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A Literature Review of Family Engagement with African Immigrant and Refugee Families

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In recent years, the ethnic and cultural diversity of the U.S. has increased as large numbers of immigrants and refugees have resettled here. Many of the recent immigrants and refugees have arrived from African countries, and human scientists and Extension professionals must be prepared to engage with the families. To inform the work of professionals, a comprehensive search of the literature on family engagement in K-12 education and out-of-school time with African families was conducted using multiple keywords in several database searches. Two books and three peer-reviewed journal articles were identified that focused on family engagement with African families. After reviewing the publications, three relevant themes for professionals seeking engagement with African families were identified: (a) culture, (b) potential challenges, and (c) program components. These themes and their subthemes are explored, and recommendations are made for Extension professionals to increase their engagement with African families in family life programs.

Keywords: African immigrants, African refugees, parent engagement, family engagement

Introduction

Family engagement is crucial to the work of Extension professionals and human scientists working in diverse areas of family life education, including education, financial literacy, community engagement and leadership, nutrition, and youth development. When family life educators come from different cultural backgrounds than the families with whom they work, cultural implications must be considered (Ballard & Taylor, 2011). While ethnic similarity between families and family life educators is not as important as the quality of service provided by the family life educator (Higginbotham & Myler, 2010), high-quality family life educators recognize and attend to cultural differences when they occur and use innovative strategies to engage with families from diverse backgrounds.

According to the United States Department of Homeland Security (2017), 9.6% of all new lawful permanent residents and 37.2% of all new refugees resettled to the U.S. in 2016 were from African countries. Many of these individuals are children who will go on to be educated in the

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U.S. education system. Despite this influx, there is a lack of research on family life engagement with and the family life experiences of African immigrant and refugee families. African families' unique experiences, values, and strengths have the potential to greatly benefit their adopted communities and schools. However, without appropriate engagement strategies, human scientists, Extension professionals, and educators may fail to build strong relationships with these families. Poor relationships with community service providers disadvantage families by limiting their access to education and resources. Further, the types of resources and engagement African families want and need, as well as how they are best able to access that information, may be quite different than how family life educators have typically worked with non-immigrant families. While many strategies for engaging diverse families exist, not all of these strategies may be appropriate in work with African immigrant families, whose contexts can differ significantly from other diverse groups (as well as within this heterogeneous group). Thus, it is important for family life educators to consider how African immigrant families' experience the cultural context and how this might shape their needs in a family engagement setting, while reframing their thinking about family engagement, and modify their approaches to work most effectively with African immigrant families.

Purpose

The purpose of this literature review was to locate, analyze, and synthesize information on family engagement in educational settings that would be especially relevant in work with African immigrant and refugee families. The goal of the literature review was to identify strategies that would benefit family life educators' work with African immigrant families, as well as to identify gaps in the current literature for future research. African families became the focus of this literature review because of the large population of African immigrants and refugees in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Remington, 2008), and the large number of African immigrant and refugee families who have recently become involved in U Connect, a program that focuses on family engagement and the promotion of academic success for middle school students from historically marginalized groups.

Methods

A comprehensive literature search for scholarship published as recently as February 2018 that related to parent and family engagement in K-12 education and out-of-school-time activities for African families was conducted using various databases, including PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, Education Source, and ERIC, as well as Google. This broad approach allowed for literature on family engagement with African families targeted toward teachers, schools, and parents themselves to emerge. Although the initial literature search focused on research relating to East African families, due to a dearth of research on East African families specifically, the search was broadened to include information about African families in general, and an iterative process was employed to identify relevant literature. A broad range of search terms was used to

ensure that the search was inclusive of all potentially relevant articles (see Table 1). Search terms were combined using the logical operators “AND,” “OR,” and “NOT” to locate the most relevant articles. Although the term “African American” was entered with the logical operator “NOT,” database searches often returned results that conflated the experiences of African Americans and African immigrants; these results were excluded from the analysis. Articles and book chapters identified by this search that focused on engagement of African immigrant and refugee families in K-12 education and out-of-school-time activities ($n = 41$ potential articles) were included for the next step. Because the initial focus of this search was on family engagement in K-12 education, articles that focused on early childhood education, engagement in health education (e.g., chronic health condition management for adults and articles that focused on the healthcare system), or a too-specific cultural context that did not include experiences of immigration (e.g., exclusive focus on one ethnic group or tribe within a rural area in a single African country) were excluded, resulting in 21 potential articles.

Table 1. Search Terms Utilized in Literature Search

Family Context Search Terms	Engagement Search Terms	Additional Context Search Terms	Excluded Terms
African cultural groups	Family engagement	Advice	African American
African immigrants	Parent education	Schools	
African immigrants or refugees	Parent engagement		
African refugees	Parent involvement		
East African	Parent training		
Ethiopian			
Immigration			
Refugees			
Somali			

The identified literature was then organized into categories based on each article’s focus: resources for parents ($n = 1$), general literature on immigrant and refugee families ($n = 25$), and literature on immigrant and refugee African families ($n = 8$). Because the motivation for this literature review was to find information relevant for working with African families engaged in family life education, articles from the third category, literature on immigrant and refugee African families, became the focus of the literature review ($n = 8$ potential articles and books).

Reference lists from each article within this category were reviewed, and any additional articles ($n = 2$) that focused on African contexts and family engagement were also included. Upon further review, three articles were excluded for having a too-specific cultural context (for example, a focus on one specific tribe or ethnic group residing in a rural area of a single African nation, with no discussion of immigration) or for lacking focus on family engagement (for example, a focus on gender role socialization). One book was excluded for lacking information on family engagement, and another book was excluded for demonstrating cultural insensitivity and pathologizing African families, which was counter to the aims of this search.

A final sample of two books and three peer-reviewed journal articles, all of which focused on family engagement and African cultural contexts, were included in this literature review. One of these books was an edited book (Adams & Kirova, 2006) that contained seven relevant chapters, six of which were authored by individuals other than the editors and detailed relevant studies conducted by the chapter authors. Two books, seven unique book chapters, and three journal articles were included in the final sample and are denoted with an asterisk in the reference list.

After reading each identified peer-reviewed journal article and book chapter included in the literature search, a summary document was created for each article and chapter; keywords that might represent a potential theme were noted. Next, a list of all keywords was created and organized into categories. These categories were grouped into three overarching themes, which are listed in order of prevalence within and across articles: (a) culture, (b) potential challenges, and (c) program components. The findings for each theme are detailed in the results.

Results

Culture

A common theme across the literature was cultural factors that impact family engagement. Cultural factors related to families' values, norms, and cultural contexts. Within this theme, four subthemes emerged: (a) the high value of educational success, (b), African cultural values and norms, (c) the importance of cultural capital, and (d) acculturation gaps between parents and children as a source of stress. Each of these subthemes is discussed below.

High Value of Educational Success. Across the literature, it was clear that immigrant and refugee parents (including African immigrants and refugees) placed a high value on education and wanted to see their children be successful in school (Adams & Kirova, 2006; Arthur, 2000; Dachyshyn, 2006; Georgis et al., 2014; Li, 2006; Szente & Hoot, 2006). Immigrant and refugee parents from multiple African countries described education as a means to better opportunities and upward social mobility for their children. For example, in discussing their work with Somali families, Georgis et al. (2014) noted that “parental aspirations included a desire for their children to grow up bicultural and do well in school so that they can be successful in Canada” (p. 26). Similarly, in Li's (2006) case study of a Sudanese refugee family, the parents had high hopes for their children's futures and saw education as a means to better opportunities. Refugee parents were committed to finding ways to support their children in their mission to be successful in school (Li, 2006; Szente & Hoot, 2006). Szente and Hoot (2006) noted that in their interviews with refugee parents that they unanimously articulated the high value their families placed on education.

It is clear that African cultures placed a high value on educational success for their children, and this translated into parents' commitment to education (Arthur, 2000). Arthur stressed that many members of the African diaspora in Minnesota valued education as a means toward upward

mobility, as he stated that this is true for most African immigrants across the U.S. “African immigrants’ commitment to education . . . has been facilitated by two main factors: first, the emphasis that African culture attaches to education; second, the immigrants’ proficiency and fluency in English” (Arthur, 2000, p. 104).

African Cultural Values and Norms. Although Africa is a continent that contains many different countries and distinct cultures, literature on family engagement with African immigrant families stressed values that were common across many of the different cultural groups. Many African cultures are communal in nature, where caring and sharing are heavily emphasized (Ghong et al., 2007). Core values in most African cultures include honesty, respect for others (including elders), care, integrity, and community. Reciprocity of these characteristics is integral to building strong relationships (Ghong et al., 2007; Roer-Strier & Strier, 2006). In discussing the ways that African parents transmit these cultural values to their children, Arthur noted, “[African] parents stress to their children the importance of education, social responsibility, respect for authority, hard work, and service” (p. 113). Additionally, extended family is important for African immigrant families, and closeness with extended family can serve as a protective factor for children, especially those growing up in single-parent homes (Arthur, 2000).

African families sometimes demonstrated different childrearing and disciplinary practices (Dachyshyn, 2006; Georgis et al., 2014) and different orientations to time (Georgis et al., 2014) than what might be expected in the U.S. Conceptualizations of what skills and type of education children need to grow into successful adults differed by culture, especially between individualistic and more communal cultures. For example, Roer-Strier and Strier (2006) found that fathers in rural Ethiopia taught their children skills related to providing for the family (e.g., farming skills) rather than sending them to school; this decision was the result of what they believed their children would need to know to become successful adults in rural Ethiopia, where education in these practical skills was necessary for survival. When families immigrate, they often maintain the conceptualizations that are consistent with their heritage culture, which can result in conflict between families’ ideals and those put forth by the education system in which their children are immersed in the U.S. (Roer-Strier & Strier, 2006). Assertiveness, for instance, is a quality that was highly valued in the U.S. but may be perceived as disrespectful, especially when directed toward teachers or other elders, in Ethiopian culture.

The Importance of Cultural Capital. Also evident across the literature was the notion of valuing one’s family cultural capital as a critical component of family engagement, including incorporating families’ cultural traditions and values into family life programming (Georgis et al., 2014; Roer-Strier & Strier, 2006). For example, in their work with Somali families, Georgis et al. (2014) found that by understanding where families come from and what they have to offer, family educators were able to build strong relationships with Somali families. Similarly, Ghong et al. (2007) stressed the importance of incorporating into family life education what families from different cultural backgrounds had to contribute to the larger group because of their culture.

In their interviews with Ethiopian fathers living in Israel, Roer-Strier and Strier (2006) found that Ethiopian fathers were interested in participating in intervention programs related to school, but some stressed that “programs must take into account the values and traditions of the Ethiopian community and try to build a bridge between the host culture and that of their country of origin” (p. 110).

Acculturation Gaps Between Parents and Children as a Source of Stress. When engaging with immigrant and refugee parents, it is important to recognize that one source of stress for families relates to acculturation gaps between parents and children. Acculturation gaps often involve role reversals related to language wherein children take on more responsibilities than parents due to children’s more rapid acquisition of English proficiency. For instance, immigrant and refugee children often translate for their parents. While providing translation can help children retain their home language and speed up the acquisition of a new language, the resulting gaps in acculturation and role reversals can be a major source of stress for families (Adams & Kirova, 2006). Stress can also be caused by differences in the values upheld by parents and children because parents want their children to uphold values from their heritage culture, but children may act on values that are more consistent with mainstream U.S. culture (Arthur, 2000; Kirova & Adams, 2006).

Potential Challenges

The second common theme in the literature was potential challenges that family life educators may need to address to engage African families. Potential challenges included three subthemes: (a) language barriers; (b) barriers related to resettlement; and (c) limited, interrupted, and different experiences with formal education. Each of these subthemes is discussed in turn.

Language Barriers. Language barriers may be a significant barrier to engagement for African families. Often, when immigrant and refugee families engage with school personnel or family life educators, language barriers make these interactions more challenging. For example, language barriers are frequently cited as a reason that parents do not attend parent-teacher conferences (Georgis et al., 2014; Szente & Hoot, 2006; Vidali & Adams, 2006). Translation services are sometimes not available in these contexts (Szente & Hoot, 2006), or parents are unaware of how to request these services, which can frustrate parents and decrease their interest in engaging with these professionals in the future.

Barriers Related to Resettlement. Barriers that immigrant and refugee families face to becoming engaged in family life programs often relate specifically to the nature of resettlement. Resettling in a new country involves adjusting to a new way of life and being disconnected from the support system of friends and family one had in their country of origin (Georgis et al., 2014). Given the importance of extended family and community in African culture, being disconnected from these supports can significantly impact African immigrant and refugee families’ ability to participate in family life education (Arthur, 2000). Sometimes these barriers take the form of

practical concerns, such as not having childcare options for children who cannot be left home alone. Another common concern was transportation: families who did not own a vehicle may not have had transportation to programming without the help of extended family and friends, a support system that may not be available after resettlement.

Limited, Interrupted, and Different Experiences with Formal Education. It is important to note that some families had limited or interrupted experiences with formal education in their country of origin due to political restrictions or conflict; even well-educated families' experiences with formal education in their country of origin may be quite different from experiences in the U.S. education system. These factors can make the U.S. education system and its expectations (e.g., parent-teacher conferences) difficult to navigate for African immigrants (Adams & Kirova, 2006; Arthur, 2000; Dachyshyn, 2006; Kugler, 2011). For example, black South Africans' access to education was severely restricted under apartheid (Kugler, 2011), and many Ethiopian refugees' formal education was interrupted due to conflict (Arthur, 2000). Adams and Kirova (2006) noted that many immigrant parents were often less educated than the general population in their new country, which can make parents feel uncomfortable being involved in their children's schooling. Adams and Kirova's assertion about parents' educational attainment related to the broader immigrant population in the U.S., and this statement may hold true for some African immigrant and refugee families and not others. For example, Arthur (2000) noted that many African immigrants to the U.S. were well-educated, initially arriving in the U.S. to pursue higher education. While these immigrants have extensive experience with formal education, their experiences have likely differed from experiences in the U.S. education system due to political, geographic, and cultural differences that impact education.

Families' heritage cultures may also have different expectations regarding parent involvement in education; limited parental involvement in schooling is the norm in many immigrants' heritage cultures. In some cultures (including many African cultures), the responsibility for educating children lies mainly with the teacher (Georgis et al., 2014), and parents trust teachers to make decisions and, thus, refrain from being involved (Ghong et al., 2007; Roer-Strier & Strier, 2006). Parents support the work of teachers (for example, by making sure children complete their homework), but involvement at school (including asking questions of the teacher or visiting the school to meet with the teacher) may be perceived as a sign of disrespect. Parents show their respect for teachers by keeping their distance (Adams & Kirova, 2006; Kugler, 2011). The expectation in the U.S. that parents are present in the school building and interact with and question teachers can be very unfamiliar and uncomfortable for immigrant and refugee families, but it is not a sign of disengagement from their child's education.

Program Components

The third theme across the literature was program components that can be employed to help engage African families. Within this theme, four subthemes were identified: (a) reciprocity in

family engagement, (b) individualized or personalized communication with families, (c) leadership roles for families who have been engaged, and (d) cultural brokers.

Reciprocity in Family Engagement. Reciprocity in family engagement refers to the need for relationships between parents and family life educators to demonstrate mutual respect and responsiveness to one another. Parent engagement strategies that foster meaningful connections by incorporating families' cultural traditions can help parents feel like they have a place at the school or organization to advocate for their children's needs (Kugler, 2011). It is important to provide a space where parents can voice their needs and ideas, as well as share responsibility in parent engagement groups rather than simply fulfill roles defined by the school or organization, for example, by regularly volunteering in the classroom (Georgis et al., 2014). Adams and Kirova (2006) similarly stressed the importance of parents' voices being heard, especially with respect to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and ESL families' backgrounds.

Individualized or Personalized Communication with Families. When family life educators interact with immigrant and refugee families, it is essential that their communication with these families is personalized. Kugler (2011) noted that schools' efforts to engage immigrant and refugee families were often minimal (for example, hosting occasional multicultural events or providing written translations to documents), and as a result, schools missed important opportunities to engage with families in meaningful ways. Kugler asserted that personalized communication (for example, making a phone call to discuss something positive with the family) was necessary to build meaningful relationships with African families. In addition, Kirova and Adams (2006) argued that location matters, asserting that working with parents in their home community (rather than expecting them to come and interact at the school facility) can provide opportunities to reach a greater number of immigrant parents rather than waiting for parents to come to the school to engage with educators.

Leadership Roles for Families who Have Been Engaged. Providing leadership opportunities for parents who have been actively engaged in family life programs not only keeps those families engaged but also helps engage new families (Kugler, 2011). Zhang and Wei-Xiao (2006) found parent leadership to be critical to their success in a community-based education program. When parents have the opportunity to serve as leaders, they become more confident in their skills, more invested in the work they are doing, and more passionate about involving other parents in this important work.

Cultural Brokers. Cultural brokers are individuals who help build connections between persons from different cultural backgrounds by bridging cultural differences (for example, between African immigrant families and educators). Cultural brokering can involve interpretation or translation, but it also includes helping families and schools understand one another's expectations and norms (Georgis et al., 2014). As noted earlier, children often act as linguistic brokers for their families (Adams & Kirova, 2006), but cultural brokers from outside the family

can be especially helpful in facilitating meaningful relationships between family life educators and families. For example, Georgis and colleagues (2014) found that cultural insiders from a partnering agency acted as cultural brokers and helped build relationships between families and schools. Cultural brokers can help alleviate strain in relationships and break down barriers to involvement for families (Georgis et al., 2014).

Implications

The themes of culture, potential challenges, and program components identified in this review of the literature have important implications for human scientists and Extension professionals working with African immigrant and refugee families across a variety of content areas (see Table 2). Throughout this section, examples from different areas of Extension scholarship are used to exemplify how the proposed strategies can support programming across content areas.

Table 2. Recommendations for Extension Professionals and Human Scientists

Theme	Subtheme	Recommendations & Strategies for Professionals
Culture	High value of educational success	Recognize and incorporate the value of educational success by framing participation in terms of educational success.
	African cultural values	Incorporate and uphold values of respect, honesty, community, caring, and integrity when working with families.
	Importance of cultural capital	Work with families' broader cultural community to create programs that incorporate families' cultural capital. Provide opportunities for families to share their expertise to strengthen programs.
	Acculturation gaps as a source of stress	Attend to stress related to different rates of acculturation for parents and children.
Potential challenges	Language barriers	Provide interpretation and translation.
	Barriers related to resettlement	Provide transportation, childcare, and meals.
	Limited, interrupted, and different experiences of formal education	Recognize when families are uncomfortable engaging because of limited formal education. Provide additional supports for families as needed.
Program components	Reciprocity in family engagement	Provide opportunities for families to voice needs and generate ideas on how to address those needs.
	Individualized or personalized communication	Make personalized phone calls. Work with families in their home community to build relationships that increase capacity to identify resources to best meet family needs.
	Leadership roles for families	Provide families who have previously participated in workshops with opportunities to lead and teach others.
	Cultural brokers	Recruit cultural brokers who can help professionals and families better understand one another's expectations and norms to alleviate strain in relationships.

Culture

Understanding the high value African families place on students' educational success has important implications for human scientists and Extension professionals. Professionals who hope to engage African families could help families see how their programs help promote educational success. For example, by helping families understand that colleges and universities expect applicants to have participated in extracurricular activities both at school and in their community, Extension professionals can help engage families in youth development programming to promote families' goals of educational success for their children.

When working with African families, Extension professionals could benefit from recognizing and understanding common African cultural values of honesty, integrity, and respect. Upholding these values when interacting with families can foster stronger relationships with families in all areas of Extension programming. Core African values of community, social responsibility, and service seem especially relevant for Extension professionals in the area of community engagement and leadership. By working with African families in their community, professionals can engage families around the issues that families find most important and relevant within their community. Further, because of the importance of extended family relationships in African cultures, family engagement does not mean just engaging parents but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and possibly older siblings and cousins.

Valuing families' heritage culture and cultural capital involves recognizing and valuing the ways that the larger group benefits from families' unique experiences and perspectives. Researching families' heritage culture is one way that family life educators can better understand families' contexts in order to facilitate relationship-building with those families (Ghong et al., 2007). Immigrant and refugee families have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can be shared with the larger group for everyone's benefit (Kugler, 2011). In the case of African immigrants to the U.S., most are well-educated (Arthur, 2000), meaning that these families may strengthen various Extension programs through the expertise and social capital they bring to programs. For example, families may be well-educated in the area of public policy, which could strengthen programs aimed at community engagement and leadership. Even in cases when families have limited experience with formal education systems, their cultural capital has the potential to strengthen programs. For example, families from rural Ethiopia often supported themselves in their country of origin through farming, and parents have often taught these skills to their children (Roer-Strier & Strier, 2006). Extension professionals working in the area of agriculture or gardening could provide opportunities for these families to share their expertise as a means of strengthening their programming by including information on different agricultural practices. Further, working with the community in these ways can help family life educators create programs that effectively incorporate families' cultural capital (Roer-Strier & Strier, 2006).

Although at first glance, acculturation gaps between parents and children as a source of family stress may not seem relevant to many human scientists and Extension professionals, this theme has important implications for many professionals, including youth workers. Families experiencing stress related to parent-child acculturation gaps may be less likely to engage in certain youth development programming for fear of increased stress if they believe these programs may Americanize their children or devalue their heritage culture. By recognizing the gaps that exist between parents and children, youth workers can find ways to incorporate students' heritage culture into programming to help alleviate parents' concerns related to these gaps.

Potential Challenges

When working with African families, it is important for Extension professionals and human scientists to recognize language as a potential challenge that might arise and to find ways to conquer this challenge. Speaking quickly may make it difficult for non-native English speakers to understand what is being communicated. It is also important to remember that sometimes individuals understand English but may find it challenging to express themselves in English. Some families may be uncomfortable engaging in English-only programming, and it is important for Extension professionals to provide opportunities for families to engage regardless of their level of English proficiency. For example, when working with families in the area of financial literacy, Extension professionals can provide translators or interpreters to make information more accessible to families. Translators, interpreters, and other cultural insiders can also help Extension educators recognize cultural differences that may lead to questions in order to help educators develop culturally competent responses to questions, thereby increasing the efficacy of these programs.

Another potential challenge that Extension professionals and family scientists may need to address is resettlement. When families resettle in the U.S., their access to social support is often restricted because they are no longer living near extended family or friends who can assist with some barriers to engagement. For example, recently resettled families may not have childcare for children who are too young to attend programming or may not have assistance with transportation issues that arise. When engaging African immigrant and refugee families, Extension educators can increase their access to these programs by providing transportation and childcare for families who can attend.

Some, though certainly not all, African immigrant and refugee families may have limited or interrupted experiences with formal education due to political conflict in their country of origin. It is important to remember that in discussing African immigrants and refugees, one is talking about a collection of individuals from over 50 different countries with a multitude of differences. Thus, African immigrants' and refugees' experiences with education vary widely when these individuals enter the U.S., and family life educators must be attuned to this variability. Despite

high levels of education among some families, it is understandable why many African immigrant and refugee families may demonstrate low levels of engagement in traditional family life programs. Extension professionals should not assume the African families with whom they work have low levels of education, but they should be aware that this might be the case for some families depending on the specific circumstances surrounding their resettlement or choice to immigrate.

When working with families with limited experiences with formal education, family life educators could utilize visual models to make information more accessible. Visual models provide a representation of material that does not depend on understanding complex linguistic patterns and nuances, and they provide a concrete way in which families can connect to the material. Additionally, family life educators should exercise sensitivity in their interactions with families and operate from a strengths-based approach, which focuses on what families do have, rather than from a deficit approach.

Program Components

Family engagement is reciprocal in nature, and families must have opportunities to voice their concerns, needs, and ideas. Extension professionals working in a variety of areas (including community engagement and leadership, nutrition, and youth development) could all strengthen their programming by creating space for families to share responsibility in the design of programs. When families are able to articulate their needs and collaborate with professionals on ways to meet these needs, they are better able to see the benefits of Extension programming, thereby increasing their engagement.

Extension professionals in all program areas could increase family engagement through personalized communication. For example, by forming relationships with families that allow for personalized communication about each family's specific needs, Extension professionals working in the area of health and wellness could help families identify specific programs and events that could best address these needs. Another way that professionals can increase their personalized communication with families is to engage with families in their home community.

Providing leadership opportunities for families who have been engaged in family life programs not only helps continue their engagement in programming but also facilitates the recruitment of new families. For example, Extension professionals working in the area of gardening could provide opportunities for families from previous classes to lead a workshop in teaching some of the skills they learned to other families. In leading these sessions, previously engaged families demonstrate the usefulness of the skills being taught for newly engaged families. Further, when these families learn that they will be leading a session, they may ask other families from their community to attend events to support them, thereby increasing the number of families reached by that program.

Finally, cultural brokers can play an important role in Extension professionals' and human scientists' work. For example, cultural brokers can help cultural outsiders working in the area of nutrition to understand families' food preferences and their culture around food and mealtimes. Cultural brokers help family life educators and families bridge cultural divides to better understand one another's expectations and norms. By bridging these divides, cultural brokers break down barriers to family engagement and can help build trusting relationships between family life educators and families.

Limitations of Past Research and Future Directions

Despite a literature review designed to focus exclusively on family engagement in K-12 education and out-of-school-time for immigrant and refugee African families, the literature in this area often encompasses broader immigrant and refugee populations and contexts without an explicit focus on families' heritage cultures; some studies on immigrants and refugees, in general, were included in this review. It is clear that the family engagement literature often neglected the myriad of cultural nuances that differ between cultural groups and often approaches African immigrants as a unified group despite major variations in their cultural contexts. The most glaring limitation and need for future research in this area is the dearth of information on African immigrant and refugee families in general, and families from individual African countries and cultures specifically. It is recommended that researchers pay close attention to the contextual differences within these groups (for example, differences between immigrants, who relocate by choice, and refugees, who are forced to flee their countries of origin for safety). Although articles that focused on African Americans were excluded from the literature review, database searches often returned results that conflated the experiences of African Americans and African immigrants. African immigrants and African Americans come from significantly different social, historical, and cultural contexts, and their experiences are distinct from one another (Arthur, 2000). Future research on family engagement, in general, should distinguish between these groups and avoid conflating their experiences.

In reviewing the literature on family engagement with African families, it was also noted that while many articles provided general advice for engaging these families (for example, Szente & Hoot, 2006), less than half of the articles provided specific strategies for family engagement (for example, Georgis et al., 2014). It is recommended that researchers collaborate with professionals who are successfully building partnerships with African families and document specific action steps and processes that could be replicated by other professionals across the country.

Finally, it is important to note that a limitation of this literature review is that it included a relatively small sample of articles and book chapters. This small sample is related to the scarcity of research on African immigrants and refugees. Because of this small sample, the results of this literature review are quite broad. Although several researchers have explored providing family

life education to diverse families (e.g., Ballard & Taylor, 2011; Duncan & Goddard, 2016), it is unclear if these best practices are appropriate for African immigrant and refugee families because so little research has been done with this group; African immigrants and refugees are a diverse group in and of themselves. Further, these individuals are situated in a unique social location because of their race and status as immigrants or refugees. Thus, best practices for African Americans or other immigrant groups may not be effective with this group; further research is needed to identify best practices for this population.

Conclusion

The communities with whom Extension professionals and human scientists work are being influenced by the influx of immigrants and refugees from Africa. To support the work of professionals, a thorough review of the literature on family engagement in K-12 education and out-of-school-time with African families was undertaken, and three themes for this work emerged. Each of these themes has important implications for human scientists and Extension professionals, who should incorporate the understanding gained from these themes into their practice. By providing specific strategies and action steps for human scientists and Extension professionals who work with African immigrant and refugee families, this paper extends the literature on family engagement, providing valuable insights for professionals who work with African families, and lays important groundwork for future basic and applied research in this area.

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