Scripta Humanika:
Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan
Vol. 2, No. 2 November 2026, Hal 64-75
ISSN: 3110-892X (Print) ISSN: 3110-8911 (Electronic)
Open Access: https://scriptaintelektual.com/scripta-humanika/index

Refugee Education, Belonging, and Inclusion: Educational Experiences and Pathways to Social Integration

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Article Info :
Received:
18-09-2026
Revised:
05-10-2026
Accepted:
02-11-2026

Abstract

The education of refugees has become an increasing issue in terms of how education systems approach the displacement, migration and social/cultural integration of refugee students. This paper explores the educational experiences of refugees and identifies the key factors that foster their sense of belonging, inclusion, and promote social integration. This study used an integrative literature review, guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 framework, to examine refugee education, belonging, and social integration. The first search was done on Google Scholar with the broad search term 'refugee education' and generated about 2,480,000 hits. However, a new search with Boolean keywords and filters resulted only in 100 citations, and after the process of duplicate elimination and screening, only 10 studies were selected for the review. Using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, we coded and reviewed the selected studies to identify recurring patterns. This process resulted in five major themes: (1) education access is important but it's just not enough; (2) belonging is an essential learning condition; (3) educators play crucial roles in inclusion; (4) language and identity are resources to be managed; and (5) systems change is necessary for inclusion. The findings suggest that refugee education should move beyond enrolment and access toward approaches that address belonging, linguistic and cultural recognition, teacher support, and structural conditions. The review argues the importance of educational policy and practice that identifies refugees as active agents who, through their identities and experiences, create inclusive educational communities, rather than as passive recipients of support.

Keywords : *refugee education, forced migration, school belonging, inclusion, structural barriers.*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the important aspects of life that contributes to the sense of security, building relationships, learning, and integrating people into the community. However, displaced individuals often face a range of challenges in accessing educational opportunities, including conflict, displacement, lack of appropriate documentation and financial means, language barriers, discrimination, and the capacity of host countries' educational systems (Bellino & Dryden-Peterson, 2018; Morrice, 2021). These challenges suggest that we cannot evaluate the educational experience of displaced individuals solely based on their school enrollment. The modern refugee education strategy has moved away from the provision of education during emergencies and focused more on inclusion within the national education systems. The international organizations, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), have highlighted that inclusion within the national education systems could foster continuity of learning, solidarity, and future possibilities for the refugee students. However, research indicates that even policies that grant the right to education might not guarantee participation, progression, or certification. The size and longevity of the problem are substantial and noticeable. The reality is, as the UNHCR reported in 2024, that the barriers to refugee children's education and participation are still serious, and it becomes harder the further they go in their level of education. This

issue is crucial because access to an educational level does not necessarily mean the right to move to the next level. Even where initial access to schooling has been achieved, inequality can persist, especially in the case of refugees, where participation rates in tertiary education have been particularly low. Another problem, noted by contemporary researchers, is a sense of belonging (Drysdale et al., 2021). It has become apparent recently that safety, belonging, social relationships, and education participation are interrelated rather than separate dimensions of refugee students' experiences (McBrien, 2017). The problems concerning education persist among refugee children, especially when it comes to higher levels of schooling. The limited involvement in tertiary education proves that educational inequality persists despite initial schooling. Belonging is another aspect mentioned in current literature (UNHCR, 2023; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). The newest evidence shows that safety, belonging, and education are interrelated aspects.

As indicated by the systematic literature review conducted by Aleghfeli et al. (2025) in the context of education for refugees and forced migrants in Europe, "education does not depend solely on the possibility of being educated." It is influenced by factors of social relations, recognition, culture, and participation." This article is especially pertinent because it shows that education inclusion should not be defined only in terms of access. However, the European perspective can serve as a foundation for studying the connections between access, belonging, language, identity, pedagogical practice, and institutional conditions within the larger realm of refugee education literature (Koehler, 2025).

This approach is in line with the larger literature base connected to Sarah Dryden-Peterson, whose research defines refugee education as one of the key processes where individuals engage with the issues of belonging, identity, national systems, and future opportunities. The author's work has focused on refugee education's goals, refugee integration into national education systems, civic education, transitions, and refugee educators and learners' experiences (Dryden-Peterson, 2019, 2020, 2022; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). This review, based on this research and subsequent reviews, does not consider access to education, sense of belonging, language, identity, teacher support, and institutional inclusion as separate issues. Instead, it takes all these aspects together, looking at how they affect the educational experience and progress toward social integration of refugee learners. Thus, this review broadens the scope of the existing literature by taking into account all the interdependent aspects of refugee educational inclusion mentioned.

The main purpose of this article is to review the literature on refugee education using the following main research questions: Why do structural and institutional barriers to the educational progression of refugee students exist beyond initial enrollment at different levels of education? And how do teachers, language policies, and school environments foster or hinder refugee students' sense of belonging and educational inclusion? This review, based on information from 10 articles identified through *Google Scholar*, seeks to investigate the various educational, relational, and institutional factors that shape the experiences of refugee learners in ways that go beyond access to education. The contribution of this paper lies in the focus on the effect of these interrelated factors when moving from educational access to meaningful participation and inclusion.

Educational rights can be regarded as essential human rights; however, their fulfillment depends upon the capability of educational systems to get rid of practical, institutional, and social obstacles. Refugee learners face all these challenges simultaneously. As Dryden-Peterson (2022) contends, refugee education needs to be conceptualized as an element of the future that refugees want to construct, not a response to the humanitarian crisis. Similarly, Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) examined the goals of refugee education and the implications of integrating refugees into the country's educational system.

This shows that inclusion of refugees in the education system goes beyond mere logistics and raises issues regarding educational quality, belonging, identity, participation, and future prospects. There have been increasing international policy developments in this regard. The efforts made by UNESCO and UNHCR regarding the inclusion of refugees highlight the possibility of a sustainable approach through inclusion within the national system itself. Withal, there is a significant difference between the right to education and the ability to enjoy the benefits of such a right as shown in the literature. Access may provide a gateway to education, but it does not necessarily remove the barriers that exist regarding finance, language, society, institutions, and academics. This is an important distinction when considering the concept of inclusion, as the term may mean differently in diverse educational contexts. In one situation, success is merely being able to go to national schools; in another,

it consists of access, success at school, recognition, belonging, and eventually graduation. It is clear from the literature that refugee education should be conceptualized through the following interrelated aspects: Access:- When students are able to access education and continue their studies; Quality and inclusion:- If students have access to quality and equal education opportunities; Future opportunities:- whether education provides students with opportunities for further learning and work.

These three aspects are interconnected; however, they are not interchangeable. A refugee learner may be able to attend school but may be prevented from learning in the classroom, encounter difficulties in moving forward through the learning process or be limited once a certain level of learning has been reached. This distinction can provide the basis for a critical analysis of the literature to date.

The structural barriers identified by scholars in their research into the education of refugees form one of the common themes. These include issues such as school capacity limitations, financial limitations, documentation, language, transportation, differences in curricula, learning material limitations, etc. Another recent systematic review on learning barriers for refugee children identified constraints in school support, curriculum differences, language and culture barriers, lack of learning material, and non-responsive educational environment (Ndibalema, 2024). Typically, refugees attending educational facilities report these barriers, but not all experience them equally. The effect of these barriers may vary according to the age, educational background and the level of education that the learner is seeking. For instance, a young learner who is going to primary education could be facing a different set of challenges than another learner who is pursuing secondary or tertiary education because of the learner's interrupted education. Language barriers may affect learners differently depending on how long they have been in the country. It is worth noting that the above barriers can work together. The refugee learner with an interrupted education may enrol in a class where the educational syllabus is based on prior knowledge that the learner has not yet acquired. When a learner has limited command of the language of instruction, educational challenges may be perceived as individual weaknesses rather than as consequences of displacement and disruption.

The idea points to a conflict in the literature. Some educational strategies to support refugees are to adapt to an existing system, but an inclusion approach questions the system by asking how flexible it is in the face of diverse educational backgrounds (Boukhari, 2025; Le Pichon, 2025). The central concern is that a learner with interrupted education may need additional academic support, while a learner with a strong educational background may need only language or recognition support. This distinction is important because a deficit perspective looks for individual weaknesses in the refugee learner, while an inclusion perspective tries to find out whether the education system is flexible enough to cope with various educational paths. The global assessment carried out by UNESCO shows a similar gap between policy and inclusion. Although many countries hosting refugees allow them access to their education systems, the capacity to pass the whole education ladder is inconsistent. Also of interest are the differences in the education systems of the host countries. Inclusion policies may have been developed at the national level, but there can be different experiences at the school level due to different levels of resource allocation, language policies, administration and curricula and attitudes towards refugees (Bajo Marcos et al., 2024). Hence, it is wrong to think that the literature on the subject reflects a uniform refugee education experience. It manifests how structural barriers intersect with an individual's educational environment.

The concept of belonging has been gaining more and more importance in refugee education research. School belonging is the learner's perception of being accepted, respected, recognised and valued as a member of the school community. Likewise, Aleghfeli et al. (2025) claim that safety, sense of belonging and educational success are intricately linked to each other. The systematic review conducted by these authors proves that discrimination, bullying, exclusion, and isolation can make a person feel a lack of belonging, while positive relations encourage it. The research by Amina et al. (2024) also indicates the significance of teachers, peer groups, and home language in building the belongingness of refugees. The researchers found out that the teachers were aware of the significance of knowing the refugee background of students, helping their peers to interact and making use of their linguistic backgrounds.

This research also identified deficit discourses. Additional discussion of the role of teachers and schools in the process can be found in the work of Anderson et al. (2024) refer to teachers and schools as "brokers of belonging." But taken together, the works suggest that relationships matter and that belonging is a social process that is constructed differently in different contexts. Amina et al.

(2024), pointed to the importance of teachers, peers and home language. Aleghfeli et al. (2025) stated out of the safety, discrimination and social relationships. The research work by Anderson et al. (2024) points out that schools and teachers play a role in the promotion and prevention of belonging respectively. According to the research results obtained by Anderson et al. (2024) from their interaction with refugees' youth, it becomes clear that teachers have an opportunity to foster and impair youth's sense of belonging. Consequently, belonging has implications for learning, as well as socially. Those students who consider themselves to belong to their school environments will be more likely to engage in activities, establish connections, receive help with academics, and think that they have a future in education. It is also relevant to this discussion are questions of age and education level. Younger students rely more on teachers and peers for their daily social interactions, while older students may have other concerns about their education, identity, career and future studies. The literature should not generalise refugee students as an identical cohort of individuals with the same experiences. This is because belonging can be different depending on the age of the individual, the education stage and others.

The dimension of refugee education is language. Students may possess very good knowledge of a language, but not necessarily of the language of instruction. Ignoring the resources they already have will socially and educationally marginalize them. Language must be viewed not only as a tool for education, but also as a part of one's identity. The language spoken at home is important and valuing it is a way to say that their history and identity are important in the space of school. Teachers valued the contribution of home language and multicultural education to the legitimization of students as visible and active participants (Amina et al., 2024). The writings of Dryden-Peterson are also based on the premise that education always revolves around issues of identity and inclusion. The works related to civic education and refugee education demonstrate the importance of understanding the membership of the displaced students (Dryden-Peterson, 2020). In the same vein, studies conducted on how refugees negotiate their ethnic and national identities reveal that schools can become sites where children negotiate a multiplicity of identities without necessarily substituting one identity for another, where children negotiate a multiplicity of identities without necessarily substituting an identity with one from the new setting (Mulimbi & Dryden-Peterson, 2019).

Not only does the research provide a standard justification for the recognition of the linguistic and cultural assets of learners, but it also demonstrates how the concept of recognition is interpreted differently in various contexts. For some students, recognition of the home language can ease the process of participation and belonging. For other students, the main issue may be access to the language of instruction and the recognition of their past learning experiences. Thus, the research body indicates that language help cannot be confined to language correction or translation alone. A culturally responsive pedagogy, therefore, goes beyond just the translation of the instructional materials but recognizes the learner’s prior experience and knowledge as part of his or her participation in education (Ober et al., 2023). Displacement status is also something to consider. Newly displaced refugees may require different levels of education and language proficiency than long-term residents within the host nation. Displacement length might influence knowledge of the education system in the host country, skills in language learning, social networks, and aspirations for further education. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between the immediate consequences of displacement and the process of educational integration.

The role played by teachers in refugee education is especially significant since they interact with students at a personal level and also enforce institutional policies. The school environment is very important for the education of refugees, Baak et al. (2023) show that what works well in one school does not necessarily work well in another school since schools vary in terms of leadership, resources, student demographics, and institutional culture. This finding thus raises a question for programs and practices that hold teachers responsible for refugee inclusion. While teachers can develop positive relationships, their ability to act effectively will depend on the overall institutional environment. This insight offers a crucial caution to studies that focus on the centrality of teachers in terms of integrating refugees into schools. The teacher can foster positive relations, adjust classroom practices, and take note of the cultural and linguistic background of the students, but all of these efforts are conditioned by the environment of the school in which the teaching takes place (Baak et al., 2023). Even a teacher with a lot of training may not be able to give each student individual help if the classes are large, resources are scarce, or policies limit what can be done.

Moreover, the literature indicates that the experience of teachers differs among countries and schools. Teachers' training, school management, resources, students and national policies affect their ability to act (Düzen & Uyanık, 2025; Karabacak et al., 2025). So, teacher training is important. Teachers need to understand refugees' experiences, language acquisition, interrupted schooling, culturally relevant pedagogy, discrimination and exclusion (Reddick, 2024). School leadership and inclusion policies, adequate resources should follow professional development.

Education goes beyond learning. In relation to refugees, learning may help them obtain jobs easier, be citizens, develop relations, and integrate into the society. Dryden-Peterson (2022) has often considered the forward-looking nature of refugee education. Education should aim to prepare people for changes in the economic and social context rather than maintain inequalities. When we are talking about refugees this becomes even more important because their displacement can last for decades. Displacement is often long-term, which points out the necessity of sustainable education systems, according to UNESCO. Much current research supports the link between education and social integration. Anderson et al. (2024) reported that education acts as a tool for social integration, participation in civic life, and labor force involvement, and in this process, school and teachers play an important part in generating the sense of belonging. These findings lead to the conclusion that educational integration is a process. Recent studies support the connection between education and social integration. But it must be remembered that the link is not automatic. As for educational programs, interaction and future job prospects are possible, but outcomes will differ depending on the learner's educational level, age, language proficiency, educational background, and the host country's policies (Dagar, 2024; Hammoud et al., 2025). Regarding the integration process, the younger refugees may be more closely connected to school life while the older ones may need to deal with additional challenges related to secondary education, tertiary education, employment and recognition of qualifications. A clear consensus is evident in the literature review findings concerning the links between access, sense of belonging, language, identity, teacher support and institutional factors. However, the reviewed studies also highlight the various contexts and populations studied, indicating that the educational experiences of refugees cannot be fully understood according to a single theoretical framework. Several approaches, including the education systems of host countries, level of education, age and phase of the migration process can influence the barriers to education and inclusion experienced by individuals. This diversity identified justifies the comparative literature analysis described above.

RESEARCH METHODS

As illustrated in the *PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) below*, the literature search was started with a broad search on Google Scholar using the search term "refugee education." This search identified approximately 2,480,000 records. The number was very large, and therefore the search had to be more focused using structured Boolean search strings and relevant filters. Thus, the number of records identified for further analysis was 100. After the 100 records were collected, 20 of them were duplicates. This resulted in 80 records for the next round. The titles and abstracts of these 80 records were further screened. Following this, 60 records were considered irrelevant to the focus and requirements of the study and were excluded from the process. Thus, only 20 records were available for further analysis. Full texts of these 20 records were obtained and reviewed for eligibility. This led to the elimination of 10 records. Among these, four were found to be non-empirical records, four were not within the scope of the review, and two did not contain adequate information for the study. Overall, 10 empirical studies were chosen as meeting all criteria and were included in the final synthesis. These empirical studies were the main source of evidence for the review. The review was used to investigate the results of the research about the education of refugees. The screening process allowed us to narrow down the large number of records initially found to the number of relevant studies. Employing reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), we first acquainted ourselves with the literature selected for this review and made notes of the concepts covered in the articles. After this step, we began coding our data and repeated the process multiple times while clustering the codes with similar themes and making notes of the patterns found within the body of the studies. In doing so, we were able to cluster the findings into five major themes. While 35 sources are cited throughout the research paper for theoretical, policy, and contextual information, the systematic synthesis and thematic analysis only focus on 10 sources that have been selected based on the PRISMA approach.

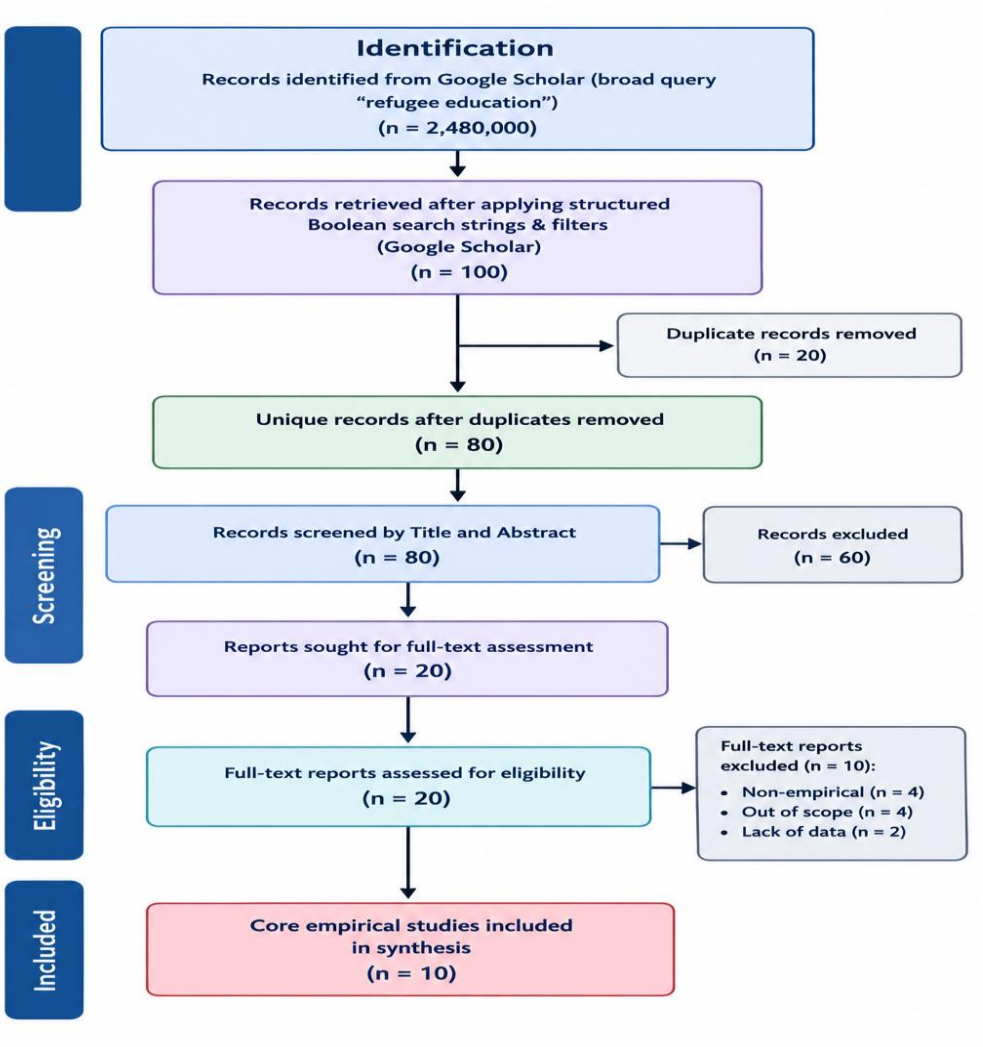


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the 10 sources used resulted in the emergence of five interrelated themes. The approach does not treat these themes as separate pieces of evidence but rather looks across the evidence provided for all the themes, the points of convergence and divergence, and the level of evidence available for each theme. The findings indicate that we can understand refugee education through the interaction of access, belonging, teaching practices, language, identity, and the broader institutional context. Evidence on these themes is fairly consistent.

Education Access Is Important but It's Just Not Enough

The first key finding is that access to education is an important basis of refugee integration, but does not guaranty education equality in itself. International experience shows that refugees face major barriers at every stage of the educational journey – from access to progression and completion of educational programs. This is manifest, for example, in the 2024 report of UNHCR. As one ascends the education ladder, educational inequality may increase. From the literature, it is clear that access must be seen throughout the entire educational continuum. A child who gains access to primary school but does not progress to secondary school has experienced partial educational exclusion.

In line with these findings, it can be said that the argument of Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) regarding the goals of refugee education being not limited to access but also extending beyond access holds true. The implication is that governments have to go beyond just counting the number of

enrollments but also have to focus on attendance, learning, completion, transition, certification, and progression. This synthesis also emphasizes an additional important difference that exists between educational levels. In some cases, access to primary or compulsory education may be guaranteed in law, but access to secondary and higher education may still be a problem. Therefore, the use of enrollment rates as a measure of inclusion cannot provide a full picture of the problem since a child may enter education but face some obstacles in terms of attendance, learning, transitions, certification, and other aspects of the educational process. Evidence for this theme is compelling as the same pattern is seen in empirical research papers, systematic reviews and literature on education of refugees (Aiello et al., 2025; Anas, 2025; Borkowski, 2023; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). The evidence does not suggest that the same barrier applies in all cases, as this depends on the level of education, the country's education system and the situation of the refugee group in question.

Belonging is an Essential Learning Condition

The other significant point Another important point is that belonging is not merely an accessory to the educational process. It is tightly bound to the participation of students in school. Aleghfeli et al. (2025) claims that a systematic review of the relationship between safety, belonging and success was intertwined. Discrimination, bullying, isolation are threats to belonging, as are supportive relationships and a positive environment for fostering belonging. Similar to Amina et al. (2024), the teacher-learner relationship, peer relationships, and recognition of the learners' linguistic background are factors impacting their sense of belonging. This result points to the idea that the sense of belonging needs to be considered as an institutional obligation and not a psychological one. It should not be required of a refugee learner to "fit in" into a new setting. In contrast, the studies assign different importance to the sources of belonging. The sources emphasized include interpersonal relationships, school structures, and so on. This distinction is crucial, as it demonstrates that interpersonal relationships and the school, rather than solely individual experience, shape belonging. The strength of the evidence on the second theme is particularly important, as it is supported by systematic review and empirical research (Aleghfeli et al., 2025; Amina et al., 2024; Anderson et al., 2024). Still, the evidence so far does not indicate that a particular practice can promote students' sense of belonging irrespective of the context. In contrast, it points to the fact that belonging results from safety, positive interpersonal relationships, recognition, and inclusiveness.

Educators Play Crucial Roles in Inclusion

It has to do with the significant role of the teacher. Anderson et al. in their study (2024) define teachers as brokers of belonging in that they facilitate the relationship between youth and schools as well as between youth and society more broadly. Inclusion in classrooms can be fostered by teachers when they gain knowledge about the background of students, encourage peer interactions, respect their native languages, have high expectations, fight discrimination, adopt culturally responsive teaching strategies, and provide guidance about education routes. These studies have identified common practices for an inclusive education experience, including understanding students' backgrounds, promoting relationships between peers, recognizing home language, maintaining high expectations, addressing discrimination, applying a culturally responsive approach, and helping students understand educational pathways. The results are similar, but it would be incorrect to assume that teachers alone can solve the problem of refugee education. However, Baak et al. (2023) argue that the school context determines the way that such practices are applied. Thus, commitment on the part of teachers is not sufficient in place of structural supports. For example, teachers may wish to provide individual language support, but they cannot do so effectively without the necessary resources. One important limitation to the findings on teachers was raised by Baak et al. (2023) demonstrates the influence of schools' context on what teachers can realistically accomplish in practice. A teacher may be committed to including children in the education process but may lack the time, materials, languages, training, or even the institutional authority to do so.

The problem is that the research presents a contradictory image of teachers. They are identified as key actors of inclusion, but their ability to contribute to the process depends on their system. There is moderate to strong evidence and converging findings across studies of teachers and school contexts that support this theme e.g. (Amina et al., 2024; Anderson et al., 2024; Baak et al., 2023). The research also suggests that teachers are mediators and not sole providers of inclusion. There is consistency across

these studies on what teacher actions correlate to inclusion in education: knowledge of the background of students, fostering peer relationships, acknowledging home language, having high expectations, reacting to discrimination, cultural responsiveness, and supporting the educational journey of students. This does not mean, however, that these results imply that teachers have the sole solution to refugee education problems.

Language and Identity Are Resources to Be Managed

The language and identity tend to be either barriers or assets depending on the orientation of the education system. A deficit perspective views a lack of proficiency in the majority language as academic failure. From an inclusion perspective, the learner who is a refugee could have multilingual and multicultural assets, which could help them learn in class. The studies examined here support the second approach. According to Amina et al. (2024), home languages and multicultural education can be effective in increasing the visibility and audibility of the refugees in the classrooms. The study is also in line with Dryden-Peterson's work in relation to identity, belongingness, and civic education. Refugees create different types of belongingness rather than shifting from one national identity to another (Dryden-Peterson, 2020; Mulimbi & Dryden-Peterson, 2019). Schools must not require students to forego their identity to include them in the school system. The findings of these studies are therefore in agreement that identity is not static in displacement. However, this research proves that the process of forming these individuals' identities is highly dependent on the educational and social environment. This thus separates inclusion from assimilation in terms of identity formation. It's important to note that refugee students don't lose their preschool identities when they are included in school. Strength of evidence: medium. Identity has been studied little as a factor in the learning experience. But evidence is limited because it does not cover some groups of refugees and some learning environments.

Systems Change Is Necessary for Inclusion

The most important finding is that the inclusion of refugees cannot be only the task of individual schools and teachers. According to UNESCO, refugee inclusion requires policy efforts to ensure legal recognition, access to education, quality, progression, certification and socio-economic inclusion. In the same way, UNHCR stresses the need to incorporate refugee students within the national education system and build system capacity. It implies that a refugee education policy needs to be multi-level: International level: finance, common but differentiated responsibility and international obligations. National level: legislation, curriculum, teachers, data collection systems, credentialing, financing School level: leadership, teaching, languages, anti-discrimination policies and parental involvement. Classroom level: relationships, pedagogy, peer interactions, and learner identity recognition. These levels are interconnected." Interventions at other levels may be hampered in their effectiveness by weakness at any level. The synthesis shows the link between the five themes. Access can help students access education but belonging determines if students are engaged. Teachers can foster inclusion, but their role is affected by the context of the school. Language and identity can help students to engage where institutions recognize them. All of these interactions depend on larger educational policies and resources. Therefore, we should view the topics as interconnected pieces of a single educational puzzle rather than as separate entities.

There is a fair amount of literature supporting system level changes, although it is somewhat mixed. Sometimes the research is based on empirical data from a particular school or educational setting. In some other cases, the research presents systematic reviews or analysis of large scale of the subject (Aiello et al., 2025; Baak et al., 2023; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; Tippett et al., 2024). This means that the literature provides an excellent basis for the importance of system conditions in general, but not enough information on what kind of policy intervention would be effective in all countries and among refugees. All five themes are closely related and not distinct findings. The key finding that is repeatedly found in the literature is that the issue of refugee education should not be viewed through the lens of school attendance. The concept of inclusion includes further participation, a sense of belonging, relationships, language and identity, and capacity building. However, across educational levels and contexts, the elements vary widely. The synthesis points to the tension between a more individualistic or structural approach to the issue. Some studies focus more closely on relationships and how teachers do their work, others focus more closely on the school setting, national systems and

structural barriers. Individualistic and structural views do not contradict each other. Studies have demonstrated that an appropriate structural and policy environment enhances the effectiveness of teacher and school practices.

Overall, the research does indeed justify a change of perspective from viewing refugee education as a question of accessibility to viewing the process of participation, inclusion, recognition, and progress. However, the design, setting, and type of evidence in the selected papers are different, so the results presented in the paper cannot be considered universal for all refugees. The main importance of the study is to show the interrelation of these factors and the conditions under which educational inclusion is possible.

CONCLUSION

This paper enhance teachers' ability to cope with the educational and social experiences related to access, belonging, inclusion, language, identity, and institutionality in the lived experiences of refugees as learners. The results can be grouped in the national education system and not depend on separate provisions in five main categories. First, access is important but not enough. For refugee learners, access to schools is crucial for inclusion, but education encompasses more than merely attending classes. Secondly, the need to belong is critical in the success of one's education. For refugee children to succeed in their education, the school environment should be one that is safe, comfortable, and socially meaningful. Recent research indicates that there is a need to enhance teachers' ability to cope with the educational and social experiences they encounter, as well as to understand the relationship between safety, belonging, and educational success. Thirdly, teachers must facilitate the process of belonging. Fourth, we must recognize that language and identity serve as valuable assets for learning. It will enhance participation and demonstrate that the refugee students are valuable members of the educational system. Finally, refugee education needs systemic change. The school cannot solve the problem alone. There is a need for coordination between education ministries, schools, humanitarian organizations, communities, families, and other public bodies. In the end, the education of refugees is not a stopgap measure for education in response to displacement. Given the protracted nature of displacement, the reality is that education often becomes part of the life experience of the refugee community. Refugees need an education system that allows them to belong and thrive in schools. The review indicates that education for refugees is not simply an issue of whether or not the learners attend school. Meaningful educational inclusion, for the 10 sources included in the review, entails continuous engagement in educational processes, belongingness, supportive relations between teachers and peers, recognition of language and identity, and a supportive institutional context. As the literature shows, these aspects of meaningful inclusion are interlinked; access to education provides an opportunity to engage but does not ensure further progress and completion of education.

There is a higher level of evidence if systematic reviews and empirical research come to the same conclusions. For example, systematic reviews by Aleghfeli et al., (2025), Aiello et al., (2025), Anas (2025) and Calaycay (2023) describe enduring barriers and contexts that affect engagement in education and successful completion. Additional context-specific information on belongingness, teaching, institutional setting, identity and equity in education is provided in empirical research by Amina et al. (2024), Anderson et al. (2024), Baak et al. (2023), Mulimbi and Dryden-Peterson (2019) and Tippett et al. (2024) respectively. Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019), Dryden-Peterson (2020, 2022) provide further information on the broader aims of refugees' education in more conceptual and policy-related works. Governments need to increase the inclusion of refugees into the national education system and not depend on separate provision alone. We must combine the inclusion of refugees with adequate resources, teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and a monitoring mechanism for educational achievement. Another policy that should be adopted is to ensure that refugee children move through all stages of education and get certified. This recommendation is according to UNESCO and UNHCR data. The most important policy implication of this review is the need to mainstream refugee learners into the national education system instead of relying on other forms of education systems.

This implication from the policy is mainly attributed to Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) due to the reasons why refugees are included in the education system of a country and the general literature that exists as a result of systematic reviews of recent years (Aiello et al., 2025; Aleghfeli et al., 2025; Calaycay, 2023). The review also suggests the need for adequate resources and capacity at the level of the national education system for the implementation of this inclusion policy. The importance of school

context has also been addressed by Baak et al. (2023). Tippett et al. (2024) have addressed how school leadership and teaching staff have addressed the issues of equity and equality in practice. The evidence points to a number of school-level measures that can be taken, but the recommendations here are primarily based on empirical studies and systematic reviews and not necessarily the evidence that every intervention is tried in all the refugee education settings. The schools should develop effective inclusion practices and policies for the learners from the refugee background. This is especially so as school and institutional environment influence educational experience (Baak et al., 2023). Schools have to deal with bullying, discrimination and exclusion and this is related to safety and belonging which are closely related to educational participation (Aleghfeli et al., 2025). Schools need to provide language and academic support to overcome language and other barriers (Amina et al., 2024; Calaycay, 2023). Literature suggests that access should be viewed as the wider education continuum and that schools should track not only enrollment rates, but also participation and academic progress (Aiello et al., 2025; Anas, 2025; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). Potential benefits for inclusion of parental and community engagement. The research available in this review is less direct in this area than in the areas of belonging, teacher-student interaction, context at the school level and language. Well-defined policies, responses to bullying and discrimination, and the provision of language and academic support can help to make refugee students feel included in schools. They can also encourage students to interact with one another, involve refugee families, respect their languages and cultures, and pay attention to their progress and participation, not simply their enrollment.

The empirical literature consistently suggests the need to enhance teachers' ability to cope with the educational and social experiences 'of refugee learners. Teachers' knowledge about the sense of belonging at schools is important (Amina et al., 2024). Teachers are important brokers of the sense of belonging (Anderson et al., 2024). Baak et al. (2023) identified the influence of the broader school context on teacher practices. Teacher training should also prepare teachers for the realities that refugee students may face such as displacement, interrupted schooling, multilingual classrooms, cultural differences, trauma, discrimination and limited access to further education. It should also help teachers understand the rights of refugee learners and encourage them to see their students' ability and potential, rather than what they are missing. This review highlights the need for better data on education, in particular data that can measure participation and progression beyond enrollment. But this data collection should protect learners' privacy and not cause stigma or discrimination. In general, the literature on refugees and education indicates that education systems need to be able to cater to the educational needs of refugees, and the empirical literature suggests that even when enrolled, they may still have unique experiences. The education system needs to enhance data collection on the refugee students without infringing on their privacy or stigmatizing them. According to UNESCO's study, there is an evident lack in terms of how visible refugees are in the education database systems.

Future research could look more closely at refugees' educational pathways, especially their transition from secondary school to higher education. It should also pay attention to disabled refugees, gender-related experiences, education in low- and middle-income host countries, teacher preparation, refugees' own views of education, non-formal and informal learning, and the connection between education and employment. The main implication of the review is that the inclusion process must be considered a collective responsibility of all the actors involved in the education process. The literature examining teachers' influence on students' sense of belonging shows that teachers can establish supportive relationships and an inclusive atmosphere (Amina et al., 2024; Anderson et al., 2024). Nevertheless, research specifically focused on the school context shows that this ability is contingent upon the institutional environment in which teachers operate (Baak et al., 2023).

Therefore, teachers should not be the only ones responsible for inclusion. Teachers need the support of school leadership, resources and enough professional training to do their role. School organizations need the right policies and institutional arrangements to promote participation and a sense of belonging. In general, education systems need the legal, financial, and administrative conditions for all this to happen. This research suggests that inclusion must occur at the systemic level. Teachers can generate belongingness, but schools need to generate institutional settings conducive to it. Schools can develop learners, but national governments need to create the right legal, economic, and policy contexts for inclusion to happen.

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