



Critical Literature Review

The Role of Educators in Supporting the Development of Refugee Students' Sense of Belonging

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ABSTRACT. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2018a) designates North America as a top destination for immigrants and refugees; it had received approximately 22.5 million refugees by the end of 2017, over half of which were school-aged (Lemke & Nickerson, 2020). This intake sparked our interest in exploring the role of schools in, and barriers to, the development of refugee students' sense of belonging. The current paper reports upon a literature review conducted using thematic analysis with a critical viewpoint. A total of 25 peer-reviewed articles were included. Our research led to the emergence of four key themes: culturally responsive teacher training; culturally relevant and trauma-informed pedagogy; academic and socio-emotional support; and the impact of first language (L1) and home culture in the development of a sense of belonging. The findings of our literature review reveal an immense need to establish policy on trauma-informed, refugee education-focused professional development for teachers who work with refugees directly. Moreover, we identify a lack of culturally responsive resources and strategies for supporting the academic and socio-emotional needs of this marginalized population. Our research highlights the importance of parental involvement; positive acculturation; peer support; and teacher-student relationships, along with a need to reduce discrimination by educators, classmates, and community, in order to support the development of refugee students' sense of belonging in the school environment.

RÉSUMÉ. Le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés a désigné l'Amérique du Nord comme la destination la plus populaire pour les immigrants et les réfugiés. Vers la fin 2017, l'Amérique du Nord aurait accueilli environ 22,5 millions de réfugiés dont plus que la moitié étaient en âge de fréquenter l'école (Lemke & Nickerson, 2020). Cette statistique a suscité notre intérêt à explorer le rôle des écoles dans le développement du sentiment d'appartenance des élèves réfugiés, ainsi que les obstacles à ce développement. Cet article rend compte d'une recension des écrits utilisant une analyse thématique et un point de vue critique. Nous avons revu un total de 25 articles évalués par les pairs. À la suite à notre recherche, quatre thèmes principaux se sont présentés : la formation des enseignants tenant compte des besoins de diverses cultures, la pédagogie tenant compte aussi bien des traumatismes que des besoins culturels, le soutien académique et socio-émotionnel, et l'influence de la langue première et de la culture familiale sur le développement d'un sentiment d'appartenance. Selon les résultats de notre recension des écrits, il s'avère très important d'établir une politique particulière au perfectionnement professionnel axée sur l'éducation des réfugiés et tenant compte des traumatismes pour les enseignants qui travaillent directement avec les réfugiés. De plus, nous avons identifié un manque de ressources et de stratégies adaptées aux besoins académiques et



socio-émotionnels de ce secteur marginalisé de la population. Notre recherche souligne l'importance de la participation des parents ; d'une acculturation positive; du soutien des pairs; et des relations positives entre enseignants et leurs élèves, ainsi que la nécessité de réduire la discrimination de la part des enseignants, des camarades de classe et de la communauté afin de favoriser le développement d'un sentiment d'appartenance des élèves-réfugiés envers le milieu scolaire.

Keywords: *education, sense of belonging, refugees, trauma, language, home culture, teacher training.*

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2018a) has designated Canada as a top destination for immigrants and hard-to-settle refugees. As per UNHCR estimates, there were 22.5 million refugees displaced worldwide by the end of 2017, over half of which were under the age of 18 (Lemke & Nickerson, 2020). In 2019, Canada resettled 30,082 refugees (UNHCR, 2020), resulting in increasing refugee populations in schools, as well as calls for more robust support systems to meet refugee students' diverse academic and socio-emotional needs.

A student's sense of belonging includes many facets: their level of attachment, or personal investment in the school; their commitment to, or compliance with school rules and expectations; their involvement in and engagement with school academics and extracurricular activities; and their belief in their school values (Wehlage et al., 1989). Different aspects of a sense of belonging, shown in Figure 1 below, play a crucial role in supporting students' wellbeing and academic success. The importance of a sense of belonging is heightened when students are new to the school environment, come from a traumatized background, and/or have limited or no school experience, as is often the case with refugees.

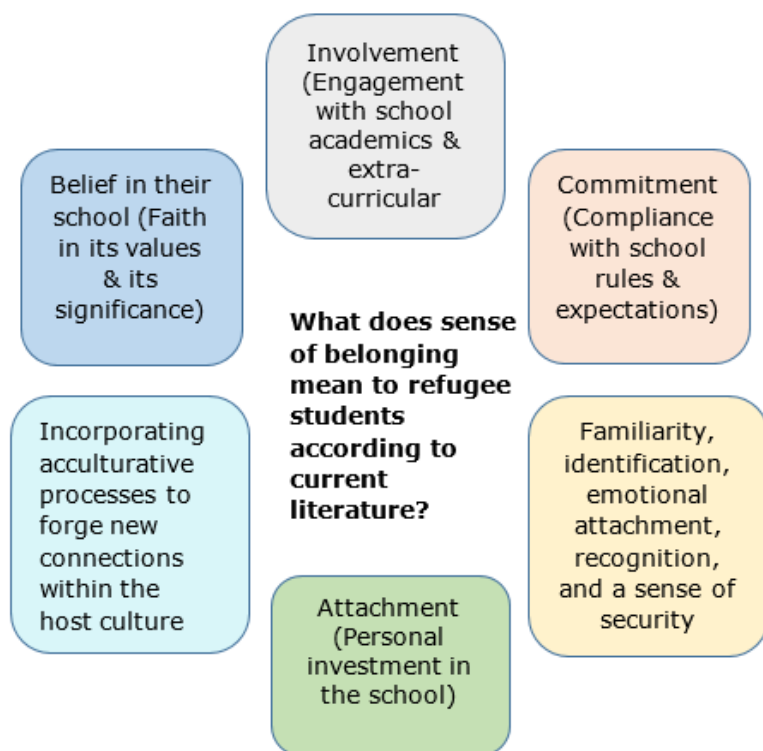


Figure 1: Different Definitions of Sense of Belonging in the Literature

Integration in school has been identified as a critical aspect of refugee students' settlement needs (Guo et al., 2019). Our research on this topic provides insight into how educators have implemented support for these students and identifies potential barriers that need to be addressed in order to support the integration of this marginalized student population. Research in this field in the North American context is emergent, responding to the increase of the refugee populations in Canada and the United States during the last decade (UNHCR 2018a).

In this critical literature review, we have focused on school support in, and barriers to, the development of refugee students' sense of belonging in educational settings. Refugees may be forced to leave their homes and countries for many reasons, such as war, violence, family separation, loss of loved ones, and psychological challenges that drove them into this flight (Brewer, 2016). Most young refugees arrive in their host countries with social, emotional, physical, and psychological developmental difficulties; having undergone traumatic experiences, such as torture, persecution, violent civil discord, arbitrary abductions, sexual abuse, the loss of loved ones, imprisonment, disease, and starvation; and having spent time in refugee camps or Third World countries (Tavares & Slotin, 2012). We recognize the need to explore the extent of the multifaceted support educators can provide to the refugee student population.

In this article, we aim to offer educators a better understanding of the various facets of a sense of belonging and to provide evidence-based strategies to support refugee students' integration.



As educators with direct experience teaching refugee and immigrant students, we performed this inquiry with a critical approach that allowed us to locate significant gaps in the theoretical and practical implementation of support strategies and policies in schools. This critical literature review also flags areas that require further attention to initiate a meaningful and necessary discussion in our scholarly community.

METHODOLOGY

In our critical literature review, we analyzed empirical studies thematically using a qualitative approach. We focused on qualitative research articles published between 2010 and 2021, as arrival of refugees in Canada increased significantly during this period, after the onset of the Syrian war in 2011. It was this particular context that sparked our interest in evaluating the needs, support, and barriers within refugee education.

Literature Search and Selection Process

To initiate our literature review, we applied the search terms "sense of belonging in refugee and immigrant students," "refugee students," and "immigrant students," to the University of Calgary Library; Google Scholar; EBSCO (Academic Search Complete); ERIC (EBSCO); Ebook Central; EBSCOHost (eBook Collection); Education Research Complete; ResearchGate; Sage Journals; and SpringerLink databases. After a preliminary review of 50 articles, the breadth of literature seemed too broad for a meaningful and focused review. Therefore, we narrowed our scope to a North America. Since different countries have different approaches and policies to support refugee populations, we decided to refine on one region. Finally, we selected a list of 25 peer-reviewed articles that met our criteria (i.e., articles about refugee students in a North American context that focused on their school experiences). This selection of articles was rooted in the following research questions:

- a) In what ways do education systems in North America support the development and maintenance of refugee students' home language, culture, and sense of belonging during their integration into the new school environment?
- b) What are some barriers that affect the implementation of academic and socio-emotional support for refugee students?

We used a thematic analysis approach to perform our critical literature review. As Andrews (2019) notes, thematic analysis is aimed at identifying, examining, and recording patterns within data. She defines themes as "patterns across datasets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated with a specific research question" (p. 1). A critical review aims to "inform other scholars about the weaknesses of prior research and strengthen knowledge development by giving focus and direction to studies for further improvement" (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017, p. 168).

Our analysis of the 25 articles revealed the following four themes: culturally responsive teacher training; culturally relevant and trauma-informed pedagogy; academic and socio-emotional



support; and impact of first language (L1) and home culture in the development of the sense of belonging.

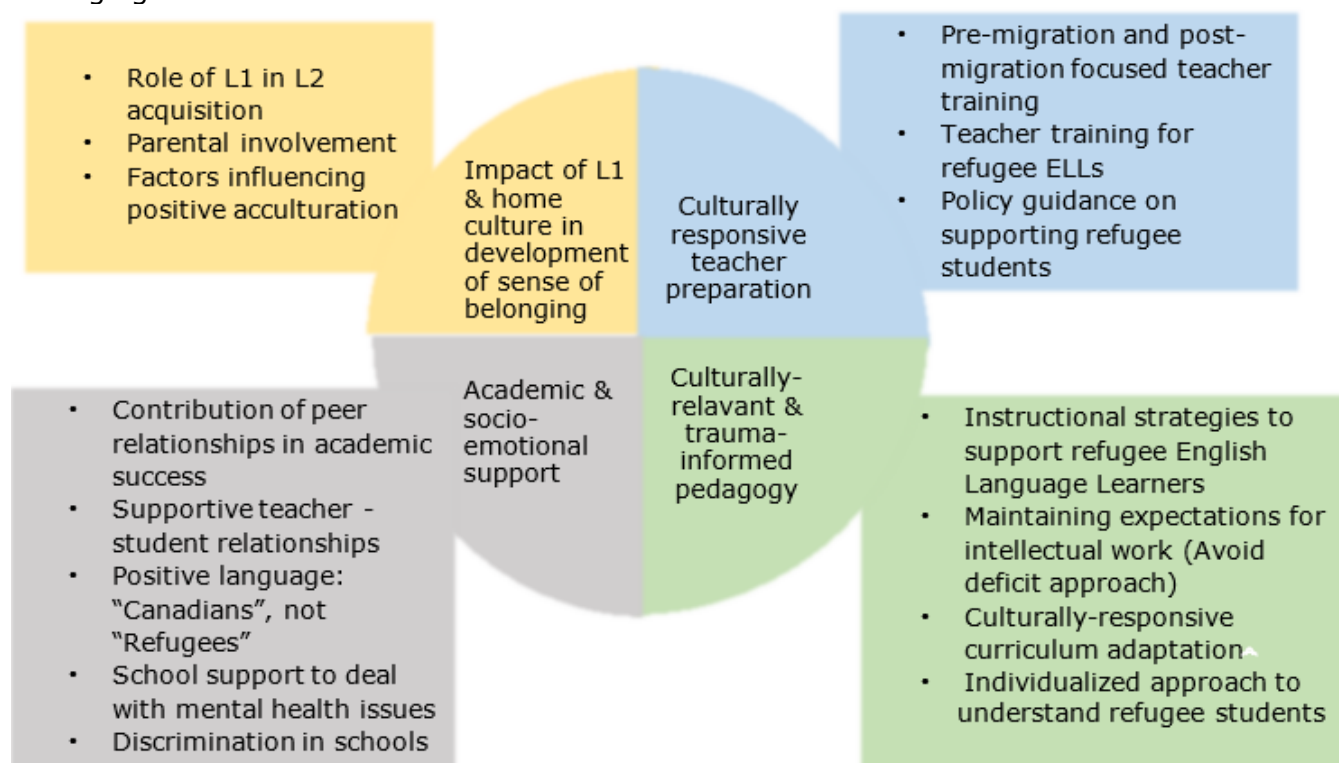


Figure 2: Overview of General and Micro Themes

Within each theme, we identified micro-themes, as illustrated in Figure 2 above. The articles we reviewed are shown in Table 1 below, according to the theme and micro theme we identified.

General Theme	Micro Theme	Articles
Culturally responsive teacher training	Pre-migration and post-migration focused teacher-training	Deroo et al. (2017); Ficarra, (2017); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); MacNevin (2012); Mayor (2019); Stewart et al. (2019)
	Teacher-training for refugee ELLs	Brewer (2016); Stewart et al. (2019); Symons & Ponzio (2019)
	Policy guidance on refugee students support	Brewer (2016); Ficarra (2017); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); MacNevin (2012)



Culturally relevant and trauma-informed pedagogy	Instructional strategies to support refugee English Language Learners	MacNevin (2012); Miles & Bailey-Mckenna (2016); Shahbazi et al. (2020); Stewart et al. (2019); Symons & Ponzio (2019); Tweedie et al. (2017); Walick & Sullivan (2015)
	Maintaining expectations for intellectual work (Avoid deficit approach)	Brewer (2016); Fruja Amthor & Roxas (2016); Guo et al. (2019); Lemke & Nickerson (2020); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Roxas & Roy (2012); Tweedie et al. (2017)
	Culturally responsive curriculum adaptation	Deroo et al. (2017); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); Mendenhall & Bartlett (2018); Miles & Bailey-McKenna (2016); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Ridley et al. (2019)
	Individualized approach to understand refugee students	Guo et al. (2019); Lemke & Nickerson (2020); MacNevin (2012); Mayor, (2019); Mendenhall & Bartlett (2018)
Academic and socio-emotional support	Role of peer relationships in academic success	Brewer (2016); Fruja Amthor & Roxas (2016); Mendenhall & Bartlett, (2018); Shahbazi et al. (2020); Walick & Sullivan (2015)
	Supportive teacher-student relationships	Fruja Amthor & Roxas (2016); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); Ridley et al. (2019); Shahbazi et al. (2020); Walick & Sullivan (2015)
	School support to meet mental health needs	Guo et al. (2019); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); Mayor (2019); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Shahbazi et al (2020); Sullivan & Simonson (2015); Tyrer & Fazel (2014); Walick & Sullivan (2015)
	Discrimination in schools	Brewer (2016); Guo et al. (2019); Massfeller & Hamm (2019); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Selimos & Daniel (2017); Symons & Ponzio (2019); Walick & Sullivan (2015)



Impact of L1 and home culture in developing their sense of belonging	Role of L1 in L2 acquisition	Brewer (2016); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Ridley et al. (2019); Walick & Sullivan (2015); Shahbazi et al (2020);
	Parental involvement	Ficarra (2017); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Walick & Sullivan (2015)
	Factors influencing positive acculturation	Feuerverger (2011); Linder et al. (2020); Moinolnolki & Han (2017); Shahbazi et al (2020); Symons & Ponzio (2019)

Table 1: Micro Themes within the General Themes in the Literature

LITERATURE REVIEW

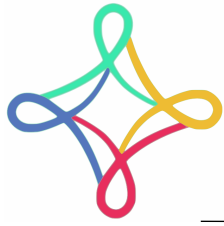
In this section, we share our critical review of the articles according to the themes and micro-themes identified in Table 1.

Culturally Responsive Teacher Training

Many studies recognize the need for teacher preparation and training to support the specific and diverse needs of incoming refugee students. Many teachers, including ourselves, report that pre-service coursework does not address practical ways of supporting refugee students, nor does it reflect the realities of refugee students' experiences and struggles in the classroom (MacNevin, 2012). Here, we elaborate on recommendations in some areas of teacher preparation programs to enhance refugee students' support.

Pre-migration and post-migration focused teacher training

A first step towards culturally responsive teacher preparation is teacher awareness of the circumstantial differences between immigrant and refugee students. A possible difficulty in distinguishing these populations may be pre-service teachers' limited engagement with refugee students (Deroo et al., 2017). To bridge this disparity, pre-service teachers should learn about specific refugee groups living in the area of the school they attend, for example, by volunteering with these populations (Ficarra, 2017). More importantly, pre-service and teacher-training programs should mandate a focus on refugee students' experiences with pre-migration and post-migration, trauma (Stewart, 2019), and language learning (MacNevin 2012; Brewer, 2016). Administrators play an important role in supporting teachers in meeting the needs of refugee students by providing relevant training and professional development opportunities. More importantly, administrators can work towards allowing adequate time and flexibility in the teacher training program to ensure teachers' engagement with culturally and linguistically appropriate teaching strategies (Ridley et al., 2019). Recent work by Massfeller and Hamm (2019) advocates professional learning on diversity, war, and immigration in order to understand refugee students' experiences within diverse classrooms.



Teacher training for refugee English Language Learners (ELLs)

Teacher training is a core factor in ensuring adequate preparation for teaching the English language to refugee populations. Symons and Ponzio (2019) found it challenging for teachers to provide sustained and systematic language and literacy instruction for newcomers when they have not been adequately trained to teach English as a Second Language (ESL). Research by Stewart et al. (2019) also reveals the need for educators to receive training in supporting refugee students' language learning, while teaching a curriculum with the necessary resources, such as age-appropriate materials which address their diverse educational needs. Teachers identified a need for right support with teaching literacy specifically, which involves knowing how to teach basic reading skills and finding age-appropriate resources that can be used to teach intermediate and high school refugee students (MacNevin, 2012).

Lack of policy guidance on supporting refugee students

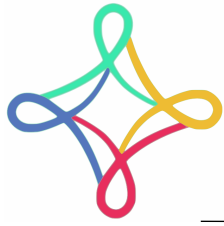
Not only do teachers have limited training in refugee education, they also cited a lack of policies and resources for supporting the needs of refugee students (MacNevin, 2012), both pre-service and in-service. Policymakers need to consult the relevant research and understand successful strategies that support refugee students' learning before developing policies in refugee education (Brewer, 2016). For example, fostering refugee students' social connections and relationships is beneficial for their academic success and engagement in school (Stermac et al., 2010) and school-level policies should promote these relationships.

Moreover, the age at which refugee students enter the North American school system should be considered, as it substantially impacts academic success (Brewer, 2016). Refugee students may not have the same amount of time to build toward success as other students due to interrupted schooling as a result of resettlement or other factors that impede their attendance and learning (Brewer, 2016). Addressing this in policy would make school administrators and teachers aware of their important role in facilitating student adjustment to a new education environment in order to succeed (Brewer, 2016). Teachers can address learning gaps by administering assessments that identify students' current levels of achievement (e.g., literacy and numeracy screening) and then respond by creating lessons that pick up from students' current level of understanding.

Another gray area highlighted in current literature is the exclusion of the voice of the marginalized themselves and the stakeholders working with them. Rather, policies and practices are established and maintained by dominant members of society who have limited direct experience with the subjects in discussion (Brewer, 2016). Overall, our research inquiry found insufficient scholarly discourse surrounding policy guidance on refugee students.

Culturally Relevant and Trauma-informed Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is described by Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016) as the creation of school experiences that allow students to excel without abandoning their culture. Refugees'

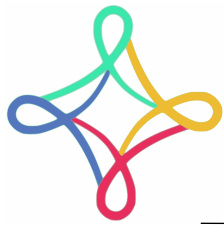


academic success is influenced by “disrupted schooling, economic difficulties, psychosocial challenges, and adjusting to a new culture and environment” (Stewart, 2019, p. 59). Refugee children are subject to various challenges, including learning English and adapting to new educational and cultural contexts upon arriving in a resettlement country (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). The literature emphasizes that teachers should provide trauma-informed practice when working with refugee students (Tweedie et al., 2017), signalling a need for professional development and training with a focus on trauma specific to refugee students. Educators who are trained in trauma-informed practice have professional learning in socio-emotional learning, and share a common language about creating welcoming, supportive, caring, respectful, and safe schools (Alberta Education, 2021). Research by Mayor (2019) found that refugee trauma is different from other forms of trauma as it is ongoing and recurring, as opposed to a singular traumatic event. To address this, professional learning should not be limited to a single session. Rather, it should include frequent opportunities for discussion, training, feedback, and support for those supporting refugees (Mayor, 2019). Culturally relevant and trauma-informed pedagogy requires educators to commit to ongoing professional learning to ensure they are equipped with strategies to support the integration of refugee learners in their classrooms.

Instructional strategies to support refugee English Language Learners

Teachers can plan for the success of their refugee learners by incorporating universal and targeted instructional strategies in the classroom that focus on language instruction. An effective ELL program is considered culturally responsive when it builds upon the existing language, culture, and unique experiences of each student (Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2016). The inclusion of students L1, culture, country of origin, and lived experiences would make the curriculum and instruction more relevant for refugee students (Symons & Ponzio, 2019).

The school system’s emphasis on language-based activities as indicators of success is problematic as it disproportionately favors native speakers over newcomers (Symons & Ponzio, 2019). For example, the emphasis on standardized tests for assessment of student learning poses a significant barrier to English language learners (Symons & Ponzio, 2019). Refugee students’ limited-to-no English language skills pose a barrier to learning grade-level curriculum content and threaten their overall success in school (Massfeller & Hamm, 2019; Symons & Ponzio, 2019). Programs such as the “Literacy, English and Academic Development” (LEAD) in Calgary, Alberta provide an opportunity for refugee students to accelerate their learning in an environment that is trauma-sensitive (e.g., maintaining a regular routine and focusing on socio-emotional learning), where they can improve their language skills in order to participate in more advanced English language learning (ELL) content area classes (Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2016). Educators in this program are trained in trauma-informed practice and are encouraged to support students with coping mechanisms. This addresses the need for resources and training in trauma-informed education and English language learning expressed by teachers and school leaders (Stewart et al., 2019), that ultimately supports bridging refugee students into mainstream classes.

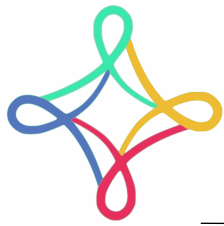


The structure of the learning environment and classroom design may also affect English language learning, impacting both content delivery and student responsiveness (Shahbazi et al., 2020). In one example, English language learners from different backgrounds across various grades were put together in one classroom for language instruction, resulting in a noisy and chaotic learning environment (Shahbazi et al., 2020). The participants of the study favored smaller group sizes within individual grade levels to promote a structured learning environment. Furthermore, Tweedie et al. (2017) found that predictability and structure in routines within a safe and secure environment are critical to supporting students from war-torn environments, who have experienced severe or disrupted attachment and instability in their lives.

In order to support the English language acquisition of refugee students, teachers should consider the positive or negative interactions between the student's home language and the target language (i.e., English). One study of Somali youth in U.S. schools found that students gained English language skills at the same rates as other learners, likely because of parallels in language structures (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). However, when faced with unfamiliar instruction materials and curriculum content, the students struggled to engage in the lessons and felt that their culture was not valued. Therefore, both language teaching and culturally relevant content are necessary elements in instructional strategies.

Maintaining expectations for intellectual work

Deficit frameworks may prevent educators from engaging with refugee youth in genuine learning (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). For instance, demonstrating care by lowering expectations for refugee students' work is counterproductive and may impede the academic achievement of refugee students. To counteract this, teachers should capitalize on refugee students' strengths (Guo et al., 2019), such as their unique funds of knowledge and multilingualism (Ridley et al., 2019), and adopt an asset approach to plan differentiated and inclusive instructions. Additionally, deficit thinking may perpetuate discriminatory beliefs and practices. To provide a fair and non-judgmental environment, refugee students should be placed in appropriate grades and academic streams rather than assume based on their language proficiency, that they should be in lower academic programs (Brewer, 2016). Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016) highlight how overlooking lower-quality work by refugee students, due to language barriers or lack of prior content knowledge, could result in a lack of academic opportunities for these students. Rather, refugee students benefit from teachers who are genuinely caring and empathetic, and who have an interest in the student and their experiences. Arguably, being a "culturally relevant pedagogue" (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016, p. 167) and adopting the attitude that all students are capable, is as important as ensuring lessons are culturally relevant. In addition to providing culturally relevant instruction, teachers need to take the time to learn about and acknowledge students' pasts by being open to hearing students' personal stories of trauma and their survival, and by celebrating their resilience (Stewart, 2017).



Culturally responsive curriculum adaptation

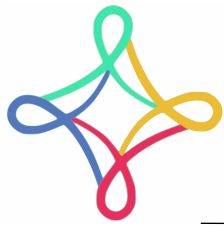
Educators may be reluctant to adapt the curriculum and pedagogy for refugee students (Massfeller & Hamm, 2019), or they may not have adequate training, support, or resources to do so, which is problematic. Work by Walick and Sullivan (2015) found that fostering student engagement by integrating familiar topics into lessons and linking the curriculum to refugee students' interests and experiences was one successful approach to ensuring meaningful and relevant delivery of content. Culturally relevant curriculum adaptation is responsive to student needs and ideas, offering them validation as persons whose thoughts and ideas matter in the classroom (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). To engage refugee students' existing knowledge, teachers are encouraged to design projects and lessons that acknowledge student's diverse experiences, knowledge-base, and backgrounds, leading them to meaningful participation and engagement (Ridley et al., 2019). For example, the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) discussed by Moinolnolki and Han (2017) combines the host culture's educational approaches with aspects of the students' home culture and educational philosophy. Educators can adopt this model of teaching to help bridge the transition to a new formal education system, while maintaining some familiarity with the home country's educational system. Similarly, MacNevin (2012) recommends that building on students' previous experience and knowledge positively impacts their learning. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to get to know their students, assess pre-existing knowledge, and culturally adapt the curriculum to individual needs so that every student feels recognized and included in the system.

Individualized approach to understanding refugee students

Teachers should recognize refugee students' knowledge base while identifying areas in which they require more support. Educators expressed an interest in receiving more information regarding refugee students' background, educational experience, and interests prior to starting in the classroom (MacNevin, 2012; Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018). Information relating to "academic skills, abilities, and learning needs" and "experiences, [...], customs and traditions" (MacNevin, 2012, p. 58) may promote an individualized approach as opposed to generalizing student backgrounds or stereotyping based on factors such as country of origin or viewing refugee students and immigrant students as the same.

Certain challenges, such as changes in accommodation during resettlement, can impact school attendance and result in disproportionately high drop-out rates (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). It is crucial that educators have an understanding of each student's circumstances in order to better support them. Because educators observe students' behavior in structured and unstructured settings, they are in a position to identify students who may be experiencing difficulties (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). Current trauma training models neglect the classroom teacher and are instead focused on the school psychologist, social workers, or external clinicians (Mayor, 2019).

In a discussion on bullying undergone by Syrian refugee students, the children expressed that they were subject to stereotypical treatment by classmates as well as teachers because of their



refugee label or because they were from Syria (Guo et al., 2019). Students' complaints to teachers about discriminatory remarks by classmates were dismissed or minimized. Educators require training in socio-emotional development (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014) and anti-racist education to prevent further discrimination. Curriculum focused on socio-emotional learning (for example, the PATHS program) can help establish a positive classroom environment.

Lastly, trauma-informed educators need to understand that refugee students' experiences of adversity vary greatly, as do their attachment to a racial, ethnic, national, gender, or linguistic group (Lemke & Nickerson, 2020). Each student arrives in the classroom with unique experiences and backgrounds, and it is the role of educators to get to know each student as an individual, and plan for their success accordingly.

Academic and Socio-emotional Support

Refugee students have been reported to enter our educational institutions with three major types of interrelated kinds of stress, namely, migration stress, acculturation stress, and traumatic stress (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). As a result, teachers may have refugee students with intensified academic or behavioral issues, especially during initial phases of resettlement. Along with providing culturally relevant and trauma-informed instruction, educators can play a crucial role in managing the acculturative stress that emerges during the resettlement process, as the subjects are prone to adjustments to a new environment and culture. How educators can provide academic and socio-emotional support to reduce this manageable stress experienced by most of the refugee students is discussed under the following micro-themes.

Role of peer relationships in academic success

Academic achievements, attitudes towards school, labor market outcomes, and future income attainment are some of the common considerations for the criteria of academic success of students, in general. Despite several barriers to their education, for instance, lack of time spent in schools, language barriers, racism, etc., refugee students have been reported to express a strong desire to excel in school and pursue post-secondary education to obtain employment (Brewer, 2016). Especially during the initial phase of their school integration, peer support becomes a great means of social connections required for the academic engagement of refugee students in school (Brewer, 2016). Such academically engaged co-ethnic peers may be a helpful resource for navigating, understanding, and adapting to the new school environment, along with supporting refugee students during emotionally isolating and draining experiences stemming from possible discriminating and racist social exposures (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). Therefore, schools can play an important role in promoting social cohesion by providing peer-training opportunities to help newcomer refugees combat the xenophobia and bullying they face during the initial phases of their resettlement in their host countries (Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018). This may also ease hesitation to participate in curricular and extracurricular activities and may eventually contribute to fading feelings of isolation and differentiation. However, as a negative consequence, refugee students' placement with "similar" peers may engender their exclusion and social segregation from "real Canadians," which may produce feelings of



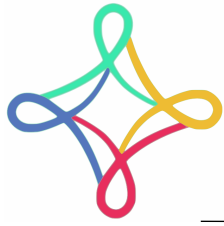
stigmatization and marginality (Selimos & Daniel, 2017, p. 92). As strong pillars of this support system, teachers should encourage such peer relationships in order to communicate and understand appropriate behavioral expectations, especially for those with limited or no school experiences (Shahbazi et al., 2020).

Supportive teacher-student relationships

Approaching student learning through the development of healthy teacher-student relationships is an important component of holistic education. Massfeller and Hamm (2019) reported refugee students coming to their classrooms with significant histories of trauma, educational gaps, and difficulty trusting strangers, especially authority figures. Outside of family, much acculturation occurs at schools and thus, is considered the most important context of socialization. On an important note, refugee ELLs often report a greater sense of belonging in school when they have good relationships with teachers (Ridley et al., 2019). A good relationship with refugee students involves teachers' willingness to become genuinely interested in students' lived experiences, and commitment to creating classrooms that celebrate their strengths (Ridley et al., 2019). By having genuine knowledge of their students' unique cultural characteristics and resettlement needs, teachers can build better relationships that may ease refugee students' adjustment process by directing them to appropriate programming and services (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). To enhance the academic and socio-emotional stability of newcomer students, Moinolnolki and Han (2017) recommend appointing professionally trained bilingual teachers specialized in addressing refugees' specific needs. However, Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016) identified some factors, like language barriers and different cultural scripts, that inform youth behaviour and impact the newcomer students' relationship with monolingual teachers in a way that may halt smooth integration into the school system. Those authors propose multicultural education as a driving force to strengthen genuine and sensible teacher-student relationships. Another strategy that may facilitate academic engagement and develop positive relationships with the refugee students is respecting refugee children's fund of knowledge and connecting curriculum and the cultural context of the school to their home culture (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). Moreover, to provide opportunities for mutual understanding in stable and culturally inclusive environments, educators should encourage refugee students to share their views and prior school experiences (Shahbazi et al., 2020). This strategy may aid the identification and acknowledgment of discrepancies between prior and current behavioral and disciplinary expectations, allowing them to be properly understood and addressed (Shahbazi et al., 2020).

School support to meet mental health needs

It has been reported that, after arriving in their host country, almost half (45%) of Syrian refugees displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, both of which may cause learning disabilities among children (Guo et al., 2019). In similar research, the academic achievement of the refugee population has been shown to be dependent on their individual mental health status (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017); therefore, schools have been considered vital to primary prevention in mental health care for refugee students (Sullivan & Simonson, 2015). Besides academic issues, the challenges of adjusting to migration can



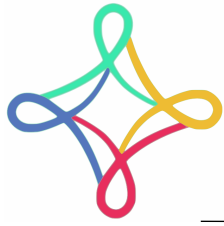
aggravate pre-existing mental disorders resulting from traumatizing and violent pre-migration experiences (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). More specifically, the loss of family and home during migration can lead to aggressive behaviors, depression, and psychological instability, which may further escalate feelings of isolation and negative self-worth (Shahbazi et al., 2020).

This implies that more psycho-emotional support is needed for refugee students in schools. Some mentionable barriers to providing this required support are inadequate professional development and training, lack of experience with PTSD, and racial discrimination (Guo et al., 2019) in a school environment. As a primary responsibility of school boards and provincial health systems collaboratively, multi-tiered mental health programs would not only support refugee students' socio-emotional needs, but they may also strengthen them to show better academic engagement (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). Culturally relevant, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), and relaxation techniques have been suggested to improve students' behavioral, emotional, and academic problems, teach social skills, and prevent school dropout (Walick & Sullivan, 2015), and, more specifically, to facilitate refugee students' recovery from their past traumatic experiences. Verbal processing interventions like Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Narrative Exposure Therapy, and Interpersonal Therapy have been recommended in Tyrer and Fazel's (2014) study. However, they recognized the limited data available on the resources and guidance for using such treatments in schools. While school psychologists may also play a crucial role through cultural awareness and by guiding school staff to better meet the needs of the refugee population (Walick & Sullivan, 2015), teachers themselves could be trained to provide individualized interventions rather than classroom or whole school approaches (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014).

Discrimination in schools

During their resettlement process in the host country, many refugee students report discrimination by their peers, teachers, staff, and even police (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). Some students express their teachers as having biased and negative attitudes, low expectations, or apathy towards them (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). Refugee students also might be facing a teacher's lack of cultural sensitivity, preconceived notions about students' cultural backgrounds, and stereotyping them as "deficient"; "inferior"; "preliterate"; "clannish"; and "backward" (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017, p. 4). In refugee camps, humanitarian aid organizations, and English language classrooms, the refugees are sometimes positioned as 'objects of aid and objects of sponsorship' and perceived through a deficit lens within their "victim" narratives (Symons & Ponzio, 2019, p. 99). Many teachers and newcomer refugee youth reported that not only them, but even their schools were often seen as poor, non-academic, drug-riddled, and violent (Selimos & Daniel, 2017).

As an expected remedial place, if schools do not provide the required support in dealing and minimizing such discrimination, already traumatized students may suffer additional layers of harm which, in turn, ruins the soul of the refugee support programs being run in different countries. As a ripple effect, such discrimination with young refugees may escalate their mental



health problems and weaken their social adaptation efforts (Guo et al., 2019), which may lead to behavioral and indiscipline issues in classrooms. To address this problem, the authors recognize the need to provide trauma-informed education for parents and teachers to cope with a traumatized child's behavior (Guo et al., 2019). Additionally, multicultural education has been found to decrease educators' prejudices about this marginalized student population along with reducing discrimination and bullying by peers in their schools (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). On an awareness note, Massfeller and Hamm (2019) posit a culturally safe environment in schools as an important prerequisite to building trust and collaboration along with fostering mutual respect in this marginalized population.

Appropriate and respectful language plays a crucial role in setting the foundation of any relationship. While interacting with refugee students, positive language use may infuse a greater sense of belonging within their schools, communities, and in their host country (Massfeller & Hamm, 2019). During their interviews with the authors, seven high school refugee students who fled from Syria and Iraq's ongoing civil war mentioned they appreciated being called "new Canadians", rather than the marginalizing term "refugees", as it made them feel confident, respected, and like they belonged (Massfeller & Hamm, 2019, p. 39). Therefore, to create a culturally safe, flourishing, and positive learning environment, the staff who work with refugee students are encouraged to acknowledge the power of the language they use in communicating with refugee families along with responding to the needs of refugee students by developing a positive, trustworthy, and respectful relationship with them (Brewer, 2016).

Impact of L1 and Home Environment on the Development of Sense of Belonging

The language of the host country is considered crucial in developing new connections during the resettlement process for refugee students. Feuerverger (2011) considers language "the vehicle for identifying, manipulating and changing power relations between people" (p. 1), while Lindner et al. (2020) see language as one of the most important components of ethnic identity. Many factors, like the extent of interaction between home and target languages, acculturation processes, and parent involvement in their education, may profoundly impact the development of a refugee students' sense of belonging. This section discusses the positive and negative role of L1 in L2 acquisition along with how schools can benefit from involving parents in easing the acculturation process of refugee students into their host country's education system.

Role of L1 in L2 acquisition

Language barriers have been one of the biggest challenges faced by refugee students due to limited or no schooling from home countries. Lack of English language skills may make newcomers feel intimidated and embarrassed to approach "Canadian" students due to their fear of making linguistic errors (Selimos & Daniel, 2017). It is here when bilingual programs may become a strong pillar in building their academic and socio-emotional strength. In an educational context, the promotion of a first language is recognized as equally important as English language instruction (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). Moreover, the English language and target culture should



supplement and not replace children's L1 and home culture in order to maintain familial and cultural ties that are crucial for their long-term psychosocial development and well-being (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017; Ridley et al., 2019).

Current literature recommends maximum attention to students' native language at least until middle school, so as to develop the required skills like manipulative abstractions and cognitive operations to acquire their L2 (Moinolnolki, & Han, 2017). Considering the potential for constructive interaction of languages, students' L1 facilitates their target L2 acquisition at a positive rate when the languages share similar underlying structures like morphemes, phonemes, and cognates. This may ease oral language development and phonological awareness (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). To leverage such positive language interaction, refugee ELLs may use their home language to negotiate new content learning, thus developing academic engagement (Ridley et al., 2019). The authors also see the power of home language when refugee parents apply their own L1 literacy skills to explain English picture books to children; this benefits both participants' English language learning skills simultaneously (Ridley et al., 2019).

On the other hand, destructive interaction between L1 and L2 comes into play when the target language rules are substantially different from the home language. For instance, Arabic and English hardly share any commonality (Guo et al., 2019). Such situations can halt newcomer students' L2 acquisition and integration into the new school system, which may lead to failure or drop out.

Parental involvement

In addition to providing culturally informed instruction to refugee students, the literature calls on educators to foster parents' meaningful involvement in their children's education. Such parental involvement may bridge the cultural gap between refugee families and schools (Ficarra, 2017). Positive and reciprocal relationships with newcomer parents may also reduce the student's acculturative stress (Walick & Sullivan, 2015). In this symbiotic arrangement, parents can become teachers' greatest allies in promoting student learning when they feel honoured by cultivated trusting relationships initiated by teachers and administration (Ridley et al., 2019). Not to overlook the challenges, this invitation to refugee parents may be hindered by some barriers like the language challenges, and access to transportation and employment (Ficarra, 2017). Therefore, new refugee parents may hesitate to get involved with their children's educational institutions due to language and/or financial crises.

Factors influencing positive acculturation

Of Lindner et al.'s (2020) the four acculturation orientations, *integration* is particularly relevant, as the focus is on positive acculturation; that is, when individuals identify with the receiving culture, yet maintain their heritage culture identity. The other three orientations, *assimilation*, *separation*, and *marginalization* all result in or from the loss of one culture or the other. Lindner et al.'s study considers some of the contextual factors that have a profound impact on the

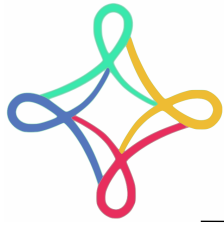


acculturation process. These include the motivation for migration, length of residency in the host country, degree of similarity between the heritage and receiving cultures, and the extent of social networks with members of the host and heritage cultures. Refugees' education level and socioeconomic status may also play an important role in their assimilation with the target culture (Lindner et al., 2020). An important individual factor like the age of migration counts for the acculturation gap between parents and the children. It is likely for children to acquire cultural practices and language with greater ease than their parents, while they may shed home culture and L1 more readily (Lindner et al., 2020). Not only variation in child versus parent exposure and openness to host and heritage culture underlies the acculturation gap, "not knowing English" is another factor that greatly impacts their acculturation and success in school (Symons & Ponzio, 2019, p.101). Positive home-school connections (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017), healthy teacher-student relationships (Shahbazi et al., 2020), and positive identity formation (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016) can advantage refugee students' academic success and sense of adaptability to the new culture while maintaining connection to their native culture.

DISCUSSION

The current integrative literature review highlights several factors which influence the sense of belonging of refugee students in schools. Once they feel welcomed and accepted in schools, they may gain confidence to deal with challenges to their sense of belonging in other quadrants of life, for instance, future places of work. Students' socio-emotional well-being is directly related to their academic achievement, which is a critical concern of educators. Rubinstein-Avila (2016) recognizes the need for creating awareness around supporting newcomers in acculturating to a new school environment. This awareness and associated implications may reduce the disproportionately high dropout rates (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017) in the refugee population by addressing some crucial factors like absenteeism, low school engagement, low parental education and involvement, problematic behavior, low academic scores, insufficient social connections, and language barriers. Even with extensive funding available in this field, a lack of understanding of refugee students' education, social integration, and well-being in refugee-receiving schools, educators, administrators, policymakers, and the governments continue to face challenges with facilitating the smooth transition of these children to the new school system (Rubinstein-Avila, 2016). Collaboratively, educational stakeholders should look for a holistic approach to refugee students' education, with full consideration of intersectionality of race, refugee status, prior schooling, language, and socioeconomic status (Roxas & Roy, 2012).

Long-term studies are needed in order to monitor the efficacy of programming, such as teacher preparation programs, trauma-informed pedagogy, and the effectiveness of strategies aimed at supporting mental health and facilitating parental involvement. Moreover, some of the proposed courses of action in the research were not practical for implementation. For example, the recommendation that school districts should avoid placing high concentrations of refugee students in "disadvantaged schools" (Rubinstein-Avila, 2016, p. 83) may not be something that districts have the ability to determine. This has to do with where the refugee families are resettled in their host country. To address this, specialized support based on the student demographics, such as the large refugee population, could be implemented in specific sites. For



example, a school with a high refugee population may allocate their refugee funding to hire educators trained in ELL, trauma-informed practice, or provide additional training to staff to support these students. Although multicultural education is beginning to address the transnational context of reception, educational research has fallen behind in examining the complicated needs of refugee students. That means, by focusing on global migration as a whole, the researchers may make erroneous inferences regarding the unique needs of this diverse group of students along with the considerations for educators without a careful and narrowed focus on refugee education in particular contexts.

As Canada is one of the top destinations for refugee resettlement in the world (UNHCR, 2019), Canadian educational policy must evolve with the ongoing increase of refugee students in school systems. As indicated by research, school districts with substantial refugee intake should budget for new programs and teacher training focused on refugee students' education. However, many schools are financially strained and are unable to allocate the funds to support additional programming and resources, or hire teachers specifically trained for this role. To share personal experience, we have worked in schools where a single learning coach or ELL designate is responsible for a wide range of students with varying needs who presumably fall under the same support umbrella.

Additionally, some schools use overly simplistic resources to teach literacy to adolescent refugee students, which can undermine the language learning abilities and competence of the students in other subject areas. This may also lead to academic disengagement, which may damage the sense of belonging of the student. For example, our literature review brought up the concern of how educators can teach age-appropriate curriculum content while also teaching language skills (Stewart et al., 2019). Not only do teachers need to be skilled at delivering culturally responsive pedagogy, but they also require resources that are culturally responsive to their students.

Our research further identifies gaps in the literature and required focus in additional areas in order to enhance awareness among the education and research communities. Additionally, some recommendations have been made towards introducing culturally relevant and trauma-informed teaching practices to help refugee students develop their sense of belonging in our educational institutions in North America. We also identify a recurrent theme across readings about inadequate teacher preparation in pre-service and in-service education programs that lead to insufficient training and strategies to support refugee students. We have also noticed a lack of policies at the school level and specific direction in terms of professional learning opportunities that directly target these gaps in practice. Lastly, refugee students are not a homogeneous group, and their strengths and needs vary depending on their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or linguistic backgrounds (Guo et al., 2019). Educators must take an individualized approach to address the diversity and cultural identities of all students, while taking a holistic approach to realizing the interactions of different parts of refugee students' life experiences.



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

It is important for educators to support marginalized students through an examination of their assumptions about their race and culture. As demographics continue to shift, so should teaching practice that responds to student needs, finding that it is “deleterious for students to have their cultural identities rejected in school and unacknowledged as integral to student learning” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1285). It is imperative that educators maintain a reflexive practice, examine any bias or preconceptions they may possess, and participate in training in areas such as anti-racist education. It is clearly outlined in the literature that acknowledging all students as individuals, through a culturally informed lens, should be an integral component of educators’ teaching philosophy to situate refugee students for success in our education system.

Furthermore, education is a key element of a humanitarian response to crisis (Sinclair, 2001) and psychosocial trauma in young children because early educational interventions may support socio-emotional healing and provide a sense of “normalcy and hope” (McBrien, 2005, p. 338). This signals the importance of extensive training in trauma-informed pedagogy. Teachers require patience, a nurturing attitude (Tweedie et al., 2017), and an understanding that an important aspect of teaching refugee students is building an authentic relationship with them and their families.

By acknowledging students’ first language and home culture, educators may see significant academic gains in second language and other subject learning. This could be challenging in terms of teachers’ differentiated lesson planning, but the benefits outweigh the input. A collaborative effort among bilingual teachers, support staff, and co-ethnic peers may help newcomer refugees in developing social connections at school and promote language learning. Parental involvement is another important but undervalued thread in the literature that may weave future success, and forge home-school connections by including parents in their children’s educational journey during resettlement periods. However, some challenges in the language, transportation, and financial areas may halt refugee parents’ involvement in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Because of the North American focus of our research inquiry, many studies were eliminated from our inquiry. We recommend performing comparative studies based on different geographical contexts due to different political climates in different regions. Sometimes, different governments in the same country may have different preferences or policies on refugee education, for instance, in recent years, the attitude toward refugees has shifted abruptly with the change in the United States administration.

Finally, our preliminary research found limited studies in some areas like policy guidance and parental involvement. We recommend future researchers explore these areas which may lead to important recommendations for policymakers and educators working in refugee education. Overall, we are hopeful that our research will help educators navigate trauma-informed practices and engage educators and other stakeholders in providing a support network that is inclusive of



all learners, along with specialized culturally responsive language instruction. Our inquiry may initiate awareness among school boards and educators in finding specific resources to promote the socio-emotional well-being of marginalized student populations, along with fulfilling the responsibility of providing equitable education. By implementing these recommendations with a clear heart and open arms, we are hopeful that educators can do their part in welcoming their new students into a place of belonging.

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