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A Framework for Educating Newcomer Refugees in the United States

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Abstract
Each year, the United States resettles more refugees than any other country in the world. These students are placed into foreign learning environments where they are forced to adapt to new academic settings while also adjusting to a new culture. Often times, these students are escaping a violent past and are placed with teachers who have limited training in dealing with such issues. This article provides school leaders with intentional implementation strategies within a three-tiered framework that can be used to guide districts towards a more comprehensive and culturally responsive educational setting. Future research would be beneficial in the areas of students' feelings of school belonging, self-awareness, nationality equating to academic achievement, and the impact entry age has on academic success.

Keywords: Refugee Education, Third World Populations, Culturally Responsive Education

Introduction
Since World War II, the United States has had a growing number of newcomer refugees in the American education system. While this number peaked in the 1980s with the passage of the Refugee Resettlement Act, the United States has seen an average of 50,000 refugees enter the country each year. According to the U.S. Department of State (2013), that number reached approximately three million refugees since 1975, with half of them being under the age of 18 and entitled to state-funded K-12 education services.

Currently, over 45 million refugees around the world-a 20-year high-await resettlement opportunities in Kenya, Pakistan, India, and more camps around the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. As the United States resettles more refugees than any other country in the world, the influence of refugees in the school setting becomes a critically important issue. Refugees make up a unique population with particular needs that districts often have limited experience and resources to address. Many of these refugees are coming from countries that are facing immense challenges including war, disease, famine, and other destabilizing conflicts and upheaval; as a result, educational opportunities are either not a priority and/or are nonexistent. Couple this with emotional/psychological trauma, discrimination, and culture shock and the traditional American classroom can be a daunting place for such a child.

The mainstream approach to education offered by many American schools does not allow for personalized instruction, which may benefit refugee students looking to successfully enter society through education. This study looked to identify the challenges refugee students face as they enter the American education system and provide solutions that districts can use to increase their chances of success. Identifying the challenges these students must overcome within the school setting and providing strategies that may help them will allow teachers to reflect on their teaching and adjust as needed to meet the needs of these students. This can only occur if the resources are in place to support their efforts and a commitment is made at the leadership level.

Purpose of this Research
The purpose of this research is to address the unmet needs of refugee students in the United States. Many of these refugees are placed in resettlement cities (Denver, CO; Fort Wayne, IN; Minneapolis, MN; Greensboro, NC; Chapel Hill, NC; and New York, NY) where there are community supports in place to aid in the resettlement. Because of this grouping, not a lot of research has been done on a national level as to the impact these students are having on the education system as a whole or in areas that are not designated as resettlement sites. Equally as absent from the research are suggested strategies that could potentially help schools meet the needs of refugee students? With continuous conflict in various places around the world, it is not likely that the refugee population in our schools will decrease, and therefore, research on the topic is needed.

Utilizing global and national research, as well as case studies of refugee education programs in Australia, this article proposes a Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States to serve as a potential guide for districts experiencing an increase in their

refugee populations [1]. The nine parts of the framework (hereafter referred to as Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States) range from financing and policies to relationships and professional development [2]. While each of the nine parts of Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States can be utilized by district leaders who see a rise in their refugee populations, it is intended to be used by districts with pre-existing community supports in place that can support the school district in educating their refugee students.

Conceptual Framework

As noted prior, in American schools, refugees face both external and internal issues that have the potential to make education harder. Not only do most of these students have to overcome a language barrier, but many are leaving violent situations in their home country. Some have experienced extended absences from formal education. The special circumstances they bring with them need to be addressed within the American public school setting. The No Child Left Behind legislation brought to light some of the educational inequities within the school system; however, there are populations of students, including many refugees that are still not getting the education they deserve.

Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States is based on a combination of three approaches to educating refugee youth. The Whole School Approach to refugee education, as researched by Pugh, Every, and Hattam in the Australian Primary School system, makes up the backbone of Cooper's framework, and it is supported by Taylor and Sidhu's research on inclusive education models [1]. The Whole School Approach was initiated by the researchers looking at the United Primary School located in Southern Australia, a unique school in that 80% of the students within the school are from non-English-speaking backgrounds [2]. In their research, the authors interviewed school leadership (principal and assistant principal) as well as teachers, completed observations in classrooms and staff meetings, and analyzed school documents. From these interviews, observations, and documents, the research team was able to identify areas that made this school successful in educating refugee students.

The whole school approach to refugee education is one that examines every level of education with regard to refugee populations, from funding and governmental policy down to the classroom teacher's instruction. The whole school approach involves an examination of the policies in place, strong leadership, and inclusion of refugee students in the mainstream. Curriculum and professional development are also targeted as areas that need to be discussed when considering the whole school approach to refugee education and students' success within the larger school dynamic. Taylor and Sidhu's research on inclusive education with regard to supporting refugees in schools supports much of what Pugh, Every, and Hattam present in their whole school approach [1,2].

Cooper's framework also includes Ogbu and Simons' Voluntary/Involuntary Spectrum [3]. The Voluntary/Involuntary Spectrum identifies categories for immigrant populations based upon how they came to the United States. Voluntary immigrants came to the United States by their own choosing for a variety of reasons, whereas involuntary immigrants were forced into the United States, often as slaves. Refugee populations are unique in that they fall in the middle of this spectrum and are categorized as Semi-Voluntary immigrants. In most cases, refugees did not choose to leave their home country; however, they were also not forced to come here, so this makes refugees unique to Ogbu and Simons' spectrum. For Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States, Ogbu and Simons' model is used to identify refugees in the immigrant spectrum.

Each of these theories acknowledges the presence of potential obstacles regarding refugee education and provides ideas that may help schools meet the needs of their refugee populations by understanding not only what their needs are but also what refugee-specific challenges they face. Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States identifies nine areas necessary for the successful education of refugee students. These areas include: funding, targeted policies and system support, site-based leadership, professional development, school-level support staff, curriculum, inclusion, relationships, and status. Figure 1 indicates how each of these areas is interconnected and overlapping to form Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States. Each component serves a vital role in creating a successful learning experience for refugee students. Table 1 delineates the research base and key factors for each aspect of the framework.

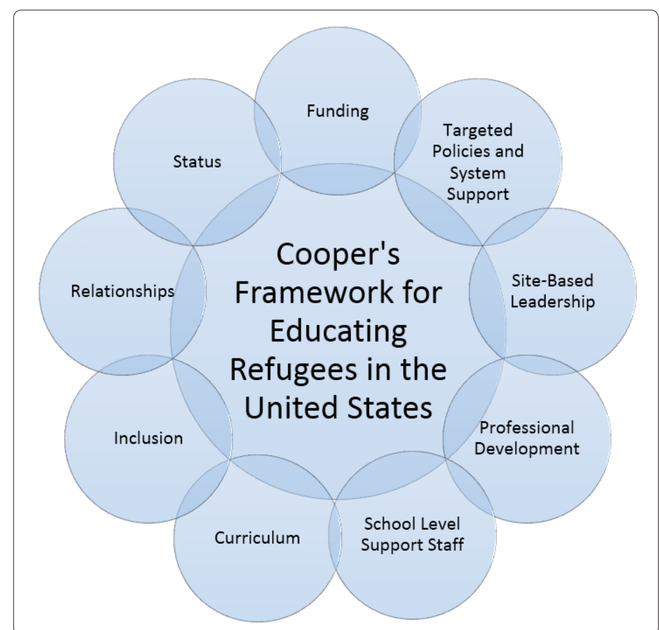

Figure 1: Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees in the United States

Table 1: Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees delineated by source

Cooper's Framework for Educating Refugees	
Pugh, Every, and Hattam [1]	1-Funding Target funding 3a-Site-based Leadership Distributive Leadership 4-Professional Development Focused on educating refugee (ESL) student Time devoted each quarter to meet and have inquiry groups 5a-School Level Support Staff Push-in/Pull out ESL support 6-Curriculum Include aspects of living in a new country (life skills) but linked to genres being taught
Taylor & Sidhu [2]	2-Targeted Policy and System Support Refugee Strategic plan (specifically addresses the educational disadvantages of refugee students) 3b-Site-based Leadership Strong advocates for Refugees 5b-School Level Support Staff Contributors to key learning areas 7-Inclusion Provide intensive language and learning support Positive and welcoming attitude Mainstream integration ASAP
Lee [4] *Ogbu and Simons [3]*	8-Relationships Avenue of site-based support for refugee students 9-Status Refugees are Semi-Voluntary minorities in the United States

Funding

In education, funding is a critical component for system support. Not only does funding provide resources, but it also shows a commitment by the governing body (either nationally or at the state or local level) to help refugees get access to a quality, public education. Title I funding is an example of federal funding and support put in place to help a targeted population overcome obstacles and succeed in the public schools. According to the federal government (www.ed.gov), there has been improved performance from year to year as a result of this direct funding. While refugees typically fit under the Title 1 criteria, there is no direct funding for refugees in particular, and data specific to them cannot be disaggregated from the overall data set. This direct funding is a necessary first step in helping refugee students succeed.

One of the most obvious funding tools that would help refugee students succeed in education is a safe school setting (e.g., Welcomers schools, separate classrooms within the school) for these students to adjust from the conditions in their home countries/refugee camps into the mainstream of America's public schools. Currently, strict fiscal environments are requiring districts to stretch budgets and, with a lack of resources being allocated to support refugee students, access to practical learning environments geared to meet the needs of refugees is inhibited, setting these students up for failure [5]. However, school districts in Denver, Colorado; Boston, Massachusetts; New York, New York; and Greensboro, North Carolina have devoted funding and support to create specialized newcomers' learning environments for newly arrived refugees. The willingness of these districts to fund designated spaces for these students has demonstrated their commitment to helping these students succeed.

Staffing is also an area in need of funding in order to support the acculturation efforts of refugee students. Hiring bilingual educators and support staff and providing access to professional development geared toward working with refugee students are two ways districts can support refugees from a funding standpoint [6]. Hickey provided insight on the Fort Wayne, Indiana, school district where in 2007 the cap was lifted on the number of refugees permitted into the area [6]. The number of refugees increased exponentially, and the resources were not in place to support this influx and the school system was not prepared. Pugh, Every, and Hattam acknowledged the creativity in managing funds at the school level in their research of Australian Primary schools, but they also suggest change at the policy level in order for whole school reform to occur [1].

Targeted Policies and System Support for Refugee Populations

In their work with refugee students in the Australian school system, Taylor and Sidhu identified gaps in policy and practice [2]. In their study, they found:

The particular needs of refugee students have been ignored by education policymakers and by research. These exclusions-from public policy and academic research-establish the context for a lack of targeted policies and organizational frameworks to address the significant disadvantages confronting refugee youth. (p. 4)

Davis added to this argument by claiming that the policy itself must help refugee students recover from the lack of educational opportunities they have likely faced as they fled their home countries [7].

An example of a policy that schools could incorporate is a strategic plan created by the school, or the district, geared toward refugee student education that will help site-based leaders identify and aid these students in their learning. This strategic plan should include

detailed guidelines that not only identify the potential gaps in learning abilities but also provide support for a variety of learning styles and attending to the social needs of the refugee students [2]. These strategic plans need support from district leadership in order to become an important component to the schools' overall goals [4]. Lee found that the "U.S. government's policy of treating refugees as legal immigrants seemed to contribute significantly to the refugee students' general perception of being welcomed" (p. 60). This is a positive step in the process of meeting the social needs of refugee students.

Another example of targeted policies and system support for refugee populations is changes in the standards for newcomers in their first years in the schools and the standard that they are measured against. Szente, Hoot, and Taylor found this idea of mandatory assessment and standards to be a common negative opinion of the teachers they interviewed in the Buffalo Public School system, with these teachers feeling some sort of modification was needed for these students. To help these students adjust and evaluate them more appropriately, more ESL services need to be in place to offer refugee students more time in a pull-out setting to grow at their pace and on measures that are suitable for their abilities [8]. On a school level, teachers and administrators should "establish meaningful policies for grading and testing refugee students' academic achievement" [8].

There also needs to be a policy change to capture data from refugee students that will allow them to be identifiable within the district. Currently, these students are typically identified as refugees as they enter the system, but they are mixed in with other demographics with regard to data capture. Large District is an example of a local school district that has no policies in place specifically for refugee student data collection. They simply group refugees with ESL students if they qualify.

With this, school districts and schools also need to create policies that respond to racist bullying and harassment [9]. Looking different, having a different culture and potentially lacking English language abilities can open refugee students to bullying. In order to keep the "tourist" mentality that Ogbu and Simons described as thriving in these students, districts need to protect refugee students from harassment and mistreatment by fellow students [3].

Site-Based Leadership

Pugh, Every, and Hattam argued, "Active and supportive leadership, which promotes inclusivity through employment of the discourses and practices of the refugee national groups and through implementing inclusive policies and programs, is a vital part of good practice for refugee education" (p. 32) [1]. In their research, they found distributive leadership to be useful in meeting the needs of refugee students. With this concept, teachers were encouraged to be involved with the decision making process within the school building by explaining what they felt was working well and what they thought could use some improvement in their day-to-day interactions with students. Distributive leadership also requires the inclusion of parent and student voices. While students are visible on a daily basis and the opportunity to speak with them is much easier than with parents, the principal must use any opportunity to speak with parents and to develop a relationship that encourages input from their perspectives as well.

Taking these various perspectives into consideration, leaders also need to take on the role of advocates for these students. Given the variety of experiences refugee students bring into the school, the principal needs to be aware of these backgrounds in order to fully understand their needs [1,2,10]. Of the principals interviewed in Taylor and Sidhu's research, both expressed strong support for the refugee students by addressing stereotypes and media representations in the school's newsletter [2]. One principal was quoted as saying, "Schools must play a role as people are so disempowered" [2].

Professional Development

Teaching is a reflective and ever-changing field. To meet these changes, districts employ the use of professional development. For refugee education, the need is the same. Teachers need continual professional development to meet the needs of their refugee students [1]. Along with curriculum-based professional development, educators need to receive "training to replace their stereotypes with accurate images based on relationships that they had built," which could create a more culturally responsive staff [11]. In their interviews with teachers, Szente, Hoot, and Taylor found that it was best to have no assumptions about a refugee student's past experiences [8]. The development of such cultural awareness could include workshops with outside resources and experts detailing student needs and stories, as well as time for teachers to meet and reflect about what they see occurring in their classes. Providing the opportunity for teachers to talk to co-workers on a less formal platform about successful strategies they are employing within their classrooms would not only allow teachers to hear multiple perspectives but would also help them become a more positive influence in the building. Pugh, Every, & Hattam argued that "teachers who do not yet value diversity in a positive way tend to travel with the majority" (p. 134), which often carries a negative mindset with regard to diverse cultures [1].

Professional development for teachers working with refugee students also needs to include an understanding the difficult histories of refugee students' backgrounds. In their interviews of Buffalo public school teachers, Szente, Hoot, and Taylor found that teachers "do not feel prepared to address the emotional stress experienced by refugee children" and therefore, more training is needed [8]. For example, National Football League athlete Tamba Hali, a Liberian-born refugee who came to the United States at the age of 10, recently shared in an interview that, when he was in Liberia, planes flying overhead meant shots were being fired on his village. When he first came to the United States, he recalled, he would hear a plane and immediately run for cover [12]. If teachers do not understand the trauma refugee students may have encountered, their reactions to these types of situations will not help the student.

One type of professional development that could be used is teaching teachers to incorporate picture books, modeling, and role-play into their instructional strategies. Although refugee students may not be able to understand the words that are being read, for example, the pictures on the pages could enable the student to interpret the message of the story [8]. As their English skills develop, these experiences could serve as ways for refugee students to communicate through pictures and simple words. These are especially important in routines and everyday class procedures [8].

School-Level Support Staff

While not all refugees are in need of these kinds of support, the majority of students who would benefit from added support personnel. Pugh, every, and Hattam found inadequate support staff to be a major obstacle for classroom teachers when dealing with refugee students. This support could come in the form of ESL support teachers pushing in to classrooms to aid the classroom teacher pulling students out for more intensive, one-on-one help [1]. Having support personnel working with these students on a more personal, individual basis gives refugee students a trusted "go-to" person, more time to think about materials, or even simply a safe area to ask questions they may be afraid to ask in the larger class setting.

Taylor and Sidhu identified the importance of support staff roles that were not solely academic in nature [2]. These non-academic roles include being interpreters for parents, helping with the registration of new students, and being a community liaison for families. There is also a need for specially licensed counselors to help meet the emotional needs of refugee students in coping with the adjustment to the American classroom and society.

Curriculum

The curriculum described in the whole school approach by Pugh, Every, and Hattam is prescribed and based on a combination of genre-themed learning goals as well as aspects of life in the new host country [1]. Waters and Leblanc supported this style of curriculum as a way to understand the citizenship of the host country and found that, by combining the two, the learning curve for academic and non-academic subjects is potentially shortened [13]. In their separate research, Hattam and every found it useful if teachers understood the global dynamics that were affecting their refugee students and what their individual students were working to overcome [1]. Having a better understanding of their individual students allowed teachers to come up with more effective curriculum topics and strategies.

Cultural sensitivity within the curriculum is also needed. Blair et al [9]. in their research of 19 schools in the United Kingdom with over 10% of the student body from an ethnic minority, found that the curricula in place were "sensitive to the identities of students and made efforts to include in the curriculum, their histories, languages, religions and cultures" (p. 5) . The authors also found that these cultural inclusions in the curriculum encouraged positive interaction and inquiry within the school. Some schools in the study also encouraged the use of the students' first language both for "settling in" and throughout their educational careers. With refugee students, promoting their sense of cultural identity within the curriculum in this way could allow them to feel the home they left is still an important part of who they are and that coming to America has not pushed them farther from their identity but has helped them embrace it.

Friedlander's research of newcomer programs within the United States found that these programs should include refugees' having access to "regular academic curriculum as mainstream" students [14]. They found that while there is no consensus for what the primary language of instruction should be with regard to these students, successful programs across the country (Long Island, NY; Hayward, CA; and Los Angeles, CA) relied on "innovative student-centered teaching methodologies" (p. 14) including whole language instruction, integration of language and content, using music and imagery, and cooperative learning [14].

Inclusion

The idea of inclusion within this framework is more than just for increased academics. For refugee students, inclusive education also involves the environmental interactions in which they are learning. Providing a welcoming attitude is one way that schools can promote diversity and positive images of refugees within the school building and embrace the unique heritage they bring to the school while also helping them feel comfortable in this new setting. For many of these students, there has been limited formal education, if any, and these students are desperately behind [1].

Taylor and Sidhu argue that mainstream incorporation is critical, assuming refugee students are provided with intensive language and learning support [2]. Pugh, Every, and Hattam examined schools that separated their refugee students academically until students had a firm base but brought them together with their host-country peers for whole-school functions to provide them with positive, social interactions [1]. In each of these studies, refugee students receive focused language and learning support to help them adjust and catch up to their host country peers as quickly as possible. As Kiche concluded, "The availability of classroom resources and an environment conducive to learning produces better educational outcomes, which ultimately push students ahead" [15]. For Cooper's framework, an environment conducive to learning is one where staff and other students accept their refugee classmates, express interest in their heritage, and embrace the opportunity to learn together.

Relationships

Refugee students come from various cultures, backgrounds, and personal experiences. In order to reach them and meet their individual needs, teachers need to form a relationship with the student that goes beyond teacher-student and instead resembles that of a mentor-student relationship. Ways in which teachers can build relationships with students is to talk with students outside of the classroom setting, allow wait time for refugee students to process questions within the lessons, and adjusting the way in which they perceive refugee students' responses in the classroom setting. According to Cheng , delays or hesitations in responses, poor topic knowledge, short direct responses, soft-spoken voices, and lack of participation are areas where refugees differ from the typical American student and this wait time can provide the newcomer refugee student the opportunity to succeed in the classroom [16]. In Lee's research, she suggested that teachers be seen as an avenue of site-based support for the students, rather than just an instructor. Although not specifically geared toward academics, these relationships are important for students who have such a fractured history [4].

Status

Ogbu and Simons' minority spectrum classifies refugees as Semi-Voluntary. It clarifies that refugees do not freely choose to come here or do so to improve their status. This is in contrast to the immigrants entering the United States in order to improve their status. The biggest difference between immigrants and refugees is that refugees are escaping violent situations, which make them unique cases and provides an opportunity to foster what Ogbu and Simons called the "Tourist attitude" [3]. With this mentality, refugees bring with them a positive and interested behavior towards the language and cultural differences. Schools that incorrectly identify refugee students as Voluntary or Involuntary and treat them as immigrants, miss out on the opportunity to foster their eagerness to learn: if refugee

students are treated as a Voluntary immigrant, they may be set up to fail by the schools in that their actions will be misunderstood, their gaps in learning will be misrepresented, and they may be placed in classes that do not foster their learning; if they are misidentified as Involuntary immigrants, they may be placed in classes that are below their learning level and stymie the tourist mentality they enter with, essentially squashing the energy they bring to the new learning environment. Interestingly, Kaprielan-Churchill argued that refugee youth "do not always comprehend their own status and condition and cannot articulate their experiences and their needs" [17]. If these students are unaware of their own status, they may misinterpret teachers' actions towards them as well. It is important that teachers understand their refugee students' backgrounds and what their specific needs are instead of grouping them in with other diverse populations.

Conclusion

As America's classrooms become more diverse and accountability models expose holes in the education systems, school districts need to take steps to ensure that their principals and teachers are prepared for the challenges of teaching all students. Cooper's Framework provides a series of steps to help districts prepare for teaching refugee students. These top-down initiatives use elements of the whole school approach including funding, targeted policies, and strong leadership [1]. Taylor and Sidhu's work supports the whole school approach while adding the element of inclusion [2]. Finally, Ogbu and Simons' Voluntary/Involuntary spectrum helps districts identify where the refugees are on the spectrum, which lends itself to teaching practices that would help to meet their needs [3]. While this framework is not all-inclusive, these nine steps are intended to be used as a whole, not separately, in order for successful teaching and learning for refugee students to take place.

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