he speaks and is knowledgeable about the reading. At fall parent-teacher conferences, Adam's mother reprimanded him quietly, but directly, when she learned he was not bringing his calendar back to school. She explained to the homeroom teacher that he does read at home and that her children have been taught that reading skills are highly valued. She also confided in the teacher that she does not want her children to have the EL "label." Adam's mother understands the weekly PAKRAT program (Parents and Kids Reading A lot Together); she knows that Adam has five books at his level to read each week, and she usually signs the list that Adam fills out after he reads the five books.

Adam's reading teacher observes him checking books out at the school library each week. He checks out a variety of books at his level and always includes some

chapter books. She has heard him mention that their family uses the public library system to check out books.

The class participates in read-alouds, whole group lessons, and reading stations each day. Stations include independent reading, independent use of a small laptop with self-directed reading activities, independent use of an iPad for vocabulary or word work, and teacher-led small groups. The reading teacher had several comments regarding Adam's behaviors during these reading activities. Adam is one of the most fully engaged students during whole group lessons and read-alouds. The teacher points out that he always has a ready comment. He will wait for others to participate, even when he knows the answer. The teacher reports that Adam's vocabulary is extremely high; he is able to use the new vocabulary in a sentence as well as give an example of a synonym or an antonym.

During small group instruction, the teacher thinks Adam often reads ahead of the group; Adam does not like to stop and discuss the reading. When given a choice, he always chooses to read independently rather than with another student. At the beginning of the year, he only wanted to do independent reading; now he knows the routine but does not get started on stations very quickly. Instead, he chooses to talk with another student, also a high reader, about computer games. Each of them knows the other is high in reading and both occasionally act bored with the stories or activities in the reading curriculum. During Thursday's reading stations, students participate in fluency practice with a partner. Adam's teacher thinks that he does not like it and does not feel he needs the practice. He starts reading before his partner is ready and becomes defensive when

his partner says he made a mistake. She feels this is an example of the high expectations Adam has for himself. She senses that he wants to be at the top of his class because he is self-driven and strives to finish his work before the other students.

   Adam's classroom observation. During Adam's classroom observation, the class began the reading block at the rug for a teacher read-aloud. Adam listened intently to the story during the entire 20 minutes. Following the read-aloud the class was given instructions on the reading stations for the day, after which he immediately went to the Chrome Book table. He chose to listen to a story over playing educational reading games. Adam was self-directed and focused, even though his best friend was sitting across from him at the table.

   For the next station, Adam went quickly to the reading corner to begin independent reading. He chose a quiet place to read, away from two other boys in the small reading area. He chose a nonfiction book, which he says are his favorite. When the class checks out books from the school library, Adam chooses nonfiction books because he says those are what his dad wants him to check out. He states his family has lots of books at home and that his parents stress the importance of reading to help them in their future. Adam would often see his older brothers and sisters reading at home and remembers himself as a kindergartener, trying to read "big" (hard) books to try to fit in with his siblings. Adam knows he is a high reader, describing himself as curious and always wanting to know more. He was excited to tell me, "When you read a book you get so interested and think what happens next. It's so exciting!"

Data Analysis and Themes

During data gathering, themes relating to my research question began to emerge. The interview transcripts, observation notes, and student documents were read carefully and analyzed. With the research question in mind, information, comments, and notes were grouped together and coded with a different color highlighter. Some of the themes relating to factors that influence reading success for the Somali students in my study were identified.

Theme 1: Strong family structure resulting from adversity. Each family involved in the study originated in Somalia and immigrated to the U.S. for essentially the same reasons. The families differ in size, educational experiences, and literacy levels. Through interviewing each family, the strong family structure that has resulted from adverse situations, conditions, and experiences is evident. While it is understood that not all hardships produce positive outcomes, what is true for each of the three students involved in the study is that each one has had a strong foundation built for them despite, or because of, adversity.

Owen's mother shared very little about her life in Africa; she had a middle school education, and her husband died before she emigrated from East Africa. As a single mother, she moved her six children to the U.S. and successfully established her family in this community. Owen had a houseful of positive role models that established the kind of environment from which he could grow and learn.

Both of Mina's parents fled Somalia as young adults and lived in Ethiopia and Kenya. The family endured a separation during their immigration experience when her

mother moved to the U.S. two years prior to her father and the children arriving. The

mother was able to provide stability for the family by securing employment. Both

parents have worked, though Mina's mother's position as an interpreter is flexible. They

have established a strong family unit through immigration challenges, the births of more

children, and changing schedules.

Employment in another state takes Adam's father away from the family during

the week. He remains involved in the family's affairs on the weekend and obviously has

a great deal of influence on his children. In the past, adverse situations were experienced

in a refugee camp in East Africa prior to immigrating to the U.S. This large family has

lived in the community for ten years and has stayed strong through the births of five more

children and the education of Adam's father.

Theme 2: Educated Parents, Home Literacy Environment, and Extensive Reading. A

focus of my literature review, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, is the

impact that early literacy experiences and a positive view of education can have on

learners. In each of the families interviewed, parents were educated in their country of

origin, fluent in their L1, and knew English to varying degrees. Some of the parents

received further education in the U.S. Each family proudly talked of their children's

book collections (English) and was well aware of their children's great reading capacity.

All three families shared insight into their well-established home literacy environments

and reported on the extensive reading their children do at home.

Owen's mother enjoys sitting by him on the couch while he reads to her. She

knows that he reads four to five chapter books in the course of one week and reports that

they visit the public library about once each week. When asked how many children's books are in the home, she smiled and said, "Too many to count!" Owen reports that he can only play educational video games on the computer, which can help him as a reader. Despite the possibility of miscommunication about his reading goal sheet, Owen's mother and teacher both know he does extensive reading at home. During the classroom observation, Owen told me he loves to read a lot and sometimes reads with a flashlight at night after everyone else has gone to sleep.

Mina's teacher sees her consistently checking out books from the school library to bring home at night. There are times Mina will ask permission to visit the library before school starts to get more books. At parent-teacher conferences, her parents confirmed that she reads every night. They also shared during our interview that Mina can block out all distractions and read for hours on the couch with siblings running around and climbing near her. Mina's parents also report that there are hundreds of children's books in their home.

It was obvious during the interview with Adam's mother that literacy is important to their family. Everyone reads something every day, and there is an abundance of resources, including hundreds of children's books. Adam's mother reads with the younger children each night. Adam also reports that there are science books in his home that he likes and is encouraged by his dad to read them. Adam shared that his dad expects him to read lots of non-fiction books.

Theme 3: Metacognition. Metacognition is an aspect that can influence reading success. Information regarding this theme is found in the literature review and will be

discussed further in Chapter 5. What was apparent from each of the data collection techniques in this study was that all three students were very aware of their reading levels and skills. Parents reported that their children understand the stories and share what they read. All three teachers were quick to say that their student was engaged in reading lessons and discussions, and independent in their "read to self" time.

According to his teacher, Owen has a mind like a sponge and remembers everything. There is a lot of participation from him during class discussion, and he knows most of the answers. He is not content to gloss over unknown words. He told me he looks up new words on the computer at home and at school. Owen also shared that he knows he is a high reader and thinks it is because when he was "little" he would often pick a book a bit hard, just to get better at reading.

Mina's teacher spoke of the connections Mina is always able to make during reading lessons. Mina was quick to answer the favorite genre question: Mysteries. The added excitement of figuring out the mystery is the challenge this top reader needs.

Adam's teacher remarked that his vocabulary is so high and that he can make connections that most of the other students are not able to make. He even gauges his own responses while in whole group discussion, waiting for others to take a turn to answer before he raises his hand. During the home interview, Adam was a part of the discussion and is very aware of the importance of reading to his family and the expectations they have for him in his learning.

  Theme 4: High Intrinsic Motivation. Another aspect influential to reading success, and evident in the lives of the participating students, is motivation. What is clear from the

data for each student is the high level of intrinsic motivation each one possesses. The influence of educated parents and high-achieving siblings, as mentioned in a previous theme, may be a motivating factor for each of the study participants. Each one is self-directed when it comes to reading independently. Incidentally, two students had behaviors that point to a lack of extrinsic motivation.

Owen loves to learn and says he enjoys reading nonfiction the most. Evidence of his intrinsic motivations is his desire to know the meaning of unknown words in order to learn more. When asked about his reading goal sheet, Owen admits he does not often record his reading minutes or complete his goal sheet because he just wants to read and not have to write anything down. The reward for completion (extrinsic motivation), or the avoidance of a consequence for not completing the sheet, is not enough to motivate Owen to do it.

The ability to focus on reading for pleasure is evidence of Mina's intrinsic motivation. She is not required to record reading minutes for her teacher, so there is no extrinsic motivation for her to read. She has simply developed a love for reading and nothing will stop her, even the noise and activity level in her busy home.

Adam, like Owen, has difficulty getting motivated to complete a reading requirement. The reward for completing the monthly reading calendar (extrinsic motivation), and avoiding the consequences from his mother and teacher for not completing it, are not enough for Adam to accomplish this. He seems to be very much like Owen and Mina, in that he just loves to read. The expectations from his family might be the source of his intrinsic motivation as he tries to keep up with the reading

success of his older siblings. With the manner in which Adam seemed to enjoy being part of the family interview, he may be intrinsically motivated to read in order to be part of family discussions when his father is home on the weekends.

Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the data collection process, analyzed results, and reflected on how results are connected to my research question. Based on the data collected from parent and teacher interviews, classroom observations during reading instruction, and analysis of student data, four general themes emerged that addressed my research question, which was, what factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students? These themes are: Strong family structure as a result of adversity, a home literacy environment where extensive reading is encouraged, the metacognition of the student and the awareness of their abilities, and the high intrinsic motivation of each student participant.

In Chapter Five, I discussed the study's findings in light of the Somali context summarized in Chapter One and the research highlighted in Chapter Two. Included in the chapter discussion are the similarities among each of the students participating in this study, which came into focus through data analysis documented in Chapter Three and further detailed in Chapter Four. This chapter also addressed implications for parents and teachers, limitations of this study, and suggestions for possible future research. As my study progressed, new questions within the topic of reading success for Somali elementary students were brought to mind. Chapter Five includes these questions, along with personal reflection on the research experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

What factors lead to reading success for Somali elementary students and how do we support these students? This was the overarching question that guided my research and led to insights into similarities among three student participants. In this chapter, I reflected on the findings of this study that connect to the literature reviewed. In addition, I examine implications for parents, teachers, and students, discussed limitations of the study, and made recommendations for further research.

Findings

The results of this case study found similarities among three Somali elementary students. Data from document review, parent interviews, teacher interviews, classroom observations, and informal conversations with the student participants were reviewed. Four themes surfaced when analyzing data: strong family structure resulting from adversity, home literacy environment evidenced by extensive reading, obvious metacognitive skills, and high intrinsic motivation. These themes will be discussed in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Strong family structure resulting from adversity. Researchers (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Bigelow, 2010; Farid and McMahan, 2004; Nilsson et al., 2012) have studied the immigration experiences of Somali students and highlight two areas that change the learning experience for them: interruptions or limitations in formal schooling and

changes in family structure. Despite gaps in education, hardships, and trauma faced by many refugee children coming to our schools in the United States, educators can see that many have adjusted very quickly and remarkably well. The barriers that Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) described in her study, namely threatened identities, acculturation stress of the family, cognitive overload, and limited support and control provided by adults are either not apparent in the participants in my study, or their families have overcome some of these barriers prior to my study. The parents have certainly experienced interruptions and limitations in their own schooling; the students themselves, however, have had consistency in their education. Changes in family structure have been experienced by each participant, but each one appears to remain strong and its members are supportive of each other. All three students have older brothers and sisters who have experienced success in school and are positive role models to their younger siblings.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the study done by Nilsson el al. (2012) focuses on post-migration trauma and changes in behavior due to resettlement. Family life and relationships, as well as their educational accomplishment are often affected. This study showed that other aspects regarding Somali children's adjustment include the many differences between cultures, loss of parents' disciplinary authority, and feeling unsupported and misunderstood by the school system. The researchers stated that each factor may have the potential to influence Somali students' learning, including learning to read in English. While the families involved in my study have been affected by change, I did not see evidence of any loss of parental authority or hear any negative comments regarding school support.

   Educated parents, home literacy environment, and extensive reading. The research of Wasik and Hendrickson (2004) organized variables in family literacy practices and viewed these as influences which can predict children's literacy outcomes. Parental characteristics that can affect literacy are family culture and identity, parental beliefs about education, socioeconomic status, and educational level. The home literacy environment has a strong impact through shared book reading, making print materials available, and maintaining a positive attitude toward literacy. Interaction with others and the quality of the parent-child relationship influences the acquisition of literacy skills. All of the families I interviewed spoke of having a large collection of reading materials for their children. Each parent is a reader themselves and models this to their children. The interviews and observations concluded that all three students read extensively. For the most part, their reading is done independently; in the past, reading with a parent was part of their daily routine. As a result, I believe these students' home literacy environments have influenced their reading skills to a great degree.

   Metacognition. While the parents only spoke of their children's ability to share about their reading when asked, the teachers all spoke of the students' metacognitive skills observed in the classroom. Researchers highlighted in the literature review understand that readers have skills and strategies they use that make them successful. A large number of studies have shown that metacognition plays a key role in reading success (Anderson, 1999; Block, 1986; Lems et al., 2010; Paris and Meyers, 1981; Sinhal, 2001). Paris and Meyer's (1981) study found successful readers engaging in accurate monitoring, adjusting reading rates, and deriving meaning for difficult vocabulary.

All these activities characterize the successful readers participating in my study. Each one appears to have the ability to make connections with what they read and to monitor their reading comprehension.

  High Intrinsic Motivation. Students have different motivation that can apply to learning to read in a second language. McGeown, Norgate, and Warhurst (2012) examined how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differs between readers, in relation to skill level. The study shows a significant difference in intrinsic motivation between low and high readers. The students in my study choose to read simply because it is enjoyable (intrinsic motivation); in the case of Owen and Adam, they are unmotivated to read because of teacher requirements or rewards (extrinsic motivation).

Implications

While my case study concerns only three successful Somali students, I believe there are still some important implications of my research. The themes that emerged have relevance for parents and teachers.

  Parents. All of the parents in this study were very supportive of their children's efforts to read; they provided a rich literacy environment. Parents can become active members of the school's Somali parent community. This group exists to provide support for all Somali parents as they navigate the school culture; this group could also provide relevant training to help parents stay in touch with and support what is happening at school. Reading workshops could provide training for parents; adult EL classes could continue, perhaps in a more accessible location (local school) to get more involvement.

Teachers. A goal from this study was to understand why some Somali students are proficient in reading and to promote the same kind of success for all Somali students. Recently, our school district provided relevant and insightful staff development for teachers that helped us understand more about Somali culture. Increased staff development in this area could help teachers support all of our Somali families. There are many ways teachers at our school can impact the reading levels of our Somali students. Knowing the parents' strong desire to support their children, teachers can communicate reading expectations and provide feedback to parents about homework with the help of our cultural navigator. Teachers can monitor book checkout closely in order to help students find engaging and appropriately-leveled books. The students in this study all have books at home that were on the "free" table. Grants can be written to obtain funds for book giveaways. Owen, Mina, and Adam all had high metacognitive skills; teachers can provide learning experiences in order to develop these skills in all students.

Limitations

This case study is based on the reading activities and behaviors of only three students. Initially, the cultural navigator phoned each family to clarify any pertinent questions they had about the study. It was communicated to me that each family was aware of my purpose in conducting the interviews. Each of these students received EL services prior to my becoming an ESL teacher within the school. My interaction with them and their families prior to the study was limited; therefore, the familiarity and trust needed for open communication was not necessarily firmly established. The parent interviews gave pertinent information, but it was my hope to gather more details than I

did. Some of the responses to interview questions were limited, particularly the school-related questions. Perhaps a detailed survey to accompany the interview would have provided more useful information.

Having more students involved in the study could have broadened the scope of the findings and validated the results to a greater degree. In addition, having more than one classroom observation would have shown me more of their reading activities and behaviors.

 As themes began to emerge during the analysis of the data, I wondered if these factors were absent for Somali students who are struggling in reading. Collecting information regarding these students using the data collection techniques from this study would be difficult.

Recommendations for Further Research and Remaining Questions

There are many areas that could be explored in relation to my topic of reading success for Somali Elementary students. Three topics kept surfacing throughout my study and would make for interesting future research: The influence of Somali orality on reading development, how background knowledge influences metacognitive skill levels in Somali children as they learn to read, and a more in-depth look at early literacy experiences of Somali students.

In Chapter 1, I wrote about the oral language tradition of Somali culture as an aspect that could affect reading for Somali students. The rich oral tradition within their cultural background is brought to school with them as they begin to learn. How does this affect them as learners? How do oral traditions influence their ability to learn to read?

How has orality changed in Somali families as they immigrate and adapt to the literacy practices here in the U.S.?

Owen, Mina, and Adam were all described as engaged learners. As high readers, their metacognitive skills were evident to their teachers on a daily basis, but what about their background knowledge? Paris and Meyer's (1981) study investigated the differences in comprehension monitoring between high and low readers. The research presented suggests that successful readers are able to think about their thinking. Anderson (1999) notes that background information can include all the experiences a reader brings to the reading process, including life and educational experiences, cultural background, knowledge of how texts are organized and how the second language works. How does background knowledge play into the students' metacognitive skill levels? Does their extensive reading contribute to their background knowledge, and in turn influence their metacognition?

There is extensive research to support early literacy practices as a factor that influences reading success. We learn from research (Purcell-Gates, Melzi, Najafi, and Orellana, 2011) that many young children begin formal schooling with literacy practices and experiences learned from their home and cultural communities. Unfortunately, much of the focus on early emergent literacy programs and practices has not given attention to families within linguistic and racial minorities and tends to have a deficit view of these homes. In my literature review, I could find very little research that focuses on Somali families' early literacy practices. As I visited with parents, it was clear that early literacy experiences were part of their family life. Each family experienced shared book reading,

made books available, and promoted literacy in their homes. How do these early literacy experiences in Somali homes differ from non-Somali families? What are ways our school can support how Somali families are experiencing literacy?

<u>Summary and Personal Reflection</u>

It was a rich and rewarding experience to learn more about Somali culture and to spend time with the Somali students and their families. I began the study intrigued by the high level of reading skills these students possessed and ended the project with a great respect and admiration for them and their families. The study also brought to mind a number of questions; the more I researched, the more I realized the deficit of information about Somali learners. I am encouraged to know, however, that as time goes on more studies will be done that will inform educators to know best practice and how to successfully guide our Somali students in their learning.

APPENDIX A

Human Subjects Document: Letter to the superintendent

Julie M. Weiss

_____

City, State Zip code

(Name of Superintendent)
Superintendent, District ___

_____

City, State Zip code

Dear Superintendent _____,

I am a 2nd grade Interventionist and ESL teacher at _____   Elementary School. I am also a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education (English as a Second Language) at Hamline University. An important part of my Master's degree is doing a research project that will involve __(school name)_____ students and their families. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission to conduct research involving students and families in our district.

The goal of this study is to research factors that contribute to reading success for some of our Somali elementary students. It is my desire as an educator to also understand how knowing these factors can provide reading support for all Somali students. Insights I gain from this study may be shared with my colleagues in order to provide opportunities for success at school and make our school the best possible learning environment for our students. My research will be based on family interviews during home visits, observations of student participants during the school day, review of relevant documents, and informal conversations with parents, students, cultural navigators and teachers.

In this study, identities will be protected and no real names or identifying characteristics will be used. Participating students' grades will not be affected in any way. Families are free to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences. I have received approval for my study from the Graduate School of Education at Hamline University, and my research will be described in my final paper, called a capstone, which will be published online.   I may also use this information in professional articles. In all cases, district, school, student, and family identities will be kept confidential.

Sincerely,

 Julie M. Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support Teacher
(Name of school)

APPENDIX B

Human Subjects Document: Letter to the principal

Julie M. Weiss

_____
City, State Zip code
_____, 2014

_____, Principal
_____ Elementary School
City, State Zip code

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education (English as a Second Language) at Hamline University. An important part of my Master's degree is doing a research project that will involve __(school name)_____   students and their families. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission to conduct research that will involve students and families in our district.

The goal of this study is to research factors that contribute to reading success for some of our Somali elementary students. It is my desire as an educator to also understand how knowing these factors can provide reading support for all Somali students. Insights I gain from this study may be shared with my colleagues in order to provide opportunities for success at school and make our school the best possible learning environment for our students. My research will be based on family interviews during home visits, observations of student participants during the school day, review of relevant documents, and informal conversations with parents, students, cultural navigators and teachers.

In this study, identities will be protected and no real names or identifying characteristics will be used. Participating students' grades will not be affected in any way. Families are free to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences. I have received approval for my study from the Graduate School of Education at Hamline University, and my research will be described in my final paper, called a capstone, which will be published online.   I may also use this information in professional articles. In all cases, district, school, student, and family identities will be kept confidential.

Sincerely,

Julie M. Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support Teacher
(Name of school

APPENDIX C

Human Subjects Documents: Letters to parents (English and Somali) and

parent permission letters (English and Somali),

Julie M. Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support Teacher
(Name of school)
_____, 2014

Dear Parent:

I am a 2nd grade Interventionist and EL teacher at _____ Elementary School. I am also a graduate student working on a Master's degree in education (English as a Second Language) at Hamline University. I would like to ask you and your child to take part in a research study because of his/her high reading level. My goal in the study is to understand what factors help Somali students become successful readers. This study can help make our school the best possible learning environment for all of our students. My research will be based on family interviews during a visit to your home, observing your child in their classroom during the school day, looking at your child's reading scores, and talking to his/her teachers.

If you and your child take part in this study, your real names will not be used. Your child's grades will not be affected in any way. You and your child are free to stop being in this project at any time without any negative results. I have received approval for my study from the Graduate School of Education at Hamline University and from the _____ Area School District. My research will be described in my final paper, which will be published online. This paper will be cataloged in Hamline University's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. In all cases, you and your child's identity will be kept confidential.

Please return the permission form on the next page to give permission for your child to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please call me at school between 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Julie Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support teacher
_____ Elementary School, Phone: _____

Julie M. Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support Teacher
(Magaca Iskoolka)

_____, 2014

Waalidiinta:

Waxaan ahay macalimad dhigta fasalka 2aad ee iskoolka _____ Elementary School. Sidoo kale waxaan diyarinaayaa (Master Degree) oo ku saabsan (English as a second language) igriiska barashadiisa jaamacad la yiraahdo Hamline University. Waxaan rabaa in aan idinn ka codsado adiga iyo ardaygaaga aqoon baaris ku saabsan aqrinta luuqada ingriiska. Waxaan doonaayaa in aan ogaado wax yaabaha ka caawiyo ardayda Soomalida aqoon kororsiga aqrinta iyo sida ay ugu wanaagsan yihiin. Aqoon baarintaan waxay iga caawineesaa si aan ku ogaado sida ugu fudud ee ardaydu wax ku baran karaan. Aqoon baaristaan ayaan ku sameen doonaa booqasho oo aan imaan doono gurigiina iyo ardayga fasalkiisa. Waxaan kaloo fiirin doonaa natiijooyinga ardayga ee aqrintiisa oo uu macalinkiisa ka qaaday.

Hadii aad adiga iyo ardayga ka qeyb gashaan aqoon baaristaan, magacyadiina lama isticmaalaay oo waa qarsoodi. Waxabana kama badaleeso natiijooyinga (Grades) uu ardayga ka heesto fasalkiisa. Hadii adiga ama ardayga uu san ku qanac saneen su'aalaha waad codsan kartaa in la joojiyo. Waxaa la iga ogalaaday jaamacadeeyda (Hamline University) in aan ka sameyo aqoon baaristaan iskoolka _____ Area School District. Aqoon baaristaan waxaa loo isticmaali doonaa Hamline Library Digtal Commons (Qeybta Aqoon Barista). Magaca ardaygana waa qarsoodi oo lama daabici doono.

Fadlan ku soo celi ogalaashahaan ku qoran warqada kale iskuulka hadii aad u ogalaato qeyb qaadashada aqoon baaristan. Wixii su'aalo ah fadlan iga soo wac iskuulka inta u dhexesa 8am-3:30pm galabnimo. Mahadsanid!

Mahadsanid,

Julie Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support teacher
_____ Elementary School, Phone: _____

_____ 2014

Dear Ms. Weiss,

I read your letter about doing a research project that would involve me and my family. I would like to be in the study and give permission for my child, _____, to also be a part of this project.

I understand that you will be doing an interview in my home with me and my child, as well as getting information from my child's teachers and observing my child during the school day in order to understand the factors that influence my child's reading level. I understand that all results will be kept confidential and anonymous and that we may stop taking part at any time without negative consequences.

Signed,

_____

Parent or Guardian

_____

Date

_____, 2014

Marwo Ms. Weiss,

Waan aqriyey warqa daadii ku saabsaneed aqoon barista ee qoys keeyga iyo anigaba aad noo dirtay. Waana u ogaladay (Magaca Ardayga) , _____, in uu ka qeyb qaato aqoon baaristaan.

Waan fahmay in aad sameyn doontid aqoon baaristaan ee ku saabsan ilmaheeyga, in aad gurigeeyga imaaneesid oo isticmaaleeysid natiijooyinga ilmaheeyga uu ka heesto fasalka dhexdiisa. Waan fahmay in aad eegi doontid meesha uu maraayo aqrinta ilmaheeyga oo la xiriri doontid macalinkiisa. Waan fahmay in magaca ilmaheeyga uu qarsoodi noqon doono oo aanan meelna lagu daabicin.

Saxiix,

_____

Waalidka

_____

Taariikhda

APPENDIX D

Human Subjects Document: Letter to classroom teachers and teacher permission letter

_____, 2014

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education (English as a Second Language) at Hamline University. An important part of my Master's degree is doing a research project that will involve __(school name)_____ students and their families. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission to conduct research that will involve a student in your classroom.

The goal of this study is to research factors that contribute to reading success for some of our Somali elementary students. It is my desire as an educator to also understand how knowing these factors can provide reading support for all Somali students. Insights I gain from this study may be shared with you and other colleagues in order to provide opportunities for success at school and make our school the best possible learning environment for our students. My research will be based on family interviews during home visits, interviews with you and other teachers, observations of student participants during the school day, review of relevant documents, and possible informal conversations with parents, students, cultural navigators and teachers.

In this study, identities will be protected and no real names or identifying characteristics will be used. Participating students' grades will not be affected in any way. Families are free to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences. I have received approval for my study from the Graduate School of Education at Hamline University, our local school district, and our principal. My research will be described in my final paper, called a capstone, which will be published online. This capstone will be cataloged in Hamline University's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository.   I may also use this information in professional articles. In all cases, district, school, student, teacher, and family identities will be kept confidential.

Sincerely,

Julie M. Weiss
2nd Grade Interventionist/EL Support Teacher
(Name of school)

_____, 2014

Dear Julie,

I read your letter about doing a research project that would involve me and one of my students. I would like to be in the study and give permission for my student, _____, to also be a part of this project.

I understand that you will be doing an interview with me at school after contracted teacher hours, as well as observing this student during the school day in order to understand the factors that influence the child's reading level. I understand that all results will be kept confidential and anonymous and that we may stop taking part at any time without negative consequences.

Signed,

_____

Teacher

_____

Date

APPENDIX E

Bank of Interview Questions

BANK OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Family Background Questions:

1. Where is your child's place of birth?
2. When did you immigrate to the U.S.?
3. How old was your child when you immigrated?
4. What was your highest level of schooling in your country of origin?
5. Are you able to speak, read, or write in Somali?
6. Are you able to speak, read, or write in English?
7. Have you received any education or training in the U.S.?
8. If you work outside the home, do you use English in your job setting?

Home Literacy Questions:

1. Do you speak Somali in your home?
2. How often do you speak English?
3. How often do your family members read books, newspapers, or other print material in Somali?
4. How often do your family members read books, newspapers, or other print material in English?
5. How often do you read to your child?
6. How often do you read with your child?
7. How often does your child read at home on his/her own?
8. Where in your home does your child like to read?
9. Approximately how many children's books are in your home?
10. How many books do you estimate your child reads at home in a typical week?
11. Do you take your child to the public library? How often?
12. Does your child talk about his/her reading?

School-related Questions:

1. How do you feel your child is doing in school?
2. How well do you feel your child is learning to read in English?
3. How often do you help your child with his/her homework?
4. Do you have contact with the school?
5. What do you like about our school?
6. Do you understand the reading program at school?
7. Do you understand the expectations of students for home reading?
8. Does your child bring library books home from school?
9. What has been helpful to you in understanding the expectations and procedures at school?

Teacher Interview Questions:

1. What is the reading level of this student (involved in the study)? (Accuracy, fluency, comprehension)
2. How often do you read aloud to your students in a whole group setting?
3. How does this student respond during the read aloud? How does he/she respond afterward? What is the frequency of a response?
4. How often does this student read to you?
5. Do you collect any data as they read to you? Is there any information recorded during or following the reading?
6. If data is collected, how is this information used?
7. What are some specific reading behaviors of this student? (Independence, reading to others)
8. Do your students record their own reading behavior or amount of time/pages read? How is this information recorded? Does this student follow this expected behavior?
9. Do you keep any records of how much a student reads at school or at home?
10. What has been your involvement with the parents of this child?
11. What kind of parent support for reading at home have you seen?
12. Does the parent of this student understand the reading program at school?
13. Does the parent understand the school's home reading program? How do you know of their understanding?
14. Are you aware of any books (in English) that this student reads at home?
15. How often does your student have reading homework? Does this student complete the homework?
16. How often does this student check out books from the school library? Do you have any indication that they read the books they are checking out?
17. Do you have any awareness of the family using the public library system to check out books?

APPENDIX F

Observation Notes

Student: Date:

SCHOOL	Notes/Observations
Reading Activities	
Reading Behaviors	
Interaction with Others (teachers, students)	
Informal/Unplanned Reading Activities	
Library Experiences	
Frequency of Activities/Behaviors	
Duration of Activities/Behaviors	

Additional notes:

<div align="center">OBSERVATION NOTES</div>

Student: Owen   Date: Feb. 25, 2015

SCHOOL	Notes/Observations
Reading Activities	O was fully engaged during whole group instruction. He followed behavior expectations during independent reading work. He listened and participated in an interactive read aloud.
Reading Behaviors	Though O was seen to be engaged throughout both of the whole group lessons, he was moving around and fidgeting quite a lot. He moved around a lot (reading to self, sharpening pencil, AR test, getting new book). O knows the routines for the reading block and makes transitions easily, yet often.
Interaction with Others (teachers, students)	As he worked on seatwork, he chatted with tablemates about answers, which the teacher allowed. This interaction did not slow him down. Several times he turned slightly around on the rug to see what his friend was doing. O responded appropriately to the teacher's directions.
Informal/Unplanned Reading Activities	O went to the computer to take an AR test during independent reading station.
Library Experiences	Not observed.
Frequency of Activities/Behaviors	In the course of the 20 minute whole group lesson, O raised his hand seventeen times to answer questions or add to the discussion. O changed his body position during whole group every few minutes (stretching out legs, putting legs to side, crossing legs, pulling knees up, pulling arms out of sleeves, putting arms in sleeves, turning to look at friends behind him). During seatwork, he changed body positions frequently (legs sprawled to the side of chair, body leaning to each side, whole body turned to the side, head down at the table).
Duration of Activities/Behaviors	Whole group – 15 minutes Reading stations – 15 minutes Interactive read-aloud/discussion (whole group) – 10 minutes

Notes: O seems to enjoy reading and is happy in each reading activity. His favorite genre is nonfiction. He knows his reading levels are high and thinks this is because he checks out books that are a little bit hard for him and is only allowed to play educational video games. He does these things in order to get better at reading. He often looks up unknown words on the computer, both at home and at school. When asked specifically about his reading goal sheet, O admits he doesn't often record his reading minutes or complete his goal sheet because he just wants to read and not have to write anything down.

OBSERVATION NOTES:

Student: Mina   Date: Feb. 25, 2015

SCHOOL	Notes/Observations
Reading Activities	During whole group lessons M would sit very still, listening carefully and responding appropriately. M quickly got started on seatwork. In small group time that followed, M joined in to act out a portion of their reading story. The class took a bathroom break in the middle of their reading block. Students each brought a book to read in the hall while waiting for their classmates.
Reading Behaviors	M remained focused during the work and finished the work before the rest of her class. Without any direction from the teacher, M got out a book and began reading independently. M read her part of the readers' theater accurately and fluently.
Interaction with Others (teachers, students)	She whispered an answer to her partner when directed to do so the first time, but did not "lean and whisper" the second time. In her small group time she was cooperative, but did not provide any group leadership, offer suggestions, or share her opinions about the activity.
Informal/Unplanned Reading Activities	Even though students walked back and forth in front of her in the hallway, and the girls on both sides of her were talking, M was able to concentrate on her book as though no one was around.
Library Experiences	Not observed.
Frequency of Activities/Behaviors	M only raised her hand once to participate in the whole group lesson. She was fully engaged in the lesson.
Duration of Activities/Behaviors	Remained focused during each part of the reading block.

Notes: M's favorite genre is mysteries; she thinks she is a good reader because she reads a lot and tries to figure out the mysteries. She is able to read and stay focused, both at home and school, even though there are distractions around her.

OBSERVATION NOTES:

Student: Adam   Date: Feb. 25, 2015

SCHOOL	Notes/Observations
Reading Activities	A listened intently to the story during the entire twenty minutes. Following the read-aloud the class was given instructions on the reading stations for the day, after which A immediately went to the Chrome Book table. A went quickly to the reading corner to begin independent reading.
Reading Behaviors	A was self-directed and focused, even though his best friend was sitting across from him at the table. He chose to listen to a story over playing educational reading games. He chose a quiet place to read, away from two other boys in the small reading area.
Interaction with Others (teachers, students)	Sat with his back to his friends on the rug and stay focused on the read aloud. A was self-directed and did not need to have any contact with the teacher during stations. Quickly and quietly talked with his best friend about what each would choose for Chrome Book work. He did not choose what his friend chose.
Informal/Unplanned Reading Activities	Not observed.
Library Experiences	Not observed.
Frequency of Activities/Behaviors	A stayed focused and engaged in each part of the reading block.
Duration of Activities/Behaviors	Each part of the reading block that was observed lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

Notes: A was aware of my presence and seemed to know that I was there to observe him as he looked my way several times as I began the observation. Most of his behavior during reading matched his teachers' comments; however, he was very careful not to waste time with his friend, as Ms. K says he often does in the morning. On this particular day, the class did not have a lot of opportunities for discussion. Through an informal conversation with A, he spoke of some of his dad's expectations, which seem to shape his reading skills and behavior to a great degree.

APPENDIX G

Participant Data

INFO	SOURCE	O	M	A
Age	Student cum file	10 years	11 years	9 years
Arrival in the U.S.	Student cum file	2009	2009	Born in U.S., 2005 family immigrated
Current services	Teacher	Regular academic services	Regular academic services	Regular academic services
Academic performance	Report card, teacher comments, cum file	Excellent academic scores; engaged learning with lots of participation	Excellent academic scores; focused learning	Excellent academic scores; high vocabulary, reluctant writer
English language proficiency	WIDA, ACCESS test scores (2014)	Composite = 5.1 Reading=5.0 Writing=4.8 Listening=5.0 Speaking=6.0	Composite =4.9 Reading=5.0 Writing=4.4 Listening=5.0 Speaking=6.0	Composite = 4.1 Reading=5.0 Writing=3.2 Listening=5.0 Speaking=6.0
STAR Reading scores	TIES, teacher data and comments	540 scale score, 4.9 grade equivalency	739 scale score, 6.6 grade equivalency	559 scale score, 5.1 grade equivalency
Rigby (Reading level) scores	Teacher data and comments	U (target=S)	Z (target=U)	U (target=O)
Oral reading fluency scores (words per minute)	Teacher data and comments	192 wpm (target=148)	186 wpm (target=149)	172 wpm (target=123)
MCA(Comprehensive Assessments)	TIES, teacher data	2014 - 344 scale score (partially meets)	2014-454 scale score (meets); 2013–357 (meets)	No score available; will take MCA in 2015
Other: Reading journal, Calendar, Log, PAKRAT list	Teacher data and comments	Inconsistent completion of reading goal sheet	Not applicable	Reluctant to write in blog; consistent PAKRAT list; inconsistent calendar

APPENDIX H

Family Information

INFORMATION	STUDENT 1	STUDENT 2	STUDENT 3
Country of origin			
Home language			
Years lived in U.S.			
Literacy level in L1			
Literacy level in English			
Other languages spoken			
Educational level of parents			
Number of children			
Children born in country of origin			
Children born in U.S.			
Other states of residence			
Length of residence in current city			
Other relevant information			

INFORMATION	STUDENT 1: Owen	STUDENT 2: Mina	STUDENT 3: Adam
Country of origin	Somalia (mother and some siblings); Yemen (Owen)	Somalia (parents); Kenya (Mina)	Somalia (parents and some siblings); U.S. (Adam)
Home language	Somali	Somali	Somali
Years lived in U.S.	6 years	8 years (dad and children); 10 years (mom)	10 years
Literacy level in L1	Fluent; mom uses L1 with children; children understand L1 but often speak L2 (English) to each other	Fluent; parents use L1 in home with children; children fluent in L1 but often use L2 (English) with each other	Fluent; parents use L1 in the home; Adam reports he can understand L1 and can speak and read a little bit
Literacy level in English	Mother is in Level 3 at local adult ESL class	Parents fluent in English	Father is fluent in English; mother is in Level 4 at local adult ESL class
Other languages spoken	None	Parents speak and read Arabic	Dad knows Arabic, level unknown
Educational level of parents	Mother had middle school education in Somalia	Both mother and father had secondary schooling in Somalia; father has 2 years in local technical college	Father went to technical college in the U.S.(medical technologist degree); mother has a middle school education in Somali
Number of children	6	9 (1 lives in Africa)	9
Children born in country of origin	6	4 born in East Africa	6 born in Kenya
Children born in U.S.	None	5	3
Other states of residence	None	Colorado-mother lived for 1 year	Ohio-only 3 weeks
Length of residence in current city	6 years	8 years (dad and children); 9 years (mom)	Lived in a refugee camp
Other relevant information	Owen's father died in Africa.	Family lived in Kenya and Ethiopia	

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