Accessing Educational Resources and Support: Newcomer Refugee Mothers' Challenges and Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic challenged many students and their families to adapt to new ways of learning and to find support for their educational needs. This study explores newcomer Turkish mothers' perspectives on accessing educational resources and support. It addresses educational inequities and highlights inclusive practices building on the cultural wealth that newcomer refugee students and parents possess. With seven newcomer Turkish mothers from refugee backgrounds from the Northeast, Northwest, and West Coast of the U.S., qualitative findings indicated that despite the variety of resources provided to all families and students, the need for tailored support and resources for newcomer refugee parents was often overlooked. As a sustainable practice, we analyzed the findings through the lens of Yosso's (2005) Cultural Community Wealth theory, which reveals that newcomer refugee mothers bring multiple capitals, including linguistic and resistance, social and familial, and navigational and aspirational. This study offers insights to formulate comprehensive strategies to sustain equity in accessing resources and support for newcomer refugee mothers by stressing the importance of schools reaching out to the families, addressing socialization needs in learning designs, and involving parents and children in the school community for a smoother transition and integration. Underscoring the critical need for sustaining educational equity for newcomer refugee families during and after the pandemic, this study offers implications for school policy and practices.
Keywords: Cultural community wealth, educational equity, newcomer refugee mothers, parental involvement, resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the lives of individuals in the U.S. at different ways; especially many challenges arose regarding the urgent shift in instructional designs and its direct impacts on students and parents (Fegert et al., 2020; Lazarin, 2020; Wolfe & McCarthy, 2020).

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Specifically, refugee[3] students and their families' struggles might even worsen. Newcomer refugees were already struggling with the daunting necessities of their new country, such as financial difficulties, obtaining residency and health insurance, family separation, linguistic barriers (Lazarin, 2020) as well as adapting to a new life after stigmas and discriminations in their home countries (Avincan et al., 2023). The new instructional plan brought additional responsibilities for refugee parents, such as assisting their children with school expectations, communications, and emotional support (Adams & Todd, 2020; Jung et al., 2022).

During this urgent shift, many schools in the U.S. supplied essential needs in some areas (e.g., updated information, food sources, or technical assistance) (Slavin & Storey, 2020). However, some districts could not provide the required resources or information, especially for the some subgroup of students with Individualized Learning Plans (Iachini & Childs, 2021). The limited research addressed the widening equity gap for refugee families and children and revealed the additional layers of inequities in the schooling system for this specific group of children (Santiago et al., 2021; Lazarin, 2020). Responding to the systemic inequities, refugee families demonstrated resilience by developing a support system for their children, including providing their accommodation and other essential needs via their networks or families, encouraging their children's multilingual skills, and motivating them to have a better life in their new settings (Boit et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2021). This study explores how newcomer refugee mothers' support systems for their children's schooling experiences demonstrate cultural community wealth in resisting educational inequities, using Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Theory (2005).

Children's Learning Experiences at Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Starting in the Spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the schooling system worldwide. Due to the high risks in the classic learning environments for public health, schools had to shift the instructional model to *emergency remote teaching*, heavily relying on technological resources, including the Internet, computers or laptops, and multimedia resources. Unpredictable change in the instructional mode resulted in teachers' and school administration's struggles due to being unequipped for the online teaching experiences, digital resources, or time constraints (Ogodo et al., 2021; Huck & Zhang, 2021; Wolfe & McCarthy, 2020). Teachers struggled with increased anxiety as they experimented with instructional tools to align with the new normal era of teaching. They could not handle the emphasis on differentiated instruction, student engagement, and parent communication was lessened (Cardullo et al., 2021; Wolfe & McCarthy, 2020).

Relevant studies revealed K-12 grade-level students' challenges with the emergency remote learning environment at home, such as academic skills (Drane et al., 2020; Fegert et al., 2020; Firang, 2020), social skills (Putri et al., 2020), and physical and mental health (Bartlett et al., 2020; de Araújo et al., 2021; de Miranda et al., 2020). Specifically, the challenges faced by newcomer refugee students worsened with the emergent learning plan as they were already struggling with cultural shock (Bousalis et al., 2021), language barriers (Carhill-Poza & Williams, 2020), and pre/post-trauma (Patrick et al., 2020; Yeasmin et al., 2020) in their new countries; they had to adapt to remote learning and manage the school expectations and learn a new language while quarantining.

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[3] The legal definition by the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees are individuals who have to leave their home countries due to life-threatening circumstances based on their race, religious views, nationalities, political or social views, or involvements (Hamlin, 2022).

Furthermore, the learning system was constructed on teacher-parent collaboration, where parents were expected to assist their children and sustain communication with the schools in need (Adams & Todd, 2020). Consequently, parents had additional responsibilities with helping their children's school expectations, supporting their families' wellness, and working responsibilities (Azim & Salem, 2022; Solheim et al., 2022; Jung et al., 2022). Nonetheless, refugee parents were already struggling with social, financial, and health challenges (Lazarin, 2020). El Arab et al. (2023) revealed a variety of critical barriers for refugee families to receive healthcare support as worsening, such as lack of access to accurate information, health problems due to their existing stress and anxiety, job loss, and insecure food sources, and vaccination status for undocumented refugees. Regarding these vital struggles of refugee parents, the school-parent collaboration expectations of the schools naturally could not be sustained. Thus, refugee students' equity gap widened during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lazarin, 2020).

Refugee students in the U.S. education system are often overlooked and overcategorized as English Language Learners (ELLs), despite their unique academic, psychological, and safety needs (Okilwa et al., 2022; Primdahl et al., 2021; Ratini, 2019). They receive standard English language support and are disproportionately placed in special education programs, often assessed as regular ELLs without consideration for their interrupted educational backgrounds (Migliarini & Stinson, 2021; Guo & Ercikan, 2021). These inequities in language instruction and assessment have further intensified the challenges refugee students face, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Refugee Parents' Resistance to Educational Inequities

Despite the U.S. school system's failure to provide enough additional support, few studies have revealed refugee parents' resilience to the systemic inequities for these students' inclusion in schools (Trujillo, 2021; Boit et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2021). Although some refugee families may not be highly visible in the schools (depending on their linguistic background and years spent in the U.S.), their home support for their children's academic success cannot be underestimated (Isik-Ercan, 2018). Despite the U.S. education system's neglect of refugee parents' linguistic assets, these parents strongly encourage their children's language learning and maintain their home language as a form of linguistic capital (Papa, 2018). Miller et al. (2021) study illustrated that young refugee children and their families developed some forms of linguistic capital during their resettlement in Australia, often speaking at least one (and up to seven) languages other than English, revealing students' capacities rather than a form of deficit. Likewise, refugee parents devised a solution for their miscommunication with their children's schools or found external resources for their needs within their communities or networks, illustrating forms of social or navigational capital (Boit et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2023; Housel, 2020). Yu et al. (2023) found that refugees demonstrated consistent reciprocity within their communities through and after their resettlement, driven by a strong passion to "pay it forward" (p. 1654). This underscores the importance of supportive collaboration in their integration into a new society.

Studies also reveal that refugee parents actively share their hopes, dreams, and encouragement for their children's success, aspiring for them to learn American culture, develop essential skills, and secure a bright future—an example of aspirational capital (Boit, 2021; Trujillo, 2021; Miller et al., 2021). For example, in Trujillo's (2021) study, Latino parents expressed their dreams of their children's high academic achievements and "have a career which is better than the one" parents have (p. 162), like in Boit et al. (2021)'s study, "spanning from fitting into the American culture to learning how to work technology, to becoming a doctor" (p. 205).

Amid the barriers to accessing equitable resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, refugee parents' commitment to their children's education and well-being demonstrated their resilience. Similarly, Zivot et al. (2022) found that refugee mothers showed remarkable resilience in coping with the multiple challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic burdens at their homes. They actively planned home activities and social interactions to support their children's well-being, organized their living environments, and sought alternative ways to mitigate stress and promote optimism, despite the impact on their own mental and physical health.

Relevant literature demonstrates that refugee parents possess substantial cultural wealth that supports their children's inclusion in the U.S. school system while resisting multilayered inequities. Despite not always being seen or heard regarding their circumstances, they persistently seek solutions to their children's academic, emotional, and social needs—even while grappling with similar challenges themselves. Therefore, it is essential to explore ways to better integrate refugee parents into the school system and identify additional resources that school districts can provide to ensure more comprehensive and equitable teaching practices, resources, and support.

Theoretical Framework: Yosso's Cultural Community Wealth Theory

Our study is grounded in Yosso's (2005) Cultural Community Wealth Theory, which identifies six forms of cultural capital: *aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational*, and *resistant capital*. These forms act as dynamic processes that reinforce one another within the context of community cultural wealth. They provide resources for resilience, well-being, and navigating social systems, though mainstream society often overlooks them (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016).

Compared to other capital-based forms of theories like Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, we have found Yosso's Cultural Community Wealth Theory particularly better suited for our study as it acknowledges the resources newcomer refugee mothers bring, allowing us to explore how these forms of capital shape their children's educational experiences through an asset-based perspective which is missing in Bourdieu's capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). While Yosso's framework builds on Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) concept of cultural capital, Yosso shifts focus to accentuate the strengths of marginalized communities (2005). Also, Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) explores how capital reproduces inequality while Yosso (2005) reframes it as an asset these communities use to navigate systemic barriers. By critiquing Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) theory for labeling certain groups as culturally deficient compared to the White, middle-class standard, Yosso asserts that marginalized communities possess valuable cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities—like bilingualism and urban life skills— that are often undervalued (2005). Thus, utilizing this theoretical framework throughout this chapter, we aim to explore how recognizing and incorporating the forms of capital influence newcomer political refugee mothers and their children's educational experiences. Below, we present our argument by briefly defining our understanding of each capital and supporting them with examples.

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams when faced with unfamiliar barriers. For example, newcomer parents work hard to provide better opportunities for their children. This aspiration to provide a better life for their kids can motivate them to search for resources and opportunities to overcome challenges and adapt to their new environment.

Linguistic capital involves language skills and communication abilities that individuals possess and develop, such as multilingualism. For example, a multilingual individual can use their

language skills to connect with schools, healthcare providers, and other members of their society. This can help them access resources and advocate for their needs.

Familial capital highlights the resources and support (e.g., emotional, social, and financial) provided by family members and relatives. Even if they live away from their relatives, newcomers can rely on family and relative connections for various types of support and advice to navigate challenges and adapt to new situations.

Social capital refers to relationships, networks, and connections that provide support and resources. Individuals can build social capital by engaging with their cultural community to share experiences, advice, and a sense of belonging in their new homeland/context. For instance, a parent's social networks can enable access to information for their children's education and healthcare, and support their social, academic, identity development, and well-being.

Navigational capital entails the ability to navigate the social institutions, healthcare, and educational systems that are not often built to address the diverse needs of marginalized communities. For instance, a parent can build navigational capital by accessing social services to advocate for their children's needs, by developing strategies to empower their community to access necessary resources.

Resistant capital involves strategies to counter systemic injustices, discrimination, and exclusion while preserving their cultural identity. For example, a newcomer can challenge adversity by forming supportive networks, advocating for their rights, and addressing systemic barriers within their community, as well as sharing strategies and supporting one another.

By defining these forms of capital, we aim to analyze how these resources shape the educational experiences of newcomer refugee mothers and their children. In the following sections, we explore how these capitals are present in the lives of our participants and contribute to their resilience and resourcefulness in facing systemic challenges.

Methodology

In this study, we used instrumental case study research (Marshall et al., 2022; Yin, 2017) to examine the study of newcomer mothers and their children as a community and explore their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted before, refugee groups struggled with multi-layer inequities for various reasons (Lazarin, 2020). Using the instrumental case as a methodological strategy, we selected newcomer refugee mothers and their children as a specific case, focusing on their limited adaptation time to the United States school systems while still considering that this phenomenon might exist in multiple settings or communities.

We aimed to gather an in-depth understanding of newcomer mothers' support of their children for their schooling experiences using multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and memoing. We used semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method to learn how participants state their experiences and define their meanings (Charmaz, 2014). Observing participants during the interviews allowed us to capture their reactions while describing their experiences supporting their children. Memoing during and after the interviews helped us to capture some participants' expressions and give the data's meaning. Using a purposeful sampling strategy, we recruited participants who a) moved to the United States in 2016 or later, b) held asylee/asylum applicant/seeker status, and c) had children K-12 in U.S. public schools.

We created a flyer that included the information about this study, the three main criteria mentioned above, and a simple survey using Google Form[4]. This survey included information about the study purpose, overall study design, the risks and benefits, the participation format, the required time, and voluntary participation and confidentiality. Using snowball sampling, we shared the flyer with our network to help us reach the potential mothers who may meet the criteria through emails, WhatsApp, or texting. Using this survey, we ensured participants' consent and determined their eligibility.

We recruited seven newcomer mothers from the Northeast (three), Northwest (three), and West Coast (one) of the U.S. who met the eligibility criteria for this study. Between May and November 2021, we conducted three rounds of 90- to 120-minute semi-structured Zoom interviews. Since our goal was to explore mothers' experiences in depth—such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their families' daily lives and adaptation process, children's schooling experiences, and families' well-being and support—we structured the interviews into three rounds.

Participants were offered the choice of conducting interviews and reviewing documents in English or Turkish, and all opted to speak in Turkish. To ensure confidentiality, we de-identified participants' and their children's names before data analysis. We used pseudonyms, allowing participants to choose their own or request that we assign them. All data was kept confidential, encrypted, and securely stored on a password-protected server to prevent unauthorized access.

Table 1

Demographics and Social Profiles of the Participants

Participants*	Regions	School Age Children**	Family Situation	English Language Proficiency (ELP)	Immigration Status***
Beyza	Northwest	1 HS and 1 ES level children	Moved as a family	Advanced	Asylee
Leyla	Northeast	2 ES level children	Family reunification	Emerging	Asylee
Nermin	Northeast	1 MS and 1 ES level children	Separated	Emerging	Asylee
Sevda	West Coast	1 ES level child	Family reunification	Emerging	Asylum seeker
Neslihan	Northeast	1 HS level child	Moved as a family	Advanced	Asylee
Emine	Northeast	1 MS and 1 ES level children	Family reunification	Advanced	Asylee
Zeynep	Northeast	1 College, 1 HS, and 1 ES level children	Moved as a family	Emerging	Asylee

*All names are pseudonyms.

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[4] We followed all the principles and guidelines to protect the rights of the participants for ethical considerations provided by the Office of Human Subjects Research Board at Montclair State University. IRB approval number: IRB-FY20-21-2209

** *ES* = Elementary school; *MS* = Middle school; *HS* = High school.
***Immigration status* is self-reported during the interview.

Using NVivo software, we analyzed the interview data following Saldaña's (2016) two-cycle coding method. In the first cycle, we conducted line-by-line coding of interview transcripts and memos, developing categories such as children's schooling experiences, families' well-being, and families' school connections. In the second cycle, we applied theoretical coding with a deductive approach to "systematically integrate around the central/core category, the one that suggests a theoretical explanation for the phenomenon" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 13). As a result, we identified linguistic and resistance capital, social and familial capital, and navigational and aspirational capital as key themes within Yosso's Cultural Wealth Theory (2005).

Seven participants (see Table 1) were all Turkish mothers who had to leave their home countries due to the political impacts and ongoing uncertainties in the Turkish judicial system. They experienced different stigma or discrimination in their home countries, including labeling, targeting, and social and physiological pressures; they even lost their jobs, and their family members were imprisoned as being affiliated with a civil human rights organization by the Turkish government (Avincan et al., 2023). Although they were raising their children by providing the best educational opportunities in their home countries, they had to consider building a new life in the United States, seeking asylum processes, family reunions, unprecedented financial situations, and other insecurities.

Findings and Discussion

We present findings from our study of seven newcomer refugee mothers and their experiences navigating educational and societal systems. In our analysis, we presented the findings by combining the six forms of capital into three pairs, as these pairs are often intertwined in the participants' experiences: (*1*) *Linguistic and Resistance Capital,* where we explore how parents utilized their language skills and resilience to support and be involved with their children's education; (*2*) *Social and Familial Capital,* where we stress the crucial role of family and community networks in adapting and navigating a new environment and accessing support and resources parents need; and (*3*) *Navigational and Aspirational Capital,* which we focus on the strategies and aspirations that guided parents in ensuring their children's social and academic development despite challenges.

Linguistic and Resistance Capital

We explore the intersections of linguistic and resistant capital of multilingual newcomer refugee mothers navigating society and the educational system to seek resources and support for their children. Since our findings suggest that linguistic and resistant capital often intertwine with the participants' experiences, we merge these two types of capital to better understand and interpret the participants' experiences and explore how parents use their cultural capital to advocate for their children's academic development. We highlight how resilient and dedicated the families are by sharing examples of their strategic use of linguistic abilities and resistance strategies to access much-needed resources.

First, drawing from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth theory, we examined how linguistic capital empowers parents with varying English language proficiency (ELP) skills. Our participants' ELP skills could be categorized into two main groups: newcomer refugee mothers with advanced English language proficiency (AELP) and emerging ELP (EELP). Newcomer

refugee mothers with AELP skills often confidently engaged with the school system, while those with EELP used their varying individual strengths creatively when seeking resources to improve language skills and involve their children's education. Additionally, we analyzed how resistant capital was present throughout the parents' efforts to overcome systemic barriers and lack of support and resources from schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the mismatch between their needs and school resources, and the search for better opportunities despite the varying challenges they faced in the U.S. education system.

Multilingual Mothers with Advanced English Language Proficiency (AELP) skills. Newcomer refugee mothers with AELP, such as Neslihan, often felt confident assisting their children academically, communicating with schools, and expressing their cultural and religious preferences. Neslihan highlighted the significant advantages of speaking English comfortably when communicating with the teachers. Neslihan shares,

I don't have any language problems. Many of my friends, for instance, struggle to make sense of what their children are studying at school, or they constantly get emails from the district and don't know what to do…I can help my child with their English homework. I'm an ELA teacher, so I understand all the assignments. My spouse and I know English, so my spouse can handle the paperwork at school. I also understand and help with their homework, which was an advantage. I'm using the same (school) system, which is, of course, an advantage too. (Neslihan, August 17, 2021)

While Neslihan stressed how her linguistic capital and familiarity with the school district provided her and her child a smoother transition to the school system and less dependence on school resources, Sevda explained how she managed to ask for direct technical support from the school principal by sending an email using her AELP skills:

It was our first time learning about Webex, and we had a problem with login credentials, so I emailed the principal, who responded very shortly and solved the problem. (Sevda, September 11, 2021)

In another example, she stressed how her comfort level with English helped her develop self-sufficiency in seeking and accessing resources:

In general, that's how it is… I haven't really asked anyone else for anything because I didn't need it. At least I can understand the emails. (Sevda, September 3, 2021)

As in Sevda's example, newcomer refugee mothers often faced challenges with new digital tools and unlike her, many parents struggled with seeking direct assistance from the school staff (Boit et al., 2021).

For Beyza, her confidence in her AELP helped her build a support system for her child to adapt to the new environment and mentor her child by challenging the status quo. Beyza shared how her approach merges linguistic and resistance capital,

Coming from a different place, I didn't just adopt the local system for my child's education... I told my child, 'I sent you to private school (back in their home country) and now to public school—you need to see both... You'll have to evaluate these opportunities and make the most of them. Of course, I said this after the first six months, once she's learned the environment and the system... I encouraged her to go beyond what was assigned. (Beyza, November 4, 2021).

Mothers with AELP skills, like Neslihan, Beyza, and Sevda, felt confident communicating with schools and supporting their children's educational and cultural development by encouraging them to go beyond the academic work provided in schools, such as doing further research on topics they were interested in, and volunteering for optional projects and tasks.

Multilingual Mothers with Emerging English Language Proficiency (EELP) skills. Mothers with EELP skills often sought various resources and devised creative solutions, such as reaching out to community networks or finding online learning tools, to address their children's needs due to the lack of language support from schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Some used the internet to access educational materials and courses, while others shared their challenges in accessing school resources (Housel, 2020) and how they could access them through community support.

Zeynep, a mother with EELP skills, described the stress she experienced due to a lack of individualized language support:

> *In fact, I want to communicate with my daughter's school, but without*
> *English, I cannot. I feel like I know nothing about this system. I cannot send*
> *any emails… My older daughter is familiar with technology and English,*
> *so we ask for her help* (Zeynep, November 22, 2021).

Zeynep was willing to be involved with her children's school. However, the lack of language support from the school hindered her parental involvement to further support her children, an experience that was not unique to Zeynep.

Lack of support from schools (linguistic, technology-related, etc.) affected not only mothers with emerging English skills but also their older children. In their study with newcomer immigrant/refugee students in Finland, Molin-Karakoc and Ikola (2019) found that added communicative responsibilities decreased the school engagement and resulted in less direct communication between schools and parents. While the other mothers in our study either had AELP skills or relied on community support, Zeynep's situation was particularly distinct because she also depended on familial support from her English-speaking older child. Similar to Zeynep's attempt to communicate with the school, Nermin highlighted that she reached out to family and community for technical support for her child's classroom assignment:

> *I did not speak English and was unfamiliar with the school system then.*
> *Teachers used SeeSaw and IXL Apps for assignments, but I needed help*
> *with how I should use them. My friend's children were at the same school.*
> *I asked her for help to use SeeSaw* (Nermin, October 4, 2021).

Like the rest of the newcomer refugee mothers in the study, who lacked individualized support from school to address their needs as newcomer refugee mothers with EELP, Nermin turned to her family and community network for support (Yu et al., 2023).

Bringing her resourcefulness, use of technology, and abilities to navigate international school systems, Leyla shared how she merged her resistance and linguistic forms of capital to help support her children's education,

> *I like doing things on the computer at home…I thought, there must be*
> *affordable activities here, too. I Google searched for free courses, and then*
> *my husband went to check them out. We didn't enroll in a course right*
> *away… For example, when enrolling in a soccer course, I found 3-4*
> *options and checked how close they were, using Maps… Then, we'd go in*
> *person, and I'd rely on my husband's English (for the rest)* (Leyla,*
> *September 14, 2021).

Leyla's example illustrates how she refused to let the unfamiliarity of a new language, educational system, and country prevent her from engaging with her children's education. Instead, she used her resourcefulness and skills to enrich her family's daily experiences to help her children make the most of the school and community resources.

The interconnectedness of the linguistic and resistance capital was present throughout participants' narratives, exemplifying how different forms of capital co-existed, constantly evolved, and reinforced one another (Yosso, 2005). Both groups of newcomer refugee mothers in our study—those with Advanced English Language Proficiency (AELP) and those with Emerging English Language Proficiency (EELP) were committed to supporting their children's education by using their varying linguistic assets and experiences, underscoring the importance of language proficiency in shaping access to their children's school resources and support (Trujillo, 2021; Miller et al., 2021). The findings indicated additional inequities for mothers with EELP when seeking educational support and resources for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Barker, 2021; Popyk, 2021), in comparison to mothers with AELP, who navigated the educational system more confidently. However, combining their linguistic skills with resistance strategies allowed mothers with EELP to overcome significant barriers by seeking and receiving community support. They demonstrated resilience by refusing to allow the lack of language support (in our study, Turkish language resources) from schools to stop them from being less involved in their children's education despite the systemic challenges.

Social and Familial Capital

In this study, social capital was derived from networks and relationships (especially from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds), and familial capital was based on support from family members. For newcomer refugee mothers, social and familial forms of capital were vital in families' access to educational resources and often intersected for mothers who navigated school systems and society, though. For example, Emine's experience illustrated how social and familial supports merge, especially in the face of educational and cultural adaptation:

> *Some friends came before me. Sister Rana was very helpful with the certification process. She guided us through these stages. Before her, a young friend who had already managed all these processes independently helped us get started* (Emine, August 24, 2021).

Emine's reliance on her friend, whom she called sister Rana, reflected how friendships could assume family-like roles, providing help with complex tasks, a vital step in adapting to the educational system.

On a new land and system, the line between these two capitals often blurred. Beyza's experience exemplified how her social network provided family-like trust and support: *When a friend told us to come over and stay with them, assuring us they would help with everything, we happily accepted that option*" (Beyza, November 4, 2021). Beyza and her family were overwhelmed by cultural shock. When they first arrived, they had no family or network for support, and relied heavily on a few close friends for help. Such a support system eased the difficulties of cultural adaptation, resulting in a smoother transition to their new homeland.

One common finding across participants' experiences was the view of the community as a support system, where social networks were often seen as extensions of familial ties, providing security, facilitating a smoother transition, and influencing crucial decision-making (Yu et al., 2023). Zeynep's narrative further highlighted the multifaceted nature of this support:

> *Due to my illness, I received significant support from my friends. Some*
> *provided financial help, while others offered emotional support. We didn't*
> *need all the financial help offered, we kept some and returned some…They*
> *helped out of genuine kindness (expecting nothing in return).*
> (Zeynep, November 22, 2021)

Zeynep's account emphasized how social and familial networks often worked in tandem to provide support to newcomers in hard times as it related to an expected hospitalization in their new homeland.

Additionally, the mothers in our study used their community network and the resources it provided as social and familial capital to support their children's educational experiences. Nermin's story exemplifies how both social and familial connections provided support:

> *My friends, especially those within my close circle, and our teacher friends*
> *helped us with my children's studies. For instance, my friends assisted my*
> *daughter with her math lessons. Since my son was younger, we were able*
> *to address his needs to some extent as parents. I received valuable support*
> *from my friends to support their coursework needs.* (Nermin, November 4,
> 2021)

Considering the lengthy process of obtaining certain legal rights and documents, newcomer refugee mothers faced additional challenges beyond the everyday responsibilities for parenting, particularly in supporting their children's needs in a new culture, language, and country. This process often involved long waiting times to obtain work permits or a SSN, resulting in their limited ability to build self-sufficiency, integrate into society, and access the resources they needed (Lazarin, 2020). As a result, many families faced barriers to accessing essential resources and support. This highlights how social and familial capital support systems provided critical academic assistance within the community since systemic challenges hinder these families from accessing such support.

Beyza's efforts to support her daughter's growth through social networks were illustrated through the following story:

> *I directed my daughter toward online volunteering activities. There are*
> *(remote) Turkish-language partnership programs in Greece, and I*
> *suggested she participate. It would benefit herself and others, allowing her*
> *to practice English, gain confidence in her communication skills, and help*
> *people.* (Beyza, November 4, 2021)

Simultaneously, her involvement with the volunteer project's mentors suggested how these interactions created a nurturing environment likened to that of familial support:

> *I also took care of the mentors affiliated with the program. I invited them*
> *to our home and visited them. This way, my child felt more comfortable,*
> *and the mentors got to know us better, which helped my child adjust more*
> *quickly to the new environment.* (Beyza, November 4, 2021)

Both examples from Beyza indicated how her involvement in her community by offering support to and receiving support from the volunteer program underscored how newcomer mothers could use social networks as an extension of the familial role, in supporting their children beyond academic settings.

Our participants' experiences highlighted the importance of familial capital, both immediate and extended, in influencing the decisions of newcomer refugee families (Miller et al., 2021):

> *While staying on the West Coast, my kids attended a public school for half*
> *a semester. They chose that school because of their cousins, so they could*

go to the same school with them. It made it a bit smoother for them...especially as they did not speak English (yet). (Sevda, August 27, 2021)

In Sevda's experience, having extended family members in a certain school and neighborhood helped her navigate certain challenges, such as selecting which school would best support her children and their limited English proficiency. Additionally, Sevda described how close family members provided support, especially during the interrupted formal education period resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic:

... When we first arrived, they (my kids) couldn't go to school for the first six months. During this time, my children and their cousins were constantly speaking English at home. Within six months, I observed my son improve his English. (Sevda, August 21, 2021)

Sevda's experiences emphasized the importance of language exposure and practice in language acquisition when formal education was inaccessible (Wolfe & McCarthy, 2020). In Sevda's case, the continuous use of English among young school-age kids created a natural learning space and adaptation process.

While Yosso's (2005) framework presents capital as distinct categories, he also emphasizes that capitals are dynamic and can co-exist with one another. In this study, social and familial capital were often deeply intertwined among participants' narratives. While six participants did not have immediate family in the U.S., they sought and received valuable support from social networks (e.g., community connections), which they described as family-like relationships.

The experiences of newcomer refugee mothers in this research indicate how social and familial capitals often intersect even when resources and support are limited. Creating a holistic support system is critical for navigating new cultural and educational environments. Social and familial capitals, along with the assets families bring and co-build, often become vital for accessing resources and navigating societal and school systems. When schools and systems fail to provide the support and resources the families need, through these interconnected supports and collaboration within safe family and community networks, newcomer refugee families can build resilience and overcome challenges collectively.

Navigational and Aspirational Capital

Despite the challenges and lack of holistic support from schools, mothers' putting their capital into use to support their children's social and academic development in the U.S. was a crucial finding in our study. In this section, we describe our participants' experiences, challenges, and successes, and how their efforts turned struggles into opportunities with limited support from schools. One common finding was their commitment to creating a supportive environment for their children to achieve their educational goals (Boit et al., 2021).

Leyla's experience illustrated the role of aspirational capital, reinforcing previous examples in this research of how parents draw on various forms of capital and assets to support their children's academic growth.

By being proactive, she was able to ensure her children remained engaged in activities despite additional challenges they experienced as newcomers. Leyla's story provided a compelling example of the crucial role parental aspirations played in their children's development and integration into society.

I took the initiative to enroll my children in various courses, including Taekwondo. Although the courses initially operated normally, they faced

> *closures and switched to online formats; I tried to find and enroll them in activities to keep them engaged and prevent boredom. I trust and hope for my children that my tireless research and efforts to adapt these opportunities will support their well-being and development.* (Leyla, September 14, 2021)

As a newcomer refugee mother with EELP skills, two young kids, temporary housing, and limited financial assets, Leyla made proactive efforts to enroll her children in various extracurricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicated her aspirational and navigational capital working together to support her children's socio-cultural, emotional and academic development and adaptation.

Similarly, the parents in our study used their strengths, specifically their past experiences and knowledge, to support their children in achieving educational goals. Beyza shared how her personal and professional background in education influenced her approach to supporting her children:

> *While working in Istanbul, I learned about the requirements for getting into X College, how students could achieve this, and what scores were needed. I was both trained and worked as a teacher within that system. I advised students to apply, check the requirements, and explore opportunities as part of my profession. When my children came here, I applied the same approach, helping them with applications and researching what they needed to succeed.* (Beyza, November 4, 2021)

Beyza's example indicated how she transferred her skills and strengths as an experienced educator in supporting her children's academic goals in the U.S. Her approach highlighted how the aspiration to overcome systemic challenges and achieve high academic goals could be transmitted through personal and professional experiences when the support from educational institutions was inadequate to address their unique needs. Furthermore, while supporting their children's education goals, the parents faced many challenges, such as overcoming language barriers to ask for and receive support and figuring out ways to access resources for their specific needs. In her account, Nermin described the challenge of adapting to a new educational system and the various strategies she used to support her child's learning:

> *(We were) constantly using translation…. I struggled because I didn't know the system (here). I tried to help my child. You know your child is struggling with English. However, they reassured me that my child's understanding would improve over time. They told me not to rush…. The other kids understood English, but my kid did not yet. I'm encouraging her to watch the cartoons in English and help her memorize vocabulary.* (Nermin, September 27, 2021)

Nermin, with her EELP skills, and commitment to supporting her child within the new educational system, encouraged her child to use materials they had access to (e.g., cartoons) so her child could practice the target language at home, an example of how she compensated for the lack of individualized support. Beyza described a similar approach to navigating the educational system:

> *I had some opportunities to engage with schools because I could not work for six months. I volunteered for a few days to familiarize myself with the school (system). Later, I told the newcomer connections to go to the school, meet with the counselor, and share their child's situation/experiences. We are a group of friends here, and some didn't want to share their*

> *experiences with the school (for safety reasons), but…. sharing made me*
> *feel more comfortable.* (Beyza, November 18, 2021)

To learn the school system and familiarize herself with the school staff, Beyza initiated her involvement with her children's school and encouraged other mothers as well. Considering going to school was a big challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to limited in-person access to school personnel. Our participants' use of strategies to navigate the school system indicated how critical their navigational and aspirational assets were for their children's education success (Housel, 2020). Like Beyza, the other newcomer refugee mothers in our study prioritized their children's academic success as well, in order to support their children's educational and future goals.

Navigational and aspirational capital involves individual resilience, optimism, and a wide range of proactive strategies that families use to overcome systemic barriers to support their children's academic and social development. The experiences shared by the mothers in our study emphasized that parental optimism about educational success, combined with providing emotional support, played a crucial role in boosting students' engagement levels and social and academic well-being (Molin-Karakoc & Ikola, 2019). Similar to the findings by Yosso (2005), the participants' experiences indicated that navigational and aspirational forms of capital are often interconnected in relation to supporting their children's social and academic development. Despite being in a new educational system and adapting to their new lives, the mothers' hopefulness and commitment to supporting their children's academic development helped them find creative ways and opportunities to overcome challenges.

Implications

In this section, we offer practical implications for school-wide policy and practices, underscore the interconnectedness of the six forms of capital, and address the challenges/needs of newcomer refugee families. We also emphasize the urgency and importance of sustaining equity in seeking/receiving support, guidance, and resources, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we suggest three key policy recommendations to support newcomer refugee families, building on our findings. First, schools must ensure equitable language support and resources for all parents. Second, schools should consider partnering with refugee resettlement agencies and community organizations to strengthen family support networks and foster a sense of belonging. Third, schools and local governments should create inclusive spaces that offer multilingual and holistic support services. In the following paragraphs, we will elaborate on each of these recommendations in detail.

First, we recommend schools consider reaching out to newcomer families, and rethink policies to ensure all parents, regardless of their ELP skills, receive equitable linguistic resources, support, and assistance to ease their integration to the school system (Ettang, 2021; Gurer, 2019; Slavin & Storey, 2020; Santiago et al., 2021). For example, schools should provide additional professional development and resources to their faculty and staff related to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, how to address their language needs, and provide multilingual resources. School leaders should also increase communication with newcomer families through linguistically and culturally responsive approaches, incorporating translation and interpretation services to increase accessibility for all parents (see Akay & Al, 2023).

Findings from our study highlight the urgency of these policies. ELP levels varied among the newcomer refugee mothers: Mothers with AELP skills and mothers with EELP skills. Findings indicate that the former group utilized their linguistic capital to communicate with school staff for

help and assist their children with their homework. Schools are entitled to provide information in the families' home language and translators as needed by law (see Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.), yet, the latter group faced a lack of language support from schools during the COVID-19 pandemic when seeking ways to support their children in a fully remote, period, and navigating a new school system in a language they had yet to feel comfortable with. However, they resisted and turned to their community for support.

Second, schools should partner with refugee resettlement agencies (e.g., International Rescue Committee, Church World Service, World Relief) and local community organizations that have built expertise working with newcomer families and providing a wide range of services like legal support, language classes, employment services, and/or healthcare services. For instance, by organizing co-hosting workshops, culturally and linguistically honoring events, and building partnerships between schools and refugee families, schools and community organizations should actively collaborate to engage and empower families and children with needs-based resources. Hence, the community networks and representatives could act as cultural mediators and support schools and teachers to adapt linguistically and culturally appropriate curricula for students and communication strategies for parents and provide holistic support for them (see The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, 2016b). Such collaborations have successful examples where individuals with whom refugee parents identify themselves could help build bridges between schools and refugee parents resolve misunderstandings and strengthen school and family connections (see The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, 2016b). Also, building these partnerships to extend support beyond classrooms could address the emerging needs of newcomer refugee families, lead to trust and collaboration between schools and families, and support their self-sufficiency and resilience, especially in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from our study highlight the importance of building culturally and linguistically safe community networks to support newcomer children's academic development. The newcomer refugee mothers emphasized strong ties with their community. Specifically, they explained how they received generous support from community members in navigating the education system and society, language assistance, and emotional support. Social and familial ties were often intertwined, as the mothers described their community networks as family-like connections. In our study, the recent arrivals and mothers with EELP skills sought out and appreciated support from the community and local organizations. Despite a lack of communication and support from their local school, the mothers' strong community ties helped them access the support and guidance needed to navigate the educational, societal, and financial systems. This support also encompassed culturally and linguistically safe environments that fostered their overall well-being.

Our final recommendation is for teachers, schools, and local governments to prioritize linguistically and culturally inclusive spaces to support increased involvement of newcomer parents and children. Specifically, this might include providing resources and information about students' rights in their home languages to keep them engaged and informed about school programs and activities (Akay & Jaffe-Walter, 2021; Isik-Ercan, 2018). Schools should also diversify the school staff to include individuals with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds as refugee families and establish resource centers and multilingual hotlines to increase parents' self-sufficiency and easy access to resources in times of need. Additionally, schools must provide holistic support and resources to help families achieve their aspirational goals. This includes guiding them to resource centers and offering parent-student workshops on social and academic needs, such as college guidance, internships, legal rights, extracurricular activities, and career pathways.

Findings from our study stress the resilience and dedication of the newcomer refugee mothers, highlighting the need for schools and policies to support the parents who have suffered from unpredictable and often traumatic challenges. Regardless of these difficulties, all newcomer refugee mothers in our study were committed to securing better opportunities for their children's education and future. Schools and policies must recognize and build upon this commitment by providing meaningful support that aligns with their needs and empowering them with the knowledge of their rights as parents and how to advocate for their children within and beyond the school system.

To conclude, by committing to and implementing these suggestions, schools can provide a more equitable and inclusive school environment where newcomer refugee families feel a sense of belonging, empowerment, and welcome. This will help them navigate the system, advocate for their and their children's rights, engage in their children's social and academic development, and support their children's aspirational goals. In light of Yosso's (2005) Cultural Community Wealth Theory, our findings and implications emphasize the wide range of interconnected assets that newcomer refugee mothers bring into society. We trust that these implications contribute to a deeper understanding of, and response to the needs of newcomer refugee mothers (as well as their children and families) and highlight the resilience, resources, and assets they bring to their school community and society.

Limitations

Our study has several limitations to consider. First, working with refugee populations presents unique challenges, requiring a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and sensitivity to their cultural and psychological needs. Many potential participants were hesitant to engage due to past trauma, ongoing safety concerns and privacy fears. This limited our access to a larger and more diverse participant pool and resulted in recruitment and data collection delays. Additionally, our focus on recruiting participants from similar cultural, linguistic, and immigration backgrounds hinders the generalizability of the findings. These limitations underscore the need for more sensitive and trauma-informed recruitment methods when reaching out to vulnerable populations.

Future studies may consider longitudinal approaches, diverse data collection methods, and expanded the sample sizes to ensure equal representation from various regions. Such efforts will provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on newcomer families' social, academic, and emotional well-being, as well as their asset development and integration in the U.S.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we aimed to explore how newcomer refugee parents perceived their access to resources and support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting qualitative research, we worked with seven newcomer refugee mothers with varying ELP levels. Grounded in Yosso's (2005) Cultural Community Wealth theory, we examined how the newcomer multilingual refugee parents leveraged their linguistic, resistance, social, familial, aspirational, and navigational capitals to support their children's social and academic development, navigate a new language, education system, and homeland.

Our findings suggested that these capitals were often intertwined in the participants' lives and experiences and played a crucial role in overcoming challenges and pursuing their aspirational

goals for themselves and their children. Building on the findings, we propose implications for school-wide policy and educational practice, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and equitable approaches. Ultimately, this chapter contributes to understanding newcomer refugee parents' experiences, challenges, and unique needs; while recognizing the cultural wealth, assets, and strengths they bring to their communities.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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