
Meeting invisibilized needs: Youth refugees' language and literacy development at the tertiary level in Canada

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Abstract

Currently, there is a knowledge gap vis-à-vis the educational needs and trajectories of youth refugee students at the tertiary level. Once admitted as domestic students, they are indistinguishable from other domestic students, invisibilizing them as a group, which impedes identifying their specific language, literacy, and socioemotional needs. Their indiscernibility as a group leads to a knowledge gap and absence of supportive policies. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to shine a spotlight on both these students' language and literacy needs, and their educators' professional development needs. Educators and key stakeholders in three institutions were surveyed and interviewed online to elicit their views and emic perspectives on key issues and challenges involved in youth refugees' language and literacy learning, related policies and services, and their own professional learning needs. These results are first steps towards filling the gap in the literature, informing policy, and supporting educators and youth refugees.

Key words: youth refugee students, tertiary education, language and literacy, resettlement, ESL/ELD, professional development


Résumé

Il existe des lacunes en matière de connaissances sur les besoins des jeunes étudiants réfugiés dans l'enseignement supérieur au Canada. Une fois admis en tant qu'étudiants nationaux, il est officiellement impossible de les distinguer des autres étudiants nationaux, et d'identifier leurs besoins spécifiques en matière de langue, d'alphabetisation et de développement socio-émotionnel. Leur indiscernabilité se traduit par une méconnaissance de besoins et par une absence de politiques de soutien. L'objectif de cette étude qualitative est de mettre en évidence leurs besoins linguistiques, ainsi que les besoins de développement

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professionnel des enseignants. Plusieurs enseignants et intervenants clés ont été interrogés et interviewés afin d'obtenir leurs points de vue sur les problèmes et les défis linguistiques que rencontrent les jeunes réfugiés, sur les politiques et services, et sur leurs propres besoins en matière de formation professionnelle. Ces résultats visent à combler des lacunes et à soutenir les enseignants et les jeunes réfugiés.

Mots-clés : jeunes étudiants réfugiés, enseignement supérieur, langue et alphabétisation, réinstallation, ALF/PANA, développement professionnel

Introduction

In discussing the power governments wield to determine policies and enact laws in the public sphere, the legal system, and public administration domestically, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2017) emphasize the power held by governments to set educational policy. They also discuss how competing interests determine whether educational policies respect cultural rights and safeguard minority language maintenance, or invisibilize minority language and culture, assimilate linguistic minority groups, and lead to language loss—both domestically and internationally. The invisibilization process may be intentionally enacted through overt or covert policies, but it can also be the inadvertent result of knowledge gaps that occur despite best intentions. This article describes the latter case.

As tertiary institutions in Canada and throughout the world increasingly make equity and anti-racism activities a policy priority, progress is made yet inconsistencies also emerge. Some scholars argue that equity agendas often amount to nothing more than institutional rhetoric or *cosmetic diversity* (Henry et al., 2016; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016) and attempts to internationalize (e.g., through scholarships, recruiting diverse faculty and students, visiting scholars, etc.) are merely a vehicle for “a fashionable, depoliticized, and comfortable multiculturalism” (Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 104). Others applaud the increased attention to critically responding to equity issues and encourage a recognition of the work that is being done (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). What remains clear is that addressing long-standing barriers to higher learning is essential. This article attempts to identify and analyze instructional and institutional barriers for one specific tertiary student group: youth refugees.

Beginning with the background of the study, in 2015 the Canadian government recognized that the conflict in Syria was at such a crisis level that it provided *prima facie* refugee status to Syrian refugees. That is, visa officers were to assume that Syrian applicants were fleeing a conflict and met the definition of a refugee, thus bypassing the usual process for refugee claims. Typically, refugee claimants apply for refugee status once they are in

Canada. After applying, they must wait for an Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) hearing. Following their hearing, the IRB decides whether they are *bona fide* refugees that qualify for protection. Given that the Syrians would have applied from outside of Canada, typically the United Nations Refugee Agency, a private group (e.g., a church group), or an organization would have needed to refer them (Government of Canada, 2020). The Syrian refugees were interviewed to meet security, criminality, and medical screening requirements, but their *prima facie* designation simplified the process considerably and they automatically became Permanent Residents (PRs). As a result, 40,000 Syrian refugees resettled in Canada in the 2015–2016 period (Government of Canada, 2019).

With so many refugees from one group settling in Canada at one time, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council issued a call for targeted research regarding how educators could respond to their needs. The broader focus of our research is on:

1. How professors and key stakeholders (i.e., program coordinators, and student services coordinators) identify youth refugees' unique language and literacy learning needs and other challenges at the tertiary level, and
2. gaining a holistic understanding of educational structures that support their learning experiences.

Being granted immediate PR status was invaluable for Syrian youth refugees (aged 18–24). Generally, youth refugees awaiting their hearing results with the IRB are required to pay international student fees for tertiary studies and are ineligible for provincial funding such as the Ontario Student Assistant Plan.¹ These two factors combined make it almost impossible for refugee claimants to enrol in tertiary studies. However, as PRs, these youth were able to access provincial funding and enrol just as any *domestic* student would (e.g., with Canadian citizenship or permanent resident status). Consequently, they were not listed any differently than domestic students in Registrars' Office documents or in any documentation that educators might see. Not being identifiable as youth refugees (i.e., being invisibilized in that respect) represents something of a double-edged sword for Syrian and other youth refugees. On the one hand, they benefit from not encountering any stigmas related to refugee status; on the other, they do not benefit from any specific

¹Only Canadian citizens, people holding PR status, and designated refugees and protected persons are eligible for funding (Government of Canada, 2021; Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2021; Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants [OCASI], 2019).

services that might be provided to refugees identified as having learning and/or socioemotional needs.

This article explains how being invisibilized — inadvertently or intentionally — can disserve Syrian (and other) youth refugees in the tertiary educational system. In the absence of focusing on the needs of recognizable groups, knowledge gaps arise. The problem with such gaps is they constrain the ability of well-intentioned educators to meet youth refugees' needs, inadvertently leading to inequities. In fact, in the wake of the pandemic, Canada has recognized the problems inherent with not distinguishing between groups (Annett, 2020); similarly, recognition of the need to track different ethnolinguistic and racialized groups in educational structures to gain better understanding of gaps in educational outcomes and address inequities is also growing (Robson, 2018).

While elementary school teachers tend to know their students' backgrounds, that is less the case at the secondary level (Dagenais, 2008) and, as is discussed in this article, only rarely do educators know their students' backgrounds, including previous refugee status, at the tertiary level. Yet research speaks to the need to fill such knowledge gaps (Cummins, 2020). Studies show that although youth refugees may have high educational aspirations, they experience significant barriers to accessing and achieving success in secondary and post-secondary education in Canada (Ferede, 2010; Shakya et al., 2012). Complex challenges span across refugees' pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences including, but not limited to, an inability to make adequate preparations prior to migrating, a lack of familial or social support, low levels of education and official language fluency upon arrival, and mental health concerns (Bajwa et al., 2017). This lack of support and preparation leaves them vulnerable to informational barriers at the tertiary level (Morrice, 2009). Bajwa et al. (2017) concluded that refugees have limited access to formal supports to help them make decisions about their educational pathway; specifically, there is a need for customized informational support (e.g., to access financial aid, fill out forms, obtain study permits, and other settlement-related needs) as well as tailored emotional support to aid in traversing the many challenges they face.

There is a clear need for improved access to appropriate supports to mitigate barriers at both the institutional and instructional levels. Therefore, this article focuses on educator experiences with, and views of, the needs of youth refugees from Syrian and other backgrounds who are enrolled in Canadian tertiary institutions and any institutional supports available to them. In the following sections, we outline the theoretical framework, provide a brief overview of the literature and contextual information, outline the methodology, salient findings, key points of discussion, and concluding comments.

Theoretical framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical work explains various, interrelated environmental influences on a student's development, from immediate contexts of family and school to broader cultural ideologies and customs. Bronfenbrenner viewed an individual's development as a complex set of relationships influenced by multiple levels of the surrounding environment. He visualized these levels as five concentric circles and named them the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was chosen as a frame for this study because it goes beyond individual development and accounts for wider influences and contexts that have direct implications for educational practice. Placing the youth refugee tertiary student at the centre of these nested structures provides insights into how these students are likely to be shaped by their ecology, which can aid in identifying and improving the supports they require to access and succeed in tertiary education (see Figure 1).

The microsystem involves personal relationships with family members,

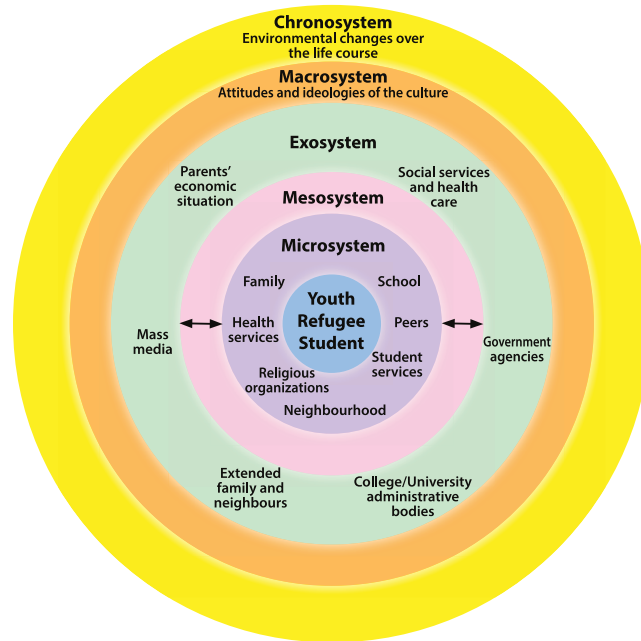


Figure 1
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory
 (adapted from Guy-Evans, 2020)

classmates, and educators. These relationships are crucial to development and are bi-directional; the individual can both influence and be influenced by others in the microsystem. Interactions between educators and children or older learners (e.g., youth refugees) are shaped by how educators view learners' background knowledge and orchestrate instruction. They may valorize aspects of their students' (cultural/linguistic) background and prior learning experiences or *funds of knowledge* (Moll and González, 2004). Alternatively, they may focus on content matter instruction, and adopt the view that it is the learner's responsibility to master the content.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stresses the need to view learners *across* multiple contexts. The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between various microsystems in students' immediate orbits; these microsystems do not function separately but are interconnected. For instance, a youth refugee's family, faith organization, school, and peers all interact and exert influence upon one another. These interactions can be empowering or disempowering, depending on whether the youth refugee's personal knowledge is validated and legitimized or disregarded and possibly stigmatized (e.g., by in/exclusionary interactions with peers at school or instructional practices of classroom educators).

Their experiences can also be viewed at the broader, exosystemic level; a level at which government policies shape educational structures and serve to support or constrain youth refugees' language and literacy learning (e.g., which programs do asylum seekers have access to, as opposed to PRs, and are they affordable?). This harkens back to Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas's (2017) view of the power governments wield to enact culturally/linguistically responsive (or sustaining) educational policies or entrench inequitable educational structures. Government policies can also shape workplace experiences (e.g., that provide access to co-op placements, build students' resumés, and make them more employable). The exosystem includes external environmental conditions. The individual does not come into direct contact with these environments but is nonetheless impacted by them. In that sense, the exosystem is very relevant to youth refugees as it can encompass political conflicts that impact learners' microsystems, forcing them to migrate and seek refuge elsewhere. It also accounts for college and university administrative policies and practices (e.g., the provision or lack thereof of institutional supports and services or refugee-specific professional development for educators) that affect a youth refugee's access and/or persistence in tertiary education.

The macrosystem focuses on the cultural elements that affect an individual's development, such as the already established customs, beliefs, and attitudes of the society and culture the person is developing in. This is not the

specific environment of the individual, but rather the society and culture in which the person is immersed. Conflicts between the societal attitudes, norms, and ideologies of a refugee's country of settlement and their home country, for example, can affect their microsystems in profound ways, including in their interactions and outcomes at school. Finally, the chronosystem represents all the environmental changes that happen over an individual's lifetime and affect development. For a youth refugee, this would include many major life transitions such as experiences of war, leaving their home country, and moving to a new country.

Taking an ecological approach and viewing components of, and influences on, learner experiences across a range of environments affords a broader understanding of their linguistic and literacy development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to this ecological environment of language and literacy development as "a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next" (p. 22). Seen in this manner, world events can have (in)direct trickle-down effects into student learning and their personal lives. A lack of control over these events and their aftermath can take a toll on youth refugees' socioemotional wellbeing. Related literature on the impact of these influences on youth refugees' language and literacy learning and socioemotional wellbeing follows.

Key literature and contextual information

Conflict at the exosystemic level and seeking refuge

When discussion turns to exosystemic forces leading to people being displaced across borders internationally, the Syrian conflict comes to mind; however, other recent waves of refugees have included Nepali-Bhutanese refugees (Taylor, 2016) and, in the aftermath of the Taliban's sweep to power in Afghanistan, many Afghan refugees will likely be resettled in the West and enter the tertiary system (Seir et al., 2021). In 2021, 82 million people were displaced due to external forces such as persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order; of these, 68% came from five countries with Syria at the top and Afghanistan in third place even before the Afghan government and army fell to the Taliban (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021a). Given UNHCR's (2021b) call for a non-return policy (*refoulement*), and re-hearing the cases of Afghan refugee claimants previously rejected, more Afghan youth refugees are likely to begin tertiary studies in Canada. While they, and the Syrian youth refugees before them, are visible in the news media for a while, they are less identifiable in tertiary level classrooms.

Educator and student experiences at the mesosystemic level

Refugee students bring a different set of funds of knowledge to learning than many of their peers. There may be a dissonance between cultural and societal norms, expectations, attitudes, and ideologies. Moreover, educators and service providers may not be prepared to meet the needs of learners who have escaped or been exiled from conflict zones. The recurrent nature of conflict and influx of students from conflict zones warrants provision of professional development (PD) to address the misalignment of educator/youth refugee learner experiences; a misalignment that will continue to pose challenges given the highly militarized times in which we live (Nelson & Appleby, 2015, p. 309). One reason for educator discomfort and inexperience with youth refugee students' language and literacy learning needs at this level is the expectation that students be functionally literate by the time they enter the college or university classroom. Educators may both have difficulty identifying how to address their socioemotional and learning needs; they may also feel doing so is 'not their job;' defining their role as strictly delivering discipline-specific content.

Research suggests that educators ill-prepared to address the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal schooling often lack the self-confidence needed to gain the know-how (e.g., new instructional strategies) to support youth refugee students' English language and literacy development (Clark, 2017; Vidwans, 2016). Furthermore, these educators may lack the background knowledge needed to recognize or support students' physical and mental health-related issues, including those relating to resettlement-related stressors (Beiser et al., 1989). For instance, youth refugee students may be contending with both posttraumatic stress and dashed life dreams (Finn, 2010). As noted by Nelson and Appleby (2015), "even after resettlement, learning can continue to be impeded due to the after-effects of torture and trauma" (p. 321). There have been calls to view and measure resilience within a socioecological framework that captures variation from the microsystem on up through the meso- and exosystemic levels (in individual, relational and external factors) with resilience gained through community supports and mental health supports making all the difference in how individuals manage psychosocial distress and mental health difficulties arising from lived experiences of war, lifetime trauma, and forced displacement (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Siriwardhana et al., 2014). However, if youth refugee students are invisibilized (i.e., if they are indistinguishable from immigrant background or possibly international students), educators may not even recognize socioemotional needs, negatively impacting their potential for resilience leading to academic success.

Educators may have received insufficient PD in these areas; however, relevant information from bodies ranging from UNESCO to ministries of

education does exist (Hanemann & Scarpino, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2008, 2016). A document by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2015) entitled *Students from refugee backgrounds: A guide for teachers and schools* explicitly addresses students' refugee experiences and outlines three components of the psychological effects of the refugee experience: post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma, and predictable anxiety triggers. The document also has suggestions for positive experiences and anxiety buffers (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015). Nelson and Appleby (2015), on the other hand, have recommended that teachers make learning participatory, use critical discourse inquiry, and experiment with art-based learning. Therefore, guides exist, but educators need to be aware of their existence, be shown how to adopt (and adapt) them in context specific manners and realize there are youth refugees in their classrooms (Montero, 2018). Moreover, educator guides, such as the British Columbia Ministry of Education document and others in the Canadian context, were developed to help teachers and other school personnel support refugee children and youth in public elementary and secondary classrooms; to the authors' knowledge, there are no equivalent or comparable resources for post-secondary educators to access that specifically address the unique needs of refugees at the tertiary level. This lack of targeted guidance reflects a broader paucity of resources and professional development for college and university educators who are struggling to support refugees in their classrooms.

Youth refugees from Syria have been referred to as a "lost" generation because only 18% of those qualified to enroll in tertiary studies actually do so in their host countries due to a lack of supportive educational structures, including responsive admission requirements (Immerstein & Al-Shaikhly, 2016). Modes of alternative admission assessment are needed to enable youth refugee students to qualify for tertiary level studies. Students that have to flee quickly do not have time to obtain the documentation Registrar's Offices require to evaluate their prior academic achievement. Shapiro et al. (2018) speak to the need for alternative admission criteria, noting that systemic barriers can block youth refugees' access to tertiary education, but supportive *bridges* do also exist. For instance, it is possible to reconstruct youth refugees' academic backgrounds and find alternative ways of corroborating their self-reports (e.g., adopting dynamic assessment techniques to evaluate competencies; Immerstein & Al-Shaikhly, 2016). As Magaziner (2015) points out, universities have the ability to bypass bureaucratic inefficiencies, prioritize refugee applications, waive requirements, and allocate social services; institutions can implement supportive educational policies — if the will is there.

Why does it matter?

The numbers speak for themselves. As noted above, there are 82 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2021a). Prime Minister Trudeau has pledged to resettle Afghan interpreters and their families that assisted the Canadian forces in their Afghan mission over the past two decades (Berthiaume, 2021). With regard to the Syrian refugees resettled in Canada, estimates from the Statistics Canada 2016 census show that:

- 7% of all newcomer children between the ages of zero and 14 come from refugee backgrounds. That figure translates to 1% of all Canadian children in that age group, and
- 14% of immigrant youths between the ages of 15 and 24 come from refugee backgrounds, which accounts for 2.4% of all Canadians in that age group. (Statistics Canada, 2018)

Research involving youth refugees suggests that landing and admission categories can have important effects on integration experiences (with different landing categories impacting youths' acculturation outcomes), but also their educational outcomes. The earlier they leave school, the earlier they transition to adult roles (e.g., marriage and children; Yoshida & Amoyaw, 2020). Less schooling lowers earning potential and heightens chances of poverty; poverty exacerbates mental health issues (Wilson et al., 2010). Youth refugees' landing experiences also affect whether they have disrupted schooling, which is a key difference between refugee children and other immigrant children. While the latter must learn a new language of instruction, they do not have gaps in their literacy and numeracy development due to a lack of access to schooling for extended periods (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). Similarly, youth refugees that experience gaps in schooling take different programs (i.e., ELD and ESL instruction as opposed to ESL instruction alone),² delaying their access to subsequent tertiary education.

Not recognizing youth refugees as a distinct group obfuscates their challenges. Invisibilizing them is linked to a lack of educator preparedness to deal with their language, literacy, and socioemotional needs; it can impact their earning potential, which impacts their quality of life. The children of economic immigrants, on the other hand, have higher university completion

²ELD refers to English Literacy Development, a support program for English language learners with a significant gap in formal schooling and do not have age-appropriate academic skills in their first language; ESL refers to English as a Second Language, a support program for ELLs with age-appropriate academic skills in their first language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

rates, transition into adulthood later, and have higher earning potential, which impacts their standard of living. It matters whether youth refugees encounter bridges or barriers to tertiary education. To fill the knowledge gap concerning their educational trajectories, educators must be able to identify them as a group with needs that must be identified and documented. This study sought to fill those knowledge gaps.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain in-depth understanding of more and less successful educational approaches, and challenges relating to the language and literacy learning of youth refugee students at the tertiary level. The qualitative data collection methods adopted in this three-phase research design included open-ended surveys, interviews, and digital product creation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This article focuses on Phase 1 of the study, which involved educators and key stakeholders responsible for academic programs and student support services at the tertiary level. Research was conducted in three Canadian tertiary institutions with sizable numbers of youth refugee students. Thirteen educators and key stakeholders from across the institutions completed online surveys and four participated in interviews. Their pseudonyms were Sam, Jamie, Alex, and Manny, and they were involved in a spectrum of programs — from Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) at the college level, to English for academic purposes (EAP), continuing education, and credit-bearing degree programs.

After completing an open-ended online survey on Qualtrics, participants had the option of participating in a semi-structured interview via Zoom. The purpose of both was to elicit information about their backgrounds, professional contexts, approaches to language and literacy education with youth refugees, and views about these students' issues, challenges, and professional learning and programming needs. Sample questions included: "What are youth refugee students' specific language and literacy learning needs?"; "What instructional strategies are most effective in promoting their communication skills in content area courses?" and "If you are able to draw on youth refugees' prior linguistic, cultural and/or disciplinary knowledge in your teaching, what are some examples of the linkages you make between your teaching and their prior knowledge?"

In Phase 2, youth refugee students who enrolled in the same tertiary institutions as the educators and key stakeholders completed an open-ended online survey and had the option of participating in follow-up Zoom interviews. The purpose of this phase was to elicit the youth refugees' views of their language and literacy education needs, and how Covid-19 was impacting

their learning. In Phase 3, they explored themes and issues relevant to their lives and interests by completing multimodal products such as digital identity texts, video resumes, material memory projects, and personal websites. Their projects will be showcased on a project website (that is currently under development) along with a more general 'toolkit' to support educators teaching youth refugees.

Analysis

Audio recordings of the interviews were anonymized and transcribed. Subsequently, the interview transcripts and survey data were reviewed and aggregated into themes using an open coding technique. The latter involved determining the most important data and organizing them thematically using axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The themes that emerged included: (lack of) identification, the (in)sufficiency of student services, literacy and language learning and socioemotional needs.

Findings and discussion

Key findings presented and discussed in this article include identifying youth refugees as a group in tertiary level studies, the services they have access to there, their language and literacy learning, and socioemotional needs.

Who are they?

Many educators and key stakeholders in the tertiary institutions involved in this study who were surveyed and/or interviewed claimed they were unsure whether they had taught or dealt with youth refugee students. This theme continued to emerge as the study progressed. Tertiary institutions do not flag youth or older refugee students. That is, when educators receive their class lists, the institution does not indicate whether any students hold (former) refugee status, nor would the Registrar's Office have that information. One professor mentioned that international and domestic students were differentiated on their class lists; however, since refugee students are only categorized as domestic students, their refugee status becomes invisibilized.

Recent trends prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion in education have highlighted the need for more data and transparency on the relationship between factors such as race, socioeconomic status, or special education needs and educational outcomes in Canada. By not collecting data on these and other important sociodemographic factors, systemic barriers to success for marginalized students such as youth refugees persist, as there are simply no data to analyze. As Robson (2018) points out, lack of data does not mean lack of a problem: "by conflating immigrant success with a blanket commitment to equality, we blindly assume we are doing OK as we do not have

any evidence to the contrary—because we haven't taken the time to collect it" (para. 27). Although Canada remains a top Programme for International Student Assessment performer with only a narrow achievement gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students, performance disadvantages do exist within specific groups—a fact that gets glossed over by statistics that view *immigrant* as a monolithic category and fail to differentiate between those admitted under the family reunification class, the economic category, or as refugees (Volante et al., 2017).

Not knowing if they have any refugee students presents several challenges for educators because then they cannot adapt their instruction to meet these students' needs. Professors are limited in their ability to circumvent this issue—they do not ask students questions about their backgrounds due to privacy concerns and there is no identification at the administrative level. Educators that participated in our study suggested that the only way to distinguish a refugee student from another immigrant background student is through self-identification. However, this process is informal and occurs infrequently. Sam reflects on what identifying a refugee is like in an educational context:

We don't really know they are refugees Secondly, we have to let them talk. . . . We can't ask them. . . . but I mean we could . . . but it would be possibly very insensitive and also not necessarily relevant to the material In most of my courses there have been . . . maybe one . . . it's hard to identify who is a refugee and who is not . . . unless they tell us.

Current data suggest that youth refugees are an invisibilized group at the tertiary level because they are neither tracked by institutions, nor made visible to educators or key stakeholders. Furthermore, their status does not appear to be a priority as professors are more concerned with helping all students learn the academic content of their courses.

Are there sufficient student services?

Student services were examined in the participating institutions. None were specifically tailored to youth refugee students; rather, the students had access to similar services as all other domestic students; namely, peer tutoring, academic advising, and general learning services as well as wellness and counselling services, and career mentoring. The educators and key stakeholders interviewed varied as to whether they felt all students required equal access to counselling services or whether youth refugees may have greater needs. Sam suggested, "If you're having an ongoing conflict in your home country in which your friends and family members may be involved, you absolutely need more psychological support . . . ; not that immigrant students don't need psychological support, it's just different kinds."

Since youth refugee students are categorized as domestic students, they do not have access to services provided to international students such as immigration advisors, international student coordinators or arrival settlement staff even though those services would be beneficial since they are geared to integration and settlement in Canada. Not tracking youth refugee students (or their needs) at the tertiary level precludes there being a documented reason for them to have dedicated services. Alex makes this connection by stating, "I think we just haven't seen a need for [services]; we provide services to everybody and we either don't have enough [refugees], or they're not coming forward, or they don't have issues specific to refugees." In the absence of tracking who youth refugees are, they would need to self-identify, and in sufficient numbers for service providers to realize that they constitute a sizable enough group with specific needs to warrant dedicated services.

Language and literacy learning needs

From our participants' perspectives, print-based literacy (as opposed to digital literacy, for example) posed one of the biggest challenges for youth refugees in the tertiary classroom. Jamie suggested that these students' biggest obstacles were in the areas of reading and writing. Alex felt that they struggled more with spelling and vocabulary than with other aspects of print-literacy. When asked about youth refugees' successes in the classroom, educators indicated that youth refugee students were often quite orally proficient and had good communication and presentation skills due to their experience dealing with the public in part-time jobs in the service sector (e.g., in fast-food restaurants).

Manny, on the other hand, pointed out that gaps in academic skills can be difficult to differentiate from other challenges:

if they've got limited or interrupted formal education, those school skills, the learning skills ... then that's hard to separate from the motivation and persistence part of it as well; being able to keep going despite being slow or frustrating or not as much fun as they want it to be.

Manny also noted that students in his courses typically had a wide range of past learning experiences, which led to youth refugees with limited or interrupted formal schooling working alongside peers that had the advantage of formal schooling and past tertiary experience. He described the positives and negatives of this dynamic:

There are benefits and disadvantages to having those [two groups of] students in the same classroom. The benefits are that the ones with more education can model those learning habits and behaviours that are very helpful The disadvantage, of course, is that their needs are quite different. The ones with more education are going to move more quickly. The ones with less education,

it's going to take them longer. So, on a day-to-day basis, the class might be moving too fast for [youth refugee students], and then they're also going to see their peers move to higher levels before they do.

The data suggested that youth refugees in tertiary education experience compounded challenges in an education system that measures success for language development against English native-speaker norms, and literacy as narrowly print-based. The data indicated that not only are these students tasked with learning a new language, and potentially acquiring discipline-specific knowledge through that new language (e.g., if they are in a diploma or degree-granting program rather than an English language program—be it LINC for beginners or EAP for more advanced learners), but they must also adapt to the values and habits expected in formal Western tertiary education. Educators also felt that the youth refugee students were sometimes frustrated and discouraged by seeing some peers progress more quickly (e.g., those with stronger English or print-literacy skills). These data, which should be noted are derived from educators' perceptions and not refugee youth themselves, suggest that without acknowledging and addressing students' unique needs, youth refugee students might internalize their lack of progress, feel unsuitable for tertiary education, become alienated, and drop out. Preliminary data from Phase 2 of the study, which involves refugee youth students directly, support these speculative findings as some youth refugee participants expressed analogous feelings of inadequacy, exclusion and being misunderstood.

Educators also suggested that providing youth refugees with culturally/linguistically responsive instruction could be challenging because the curricula in their respective programs tended to be prescriptive. Some stated that they tried to integrate students' prior knowledge and experiences, but tightly focused curricula and course objectives made it difficult to do so. Sam stated that “within the core [courses], there's not a lot of leeway. We teach grammar, we teach how to write an essay . . .] we teach vocabulary and reading texts, but mostly it is very formulaic.”

Jamie, on the other hand, discussed his perceived challenges in orchestrating culturally/linguistically responsive pedagogy on a pragmatic, practical level as follows:

It's very hard to accommodate everyone's cultural background . . . sometimes we have students from about 10 different countries, and that will be very hard . . . usually what we can do is . . . we can draw on their cultures when it's time to celebrate something in their own culture.

Jamie's comments speak to more traditional multicultural educational approaches adopted in heterogenous classrooms where educators feel unprepared to include a variety of backgrounds. In those cases, cultural inclusion tends to

focus on surface level recognition of diversity (e.g., celebrating customs and holidays) rather than allowing space for individual students to draw on their prior knowledge and experiences, and apply it to new learning.

This superficially inclusive *food and festival* approach raises the issue of whether educators receive sufficient targeted PD to be able to orchestrate culturally/linguistically sustaining pedagogy in settings of increasing diversity. Jamie's comments accord with this notion, indicating that he feels PD is lacking, stating: "professional development sessions [could] be held to help professors understand more about these refugee students because their previous learning experiences are very much different from other learners."

These illustrations of the educators' approaches to language and literacy education with youth refugees, and views of programming challenges and PD needs, suggest greater attention must be placed on acknowledging and understanding how to meet the language and literacy needs of youth refugee students with limited and interrupted formal schooling at the tertiary level. The focus should not just be on a deficit view of the challenges they face (i.e., what they lack with regards to what is expected in tertiary education), but on the institutions themselves and the various ways in which their policies and practices may work to impede these students' success and reinforce dominant power structures and ways of knowing and being.

Socioemotional needs

Instructor responses indicated varying perceptions of the socioemotional needs of refugee background students, and both their own and their institution's preparedness to address those needs. Two participants expressed the view that they had not seen any indication that youth refugees had exceptional needs and, generally speaking, did not differentiate between them and other immigrant background students in the classroom. When asked about dealing with past trauma in youth refugees, Alex, an EAP instructor, stated: "Everybody has mental health issues. None of us are perfect, but I didn't see them. I didn't see it manifest . . . It's just a language classroom full of non-native English speakers from all over the world." Similarly, Jamie attested to not having seen youth refugees exhibit any notable socioemotional needs. He felt that by the time they enrolled in his course, those needs would have largely abated. As he described: "I think that their first one or two years in Canada kind of help them get over the trauma to some extent. And in my teaching, I don't see very strong emotional needs from this group of students." In contrast, Sam recounted trauma that acted as a barrier to students' success:

I've had a few students who . . . struggle with ongoing events at home. I mean that they have received mail, or they would have received notifications that their family member is now in hospital, or they can't find their family member . . .

So, it is not that they wouldn't be successful, it's that this ongoing trauma ... it's just hard for them to succeed.

Manny also mentioned that he has had "some pretty traumatized young people in the class" and discussed how their trauma could "affect their focus and certainly their mental health." Manny framed mental health as a challenge even for those youth refugees who had not experienced trauma per se, stating:

I think mental health in general is a big challenge, even if they've not had trauma because, for many of them, it was their parents' decision to leave their country and emigrate and ... even if that decision was forced by danger or persecution, it still feels like they were being ripped out of everything ... all those connections that are so important when they're young.

Further, Sam expressed a lack of preparedness to adequately address the potentially complex needs of these students. Sam expressed: "It is a very challenging situation because I don't know how you can really help them ... you are just a professor not a psychologist."

Since Manny was a LINC instructor, he spoke to gaps in institutional services for youth refugees specifically in this regard, noting that his students could not access counselling services because they did not pay fees for their language program: "They can access accessible learning services and I've taken that route, and tried to access some services for students [that way]. That hasn't been hugely successful so far ... It's super frustrating ... that's a big need."

Beyond potential trauma, youth refugees may also be dealing with other stressors: Specifically, competing educational, social, family, and financial responsibilities. Although youth refugees might have very limited English language proficiency, educators noted that they were nonetheless often the person in the family with the most developed English skills and frequently acted as language brokers for other family members (e.g., by accompanying them to appointments as an interpreter). Additionally, they were often the ones in the family that were the most employable. As Manny noted, many of his students worked in addition to studying, which was stressful for them: "It's really challenging for them to balance those responsibilities with the responsibilities of learning and their need to be young adults with friends and things like that."

There is a need to extend *glocal* mental health supports and recognize psychosocial distress and mental health difficulties arising from lived experiences of war, lifetime trauma and displacement, as well as those arising from everyday stressors (e.g., balancing a social life with school and family responsibilities). As noted above, Ministry of Education supports do exist for K-12 educators (e.g., British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015; Ontario

Ministry of Education, 2007, 2008, 2016) and a fledgling TESOL literature is developing on the topic (Nelson & Appleby, 2015); however, organized system-wide support is missing at the tertiary level.

Implications and conclusion

While this article only offers a snapshot of the experiences and challenges educators at the tertiary level may encounter with regards to identifying and meeting the needs of youth refugees in their classrooms, it provides insight into some of the challenges and ways forward in difficult times. The findings of this study have implications for youth refugees at the tertiary level across the instructional (microsystem and mesosystem) level and the systemic (exosystem) level.

At the instructional level, PD is needed so educators can gain the knowledge and tools needed to translate their good intentions into concrete outcomes in the classroom. Safe and confidential identification of youth refugees is additionally needed, so instructors can orchestrate learner-centred, trauma-informed pedagogies for students that may benefit from such approaches.

At the systemic (exosystem) level, targeted services, more scholarships, and alternative admissions procedures are needed to address refugee-specific needs. Demographic and needs-based data must be collected to make this growing, yet underserved student population group visible, and begin to fill gaps in student services to support them. In addition, detailed province-specific sociodemographic data need to be collected to get a full picture of how youth refugees are faring and the services they need to enter and traverse tertiary education (Robson, 2018, para. 26). Although immigrant-background students have traditionally fared well in Canadian schools, this must not obscure the fact that refugee students, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, *do* experience barriers to academic success (Cummins, 2020). To prevent another *lost generation* of youth refugees, tertiary education should not be viewed as a luxury, but as a right and an investment in Canada's future (Magaziner, 2015).

To reiterate and conclude, larger actors, such as governments, possess the power to dictate, enact, and regulate policies and laws in public domains such as education; those decisions work to either further invisibilize, oppress, and assimilate marginalized groups or legitimize, respect, and protect minoritized languages and cultures (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017). As previously mentioned, processes of invisibilization may be overt or covert, deliberate, or unintentional, but benevolent intentions do not negate harmful effects. Moving forward, coordinated and informed action is needed across the governmental, institutional, and instructional spheres. Specifically, there is a need for policy and program initiatives that are adequately funded and

responsibly implemented in ways that recognize and address the language, literacy, and socioeconomic needs of youth refugees. At the same time, work is needed to rectify the inherent systemic inequities that disadvantage students with funds of knowledge that differ from what is expected and valued in formal tertiary education.

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