



International Literacy and Development

Refugee Needs Assessment

A Survey of Language and Literacy Needs in Dallas/Fort Worth

Miranda Kuykendall and Hannah Johnson

Sponsored by the Harold Simmons Foundation

Supervised by Daniel Wilson, Ph.D., Director of XRI Institute

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International Literacy and Development: An Overview

International Literacy and Development (ILAD) is a non-profit organization focused on human flourishing among under-resourced language speakers around the world. The vision of ILAD is to see *lives transformed in marginalized language communities through literacy and development*. ILAD partners with local communities, governments, and organizations to develop local language literacy coupled with economic development. ILAD began in 2011 with the hopes of providing literacy and development opportunities to minority people who are underserved and overlooked primarily due to their mother tongue.

ILAD exists to *empower the overlooked* and provides input, advice, and technical expertise to community leaders who desire to see their language increase in its capacity to serve the needs of its speakers. Whether through orthography development, the creation of written materials, or improvements in reading, writing, and technological literacy, ILAD professionals base their decisions not only upon sound technical knowledge, but also the desires and goals of the people they serve. ILAD engages in *innovative language development programs* that promote the reading and writing of local languages through literacy classes and literacy teacher trainings with the following three purposes:

- Training individuals to read and write
- Educating adults in order to alleviate poverty
- Encouraging adults to educate both their peers and the next generation

WHOLE PERSON DEVELOPMENT



BODY



MIND



SPIRIT

ILAD is driven by the belief that all people, regardless of language and culture, should have access to opportunities that promote human flourishing.

Community Needs

When refugees first arrive in the United States, they often come with valuable prior experiences and great potential but few earthly possessions. Some of the new refugees' greatest needs over their first few months after arrival are housing and basic material needs such as items with which to set up their new homes. Many need assistance learning how to use basic amenities such as electricity and running water. In addition, because these people arrive with the desire to contribute to their new country and have upward mobility, they often need English lessons, opportunities to pursue their GEDs, job skills, open doors for creating enterprises and viable platforms from which to grow these enterprises, and solvency in order to put down roots for the long-term. ILAD can contribute to these needs through empowering refugees with tools for language acquisition, translation, and literacy training.

The needs within the Vickery Meadow refugee community that ILAD feels most equipped to meet at this stage are those related to language, translation, and development. First, like refugees nationwide, the refugees at Vickery Meadow need to be able to understand cultural and economic systems within the United States, and they need to know how to manage and network within those systems for acculturation. Second, they need access to and assistance with language and literacy education. ILAD's specific focus on linguistics and literacy can provide the tools to enable refugees to begin or further their language learning and begin literacy training. ILAD also has the capacity to enable refugees to share their under-resourced languages with others to give them more of a sense of dignity, meaning, and belonging and to help them feel that their cultural and linguistic heritage is valued and worth preserving as they seek to adapt to their new environment.

In short, ILAD hopes to develop relationships with members of the Vickery Meadow community with the goal of providing refugees with linguistic tools that can help improve their quality of life.

Research Oversight

Daniel Wilson, a linguist with a Ph.D. from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa maintained oversight of the project. Daniel has conducted extensive research and published several papers on theoretical linguistics and has field experience both in Tbilisi, Georgia and in the United States within an undocumented language group based in Africa.

Needs Assessment Research

I. Primary Research Questions

- What are the critical sectors where communication resources are deemed necessary for a refugee population that is new and systematically/structurally unsupported?
- What bottlenecks exist for creating and scaling communication resources among refugees in critical sectors, and how do these bottlenecks create restrictions that affect integration?
- What are some possible solutions for addressing these bottlenecks and restrictions?

II. Literature Review

Our goal in this study was to draw on the notable work that has already been done among refugee and immigrant populations while also building on this knowledge to create viable solutions for those in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. As the effectiveness of communication resources is dependent upon language, literacy, and translation, we reviewed literature from several fields of study, including migration and refugee studies, second language acquisition, literacy and education, and psychology. In addition, we examined case studies done among two groups that have been historically known to lack systemic and structural support at the time of their arrival. Many of the results we found in the literature were confirmed through our interviews and focus groups among a third group in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

1. *Refugee Integration*

In order to successfully answer our research questions, it is important that we first clearly define ‘integration.’ In their survey of refugee studies literature, Ager and Strang¹ aggregated information among several sources in order to create a framework for use among those working with refugees. They found several key domains that affect integration. The domains, or sectors, include education, employment, housing, health, social connections within and outside of their ethnic communities, an understanding of rights and citizenship, a sense of safety and stability, and language and cultural knowledge. Although successful navigation of these sectors is a strong indicator of integration, the authors are quick to note that restrictions to these successes lie in the lack of language and cultural knowledge and in the ongoing fear of instability.² Much of our research by way of primary sources also confirms these sectors as being critical for successful integration.

According to the UNHCR integration framework for language training, “facilitating language acquisition also helps to promote the human and civil rights of resettled refugees, enhancing their capacity to act as self-advocates in commercial transactions and

¹ Alistair Ager and Allison Strang. *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework*. Journal of Refugee Studies. (2008).

² Ibid.

in their dealings with employers, law enforcement personnel, and government agencies."³ The framework points to several strategies and models for language learning, including home-based learning and instruction “outside of conventional working hours.” In Vanja Pejic’s “Community-Based Interventions with Refugee Families Using a Family Systems Approach,” the author emphasizes the **importance of involving the community in resource and program design, presenting programs that are specific to the community being served, and providing services at neutral locations (ie: homes, community centers, etc).**⁴

John Benseman writes that many challenges that arise when working with adult refugee learners with limited literacy are “due not only to their experiences as refugees, but also as learners with minimal or no educational experience. Their progress depends on a skillful development of ‘learning to learn,’ acquiring basic literacy skills, personal confidence and transfer of these skills to everyday life outside the classroom.”⁵ Benseman also mentions the importance of trauma-informed language and literacy programs, pointing to three types of stress faced by refugees: migration, acculturative, and traumatic.⁶ According to Benseman, “resettlement issues cannot be separated from language development.”⁷ Literacy, language, and education are critical to successful refugee resettlement.

2. *Refugee Literacy, Language, & Education*

Systemically and structurally unsupported refugee groups include those who lack the resources in their mother tongue or the skills in their second language to adjust to their new environment. Studies in second language acquisition have proven that students are most successful in learning a second language when they have strong foundations in literacy and education in their first language.⁸ However, refugees who have limited formal education or whose language lacks a formalized orthography (writing system) do not have the foundations necessary for the transfer of literacy skills. In addition, research has shown that knowledge in alphabetic print literacy in a first language also affects oral language processing in the second language.⁹

³ Unhcr.org. (2019). *Fostering Independent Communication: Language Training Programs for Adult Resettled Refugees*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/3d9860614.pdf>

⁴ Pejic, Vanja, Andrea Alvarado, Robyn Hess, and Sarah Groark. *The Family Journal* 25(1) (November 2016).

⁵ Benseman, J. (2014). *Adult Refugee Learners with Limited Literacy: Needs and Effective Responses*. *Refuge*. 93. Retrieved from <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/download/38606/35020>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cummins, J. *The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students* (Los Angeles: National Dissemination and Assessment Center, 1981); Collier, Virginia P., and Wayne P. Thomas. *Validating the Power of Bilingual Schooling: Thirty-Two Years of Large-Scale, Longitudinal Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 203-217.

⁹ Tarone, Elaine, Martha Bigelow & Kit Hansen. *Literacy and second language oracy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

Literacy has traditionally been defined as the ability to read and write. However, the latter part of the twentieth century has introduced technology and methods that have added layers of complexity to this definition. For our purposes as an organization and for the purposes of this project, we will use the definition provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO): Literacy is “a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world.”¹⁰ According to this description, successful acquisition of literacy skills incorporates all of the above modes and types with a focus on print literacy as a foundation.

Experts divide adult English Language Learners into six categories of literacy skills. These categories can be seen in Table 1. The first three categories emphasize those students who have little to no literacy skills in any language, while the last three categories focus on groups that have literacy skills in languages other than English.

Table 1. Types of Mother Tongue Literacy and Effects on Second Language Literacy Learning

Mother Tongue Literacy	Explanation	Special Considerations
<i>Preliterate</i>	Mother tongue has no written form (e.g., many American indigenous, African, Australian, and Pacific languages).	Learners need exposure to the purposes and uses of literacy.
<i>Nonliterate</i>	Learners have no access to literacy instruction.	Learners may feel stigmatized.
<i>Semiliterate</i>	Learners have limited access to literacy instruction.	Learners may have had past negative experiences with literacy learning.
<i>Nonalphabet literate</i>	Learners are fully literate in a language written in a nonalphabetic script (e.g., Chinese).	Learners need instruction in reading an alphabetic script and in the sound-syllable correspondences in English.
<i>Non-Roman alphabet literate</i>	Learners are literate in a language written in a non-Roman alphabet (e.g., Arabic, Greek, Korean, Russian, and Thai).	Learners need instruction in the Roman alphabet in order to transfer their mother tongue literacy skills to English. Some, such as readers of Arabic, will need to learn to read from left to right.

¹⁰ UNESCO. (2019). *Literacy*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy>

<i>Roman alphabet literate</i>	Learners are fully literate in a language written in a Roman alphabet script (e.g., French, German, and Spanish). They read from left to right and recognize letter shapes and fonts.	Learners need instruction in the specific letter-to-sound and sound-syllable correspondences of English.
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From Reading and Adult English Language Learners: A Review of the Research, by M. Burt, J. K. Peyton, and R. Adams, 2003, Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education and Center for Applied Linguistics.

Our needs assessment specifically focuses on the first three categories – preliterate, nonliterate, and semiliterate English Language Learners (ELLs).¹¹

The majority of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the United States have been created with the assumption that students are already literate in another language. However, a significant segment of ELLs come to the United States without literacy or formal education in any language.

Recent research demonstrates that classroom methods used for mainstream ELLs are not as effective with limited-literate learners (preliterate, non-literate, and semi-literate populations) because these groups require more time to develop two new skills: a new language and reading and writing skills.¹² Their adjustment is also affected by differences between their native language and English, lack of familiarity with a formal classroom, and exposure to print.¹³ Texas currently resettles the largest number of refugees in the United States, and Dallas resettles the largest numbers of refugees in the state. The Dallas/Fort Worth area offers a wealth of general ESL services but still needs more resources that focus specifically on limited-literate learners. For this reason, we will give particular attention to limited-literate learners – more specifically, those who come from oral cultures¹⁴ that have no standardized writing systems.

The term ‘new literacies’ has been adopted in the past few decades to reflect the wealth and breadth of knowledge that already exists within cultures.¹⁵ Therefore, literacy is no longer just associated with formal schooling and cognitive processes, but it is also linked

¹¹ Huntley, Helen S. *The New Illiteracy: A Study of the Pedagogic Principles of Teaching English as a Second Language to Non-Literate Adults*. 1992.

¹² Burt, Miriam and Joy Peyton. *Reading and Adult English Language Learners: The Role of the First Language* (Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2003); Tarone, Elaine, Martha Bigelow & Kit Hansen. *Literacy and second language oracy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); Kurvers, Jeanne et. al, *Literacy and Word Boundaries* (Richmond, VA: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Forum of LESLLA, 2006), 45-65.

¹³ Wrigley, H. S. *New to literacy: Challenges facing immigrants with minimal prior schooling*. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 2013 31–35.

¹⁴ Cultures whose primary form of conveying information is through the spoken word; cultures whose members process information differently from those with a foundation in literacy

¹⁵ Street, B. *Literacy in theory and practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Gee, J. *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideologies in discourses*. (London: Routledge, 1990); Barton, D. *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

to social, economic, and political practices – a concept that is important when it comes to integrating literacy and language learning among refugees and immigrants. Along with ‘new literacies,’ the New London Group¹⁶ introduced teaching techniques around ‘multiliteracies,’ which highlight various forms and modes of communication (multimodality) through different languages (multilingualism).¹⁷ When we combine these theories together, literacy becomes a system of learning that requires a combination of oral, visual, written, digital, and even non-verbal means.¹⁸ For example, Western textbooks tend to rely on drawings and illustrations to represent objects and pictures. However, research has shown that non-literate and preliterate refugees can sometimes misinterpret drawings and illustrations because they are outsiders to the Western culture of literacy. Two-dimensional, black & white illustrations, maps, graphs, and charts, along with symbols such as arrows and bubbles, are often misinterpreted or misunderstood by these groups because they require specific background knowledge and context.¹⁹

3. *Women and Literacy*

For many years, UNESCO statistics have reported that women are at a disadvantage when it comes to literacy. Many women are denied education in their home countries, and even after migrating to another country, they often find themselves unable to attend class due to household responsibilities and childcare.²⁰ In addition, the compound effects of trauma, role reversals within the family, and the inability to communicate with service providers often create a sense of powerlessness among many refugee women.²¹

4. *Proven Teaching Methods for Preliterate Learners*

Several models have been created with these populations in mind, namely, the Continua of Biliteracy²² and the Mutually Adaptive Learning Program.²³ These models take into

¹⁶ The New London Group. “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures.” *Harvard Educational Review* (April 1996): 60-93.

¹⁷ Kress, Gunther. “Multimodality: Challenges to Thinking about Language.” *TESOL Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2000): 337-40; New London Group, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures.” 60-93.

¹⁸ “Poster: Writing and Communication - WOVEN” last modified July 8, 2019, <https://wcprogram.lmc.gatech.edu/posters/woven>.

¹⁹ Hvitfeldt, C. “Picture perception and interpretation among preliterate adults.” *Passage: A Journal of Refugee Education*, 1(1) (1985): 27-30; Bruski, Dan. “Graphic device interpretation by low-literate adult ELLs: do they get the picture?” *Minnesota and Wisconsin Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages*. (2012).

²⁰ Watkins, Paula G., et. al. “‘I’m Telling You ... The Language Barrier Is the Most, the Biggest Challenge’: Barriers to Education among Karen Refugee Women in Australia.” *Australian Journal of Education* 56, no. 2 (August 2012): 126–41.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Hornberger, N. H. *The Continua of Biliteracy and the Bilingual Educator: Educational Linguistics in Practice*. (2004). Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/9

²³ DeCapua, A. & Marshall, H.W. “Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools,” (2011): 68

account multiliteracies while also adding value to refugee and immigrant cultures. Simply stated,

teachers should work from a broad definition of literacy that includes not only numeracy, problem solving, and the ability to read, write, and speak English, but also emotional and social literacies such as motivation, interpersonal effectiveness, critical thinking, and cultural awareness.²⁴

Some teaching strategies that work with preliterate and non-literate learners include:

- class assignments in group settings while encouraging individual accountability
- encouraging frequent observation and imitation
- supporting written activities with oral interaction through listening and repetition
- multisensory and hands-on activities
- teaching lessons with immediate relevance²⁵

5. *Trauma-Informed Education & Intervention*

Given that many refugees arrive with the effects of trauma, stress, and displacement, it is important that educators create environments that maximize learning. Oftentimes ESL instructors are some of the few Westerners that refugees relate to on a regular basis. In her research, Horseman identifies three areas of focus for trauma-affected students: control, connection, and meaning. She notes that “trauma entails being controlled by others and being out of your own control. One of the effects of trauma is that control becomes a complex and difficult terrain.”²⁶ This requires teachers to patiently walk alongside students through relationship, empathy, and listening, which can help students regain a sense of agency. Researchers also encourage educators to focus on building a sense of community among students, providing a safe space for open dialogue about daily struggles and storytelling, and incorporating curriculum content that affects mental health concerns (i.e. going to the doctor, disciplining children, etc.). Finally, educators should be sure to recognize and highlight students’ strengths, since limitations in language and adjustment often leave them discouraged.²⁷

In addition, as many refugees come from collectivist societies, cultural and community reinforcement have been critical in helping them to maintain a sense of identity while

²⁴ Benseman, J. *Adult Refugee Learners with Limited Literacy: Needs and Effective Responses*. Refuge. (2014, 93).

²⁵ Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning. “The Hmong in our midst: A resource for ELT classrooms.” U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (2004); Florez, MaryAnn Cunningham and Lynda Terrill. “Working With Literacy-Level Adult English Language Learners.” *The CAELA Guide for Adult ESL Trainers* (Washington DC: CAELA, July 2003), 9-17; DeCapua, A. & Marshall, H.W. “Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools,” (2011).

²⁶ Jenny Horseman. “*But I’m not a therapist: Furthering discussion about literacy work with survivors of trauma*.” (Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1997) 10.

²⁷ Adkins, et.al. “Cultural Adjustment and Mental Health: The Role of the ESL Teacher.” Wheat Ridge, CO: Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning, 1998; Wilbur, Amea. “Creating Inclusive EAL Classrooms: How Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Instructors Understand and Mitigate Barriers for Students Who Have Experienced Trauma”. *TESL Canada Journal* 33 (February 2017), 1-19.

also helping them to integrate. Contrary to what many may believe, strong community connections do not prevent successful integration into mainstream society.²⁸ In their study on community-based approaches, Pejic and colleagues found that creating programs centered around family units rather than individuals not only provided necessary social and emotional support but also prevented future mental health occurrences.²⁹ For example, Somalis depend on much of their extended family and network to help raise children. When these supports are removed, it introduces added pressure and drains energy.³⁰ Researchers also found that when presented with options for mental health assistance within the context of community centers and programs, refugees were more likely to participate since the group environment reduced stigma.

Some key recommendations offered for implementing such programs include:³¹

- Prevent friction in the family unit by reducing gaps in acculturation among family members. Parents should be an active part of decision-making, and measures taken with children should include cultural beliefs and family values.
- Identify community leaders and use their influence to break down barriers and to build trust.
- Meet basic needs in order to ensure success of mental health assistance.
- Provide families with tools that empower them to navigate new culture.
- Focus on family strengths, assets, and resilience.

III. Case Studies

Three of the largest limited-literate populations to come to the United States in the last few decades are the Hmong of Laos, the Somali Bantu of Somalia, and the Rohingya of Myanmar. In spite of the stark difference between their geographic origins, there are many parallels among these groups, including their rural and agricultural backgrounds and family or clan-based systems of leadership.

1. Hmong

Conflict forced them out of their homeland, and isolation in the Laotian mountains separated them from their language and culture. In the early 1800s, the Hmong people, a minority ethnic group from China, left the Chinese mainland and journeyed to the countries of Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos.³² The Hmong then migrated to Laos and settled in the mountains to begin their new lives.

²⁸ Ager, A. and Strang, A. *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework*. Journal of Refugee Studies. (2008).

²⁹ Pejic, Vanja, et. al. *The Family Journal* 25(1) (November 2016).

³⁰ Betancourt, T. S., Abdi, S., Ito, B. S., Lilienthal, G. M., Agalab, N., & Ellis, H. *Cultural diversity & ethnic minority psychology*, 21(1). 2015.

³¹ Pejic, Vanja, Andrea Alvarado, Robyn Hess, and Sarah Groark. *The Family Journal* 25(1). November 2016.

³² Lee, et. al. "The Hmong in the United States: From Preliterate to College Success." *American International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, (February 2016), 42-52; Vang, Chia Y. *Hmong in Minnesota*. Canada: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008.

In an interesting turn of events, the United States CIA established a unique relationship with the Hmong people and convinced Hmong leaders to enlist many Hmong in a secret war against communism. In exchange for this service, some economic and educational development was brought to the Hmong people through USAID; however, many of the Hmong still remained uneducated. The war continued for fifteen years and eventually placed the Hmong at odds with the Laotian government. Finally, in 1975, a mass exodus took place, and many Hmong fled as refugees to the United States.³³

The largest settlements of Hmong people in the United States can be found in California and Minnesota.³⁴ As a group-oriented community, the Hmong have traditionally governed themselves within clans. Through these clans, they collectively decide how resources are shared and make decisions that benefit the larger community. Weinstein noted that because of this group mentality, many Hmong did not communicate in English outside of the ESL classroom, as communication was usually assigned to one community member.³⁵

As the Hmong arrived in America, many discovered that their roles in the family and community were changing. Hmong women in their homeland are traditionally subject to their fathers and husbands and are expected to marry at a young age, have children, and raise a family. However, life in the United States required a paradigm shift where girls understood that they have the opportunity to gain education and work outside of the home. The same dynamic was seen among the elderly. As the mainstay of wisdom and experience in the community, the elderly are highly respected and carry roles of significance in traditional Hmong culture. Still, in the United States and other Western nations, their wisdom and experience is not as admired. These role reversals resulted in an increase of psychologically related conditions, such as stomach pains and headaches. In addition, even though at times they may be forced to work in order to provide for their families, refugees over the age of 45 have had more difficulty finding work.³⁶ In fact, refugees who arrived between the ages of 40-50 are at a higher risk for isolation because they were unable to achieve English fluency and therefore unable to integrate.³⁷

Lastly, Weinstein notes that conventional programs such as “survival ESL” classes did little to benefit the Hmong because they tended to focus on filling out forms and other bureaucratic tasks. Rather, Weinstein suggests that gaining an understanding of refugee cultures and skill sets can help to create motivation and a need for communication. One

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning. “The Hmong in our midst: A resource for ELT classrooms.” (2004)

³⁵ Weinstein, Gail. “Literacy and Second Language Acquisition: Issues and Perspectives.” *TESOL Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1984).

³⁶ Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning. “The Hmong in our midst: A resource for ELT classrooms.” (2004)

³⁷ Westermeyer, J., & Her, C. “Predictors of English fluency among Hmong refugees in Minnesota: A longitudinal study.” *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, (1996), 125-132.

such example is that of a program for Hmong women who are talented in needlework. Needlework is used as a foundation for learning English and through the program the women are introduced to literacy activities based on shopping for fabric, creating marketing materials, learning numeracy, and much more. In addition, a longitudinal study conducted by Westermeyer & Her revealed that offering any level of training in English upon arrival provides better chances for achieving fluency.³⁸ It is important to note that nearly forty years after the first migration of the Hmong to the United States, the number of Hmong who have graduated with university degrees has grown, with women graduates gradually increasing. This displays the successful adjustment of Hmong attitudes regarding women and education.³⁹

2. *Somali Bantu*

“We didn’t know what freedom was; we have been let out of the cage and we don’t want to go back in.”⁴⁰ Amidst the upheaval from all they had known, the Somali Bantu had experienced so much turmoil that when asked about returning to their land, a community elder responded that they did not want to return.

In the nineteenth century, the Somali Bantu were brought to Somalia as slaves. As a persecuted and oppressed minority within Somalia, the Bantu were denied rights, education, and full participation within Somali society. In the late nineties, after centuries of oppression, many Somali Bantu fled to other countries in East Africa to live in refugee camps before resettling in the United States in 1999.

The largest settlement of Somali Bantu can be found in Minnesota, followed by Ohio, New York, and Washington D.C. Since the Bantu had been isolated from the mainstream Somali population, many still identify and organize themselves by ancient tribal affiliations. A large number of them worked as farmers in their tribal lands, but those who moved to urban areas and refugee camps also developed skills in construction, manual labor, woodworking, and machine maintenance.⁴¹

As a patriarchal society, men have traditionally had more opportunity to work outside the home and gain an education, while women are expected to marry and raise a family. In addition, as Sunni Muslims, the Somali Bantu men follow Somali tradition and can have multiple wives. Lastly, Bantu children are expected to assist women with household responsibilities.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lee, et. al. “The Hmong in the United States: From Preliterate to College Success.” *American International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, (February 2016).

⁴⁰ VanLehman, Dan and Omar Eno. *The Somali Bantu: Their history and culture*, Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. (February 2003), 2.

⁴¹ VanLehman, Dan and Omar Eno. *The Somali Bantu: Their history and culture*, (February 2003), 1.

There are two main languages among the Somali Bantu: Af-Maay and Af-Maxaa. Both languages have scripts and use the Roman alphabet, but because of years of oppression, many Somali Bantu have not had an opportunity to gain a formal education. Despite this, resettlement to the refugee camps afforded many children a basic primary education and exposed many refugees to the English language.⁴² Still, Somali Bantus have difficulty learning English and understanding academic vocabulary because of the frequent interruptions to education.⁴³

A few effective programs that have worked among the Somali Bantu include using cultural stories, folktales, and proverbs for teaching English. As a method used among older women, this strategy improved grammar, vocabulary, and discourse. It also gave Somali women the opportunity to highlight cultural values such as respect for parents, generosity, wisdom, and fairness. Ultimately, story-based literacy elevated the prestige of Somali Bantu culture and gave the women a sense of respect and self-worth.⁴⁴

3. *Rohingya of Myanmar*

The day was Eid al-Fitr, the celebration of the end of a month-long fast. She invited us over for a meal to partake in the festivities with her. Over a small meal, we talked about her family, her home country, and the hardship of being a single mom in America. She has difficulty reading one-syllable words in English, but she can pronounce the word “genocide” with no accent.

“I miss my family,” she said on Eid, holding back tears. “My mom is in Bangladesh with my brother and my sister-in-law. My husband is in Thailand. My sister is in Myanmar still. Her house was bombed by the military last month, but she is still safe.” A few minutes later, she was able to reach her mother via WhatsApp to wish her *Eid Mubarak*, Blessed Eid. A small slice of home in a faraway land.

Stateless. Scattered. Separated. Already for a long time; possibly for a lifetime. Scattered all because of where they were born and what blood courses through their veins. They are Rohingya, and they have a story to tell.

The Rohingya Muslim people, with a currently estimated population of nearly 2.6 million,⁴⁵ hail from Rakhine State (also known as Arakan) in Myanmar, formerly known

⁴² Ibid. 19

⁴³ Bigelow, Martha, and Patsy Vinogradov. “Teaching Adult Second Language Learners Who Are Emergent Readers.” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 31 (2011): 120–36.

⁴⁴ Marshall, Susan R., “Somali Stories: A Development of a Story-Based ESL Literacy Tool for Use With Older Adult Somali Women” *School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations* (2015), 290.

⁴⁵ Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2019. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-second edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

as Burma.⁴⁶ According to National Geographic, their ancestors began migrating to Myanmar from South Asia in the 1400s, followed by another wave of immigrants during the British colonial rule, though some would claim a longer history in the country.⁴⁷ Upon the exit of the British empire, the Muslims of Myanmar were promised their own independent state, a promise which was never kept.⁴⁸ Thus began the animosity between the Burmese people and the Rohingya.

In 1962, Myanmar became a military state, and the newly-militarized government began a campaign to push the Rohingya out of the country, accusing many of heinous crimes they did not commit.⁴⁹ Hundreds of thousands fled to Bangladesh as a result.⁵⁰ In 1962, the ethnic cleansing, persecution, and scattering of an entire people began.⁵¹ Then, in 1982, Myanmar passed the **Burma Citizenship Law**, effectively stripping citizenship from all whose families had settled in Myanmar after the 1823 British occupation began.⁵² All who had settled after 1823 and had previously possessed certificates of citizenship were required, according to this new law, to surrender their documents or face heavy fines.⁵³ The government, the military, and radical Buddhist activists later began to intensify the persecution of the Rohingya that began in 1962.⁵⁴

While the government of Myanmar recognized 135 ethnic groups within its borders, the Rohingya no longer received formal recognition as a result of the 1982 ruling.⁵⁵ Under Myanmar law, Rohingya people were no longer allowed to participate in formal education, rendering them largely illiterate save for the Arabic they may learn in order to read their holy book, the Qur'an.⁵⁶ (Their language does not have a formally accepted writing system as of yet.)⁵⁷ They were no longer allowed to marry legally⁵⁸, bear children with fewer than three years between them⁵⁹, work legally, or own permanent structures as

⁴⁶ Blakemore, Erin. (2019). "Who are the Rohingya People?" *National Geographic*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/people/reference/rohingya-people/>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Burma Citizenship Law (Pyithu Hluttaw Larv No 4 of 19BZ). Retrieved from <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/1982%20Myanmar%20Citizenship%20Law%20%5BENGLISH%5D.pdf>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Blakemore, "Who are the Rohingya People?"

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Eberhard, Ethnologue, rhg

⁵⁸ Albert, Eleanor and Andrew Chatzky. "The Rohingya Crisis." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/rohingya-crisis>

⁵⁹ Library of Congress. (2015). "Burma: Four 'Race and Religion Protection Laws' Adopted." Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/burma-four-race-and-religion-protection-laws-adopted/>

homes⁶⁰. They were (and still are) forced to remain within strict boundaries and not allowed to travel without permission or bribes.⁶¹

Many more fled to Bangladesh or other nearby countries, settling in refugee camps or informal, temporary shelters. Entire generations of Rohingya have since grown up in these shelters and camps, never having seen their homeland.

On August 25, 2017, a small group of Rohingya activists attacked the Myanmar military that had been persecuting them.⁶² The military's response in the township of Tula Toli was the shot heard around the world for the Rohingya.⁶³ Hundreds are said to have been killed, many put into mass graves or tossed into the river.⁶⁴ Women were forced to watch their babies be killed before they themselves were gang-raped.⁶⁵

Most of those who escaped fled in droves through jungles and treacherous waters into Bangladesh -- over 700,000 after the Tula Toli raid.⁶⁶ Now, estimates show only about 400,000 Rohingya still living in Rakhine State, with scores still fleeing daily.⁶⁷ The Myanmar government continues to carry out air and ground raids, torture, rape, and disenfranchisement of the Rohingya people. They flee for their lives in hope of a better future, but oftentimes when they arrive to safety, the outlook is still bleak.

The government of Bangladesh does not allow Rohingya children to pursue formal education for fear of their stay becoming permanent, and the government of Myanmar does not allow the learning centers in the camps to use Burmese curriculum so as to preclude them from returning to Myanmar.⁶⁸ In Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, Rohingya are not allowed to work legally.⁶⁹ Many fear deportation if discovered and live under the radar, their living conditions not much better than the places from which they came.⁷⁰ But a precious few are able to resettle in countries such as Ireland, Australia, and the United States with the dream of a new life.

⁶⁰ personal communication with Rohingya refugee, April 9, 2019

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Albert, "The Rohingya Crisis".

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Albert, "The Rohingya Crisis."

⁶⁶ Albert, "The Rohingya Crisis."

⁶⁷ Humanitarian Aid. (2018). "UN deputy aid chief shines light on plight of 400,000 Rohingya still inside Myanmar." UN News. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1007522>

⁶⁸ McPherson, Poppy and Ruma Paul. (2019). "Rohingya 'Lost Generation' Struggle to Study in Bangladesh Camps." Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-education/rohingya-lost-generation-struggle-to-study-in-bangladesh-camps-idUSKCN1QZ0EA>

⁶⁹ Albert, "The Rohingya Crisis."

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The Rohingya are one of the largest ethnic groups currently resettling in Dallas/Fort Worth. Estimates from ILAD's research show nearly 200 families living in the Metroplex, with these numbers continuing to increase. They bring with them their trauma, their struggles, their creativity, and their vision for a brighter tomorrow.

Kamal*⁷¹ could have kissed the ground as he spoke to us of his love for America. "My country never gave me anything. I wasn't a citizen. I could not travel where I wanted to go. I was not free. But here in America? I am free. I can own a car, live in a house, and go wherever I want whenever I want to. I am so happy to be in America. So thankful."⁷² He echoes the voices of many Dallas-area Rohingya in their gratefulness for being given a new start.

The Rohingya of Dallas are strong. Resilient. Innovative. Many are weary but still willing to allow hope to beat within their hearts here in this new home. They know they have challenges ahead of them, and the needs assessed are evident, but with language tools and the support of the Dallas community, their potential to thrive and to give back is limitless.

IV. Needs Assessment Research: Introduction

According to the Welcoming Dallas Strategic plan, "nearly one-quarter of Dallas' current residents were born outside of the United States." This makes "the integration of foreign-born residents critical to the social, cultural and economic future of Dallas."⁷³ While in recent years, overall refugee intake numbers have steadily decreased, the need for literacy and language development still remains in order to empower DFW refugees to become thriving members of our community. Because many of the language communities who have arrived in recent years come from primary oral cultures, a need exists to create multimodal tools (utilizing audiovisual media, for example) and resources that better serve them as they acclimate.

A significant portion of refugees who arrive in the United States are members of ethnic and language minority communities. These populations present unique challenges as resources for education and economic betterment are typically not provided in their home countries. Furthermore, some of these refugees have fled to the United States precisely because they belong to such communities. Given these challenges, we seek to use our expertise in linguistics and literacy to provide unique support for these communities in the Vickery Meadow and greater DFW area. To that end, conducted research to learn the scope and depth of the demographics,

⁷¹ *pseudonym

⁷² Personal communication, April 9, 2019

⁷³ City Of Dallas. *Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan*. (2018). [Brochure]. Retrieved from <https://dallascityhall.com/departments/wcia/DCHDocuments/COD-WCIA-Booklet.pdf>

successes, and needs of the local refugee community and their serving organizations in order to contribute without duplicating others' efforts.

The researchers, Hannah Johnson and Miranda Kuykendall, have been with ILAD for two years. Kuykendall has ten years of experience teaching English, Spanish, and ESL and is currently completing an M.A. in Applied Linguistics. Johnson is an educational linguist with an M.A. in Applied Anthropology and an M.Ed. in Reading & ESL. Daniel Wilson has a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa and is the Director of XRI Institute, a research institute devoted to connecting development workers with the best available research in higher education.

1. Research Plan

Methods

- Interviews and focus groups
- Case studies
- Ethnographies

Techniques

- Chain referrals
- Literature review

Participants

- Resettlement agencies
- Long-established organizations and individuals in refugee community
- Representatives from critical sectors
- Refugees in our community of focus

2. Phases of Research

This study was conducted in three phases. Findings from Phase 1 were presented to the Metroplex Refugee Network at the North Texas Association of Governments in March.

PHASE 1

Goals	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To understand the scope of work being done among DFW refugee communities and the individuals and organizations serving them ● To understand the greatest needs that arise among DFW refugees within their first year of arrival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Join the Dallas Area Refugee Forum (DARF). ● Conduct interviews with individuals and organizations that serve refugees. ● Draw data from Phase 1 to determine which ethnic groups present the most need; present findings.

PHASE 2

Goals	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To observe effective strategies among under-resourced ethnic groups with the most need ● To understand the greatest needs that exist among an identified refugee ethnic minority in Dallas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct a case study on under-resourced ethnic group* and the entities who serve them in high numbers ● Questions that inform case study include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are these entities doing to successfully communicate to the community? ○ Is there a centralized source or ideal model that these entities are using for success? ○ How do critical sectors use these resources? ● Conduct focus groups and group interviews with refugees in the identified language community

***Rohingya of Myanmar as Community of Focus**

Throughout the Phase 1 interview process, we repeatedly heard that the DFW Rohingya community often has the greatest challenges in terms of acclimation, language, communication, and literacy. As such, we chose the Rohingya as our community of focus for interviews and further study.

PHASE 3

Goals	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Propose a solution that prioritizes simplicity, sustainability, and scalability for use among the larger refugee community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyze data from Phase 2. ● Propose best solutions for improving communication resources among ethnic group of focus.

V. Findings for Phase 1

Table 2: Intake Numbers, Projections, & Changes

<i>2018 Fiscal Year</i>	Data from the resettlement agencies shows estimates of 1,000 people resettled in DFW (includes asylees).
<i>2019 Fiscal Year (as of February 2019)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) has seen 90 arrivals. ● Refugee Services of Texas (RST) has seen 72 arrivals. ● International Rescue Committee (IRC) has seen an estimated 100 arrivals. ● World Relief Fort Worth (WRFW) has seen 32 arrivals.
<i>2019 Projections</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CCFW projects 218 arrivals. ● IRC projects 350 arrivals. ● RST projects 299 arrivals. ● WRFW projects 120.
<i>Changes Reported</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CCFW reports a decrease of nearly 400 arrivals per year since 2017. ● RST reports a decrease of nearly 50% in arrivals in the past few years. ● WRFW reports a decrease of nearly 400 arrivals per year from several years ago.

1. Demographics for DFW-Area Refugees and Asylees

It is important to note the ethnic minorities represented within these demographics. From Afghanistan (SIV) we have heard reports of Hazara, Kurds, and Turkmen along with ethnic majority members. From Iraq (SIV) we have heard of Yazidi along with ethnic majority members. From Myanmar we have heard of Rohingya, Chin (many different groups), Karen (many different groups), Karenni, and Kachin. Many of those who come to us from Nepal are ethnic minority Bhutanese who resettled temporarily in Nepal. We are still learning about Congolese groups and welcome new information as it comes and also wish to point out that this data changes rapidly and continually as intake changes.



2. Highest Percentages

Each resettlement organization has a different method for assessing demographic percentages. The following represents the top three countries from which each agency resettled based on information provided.

Catholic Charities Fort Worth: 2018 Fiscal Year
(2868 total individuals resettled over four years)

DR Congo	40%
Afghanistan	26%
Myanmar	19%

International Rescue Committee: 2014-2018 Fiscal Years
(2868 total individuals resettled over four years)

Myanmar	36.6%
Iraq	18.3%
Afghanistan	13.7%

Refugee Services of Texas: 2018 Calendar Year

Afghanistan	57.7%
DR Congo	12%
Iraq	7%

World Relief: Fort Worth General Demographic Data

DR Congo	40%
Afghanistan	20%

3. Needs of DFW-Area Refugees Upon Arrival

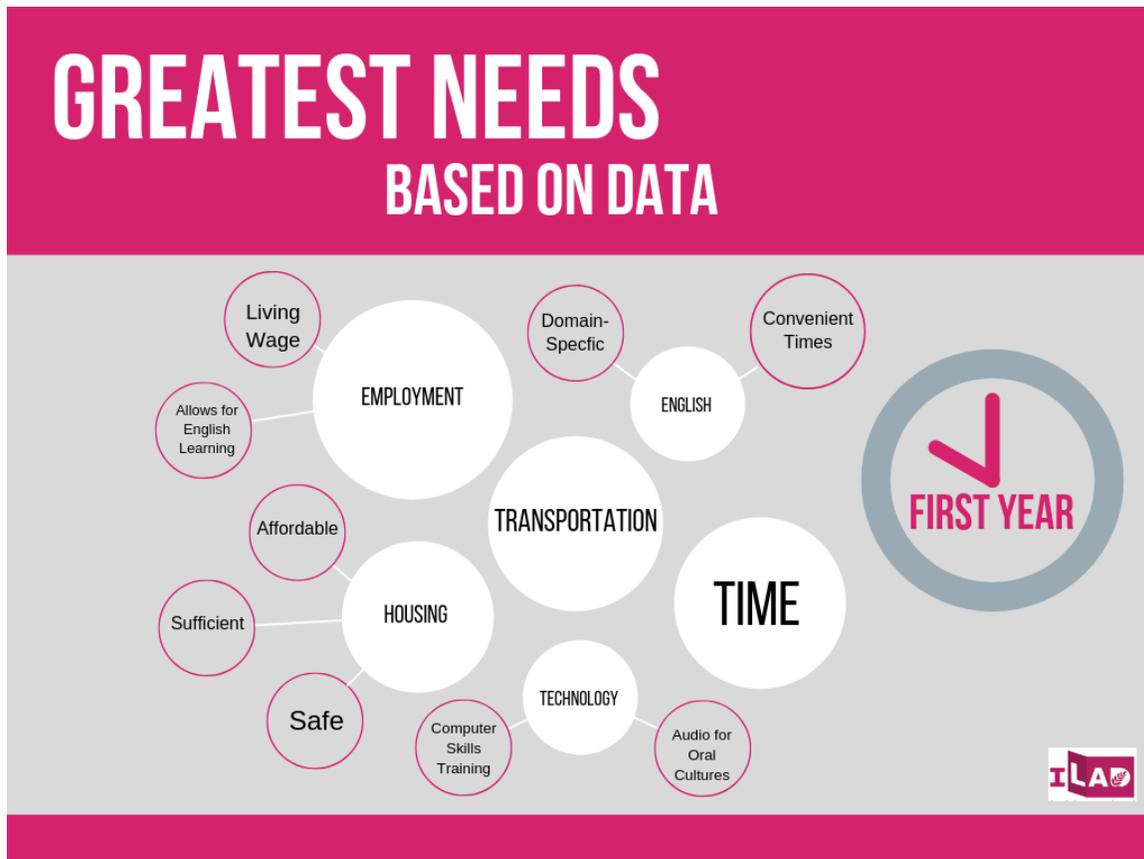
When a refugee family first arrives, they face a number of significant challenges. They are here in a brand-new culture with new systems and new ways of handling day-to-day tasks. English is completely different from their mother tongue, and many of them may not have had the chance to learn before they came. In addition, they must navigate parenting children who increasingly move away from their parents’ cultures as they adopt the culture of their new surroundings. Finally, on top of all other seen needs, refugees need a sense of empowerment in their new homes.

“Refugees need to feel empowered in order to ultimately find personal fulfillment.”⁷⁴

SUNNY HONG, Ph.D., ANTHROPOLOGIST

Beyond general, immediate needs, refugees face many layers of nuanced challenges that are interconnected. Cultural shock compounds trauma that many have already experienced, making it even harder to adjust to life here. So often, refugee families are forced (due to financial need) to dive into work soon after they arrive, and they do not have sufficient **time** to get a feel for their surroundings, learn the basics of our systems and language, and begin to make their new dwellings feel like a home.

⁷⁴ personal communication, January 24, 2019



a. Health Needs

Because many refugees who come from situations of high poverty have had little (or inadequate) healthcare, they often arrive with a number of chronic illnesses, dental problems, or other health anomalies that need to be treated. The government does provide assistance for many of these services, but it can be challenging for newly-arrived refugees to know how to navigate the system and use their health benefits. In addition, while it is possible to obtain treatment for present health conditions, well care is still not provided for by federal assistance.

Finally, because of common cross-cultural misunderstandings or lack of communication or transportation, refugees may sometimes miss health appointments and have to wait up to three months to reschedule.

Refugees who come from war-torn areas or whose homelands are stages for ethnic violence and genocide arrive with mental and emotional wounds and trauma. The loss of loved ones due to violence, the loss of their homes, gender-based violence, and so many other traumatic experiences can make even daily life difficult. This impacts navigating the new culture, learning language and job skills, befriending others in the

community, and much more. Highly trained counselors and interpreters are a consistent need to help address the needs of refugees impacted by trauma. Heart House, Mosaic, Catholic Charities, and the IRC, for example, have set up programs to target these specific needs, as have a number of other organizations in the area.

Mental health is another area of need among DFW-area refugees, including a number of previously undiagnosed mental illnesses. Chaundra Merrell of IRC remarks that “The need was always there, but we are now pulling back the curtain and starting to see it”.⁷⁵ Many refugees arrive with cases of depression and/or post-traumatic stress disorder, and some also deal with suicidal ideations. Cultural challenges also exist when discussing the issues at hand. In some cultures, an individual with a mental illness is simply labeled as ‘crazy’, often bringing shame upon the individual or the family. Some languages do not have the vocabulary for mental health concerns or for trauma, adding to the barriers to overcome when attempting to serve clients. In addition, finding ESL classes that take trauma and mental health issues and vocabulary into account can be challenging.

Domestic violence is yet another issue that arises among refugees. Because of language and culture barriers, domestic violence can be hard to identify and define, and serving these victims can be challenging for the same reasons.

Refugees need *safe spaces* to talk about issues, whether it be that counseling happens in their home or in another comfortable location (because coming to an office may be foreign or unsettling for a client), and with that in mind, several agencies are beginning to take this idea and put it into practice. Refugees need *affordable services with interpreters* for their language who are *trained in mental health care communication*. Refugees also need *vocabulary* for discussing mental health and trauma, which can eventually help them let go of shame associated with their mental health needs. Refugees need friends -- both American and from their own cultures -- in order to adjust and cope with their new surroundings.

“Anecdotally, I’ve noticed that there are more cases of schizophrenia, bipolar, and other profound mental issues because those kinds of cases don’t do as well in refugee camps. I suspect that, perhaps, they are in higher proportion than in their country of origin. However, this is the intent for the resettlement programs as a whole – to provide support for the most vulnerable.”

LANCE RASBRIDGE, Ph.D., MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST, PARKLAND HOSPITAL⁷⁶

⁷⁵ personal communication, February 26, 2019

⁷⁶ personal communication, March 7, 2019

b. Relational and Family Needs

One of the key findings of this research indicates a deep need for refugee families to have *human connection*. So many of the refugees in the DFW area come from oral cultures or cultures that are much more interpersonal and communal than traditional American cultures, and they need people who can take the time to *personally* walk them through the things they need to know in order to survive and thrive here. They need community that is like them, such as a religious community with services in their language or the weekly community groups CCFW created for their clients in different ethnic groups. They need local friends in order to feel more a part of the greater community. *People are the most-needed and most valuable resource among the refugee community in DFW.*

Yet another challenge that arises among refugees who have resettled in the DFW area is that of *parenting in their new culture*. Some families, due to trauma or a plethora of other issues, may need basic parenting classes. For example, a young expectant mother who escapes her village and loses her own mother will need someone to show her how to care for her child well. In addition, parenting bicultural (or even multicultural) children can pose a challenge for the parents – and an opportunity for the service community of DFW.

Jonathan Parsons of WRFW commented that “a real *balance of power shifts* once they have been here a while”.⁷⁷ Many in the service community see this play out daily as children become interpreters for their parents, teenagers get driver’s licenses before their parents, and children learn much more quickly how to navigate the culture and systems (both for good and bad reasons). Children adopt new vocabulary and customs as they acculturate and sometimes lose pieces of their parents’ cultures and languages in the process. Joshua Samuels, former community liaison at Fellowship Dallas, also notes that he often receives calls for American volunteers to help parents learn to communicate with, discipline, and deepen relationships with the “American half” of their child, pointing back to the need for connection in the acculturation process.

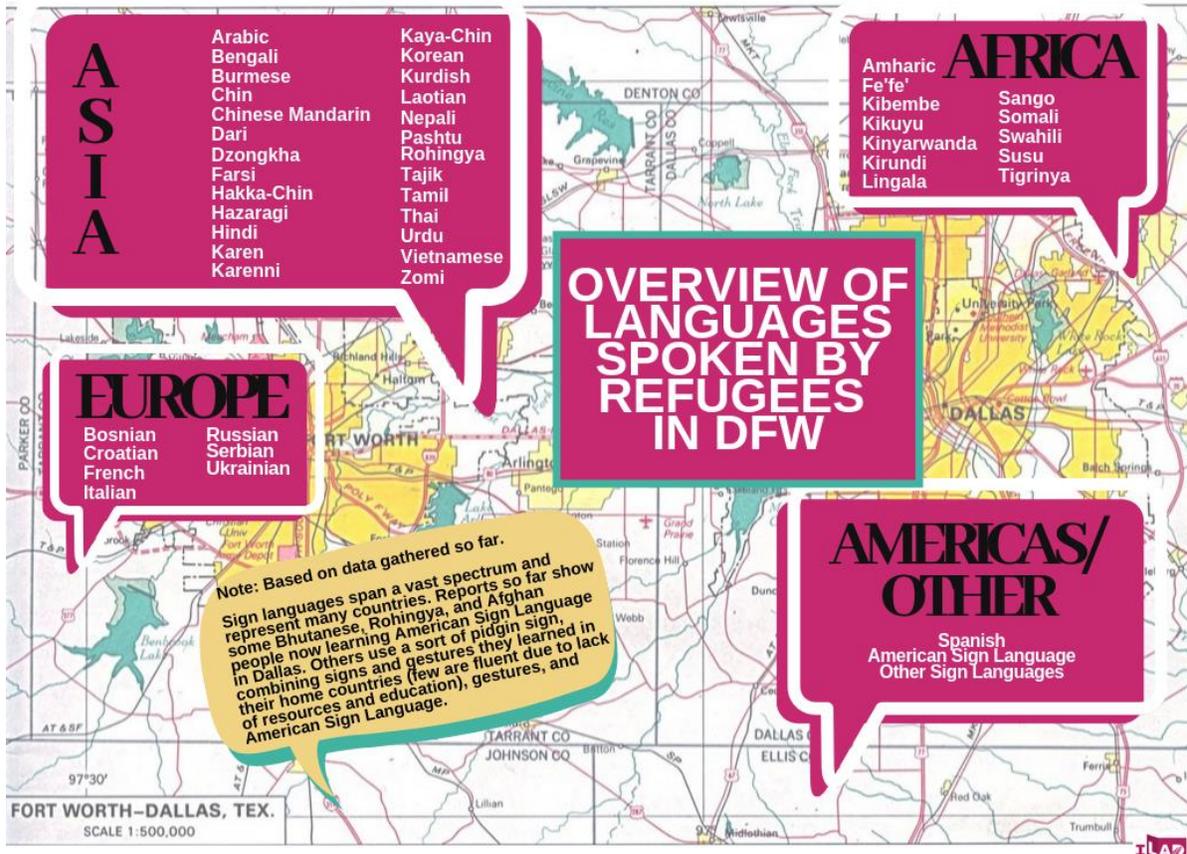
“Kids are becoming bicultural, but often parents only operate in their native culture and language. Parents feel as if they only know half of their kids. *They know how to deal with the Burmese half but are uncertain regarding the American half.*”

JOSHUA SAMUELS, COMMUNITY LIAISON, FELLOWSHIP DALLAS ⁷⁸

⁷⁷ personal communication, February 19, 2019

⁷⁸ personal communication, January 28, 2019

c. Language and Literacy Needs



When discussing literacy, we acknowledge that there are diverse ‘ways of knowing.’ Effective communication not only includes reading and writing but also an understanding of cross-cultural communication, workplace etiquette, and public service systems. Formal, grammar-based ESL classes are seldom entirely effective when teaching students from oral cultures; these students benefit most from conversational English practice.

“Conversational English practice can help honor [refugees] in their culture, and language exchange furthers the process.”⁷⁹

JEREMY HARRISON

In addition, *cross-cultural communication skills are needed to fully understand unspoken subtext in conversation.* Gaining these language skills in the context of domain-specific and industry-specific ESL classes can facilitate adjustment within the first year.

⁷⁹ personal communication, February 14, 2019

From understanding how to complete paperwork to knowing how to access resources, effective integration is greatly influenced by proficiency in English and familiarity with the system.

Some of these needs include the following:

- Teaching refugees how to read and sort through mail
- Teaching about culturally-appropriate usage of kinship terms for accurate reporting of information to public service providers in a Western context (For example, some refugees will call a friend “brother”.)
- Successful communication with teachers and administrators in schools
- Understanding the need for direct communication in the workplace

Finally, studies have shown that *lack of literacy skills in the native language greatly hinders success in the second language*. We found that refugees from Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, along with the elderly, are among those who most lack literacy and education in their native tongue.

4. Challenges in the Public Sector

Challenges in the public sector include the need for cross-cultural communication and understanding, fear of first responders due to prior experiences in their home countries, parenting bicultural children in monocultural homes, lack of literacy, funding for organizations that serve refugees in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and the need for education and advocacy in the public sector about refugee issues.



"They need to hear our voices. They're hearing from the opposition all the time, and it's a loud minority."⁸⁰

LINDA ABRAMSON EVANS, UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION-USA, DALLAS: COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES

5. Employment Opportunities

As one of the metropolitan areas with the highest job growth rates within the United States,⁸¹ Brindley of Amplio Recruiting notes that Dallas/Fort Worth is uniquely poised to effectively employ the refugee population. As the director of the Amplio Recruiting staffing agency, Brindley's goal is to "create job pipelines" where there is a seamless process for connecting employable refugees and business owners. With an unemployment rate of 3.2%, Brindley says, "everyone needs workers of all skill levels." Refugees should be able to enter the job market in the manufacturing, warehousing, hospitality, and trucking industries with little to no skill or training. The "blockages" to creating these pipelines include a number of the challenges mentioned previously in this

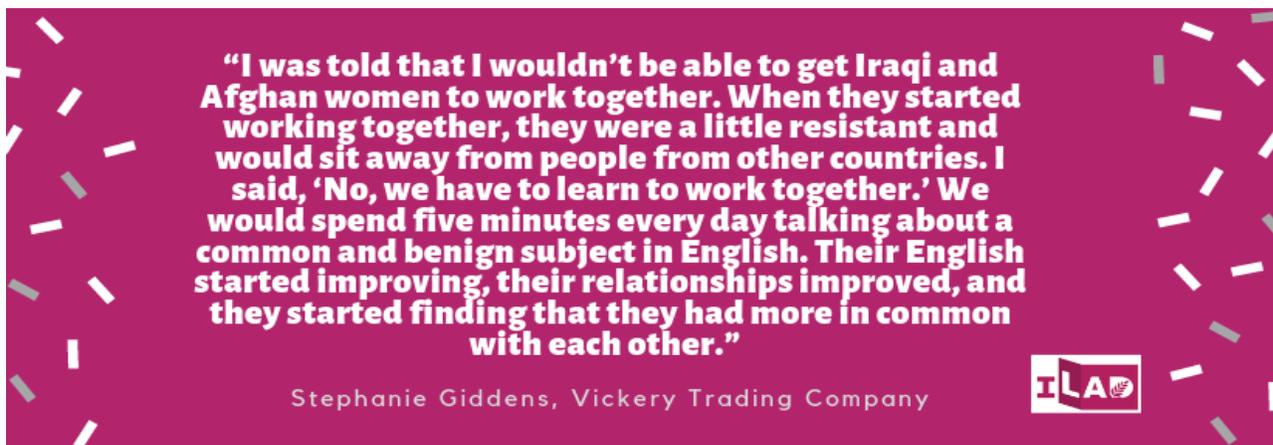
⁸⁰ personal communication, February 20, 2019

⁸¹United States Department of Labor. (2019). Dallas-Fort Worth Area Employment -- May 2019. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/regions/southwest/news-release/pdf/areaemployment_dallasfortworth.pdf

paper: transportation, lack of job-readiness skills, and employers lacking knowledge of refugees as a viable workforce.

Some solutions that Brindley suggests include:

- developing a city-wide method of assessing skills and onboarding non-English speaking employees
- training refugees and employers in cross-cultural communication
- connecting with cultural leaders and hiring groups of refugees in order to overcome language barriers
- offering necessary on-the-job skills and English language training that will facilitate successful integration into American culture.⁸²



Vickery Trading Company (VTC) offers employees opportunities to do just that. The women at VTC learn a marketable skill and are paid a fair wage for their work, all the while receiving English language and reading assistance, cross-cultural communication training, and job preparation help for their futures once they finish the program. In addition, during the work day, women are asked to work alongside others from vastly different cultures, using English as a bridge for communication. Through this shared language and their shared experiences, despite how different they are as individuals and within their cultural backgrounds, these women form deep, lasting bonds.⁸³

⁸² personal communication 27 March 2019

⁸³ personal communication, March 7, 2019

6. Key Trends

Key Trends with Bottlenecks for Communication Resources Among Refugees

Our research is focused on identifying bottlenecks with respect to communication in critical sectors. Below are some areas in which a need exists for the creation, modification, or increase of communication services:

Industry-specific and domain-specific ESL classes - Once again, because of the limited amount of time refugees have to become self-sufficient, providing a wider offering of strategic, focused, language classes based on line of work and needed domains is an effective way to quickly integrate refugees into the workforce and society. One such suggestion would be a six-week crash course in citizenship test vocabulary, another in school communication, another in vocabulary for various workplaces, etc.

Orality-focused resource creation - Because many refugees come from oral cultures, reinforcing informational materials (i.e. health awareness pamphlets) with audio and visual supports helps to convey important information on several levels.

Increase in staff - In spite of the many resources that have been developed to assist refugees, consistent human interaction and community is the most effective way to aid holistic integration. Organizations are in need of more volunteer staff in order to reduce volunteer to refugee family ratios and to provide sustainable physical, emotional, and community support.

Cross-cultural communication training - Refugees, employers, and service providers would do well to understand the shades of nonverbal communication in American and refugee cultures (for example, gestures, facial expressions, and even the “relational yes”). This has the potential to increase trust and confidence between Americans and refugees.

Inter-agency communication – Venues such as the Dallas Area Refugee Forum and the Metroplex Refugee Network provide a wonderful platform for inter-agency communication. Strengthening this collaboration can occur through crisis-response teams, inter-agency referrals based on specialty, and continuing to strive for more partnership, delegation, and communication.

Family support – Continuing to provide support groups and counseling to help parents and students navigate the change in culture and intra-family dynamics as children are raised in a new environment.

Increased time to adjust – The urgency to adjust under the compounding pressures of culture shock, trauma, and lack of familiarity with the American system can potentially be harmful to refugees as they arrive to the United States. Increased funding and possible program restructuring could allow for increased time so that refugees are able to integrate in a healthy way.

VI. Findings for Phase 2

1. Overview of the Rohingya of Myanmar

The dearth of published scholarly literature specifically targeting translation, communication, and literacy among the Rohingya presented a challenge and was a reminder that working in these domains among Rohingya refugees in the United States is still a relatively new thing. Not much has been done as of yet, hence the lack of material to consult. As such, we focused our Rohingya-specific literature review on issues of gender, translation, and multimodal communication as found in online research. The majority of the literature discusses Rohingya in Bangladesh, but many of the topics discussed still apply Stateside, especially since the majority of Rohingya refugees coming to the United States first spent time living in Bangladesh.⁸⁴

a. Gender, Sexuality, and Trauma

Katie Botkin, in her article “The Linguistics of Refugee Response,” discusses a study conducted by Translators Without Borders (TWB) in the main refugee camp in Bangladesh, where they found that “‘the word for gender doesn’t exist, so trying to explain that to a group of people who are very conservative’ was very difficult.”⁸⁵ According to the Rohingya Language Guidance framework, published by TWB, in the Rohingya language, one word exists for ‘male’, while three words exist for ‘female’.⁸⁶ In addition, the language has no neutral word for the act of sex.⁸⁷ “In practice,” the framework states, “the words used for this depend on whether it is deemed ‘religiously permissible’ (*jaiz*) or ‘impermissible’ (*na-jaiz*).”⁸⁸ Rahim, a translator with TWB, remarks that “ideas are cultural, and words are dependent on the time period and agreed-upon definition.”⁸⁹ If ideas are cultural, and if certain words do not have one-word equivalents but rather conceptual translations, these terms often must be developed and integrated into the language.

For example, many of the studies we conducted on the language of gender and the Rohingya mentioned that aid agencies often have difficulty discussing rape and gender-based violence because of lack of specific terms compounded by cultural

⁸⁴ This assertion is based both on our personal interviews and on the literature consulted.

⁸⁵ Botkin, K. (2018). The linguistics of refugee response. . MultiLingual VERTIQU. Retrieved from <https://magazine.multilingual.com/previewissue/aug-sep-2018/the-linguistics-of-refugee-response/>

⁸⁶ Translators without Borders. (2018). *Rohingya Language Guidance*. Retrieved from https://translatorswithoutborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/RohingyaLanguageGuidance_Gender_Final.pdf

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

norms about what is discussed, where, how, and with whom. The Rohingya Language Guidance framework mentions that

the combination of religious conservatism, illiteracy and the oppression they experienced in Myanmar leads Rohingya women facing many constraints and segregation. Rohingya women have responded to these sociocultural factors by developing a sociolect, or social dialect, of their own.”⁹⁰

As a result, men do not often understand terms developed by the women, including terms related to female anatomy and sexuality.⁹¹ Rohingya people in groups often use euphemisms to discuss anatomy, sexuality, and traumatic experiences, according to TWB.⁹² Trauma can also be difficult to discuss effectively and plainly because of these reasons.

b. Translation

The Rohingya language, while closely related to Chittagonian, is still distinct and has somewhat of a limited lexicon; thus, according to Botkin, words such as ‘diarrhea,’ ‘hospital,’ ‘emotion,’ ‘safety,’ and ‘rape’ do not have one-word equivalents.⁹³ TWB recently published their Rohingya Zuban Rapid Language Assessment, in which they discuss their findings among Rohingya in Bangladesh. The report notes that a number of concepts that are simple to explain in English “are very complicated to convey in Rohingya.”⁹⁴ For example, “words like consent, anonymous, compensate, and even confidentiality can be difficult to translate.”⁹⁵

The Rohingya Language Guidance framework points out that “a range of euphemistic terms is used to describe abuse,” words ranging in meaning from ‘being villainous’ to ‘being dishonored’ to ‘stain’ to ‘forced oppression’.⁹⁶ Using the wrong term in this situation or in other similar translation scenarios could mean the difference between care and disaster.

c. Language Shift

Language shift is another issue in translation and development of linguistically and culturally-appropriate learning materials for Rohingya people. This is common among displaced people and between generations as those in one part of

⁹⁰ Translators without Borders, “Rohingya Language Guidance”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Botkin, “Linguistics”

⁹⁴ Translators without Borders. (2017). *Translators without Borders / Rohingya crisis response*. Retrieved from <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/rohingya-zuban/>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Translators without Borders, “Rohingya Language Guidance”

the world or in one generation use certain terms that either die out or change later on. TWB's Scott and Rahim write that "the Rohingya dialect spoken by the older arrivals now differs from the Rohingya spoken by the newer arrivals."⁹⁷

Oftentimes, according to Scott and Rahim, newly-arrived Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh will have evidence of Burmese, Farsi, and Arabic in their idiolects. Still others will include Bengali words in their idiolects, as well.⁹⁸ An understanding of language shift is valuable when developing Rohingya-language materials for wide distribution among the community.

d. Literacy

The Rohingya Zuban report notes that researchers found that literacy among arrivals from 2017 on was lower than those who came prior to the 2017 mass exodus.⁹⁹ According to the study, 59% completed some education at madrassahs (studies in Arabic and/or Urdu), but they were "often unable to comprehend the text as much of their practice focuses only on recitation".¹⁰⁰ In addition, 17% of male new arrivals and 6% of female new arrivals had basic literacy in Burmese, with the highest levels of comprehension found among males aged 18-38.¹⁰¹ It is important to note, as well, that females in much of the Rohingya community do not go to school once they reach puberty, which greatly impacts the levels of education and social interaction they receive.¹⁰²

e. Multimodal communication

"Information is aid" is a common phrase uttered in humanitarian aid circles. Internews developed an Information Ecosystem analysis to study just that. "Without locally relevant and actionable information," the report states, "communities are disempowered and left to rely on potentially dangerous misinformation and rumors to decide their next steps."¹⁰³ According to Internews, communication must take "age, education level, digital access, [and] linguistic and gender divides of the target communities" into account, utilizing the already existing dissemination systems and tools whenever possible.¹⁰⁴ Information,

⁹⁷Scott, I. and Rahim, A. (2018). *Hefazot transforms to nirapotta; janela becomes kirkiri*. Translators without Borders Blog. Retrieved from <https://www.translatorswithoutborders.org/blog/hefazot-transforms-to-nirapotta-janela-becomes-kirkiri/>

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Translators without Borders, *Rohingya Crisis Response*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Internews. (2019). "Communicating with Communities." Retrieved from <https://internews.org/resource/communicating-communities>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Internews states, must be timely, actionable, and in the mother tongue of the recipients.¹⁰⁵

The Rohingya people are an oral-centric people. Katie Botkin writes that oral transmission is the most effective mode of sharing information among Rohingya refugees in the camps in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁶ Malaka Gharib adds that Rohingya people in Bangladesh also appreciate spoken poetry as a method of delivering information.¹⁰⁷ TWB's Rohingya Zuban study revealed the need for key messages to be made available orally through shared audio files or WhatsApp.¹⁰⁸ The report also points out that videos should be made in Rohingya and that signs created "should be multilingual and include pictures."¹⁰⁹

According to Anastasia Kyriacou's report, media access in the Rohingya home state of Rakhine was limited, and thus most Rohingya will more readily trust information delivered face-to-face.¹¹⁰ Kyriacou also mentions that many Rohingya appreciate information delivered in a discussion format so that they can interact with the source.¹¹¹ TWB brings to light the fact that 66% of Rohingya in Bangladesh cannot read or write in any language, and their preference for verbal or face-to-face communication stems directly from the culture's "very strong trust levels in imams, family, aid and medical professionals, and *mahjees* [cultural nodes] as sources of information."¹¹² In addition, Rohingya people best understand simple messaging in a visual format.¹¹³ To address this in the Bangladesh context, BBC Media Action created a series of multi-modal communication tools available, including videos about health, medical, and safety issues - all in Rohingya and all available for download on mobile phones.¹¹⁴

2. Chicago, Illinois

Located in the Little India district of Chicago is a fledgling community center that has begun to make an incredible impact on the Rohingya refugee community, the largest in

¹⁰⁵ Internews, "Communicating"

¹⁰⁶ Botkin, "Linguistics"

¹⁰⁷ Gharib, M. (2018). *NPR Choice page*. Npr.org. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/07/22/630858182/finding-the-right-words-to-help-rohingya-refugees>

¹⁰⁸ Translators without Borders, *Rohingya Crisis Response*

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Kyriacou, A. (2018). *When Traditional Communications Outperform Digital Technology: Rohingya Refugees*. OpenDemocracy. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/ourbeeb/when-traditional-communications-outperform-digital-technology-rohingya-re>

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Translators without Borders, *Rohingya Crisis Response*

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ BBC Media Action. (2019). "CXB Media: Children and Learning." Retrieved from <http://www.shongjog.org.bd/resources/i/?id=c85cc160-0713-4935-bbae-89357e7d58dc>

the United States. The Rohingya Cultural Center of Chicago (RCCC), founded and run by Mr. Nasir Zakaria, who is himself a Rohingya refugee, was founded three years ago with the hopes of providing holistic services and a sense of community to the Rohingya people in Chicago. Also in Chicago is Dr. Anne Saw, professor of Asian American Psychology, who has been developing a trauma-informed language program for Rohingya in Chicago.

a. Rohingya Cultural Center of Chicago

Mr. Zakaria told us during our March visit to RCCC that he wanted Chicago's Rohingya to have a place they could call their own¹¹⁵. The Cultural Center offers translation and social care services, education programs, religious education programs, and a gathering space for the community to feel at home.



"The women carry the culture."

LAURA TOFFENETTI, ROHINGYA CULTURAL CENTER OF CHICAGO

We visited their Mommy and Me program, where mothers of young children come twice weekly to mingle with other mothers, play in developmental learning centers with their children, and have story time as a group. In each center were different activities: puzzles, playdough, manipulative toys, books, etc. Laura Toffenetti, program director and a retired teacher, told us that many of the women had never before played with a puzzle or playdough until they came to Mommy and Me and that they often had to be shown the proper way to hold a book.¹¹⁶ She started the program with the hopes of providing some consistency where families had never before had it and of showing the families a model of what formalized education looks like in America.

These mothers, many of whom have either lost their own mothers due to the genocide or are separated from them across the world, often struggle to parent

¹¹⁵ personal interview, March 14, 2019

¹¹⁶ personal interview, March 14, 2019

their children and often are unaware of the types of toys that are developmentally appropriate for their children. Toffenetti told us that these mothers often feel isolated from the world and from their community due to family responsibilities and cultural norms, and this program helps bridge the gap for them. "The women carry the culture," Toffenetti said. "That's why the impact of this program is probably greater than any other."

“Teacher, I was 40 when I picked up a pencil for the first time.”

ROHINGYA CITIZENSHIP ENGLISH STUDENT

While at the Cultural Center, we also experienced a session of their citizenship English class, a course taught to empower attendees not only with the knowledge and skills to pass the American citizenship test but also the vocabulary with which to do so. For example, when we arrived, students were learning what the term *marital status* means. For most students, this class was the first time they had ever been given the opportunity to learn to read in any language. Toffenetti told us that the general ESOL courses the Rohingya community had been involved in were not as effective, likely due to their preliteracy and prenumeracy, as well as a lack of available curriculum that is specifically for them (A staff member at RefugeeOne, Illinois’ main resettlement agency, told us that she has yet to find any ESOL curriculum that specifically meets the needs of the Rohingya she works with). "Their inability to read and write was nailing them to the wall," Toffenetti told us. With that in mind, the Cultural Center started this citizenship English course to provide something uniquely geared toward the Rohingya.

Susan Chestnut, the instructor of this course, told us that at first, the students did not know shapes (which can sometimes be the case with preliterate, oral cultures), so she did a unit on shapes.¹¹⁷ She had to teach them the difference between a city, a county, a state, and a country, and she has worked hard to teach them the importance of arriving on time and prepared to class, something which can be challenging for those who are not from a time-oriented culture. She also conducts mock citizenship interviews in front of the class to help them become more comfortable with what they will face during the citizenship process. Giving them the chance to speak in front of their peers also provides the class with opportunities to encourage their classmates, building more community and confidence.

Programs such as this course empower Chicago Rohingya to move forward confidently toward citizenship, which for most will be the first citizenship they

¹¹⁷ personal interview, March 14, 2019

have ever had. Mr. Zakaria remarked that citizenship for the Rohingya is high priority “because they will finally be a citizen somewhere. The United States is the most powerful country in the world, so a passport from here is really valuable to Rohingya.” In addition, the ability to travel and move around freely, something most Rohingya have never had due to restrictions in Myanmar or in other areas of resettlement before America, is prized because they can then go back to help their families in other countries.

b. Anne Saw, Ph.D., DePaul University¹¹⁸

Dr. Anne Saw, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and affiliate faculty of the Refugee and Forced Migration Studies program at DePaul University, is currently launching a community health assessment with the Rohingya community in Chicago. In addition, because she focuses on refugee mental health and trauma, she is also working on an upcoming publication about participatory research with Rohingya and other refugees.

Dr. Saw connected with the Rohingya community in Chicago over two years ago to explore their need and desire for a home-based literacy program for home-bound Rohingya women. “We started off by identifying language as the biggest barrier to everything,” she told us. “Language was the big barrier [to the research] because we could not speak with very many community members without a translator.” She said that conversations in a weekly community meeting brought out the desire of the women to learn in their homes because traditional classes felt overwhelming, and they are most comfortable at home. “What we know is that the English being taught... wasn’t working,” Saw remarked. “We sort of have this vague idea that using what is in their environment will help them.” Seniors and women with small children, according to Saw, are the ones with the most need.

She told us, “If you’re 30 or older, you probably have a story to tell about trauma.” She also notes that while many Rohingya will talk about their family members in the camps and about advocacy for Rohingya people, they will not openly talk about their own traumatic experiences unless they are asked. “Typically, they are not seeking services or talking about it until about five years after resettlement,” she said. “How we conceptualize mental health is from a Western lens,” she said, pointing out that because of stigma attached to mental health issues, many non-westerners (Rohingya included), trauma is manifested in psychosomatic ways, such as headaches, dizziness, and overthinking. With all this

¹¹⁸ personal interview, March 14, 2019

in mind, Saw stresses the need to develop trauma-informed English literacy tools to be taught in the homes of Rohingya women and seniors.

c. Major Findings in Chicago

Based on information gathered in Chicago, we identified four major keys to success in assisting Rohingya people with language, communication, and literacy:

1. The Rohingya need a place to belong. Social capital is the most critical factor to their success in a new country.
2. In-person and/or verbal interaction is the best way to empower and to inform Rohingya people.
3. Because the women carry the culture, and because the women tend to be homebound, meeting them where they are to provide them with tools for learning English is critical to their success and to the success of the next generation of Rohingya in the United States.
4. Services must be trauma-informed if they are to have an enduring impact.

2. Clarkston, Georgia

In June, ILAD visited the city of Clarkston in southeast Atlanta in order to learn about and from the first Rohingya community center in the United States.

In a humble apartment building in the heart of Clarkston, Georgia, known to be America's most diverse square mile,¹¹⁹ is a small community center with a large reach into the Clarkston and metro-Atlanta areas. The Burmese Rohingya Community of Georgia (BRCG), founded in 2014, started with two families and has now grown into an operation that serves not only Burmese and other Rohingya but also refugees from many other countries.¹²⁰

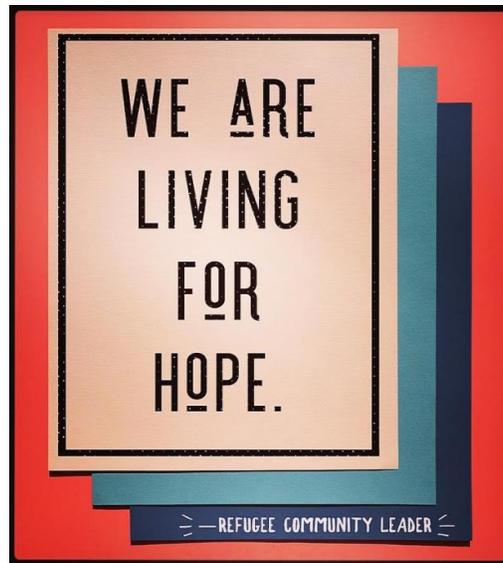
Ayub and Mohammadul, two of the original founders, said they left Myanmar for Bangladesh, then boarded a boat headed toward Malaysia. Ten days into the trip, their boat became stranded with no food left and no hope in sight. Seventeen days later, the Sri Lanka navy rescued the passengers, and many of them spent several years in Sri Lanka before resettling elsewhere. After five years in Sri Lanka, Ayub and Mohammadul were resettled in Atlanta, two of the only six Rohingya in the state of Georgia at that time. They all found each other eventually and founded the community center with the goal of helping others to achieve their dreams. The center now serves the estimated 500 Rohingya in Clarkston, as well as many other refugees in the area.

¹¹⁹City of Clarkston. (2018). "Interesting Facts." Retrieved from <http://clarkstonga.gov/interesting-facts>

¹²⁰ personal interview, June 24, 2019

a. Programs Overview

In 2014, the founders established BRCG after seeing that resettlement agencies are often only able to provide holistic services for the first few months of refugees' resettlement process. BRCG wanted "to create sustainable solutions and resources."¹²¹ They provide English classes, religious education, citizenship courses, translation services, employment assistance, cultural orientation training, domestic violence prevention training, and advocacy for Rohingya and other refugee issues.



b. Living for Hope

Despite financial challenges, language and cultural barriers, low or lack of education, and the continued need for understanding of refugee issues among the general American public, Ayub said that the greatest strength of the Rohingya is that they never give up hope. "We always have hope that one day we can be successful," he said. "We are living for hope. Even though they are killing, raping, and martyring [our people in Myanmar], still, we never give up hope." Mohammadul agreed, adding, "The best thing about Rohingya minds and hearts: We are always trying to start businesses. Most business people in Arakan (the Rohingya homeland in Myanmar) are Rohingya." Ayub commented that the Rohingya try not to depend on others as a whole and that they are skilled in making money given the opportunity. Given a chance, he said, the Rohingya people will go far.

c. Untapped Potential: Entrepreneurship

The founders of BRCG told us that their hope for Rohingya in America lies in the education of their children. They hope to see their children become doctors, members

¹²¹ personal interview, June 24, 2019

of the armed forces, and contributors to American culture, all of which echoed the hopes of our Dallas Rohingya interviewees, as well. The Rohingya also desire rights for their people in Myanmar, but as they continue to hope for a permanent solution, they hope to contribute where they are.

The potential for the Rohingya to contribute to their new communities in America and to the nation as a whole has largely been untapped as of yet due to the newness of most resettlers' arrivals and due to lack of resources catered to their specific needs. However, according to BRCG, their capacity for business, entrepreneurship, and beneficial contributions is tremendous. Mohammadul pointed to the history of refugees during WWII who resettled in America, found their footing, and built some of the most significant enterprises of the 20th century. With time and help, he told us, the Rohingya could do the same.

If Rohingya people in Vickery Meadow and across the country are provided with the resources they need to acculturate well in America, equipped to navigate the complex social systems and structures, and educated in English using resources that are best suited to their needs, they can have the chance to build businesses, enhance their communities, and contribute to the economy and to society as a whole.

c. Major Findings

Based on the interview with BRCG, we gained two valuable pieces of information:

1. The Rohingya people are self-starters and business-minded, eager to contribute.
2. In order to contribute effectively through business and enterprise, the Rohingya people first need to be empowered through language and acclimation tools and services.

3. Dallas/Fort Worth Rohingya Community

The purpose of ILAD's Rohingya interviews was to hear from the members of the DFW Rohingya community themselves and learn from them about their history, their challenges living in DFW, the resources they might find most helpful, and their dreams for their futures in America.

a. Interview Findings

ILAD sampled an estimated 5% of the area's population through a snowball collection method, amounting to interviews with ten family units. Nearly half of all participants were new arrivals to America; the others had been in the country for up to five years. This fact is important because it shows that the communication needs experienced by new arrivals often endure years into resettlement.

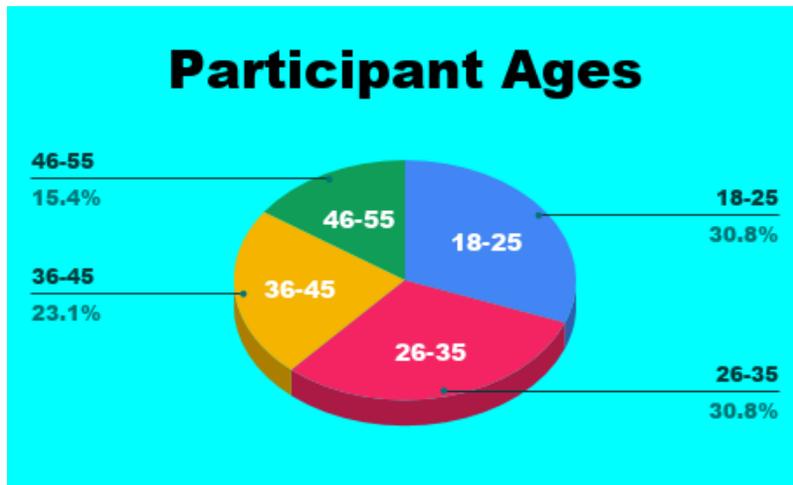
ILAD gathered with each family unit individually whenever possible. Some families wanted to meet together, in which case we accommodated them. Our interpreter was trained in both questioning strategies and in the vocabulary of the questions themselves. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. At the end of each session, we provided the families with things like laundry detergent, rice, fruit, tea, and chilis. We also provided them with our contact information in the event that future questions arise. The interpreter was compensated with an honorarium.

At the beginning of a session, we explained the purpose of our interview as a means of learning about the Rohingya experience and their challenges/successes in communication.

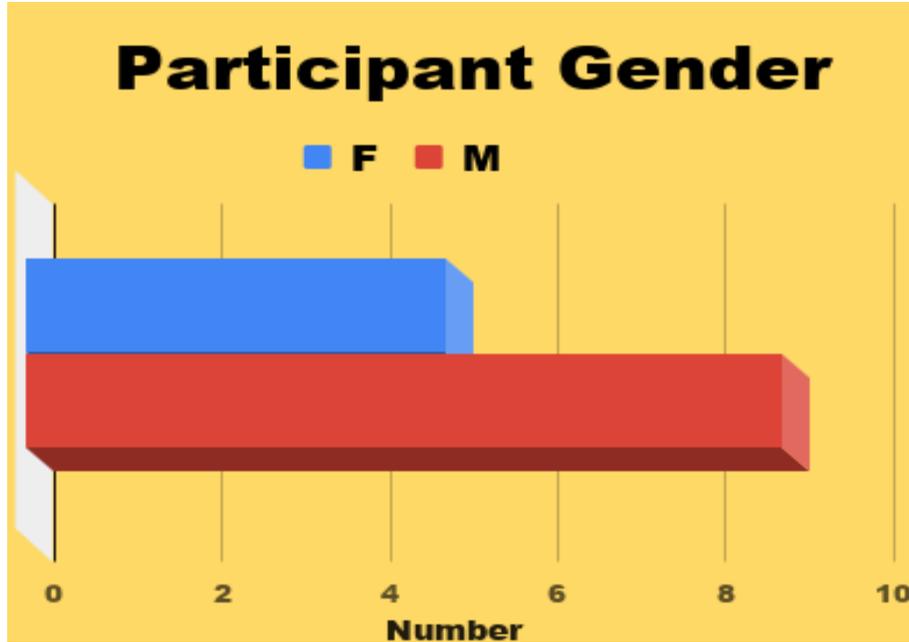
b. Consent

If interview participants were fully literate in English, we provided them with a written consent form. Verbal consent for those without English literacy was given with a third (literate) party (the interpreter) present. The third party signed consent verification after the session.

c. Summary of Data

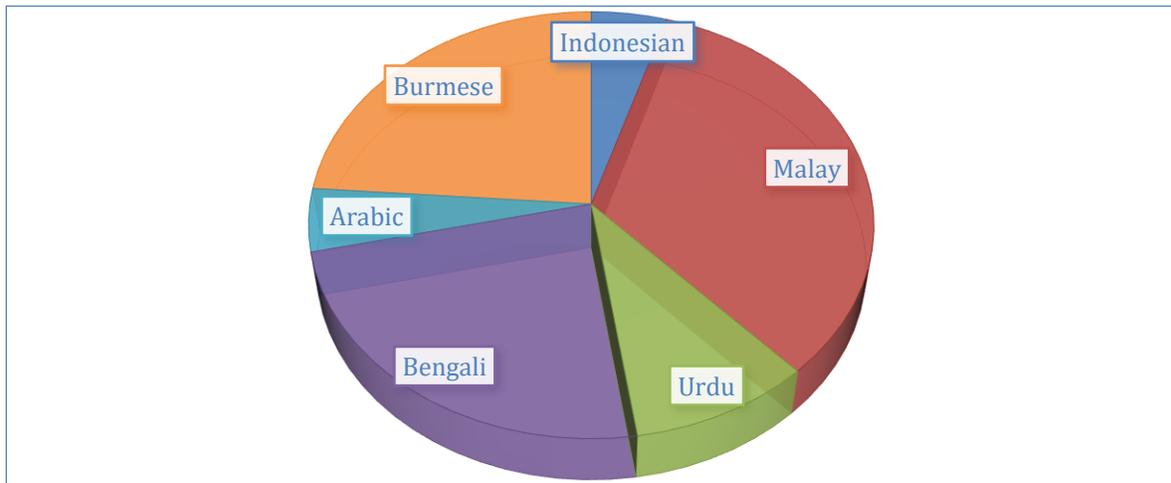


The majority of participants are between the ages of 18-35, most with children and young families.

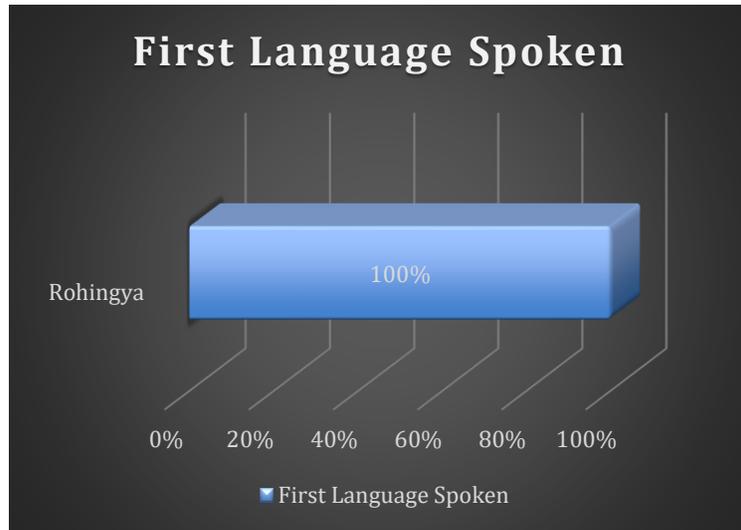


We interviewed five females and nine males, with ten families represented in total.

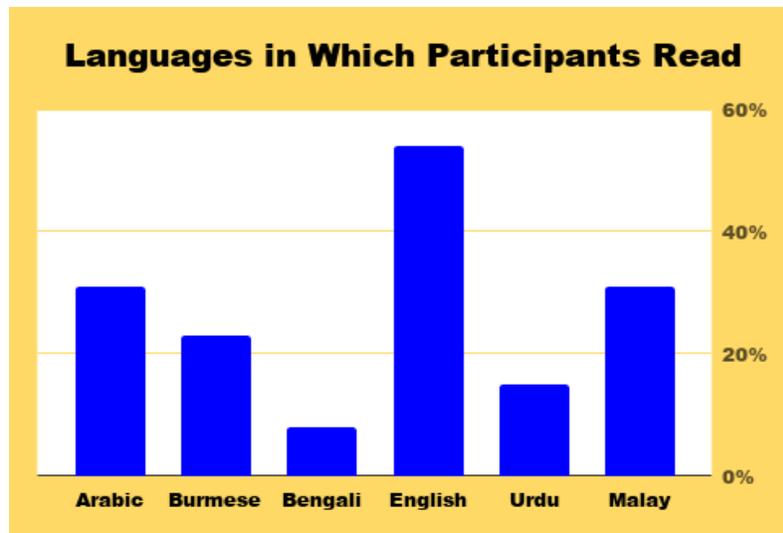
Languages Other than Rohingya Spoken by Participants



It is important to note that those who speak Malay, Bengali (also known as Bangla), Urdu, and Indonesian learned those languages as a result of resettlement into second or third countries after leaving Myanmar. Those who speak Burmese learned the language either in Myanmar through daily life or schooling or in Bangladesh in informal learning centers. Those who speak Arabic acquired their knowledge of the language through religious training. English is spoken by 8.1% of participants.



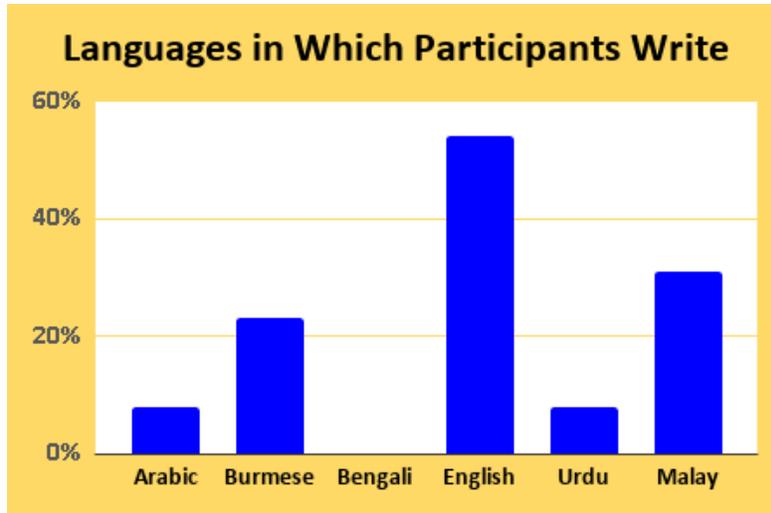
Every participant interviewed noted that Rohingya is their mother tongue, with a small percentage also having learned Burmese or English from a young age.



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Most participants who read do so in English. Those who read Arabic learned to do so through religious training, and those who spoke Malay and now read it are able to do so now because of having learned to read English first, as the orthography for Malay is the same as that of the English language. Of those who read in Burmese, the majority can do so because of post-primary education; however, some who indicated an ability to read Burmese may only have a cursory knowledge of Burmese literacy. Few others were able to receive training to read in Urdu or Bengali.

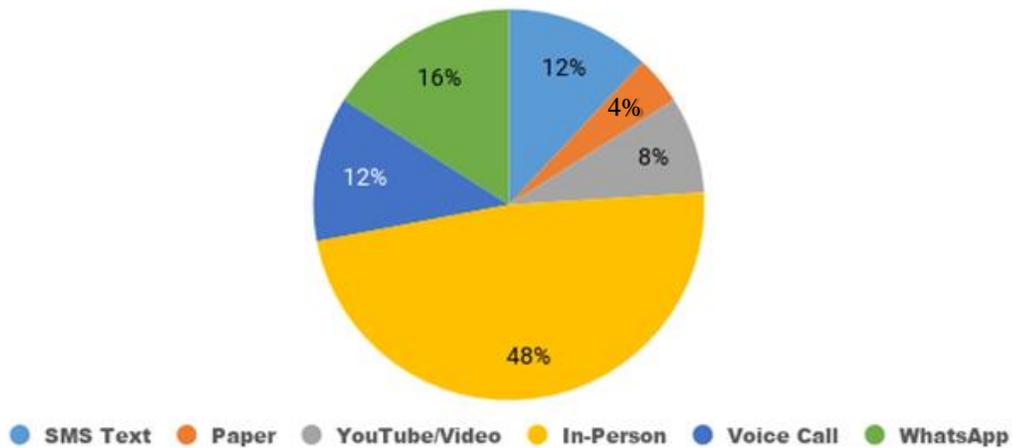
¹²² Does not indicate proficiency level.



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Participants by and large learned to write first in English. Some could write in Burmese due to education received in Myanmar or Bangladesh. Others could write in Malay due to having learned English, as the orthography for Malay is the same as that of the English language. Some could write in Arabic or Urdu due to religious training.

Preferred Method of Communication



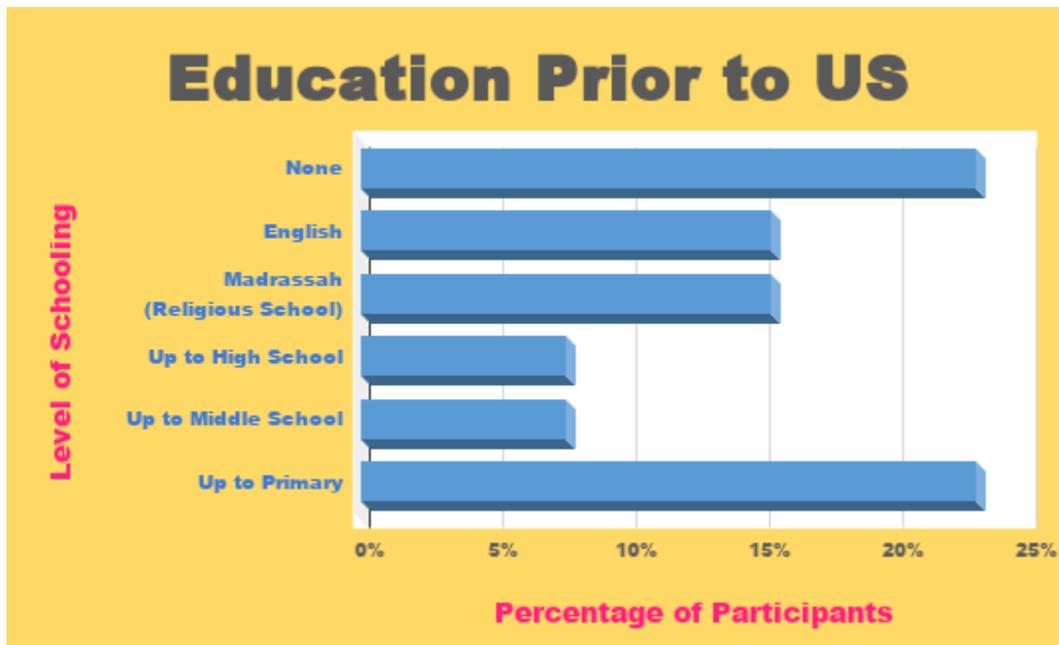
This graph represents participants’ preferences for receiving important information. Based on this data, information delivered orally is most effective. Videos sharing oral information given by a real person and disseminated via WhatsApp could be a bridge between the need for in-person communication and oral communication. Subtitles in English could also help those who prefer written/paper communication, as well as those who are learning English.

¹²³ Does not indicate proficiency level.

Languages of Education Prior to US



The majority of participants who attended school were provided basic education in Rohingya. Those who received training in Arabic did so in religious centers for the purpose of reading their holy book. Most of those who had schooling in English and Burmese received that education in middle school or beyond (including English classes in refugee camps).



The majority of participants received either no formal education at all or only education up through primary school (which, as noted in the previous set of data, was most often in Rohingya and thus did not contribute literacy). Only a small percentage of participants received any education past middle school.

d. Case studies (*All names are pseudonyms.)

i. Education

Rushida* is a mother of three, working two jobs to support her children. She is smart, quick-witted, and resourceful. Her children work hard at their madrassah and excel in school, too. To have grown up illiterate and then raise children in three countries is no small feat for Rushida, but while her success is beginning to show in her children's lives, she still faces challenges.



During an English reading lesson, she seemed to be struggling a bit with distraction. After our attempts to encourage her, she said,

My memory is bad. I work to support my kids, and my memory is bad. My rent bill is high, and my memory is bad. My husband is overseas, and my memory is bad. My sister's house in our country was just bombed by the government, and my memory is bad. My mother is dying in the refugee camp, and my memory is bad.

In essence, consistent, acute trauma was impacting every part of her life and impeding her ability to learn well, retain what she learns, and begin to thrive.

On one occasion, we found that she had not received a letter from her child's school about a special education plan and had consequently missed the meeting. She told us through our interpreter, "I want to be involved in my children's education. I care a lot about how they do in school. But because of work and language gaps, I can't." Her children, as is the case with many refugee families, often serve as interpreters for her, which is truly insufficient for the amount and level of communication that needs to happen between parents and schools.

We were able to facilitate communication with her school. She was thrilled to know that her child had progressed and that he was behaving well in school, a simple thing that would not have been communicated without an intermediary.

Rushida is in survival mode. She does not have the time to delve deeply into English learning because she is taking care of her family. Even if she did, she would need trauma-informed English programs to help her work through the emotional impact of her life situations and begin to improve her language and literacy abilities. However, because she is so resilient and resourceful, given the opportunity and the resources, Rushida, too, could begin to thrive.

ii. Social Services

Minara* is 22 years old, a mother of a three-year old, and a recent arrival to America. She was never allowed to go to school in her home country. She can speak bits and pieces of several languages and is an intelligent, typical millennial woman in many ways, but she has no numeracy, and she is not literate. Minara told us that she needed help understanding how to use her WIC benefits and transportation to the store to buy the food WIC provided her.

We arrived at her house to take her to the store, and we realized that she did not have her pin number for her card. Explaining this to her was a challenge not only due to language gaps but also due to her lack of experience with using a pin number for other things before coming to America.

We called the customer service line, and they were as helpful as they could be and did get an interpreter for us. However, getting the targeted help we needed (finding her pin number) was a challenge because she did not understand the problem, and the helpline was unable to talk to anyone aside from the client due to HIPPA laws. In addition, when they asked for her phone number to look up her account, she was unable to read it to them.

We eventually got the pin number, however, and we took her to the store. There, we saw yet again how lack of literacy, lack of numeracy, and lack of training in this critical sector impacted this family in a very real way.

For example, in her case, she was only able to get \$9 worth of produce. In her home country, produce is purchased by unit rather than by weight, and she simply wanted to purchase the items she wanted and needed for her family. On top of that, her lack of math education and lack of numeracy made it nearly impossible to explain that items sold by weight could only amount to \$9 before she had to pay the difference.

A simple training video or session could allow people like Minara to understand the basics of using WIC. Basic English and math skills could empower her to purchase exactly what she needs or wants. Minara is a fast learner, as evidenced

by the fact that at our next visit, she showed us the photo she took of her pin number for safe-keeping. She is tech-savvy, and with a few more resources at her disposal, Minara could feel much more confident navigating the WIC and SNAP systems.

iii. Housing



At nearly 5am one day, a fire broke out in one of the apartment buildings in Vickery Meadow. Many families lost everything and had to be relocated, and others were affected or displaced because of fire or water damage. One family had only been in the United States for two weeks, and they lost everything. The problem presented by the fire and the situations that arose following was multifaceted.

First, most, if not all, of the residents in this complex were without renter's insurance. Second, they were unaware of how to report code violations. Third, materials to explain such things were written and difficult to access. Fourth, written notices of housing-related information were delivered in English only.

One resident, who had experienced a great deal of water damage in her home, received such a notice. Because it was only in English and only in writing, she was unable to decipher the letter and had to ask her advocate for help. Without that in-person assistance, she might have had fines levied upon her. She would have benefited from a video or an oral explanation in her own language of the landlord's expectations and of her rights as a renter, information which is not yet readily accessible or widespread in her language.

iv. Employment: The Literacy Difference

Kala* and Noor* tell a different story from many of the others we interviewed. Raised outside of Rakhine and permitted to go to school, Kala grew up trilingual, fully proficient in written and spoken Burmese and English, as well as spoken Burmese. Years ago, she fled to another country, where she met her husband. His intelligence and his street smarts empowered him with survival skills and the ability to learn quickly. After a short time, he was able to learn the ins and outs of the housing system in their first host country, how to build and maintain credit, and how to navigate complex social systems. He also learned the local language while there, enabling him to communicate effectively in his new surroundings.

They came to America and quickly began building their own credit with the goal of buying a home. He worked two jobs to support his family, and she began serving as an interpreter. After only two years in the United States, they were self-sufficient and purchased a beautiful home. For them, literacy has made all the difference. Kala's proficiency in written English and Burmese and his proficiency in written English enabled them to navigate the social systems with much more ease than many of their preliterate friends in the same community. Aware of the success their prior experience has brought them, they both desire to help other Rohingya do the same.

v. Health Services

We asked Auntie her age. She laughed as she told us, "I think I'm 54, but I have no idea what the paperwork says!" Auntie had just arrived to the United States one month prior to our interview with her, and due to some health issues she had been experiencing, she requested our help in finding a Bangladeshi doctor in the area. As we talked with her, we learned that she has diabetes and has been struggling with a wide array of other issues, as well, with no real solution in sight.

Then we heard a knock on the door. One of her caseworkers had come to obtain a signature on some of her grandchild's paperwork. While the caseworker was with us, Auntie went to another room and grabbed all of her diabetes medication and testing equipment to show us. As it turned out, she did not understand how to use the equipment, though her agency had taken great pains to show her, because Auntie is illiterate and has no numeracy.

Thankfully, her caseworker was able to arrange for a new doctor and for an appointment with a local clinic and another caseworker to show Auntie again how to read the numbers on the equipment. However, it was evident that a teaching tool, such as a simple instructional video in her language, could have a lasting impact on people like her, empowering them with information and the ability to take better care of their own health.



VII. Proposed Solutions:

Having studied other literacy programs with the Hmong and Somali Bantu preliterate populations, holistic programs with the Chicago Rohingya population, and the findings of our interviews in Dallas/Fort Worth, ILAD proposes the following possible solutions as working prototypes. We are in the process of seeking funding sources in order to implement the project.

It is important to note that the program will begin with the Rohingya language community first, and as future potential projects develop, the same types of materials could be scaled and replicated among other language communities.

Our pilot project proposal includes three small projects in several stages:

- The creation of informational “How To” videos for critical sectors in Rohingya to be shared with local agencies and with community members
- The establishment of a free community resource interpretation service in the Vickery Meadow community for translation of mail, documents, etc., as well as connections to necessary community resources

- The development of an in-home language exchange and cultural preservation program (similar to the Nurse Family Partnership model), partnering with Books Unbound for Rohingya-specific resources

Long-term possible solutions beyond initial pilot project:

- Continuation of resource center and language exchange among the Rohingya
- Contribution of language data collected from pilot project to future machine translation initiatives
- Development of acculturation materials (videos, curriculum, etc.) for other under-resourced language groups
- Development of language and cultural exchange for other language groups

VIII. Topic for Future Research

Once refugees are given the step up into acculturation and integration through language, they can truly begin to thrive. Given the entrepreneurial spirit and business mindedness of many Rohingya, the possibility of business development opportunities among Stateside Rohingya in the future would be interesting to explore.

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We welcome you.

ILAD



CONTACT THE RESEARCHERS

Miranda Kuykendall
mirandak@ilad.email

Hannah Johnson
hannahj@ilad.email

ILAD.NGO



Contact Us:

ILAD.ngo • 682-712-0128 • ilad@ilad.email
PO Box 383153 Duncanville, TX 75138-3153