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Mohamed Khalifa
Singaye Rwatwengabo
Pima Community College
Refugee Education Program

WRITING ABOUT LANGUAGE: VOICES FROM A COMMUNITY REFUGEE EDUCATION PROGRAM

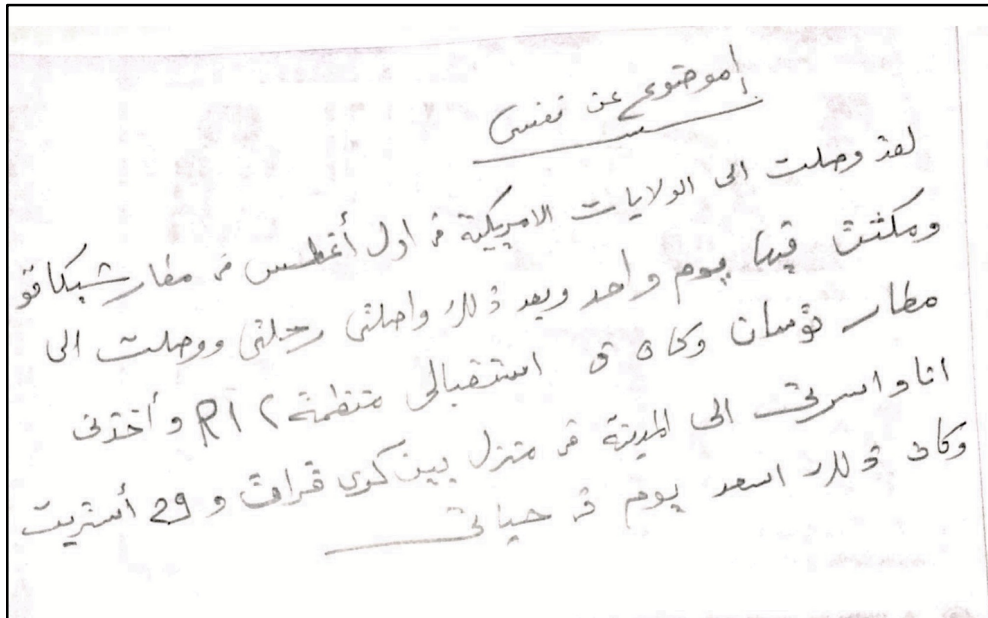
The Refugee Education Program at Pima Community College

The Refugee Education Program (REP) has been a part of the Tucson community for 40 years. It runs through Pima Community College as part of Adult Basic Education for College and Career (ABECC) and is funded by the Department of Economic Security's Refugee Resettlement Program. Refugees who have been in the country for less than five years are able to take advantage of free classes; afterwards, many transition to ELAA (English Language Acquisition for Adults) classes or to credited Pima classes and training programs. Our job as REP instructors is to prepare people for their first job in the U.S. as well as provide a pathway into the mainstream adult basic education system.

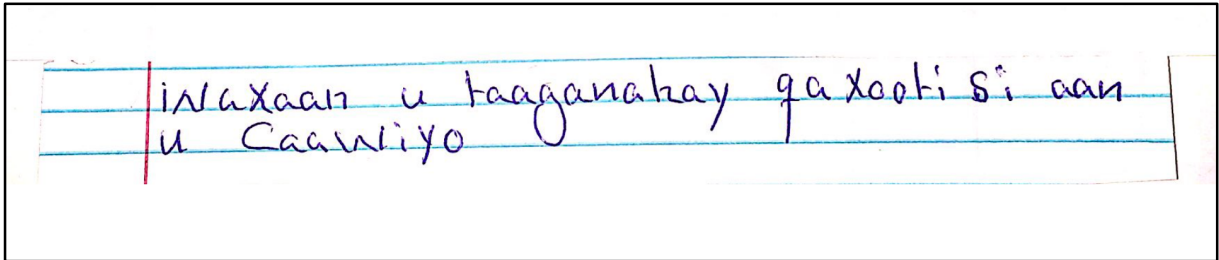
Two thirds of our students are adult L2 emergent readers. We provide three levels of instruction: Emergent Readers, Low Beginning, and High Beginning. These students' writings are from a High Beginning class. Following the Continuum of Literacy Acquisition, this community education program considers students "high beginning" if they have a 2nd-3rd grade reading and writing level and can communicate verbally about basic day-to-day needs. I came across the

request for entries from *CMS* and thought that the idea of students writing about language would be relatable and interesting to them. Since students at this level can struggle with confidence in their writing skills, I was excited to see that the submissions could be in their native language. The students were very motivated to express themselves, and wrote about language broadly. For example, one student copied the lyrics to his favorite song, explaining that it gave him peace and comfort.

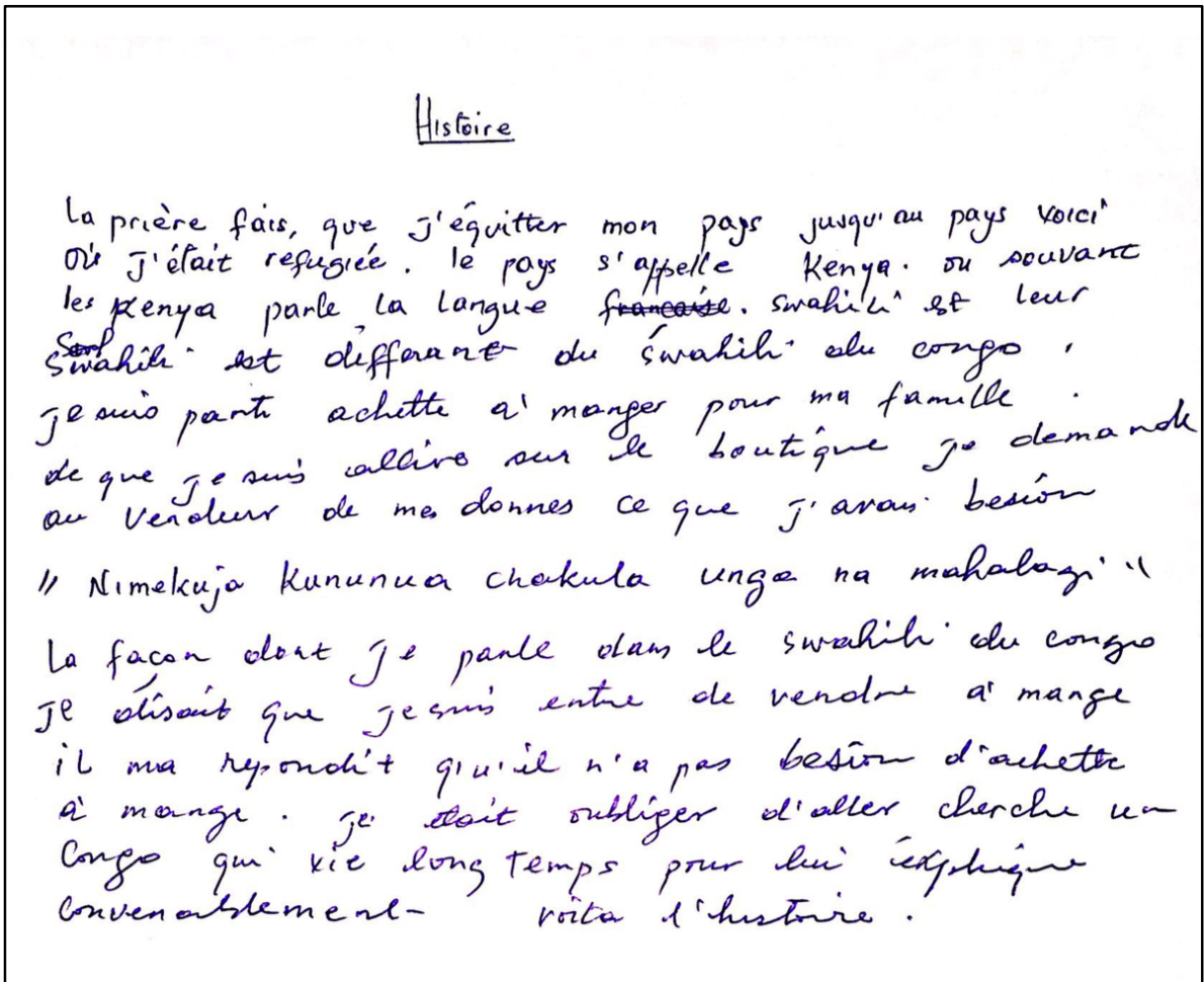
As a teacher, I feel that giving students the opportunity to express themselves in their native language is very important. It emphasizes the idea that their culture has value and does not need to be forgotten or cast aside in this new country, while obviously reaffirming the importance of continuing to teach and practice their language with their own children. The students selected represent a spectrum of age and life experience. Mohamed is a single man in his 20s, living with his sister. Singaye is in his 40s and has four children. Yaya had four wives and sixteen children in Sudan; he is a senior citizen who attends two classes each day and often studies at the nearby local library. Having their voices heard and celebrated in this journal honors their resilience, strength and commitment to education.



In the text above, Yaya, 60, from Sudan, writes about his journey from his native country to Tucson, Arizona.



Mohamed, 28, from Somalia, writes that he is studying in the Refugee Education Program so that one day he can help others.



Singaye, 39, from the Congo, tells a story about an experience he had in another African country, where he was speaking Swahili, but the words "buy" and "sell" were translated differently in the two countries, creating confusion at the market.

Clare Cox has been a certified educator in Tucson, Arizona, for over 20 years. She received her BA (Elementary Education) and MA (Language, Reading and Culture) from the University of Arizona and has worked mainly in Early Childhood, including five years as an ELD (English Language Development) Kindergarten teacher. Ms. Cox has been an instructor with the Refugee Education Program since 2017.