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**An Exploration of the Factors
Influencing the Inclusion of
Refugee Background Learners in the
Aotearoa New Zealand Education System**

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Abstract

For several years, a refugee crisis has been taking place as an unprecedented number of people become displaced following conflict and persecution in their home countries, half of whom are children and young people under the age of 18. As Aotearoa New Zealand continues to welcome refugees, it is essential for schools and the wider education system to encourage inclusion of refugee background learners. Enabling them the opportunity to participate meaningfully with education, and experience academic and social success, will lead to positive future outcomes and minimise marginalisation. In this research, a mixed-method design is used to explore the factors influencing inclusion of a small cohort of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Sixteen participants completed an online survey, with three engaging further in a semi-structured interview allowing them an opportunity to provide a perspective of their lived experience in the education system. It was found that the key factors contributing to inclusion for these learners were parent engagement in education, teacher and peer relationships, recognition and value of cultural diversity, and the extra resources they were able to access to enhance their academic and social outcomes. It is hoped the findings from this research can inform teachers, schools, and education policy makers of the factors contributing to inclusion from the perspective of the learners. This will allow systems and processes to be put in place which have the potential to increase participation, learning and belonging of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa education system.

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“No one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.”

–Alfred North Whitehead

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Refugees are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, with the same hopes and ambitions as us – except that a twist of fate has bound their lives to a global refugee crisis on an unprecedented scale.”

– Khaled Hosseini

A global refugee crisis is taking place as an unprecedented number of people seek refuge in countries other than their own to escape war, violence and persecution. Current statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2018) estimate that 25.4 million people are recognised as refugees under international law, fifty-three percent of whom are children and young people aged under 18. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies both new and prolonged conflict, as well as the denial of human rights based on one’s religion, race, or political or social beliefs as the key factors leading to individuals becoming refugees (UNHCR, 2018).

In an effort to ‘do our bit’ as a nation and provide sanctuary for a number of refugees, the Aotearoa New Zealand government has developed the Refugee Quota Programme to ensure a minimum number of vulnerable people are resettled within local communities each year. Refugees who enter through the programme must be identified as mandated refugees by the UNHCR and on arrival gain permanent residency permitting them to immediately access resources such as healthcare and education (Immigration New Zealand, 2018a; Stephens, 2017). Refugees may also arrive under the Refugee Family Support Category or as spontaneous refugees (also known as asylum seekers). The Refugee Family Support Category provides a quota of a further 300 places allowing the family members of resettled refugees to join them, while spontaneous

refugees typically seek refugee or protection status upon their arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand (Immigration New Zealand, 2018a).

Between August 2017 and July 2018, just over 1,000 refugees resettled in Aotearoa New Zealand under the Refugee Quota Programme. A further 431 were granted residency as either spontaneous refugees or under the Refugee Family Support Category. Of those who arrived as part of the Refugee Quota Programme, 377 were school-age and a further 107 were under five years of age, so would have engaged with the Aotearoa New Zealand education system soon after arrival (Immigration New Zealand, 2018b). Presence, participation, and belonging in education is a critical element of resettlement for these children and young people. Therefore, responsive and inclusive education can facilitate successful integration into a new society and can support the well-being of refugee background learners as they navigate the many changes and challenges resettlement brings (Hayward, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Post-arrival support is provided at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre for all refugees resettling in Aotearoa New Zealand; this includes the provision of education programmes for children and young people. These programmes provide an opportunity to learn about local culture and society, gain English language skills, and become familiar with the expectations and norms of the education system ahead of integrating into community schools (Ministry of Education, 2016). While these programmes are an important and valuable component of resettlement, they are short in duration (six weeks) and do not provide a realistic experience of mainstream schools as they lack the social and cultural complexities that influence the formal education system. For most refugee background learners, the transition from the resettlement centre to school will

be their first experience of their new community, and it is within the school environment that they learn to navigate these societal and cultural expectations, forge new relationships, and develop the skills that will enable future independence and self-sufficiency (Hayes, 2016).

Aotearoa New Zealand is a signatory to several international agreements outlining the educational rights of children and young people, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Consequently, the education system has a responsibility to provide effective and appropriate education which is responsive to all learners, regardless of their background. To do so effectively, the factors that influence the ability of learners to engage meaningfully must be understood. Research by Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs (2014) recognises that schools with “an ethos of equity and inclusion” (p. 1340) have the potential to strengthen the academic and vocational abilities of refugee background learners while promoting social belonging, all of which contribute to successful resettlement within Aotearoa New Zealand society.

While inclusion is promoted within local schools via initiatives and frameworks such as *Success for All* (Ministry of Education, 2010) and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), this research is interested in exploring the factors contributing to inclusion for refugee background learners in Aotearoa New Zealand. Recognising these factors will provide valuable information about how the participation, belonging, and learning of these children and young people can be increased within the existing multicultural education system. This research does not aim to make any generalisations or inferences about the refugee population, but rather focuses on the

Chapter 1: Introduction

perceptions of a small number of refugee background learners currently in the education system. Although the body of research is increasing as refugee background learners become more common in schools globally, literature which is specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context is limited. By engaging with refugee background learners and exploring their lived experiences through their voice, this research concentrates on the holistic and dynamic processes of inclusion which can sustain a supportive and responsive setting which values diversity, supporting social and emotional wellbeing.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

“In our world, knowledge is power, and education empowers. It is an indispensable part of the development equation. It has intrinsic value – extending far beyond the economic – to empower people to determine their own destiny. That is why the opportunity to be educated is central to advancing human development”

– Helen Clark

This chapter explores the available literature which focuses on the challenges refugee background learners face within the education system as well as the processes, systems, and interactions which support their inclusion, both in the Aotearoa New Zealand context and internationally, providing direction for this research. Inclusion is the dominant theme of this research, so this is defined and examined in some depth along with the key factors identified in the literature as contributing to refugee background learners’ opportunity to experience this.

An Overview of the Current Issue

Over the last 75 years 33,000 refugees from diverse countries and backgrounds have resettled within Aotearoa New Zealand communities, with a further 1,000 to be settled annually as per the Aotearoa New Zealand government’s Refugee Quota Programme (Immigration New Zealand, 2018c). This number is set to increase following the Aotearoa New Zealand governments recent changes to the Refugee Quota Programme enabling 1,500 refugees to resettle within our communities each year from 2020. This change was the successful result of community led activism by Murdoch Stephens who campaigned for several years to ‘double the quota’, which prior to 2016 was only 750 (Ardern & Lees-Galloway, 2018; Stephens, 2017).

While resettlement is typically a positive step for refugees, relocation in an unfamiliar country can be daunting. Local and international research has identified grief

and trauma, the fracturing of family units, loss of identity, stigmatisation, and disempowerment as obstacles frequently faced by refugees (Kate, Verbitsky & Wilson, 2018; Nash, Wong & Trlin, 2006; Quinn, 2014). Unfortunately, these difficulties can continue following resettlement in host countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand. The isolation often encountered as a result of limited knowledge of the host country, and language barriers can amplify these obstacles (Hope, 2008; Kennedy, 2016; Marlowe, Bartley & Hibtit, 2014). Following resettlement, it is not uncommon for individuals of refugee background to experience lower socioeconomic standing, unemployment, poor health outcomes, psychological challenges, and ongoing prejudice and racism in their new communities (Block et al., 2014).

To support newly arrived “refugees settle more quickly into their lives in New Zealand, increasingly independent from Government help” (p. 5), the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy has been developed as a framework to encourage positive resettlement (Immigration New Zealand, 2012). The Strategy has identified that the attainment of five distinct goals can lead to enhanced integration and minimise marginalisation of refugee background newcomers by encouraging independence and belonging. These goals are:

1. *Self-sufficiency* through the attainment of paid employment.
2. *Active participation* in Aotearoa New Zealand communities.
3. Enjoying good physical and emotional *health and wellbeing*.
4. Involvement in *education* for adults and children – either formal schooling or to develop English language skills.
5. Obtaining safe, healthy, and secure *housing* without requiring government assistance.

While the focus of this research is involvement in formal education, the Strategy recognises that these goals are often interdependent, and aims to encourage coordination between government agencies, non-government organisations, and refugee communities to boost social and economic integration. A large proportion of refugees arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand are aged under 18, so the prioritisation of effective and appropriate education is vital to promote ongoing and long-term achievement of these strategy goals (Changemakers Refugee Forum, 2011; Marlowe et al., 2014).

To support an ethnically diverse society, the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) includes a multicultural focus to encourage participation and success for all learners. While it has a strong focus on academic learning areas, the development of competencies which enable young people to grow into positive and resilient adults who can participate and contribute effectively in their communities, both socially and economically, is also emphasised. Strauss and Smedley (2009) have noted that although refugee background learners in Aotearoa New Zealand have access to education, they are often at a disadvantage compared to non-refugee background peers when they enter local schools and commonly have distinct learning needs which can isolate them from the mainstream curriculum. Despite UNESCO's global Education for All movement working to provide quality basic education for all people regardless of their circumstances, the realities of war and persecution in countries of origin and life in refugee camps in transition countries typically leads to interrupted, poor quality, or, for some, no formal education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Ficarra, 2017; Miller, Ziaian, & Esterman, 2017).

There is no denying that the educational, social, and cultural experience of refugee background learners both in their past and upon resettlement can pose challenges within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. Limited language proficiency, negative (and often false) media characterisations, and the idea that refugees are helpless victims can contribute to society, including schools and teachers, focusing on the limitations of these individuals (Harvey & Myint, 2014; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018). Strauss and Smedley (2009) state that “schools exist to serve the societies in which they are positioned” (p. 5) so, as the cultural demographics of Aotearoa New Zealand communities change schools must respond. Encouraging all teachers, school support staff, and educational policy makers to focus on the strengths and capabilities of refugee background learners, rather than approaching their education with a deficit mindset, will promote meaningful participation for all students and, in time, alter the status quo (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014).

The opportunity for refugee background children to engage in formal education is not only a fundamental right, but, an obligation of the Aotearoa New Zealand government as per the UNESCO Framework for Action Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2016). This document states that while each child has equal opportunity to attend school in Aotearoa New Zealand, to ensure positive outcomes education must also be equitable, defined as “inclusive, responsive, and resilient . . . to meet the needs of all learners” (p. 32). To promote equitable education, guidelines for both the development of an inclusive school environment and for ensuring refugee background learners can participate fully in schooling have been outlined by the Ministry of Education in their *Refugee Handbook for Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2016). The *Refugee Handbook for Schools* is divided into five sections, each concentrating on an aspect of schooling which

has the potential to enhance educational success for refugee background learners.

These include:

1. *Preparing the school to welcome refugees* by providing a safe and supportive environment and culturally responsive staff.
2. Ensuring *enrolment processes* are completed in a manner that ensures both learners and their families understand the school processes, often with the assistance of bilingual support. Assessment should also be completed to ensure appropriate class placement
3. The planning and delivery of an effective and *appropriate teaching* programme. Knowledge of the learner, including recognition of their strengths and limitations are essential to ensure this can occur. Resources should be available to promote literacy and numeracy, and an individual learning plan should be developed with input from the learner and their family.
4. Advice on *identifying and managing learners who are at-risk* of social, emotional, psychological, or academic challenges. Schools need to have an awareness of the potential stressors and be sensitive to these and have processes in place to recognise when other support agencies are required to assist.
5. Supporting the smooth *transition from school* to tertiary education or the workforce. Providing good advice that is accurate and appropriate, enabling learners to access careers counsellors, and ensuring refugee background learners have an opportunity to make decisions about their future is essential for their long-term economic and social success.

While this handbook provides a plethora of useful information to promote inclusion of refugee background learners, it is the responsibility of the individual school and teachers to implement these approaches. Schools focused on encouraging these learners to be part of the wider school community through inclusive practice will contribute to positive integration, facilitating social connectedness and cohesion, and will minimise current and future marginalisation which is often seen within newcomer communities (Amthor & Roxas, 2016).

Inclusive Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

The concept of inclusion within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system became a focus of policy makers and educators in the 1990's following a trend of mainstreaming and the development of the *Special Education 2000 (SE2000)* initiative (Kearney & Kane, 2006; McMenemy, 2017). The Ministry of Education's goal of providing a "world class inclusive education system" (as cited in Brown, 1997, p. 141) through *SE2000* focused on improving the educational outcomes of those with higher learning and behavioural needs by developing inclusive classrooms and schools (Brown, 1997; Thomson, 2013). The Ministry of Education (2015) has defined inclusion within education as:

Ensuring all students are made to feel welcome at school and are able to take part in all aspects of school life. Diversity is respected and school-wide practices and classroom programmes respond to students' different needs, skills, interests, cultures and backgrounds (Inclusion, para. 4).

Inclusive education is still a priority of the Aotearoa New Zealand government; however, this goes beyond those with different educational needs and now applies to

every learner, with the policy *Success for All* (Ministry of Education, 2010) acting as a guiding framework for inclusive schools. This framework considers the role of quality and responsive teaching, effective leaders and systems, and involved parents as influencing learners' success. *Success for All* describes several expectations which must underpin all school processes and interactions to allow every learner to experience inclusion and educational achievement. These include valuing each learner and their family, respecting diversity, and striving for equity (Ministry of Education, 2010). These expectations are reiterated as values in the Ministry of Education's '*What an inclusive school looks like*' document designed for educators (Ministry of Education, 2014) and align with those of the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2017). This is an internationally recognised resource developed to help schools effectively integrate values into their systems, processes, curriculum, and interactions to enhance inclusive practice.

UNESCO's *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all* (2005) describes the provision of a safe, responsive environment where individuals' personal and social circumstances are not barriers to meaningful participation as critical for the educational and social outcomes of refugee background learners. Schools are optimally placed to provide structure and to re-establish a sense of normality for these learners who too often face disempowerment and discrimination (O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018). Research has recognised that meaningful participation in an inclusive environment has the potential to enhance self-esteem and resilience, encourage social relationships, and aid in developing the skills which open doors to future success (Block et al., 2014).

To encourage inclusion within the education system, an understanding of the diverse and complex needs of refugee background learners is vital. Every refugee background learner will have faced different experiences prior to and following resettlement, however, there are several principal factors that have been identified as crucial in influencing inclusion, and consequently, the educational and social outcomes for these children and young people. These include but are not limited to (1) English language proficiency, (2) recognition and value of diversity within the school environment, (3) parental engagement, and (4) relationships and belonging.

English language proficiency

A pivotal factor influencing any individual's ability to participate fully with the mainstream curriculum and in social contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand is English language proficiency. Although it is crucial to develop an individual's language skills, this focus can often take precedence over the social and emotional needs of students, particularly those in high-school (Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2011; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). This research recognises that language is imperative to inclusion, participation and belonging in the education system, however, as there is a large body of research to support this, language proficiency is not a focal point of this project.

Recognition and value of diversity

Over the last two years, Aotearoa New Zealand has welcomed refugees from 26 different countries including Syria, Ethiopia, Colombia, and Burma¹ (Immigration New Zealand, 2018b). Every refugee that arrives will have a different background and

¹ While it is recognised that Myanmar is the official name, this research uses the name Burma. This decision was made following the interview with a Burmese participant who referred to her home country as Burma.

experience of life as a refugee, including those from the same ethnic community, and each will have different strengths and vulnerabilities. It is vital to appreciate that refugees are not a homogenous group. As pointed out by a refugee background participant in Hannah's (1999) research "treating everyone the same can be discriminatory" (p. 163). All refugee background learners within the education system are culturally and linguistically diverse and an individual's educational requirements will be influenced by many factors (Christie & Sidhu, 2006; Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017). Integration into local mainstream education can be incredibly challenging, particularly when the schools have a largely monocultural population or limited experience with refugee background learners. It is essential that schools provide a safe and welcoming environment which builds on the knowledge, strengths, and cultural uniqueness of every learner empowering those of refugee background to experience an education in which they can participate and succeed academically and socially (Block et al., 2014; Ministry of Education, 2016).

The Aotearoa New Zealand Children's Commissioner has gained invaluable information from young people currently within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system via their *Education Matters to Me* project (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018). By allowing children and young people to share their experience of school, both good and bad, and eliciting information about how school could better serve them an abundance of beneficial data was captured, including the following key insights:

1. Children and young people want to be recognised and understood as individuals within the context of all their whole world, and have their experiences valued.

2. Children and young people often feel they are not treated equally within their school environment as a result of their cultural diversity.
3. Children and young people identify trusting relationships with teachers as a key factor facilitating their academic achievement.
4. Children and young people want their individual abilities identified and used to enhance their learning. They also want academic learning to be useful and relevant to their lives outside of the school context.
5. Children and young people need to feel happy and comfortable within their learning environment to promote wellbeing and academic success.
6. Children and young people want agency, both in relation to their learning and their lives. They want to be respected and allowed an opportunity to make decisions.

While *Education Matters to Me* is not specific to refugee background learners, these insights are relevant to this group who often face academic and emotional challenges when adjusting to school life in unfamiliar cultural and social contexts, particularly those who arrive as adolescents or with limited or interrupted prior learning (Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Mendenhall et al., 2017). While many of these concepts are recognised in current Ministry of Education policy and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), the students who contributed to the Children's Commissioner project still identify these as areas which, if improved, will enhance their school experience.

Within the classroom, teachers who are culturally responsive and feel capable in their ability to teach refugee background learners have the potential to improve academic engagement and self-confidence (Naidoo, 2013). Acknowledging the unique

experiences and cultural knowledge of refugee background learners and incorporating these into learning tasks can promote presence and participation in education. To encourage this, learners' existing cultural capital should be identified as a positive asset (Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2016). Optimal learning is said to occur when teachers can align a learners' existing knowledge to the curriculum, making it relevant and accessible, allowing an opportunity for meaningful participation in classwork (Dooley, 2009; Dutta, 2107).

Teachers who provide learners an opportunity to celebrate their identity and share their culture and experiences encourage peers to be culturally responsive, minimising discriminatory judgements and promoting inclusivity. Over time, this has the potential to change the negative public discourse that leads to prejudice and hostility (Byrd, 2016; Matthews, 2008). Appreciation of difference from both teachers and peers supports greater equity, particularly for groups who have a greater risk of experiencing marginalisation within society (Keddie & Niesche, 2012). Enabling and encouraging refugee background young people to be proud of and retain their cultural identity, while simultaneously integrating into both the school and wider community facilitates successful participation, improved wellbeing, and future academic achievement (Sampson, Marlowe, de Haan, & Bartley, 2016).

Engagement of parents

One of the determining factors of positive school outcomes is parental engagement in education, but, this is not always easy for parents of refugee background learners (Rouse & Ware, 2017; Block et al., 2014). Refugee background parents are typically hopeful for the future and have high educational aspirations for their children, however, many factors influence how involved they can be. These factors include their own school

experience and literacy, English language proficiency, cultural ideologies about school and learning, the need to focus on gaining employment, and the personal vulnerabilities they may face following resettlement (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014).

Learning is not limited to the classroom, with informal learning opportunities presented in many environments outside school. However, parents who are pre-literate or have little education may find it difficult to provide home learning opportunities, such as reading with their children, assisting with homework, and making real-life connections between learning and other environments, all of which enhance educational success (Warsame, Mortensen, & Janif, 2014; Rouse & Ware, 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Differing cultural perspectives around the expectations of the school system and teachers also contribute to varying levels of engagement. While parents of learners in Aotearoa New Zealand are expected to play an active role in their children's education, some ethnic backgrounds believe the responsibility lies with the teacher to ensure classwork is done and to discipline students, with minimal parental involvement required (Georgis et al., 2014). Furthermore, parents who have experienced repressive governments, difficult bureaucratic procedures, and conflict with authorities in their home country and/or within temporary host countries can often mistrust local authority, including schools, following resettlement in Aotearoa New Zealand (McBrien, 2011).

Parental disengagement can be further perpetuated by limited English language proficiency. Rah, Choi, and Suo'ng Thị Nguyễn's (2009) research states that parents who feel self-conscious of their language ability or who are unable to communicate effectively feel disempowered regarding their children's education; they struggle to

understand the school system and the expectations of this, are unable to assist with academic tasks or easily engage with school staff and are less likely to be involved in school activities. This has also been reported as a barrier limiting parents' opportunities to participate in their children's schooling in the Aotearoa New Zealand context (Sampson et al., 2016). Upon arrival in a host country, it is not uncommon for children to become proficient in English much faster than their parents, and this has been identified in recent research as challenging for families (Gilhooly & Lee, 2016; Rah et al., 2009). These studies identify a power shift that occurs when parents need a child to act as the spokesperson of the family. This can be problematic for both children who must engage in typically adult conversations as well as the parents who feel a loss of control over their roles as caregivers (Harvey & Myint, 2014). This also limits how effectively teachers and school personnel can communicate their expectations or concerns to parents and caregivers, further isolating them from the education system.

Resettlement can be very challenging for refugee background parents; experiences in home countries, pre-settlement countries, and the host country can leave them vulnerable and unable to contribute meaningfully to their children's education. Refugee families typically arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand as 'nuclear families' and this can be quite different to the family and societal structures of their ethnic communities (Rah et al., 2009). The loss of extended family and community networks has been identified as a key challenge affecting parents' capability to support education. Parents often find themselves overburdened working long hours and with other young children to care for and this limits their involvement in learning tasks and school events (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Georgis et al., 2014). As well as logistical and language challenges, the ongoing stress and trauma of forced migration can affect how well refugee background parents

can provide emotional support (McBrien, 2005; O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018). It is critical for refugee background learners to build positive and supportive relationships outside of their family when parents are experiencing their own emotional challenges.

Relationships and belonging

Refugee background learners face many challenges both pre and post-settlement; they have often grown up in environments where social exclusion is common, and uncertainty is always present. On arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand there are many difficulties to overcome, particularly around language and culture, however, resettlement provides a sense of permanency and with this comes the opportunity to belong. While research identifies refugee background children and young people as incredibly resilient, both educational achievement and emotional well-being can be strengthened through positive peer relationships and school experiences which promote self-esteem and social adjustment (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010; McCarthy & Marks, 2010; Pieloch, McCullough & Marks, 2016). Within the school environment there are two central relationships which naturally develop; those with peers and those with teachers. These relationships have been identified by Hayes (2016) as primary transmitters of cultural knowledge, and by Sabbah (2007) as key providers of academic and social support; they enable learners to feel safe and included and provide opportunities for them to build social resources empowering them to become participating members of their schools and communities.

The connections forged between teachers and refugee background learners have the capacity to influence their optimism toward education, academic outcomes, and social and emotional wellbeing (Bartlett, Mendenhall, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017). Teachers who can build trusting and respectful relationships with learners who are both

academically, emotionally, and socially vulnerable are invaluable for these learners. Beyond providing subject specific support, teachers can be a stable and emotionally supportive adult in the learner's environment, which is especially important if their own parents or caregivers are unable to fill this role effectively (Hayes, 2016; O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018). A further advantage of the teacher-learner relationship is the agency or autonomy that can be facilitated when teachers have an awareness of a learner's capabilities (Pieloch et al., 2016). Hunter (as cited in Ladika, 2017) states that refugees have minimal control and power over their lives; empowering children and young people to develop autonomy in a safe environment, such as the classroom, is essential for developing the self-responsibility required for future success.

While teachers play a central role in supporting learners in the school environment, engagement with peers is also crucial to provide refugee background youth with a sense of social belonging, and this is something which can be challenging when navigating two or more cultural identities. Miller et al. (2018) have acknowledged that these learners are often bridging two worlds - the cultural values and customs of their home country with family and their ethnic communities, and, to fit in, those of the host country at school and with peers. Those who have spent a long period of time in secondary countries prior to resettlement may also have elements of a further ethnic culture to manage. Unfortunately, negative public discourse about refugees has created a society where bullying, racism, and marginalisation are common, and this can contribute to these learners minimising and undervaluing their ethnic culture in the school environment (Hayes, 2016). The development of supportive relationships and positive interactions with peers provides several advantages; they promote social connections and belonging for learners leading to faster language acquisition and enhanced well-

being, and over time, they change the damaging stereotypes of individuals of refugee backgrounds reducing ongoing marginalisation in the wider community (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; McBrien, Dooley & Birman, 2017).

The development of peer relationships must also be a consideration in class placement. For example, Naidoo's (2013) study of refugee background learners in the Australian context has recognised that learners who are placed in classes based on academic ability rather than age can become socially alienated from peers, negatively impacting self-perception and belonging. Social support from peers, as well as teachers and connections within the larger community, is fundamental to facilitate positive social adjustment and improve academic and psychological well-being, and the education system is in a privileged position to help this take place.

Summary

The refugee background learner population will continue to grow in Aotearoa New Zealand, so it is essential that both schools and the wider education system have an understanding how to encourage these children and young people to engage meaningfully. Ensuring educational inclusion for refugee background learners supports academic and social success while contributing to the development of skills required to successfully participate and feel a sense of belonging within society. There were many influences identified in the literature as contributing to refugee background learners' ability to experience inclusion; these were discussed as four key factors including English language proficiency, recognition and value of diversity, parent engagement, and relationships and belonging. While Aotearoa New Zealand has a long history of welcoming refugees local research is limited and although several studies focusing on

Chapter 2: Literature Review

the Aotearoa New Zealand setting were explored, most of the literature reviewed was from an international context.

Chapter Three: Methodology

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”

– Kofi Annan

In this chapter, the methodology utilised in this research is outlined. The aims of the research are reiterated and the theoretical approach that framed the study is described. Following this, the methods used to gather data, how the data was analysed, and the participant and recruitment details are discussed in detail, along with the considerations which ensured this study was conducted ethically.

Research Aims

This project aimed to explore the lived experiences of refugee background learners in the education system to better understand the following research questions:

1. What factors act to include refugee background learners in Aotearoa New Zealand schools?
2. How can the Aotearoa New Zealand education system increase the presence, participation, belonging and learning of refugee background learners?

A principle goal of the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy is that “refugees are participating fully and integrated socially and economically . . . and have a strong sense of belonging to their own community and to New Zealand” (Immigration New Zealand, 2012, p. 3). Access to education that is responsive and allows for meaningful participation by refugee background learners is crucial to ensure this goal is met. To encourage the inclusion of refugee background learners in the education system a holistic approach must be taken. Each and every learner will arrive in Aotearoa

New Zealand with different experiences, values, and understandings and there are many diverse challenges that need to be overcome in order for them to engage meaningfully with educational opportunities. Identifying these and understanding them in relation to the learners 'whole world' is fundamental to support them as they find a place in their new society.

Inclusion and exclusion do not exist independently of each other, so it is expected that this research will see elements of both occurring within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. However, in an effort to shift away from the deficit views that are so often associated with refugees, the prioritisation will be to explore the positive factors which contribute to refugee background learners experiencing inclusion in the education system. It is hoped that the findings from this research can help inform those working within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system about what *is* working, and how this can be built upon to encourage equitable outcomes, enhance educational and vocational opportunities, and minimise the likelihood of future marginalisation of these learners.

A Social-Ecological Approach

This research was guided by social-ecological and social-constructivism frameworks. The educational experience of the participants is very much socially based and dependent on the individual (Punch, 2012). In Krahenbuhl's (2016) discussion about social-constructivism, it is stated that "knowledge is built on a foundation of prior knowledge and thus, that learning is the result from experiences and ideas" (p. 97). Allowing this concept to guide the research, particularly the exploration of individuals lived-experience of the education system is crucial to gain a true insight into the inclusion of refugee background learners.

As inclusion within the education system is influenced by many factors within a refugee background learner's context, using a social-ecological approach to help frame this research ensured consideration of these. First devised by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in the late 1970's, the social-ecological perspective was utilised to identify the social influences which can affect the lives and development of children. Using a model of concentric circles, Bronfenbrenner placed the child at the centre of any situation with the different factors ordered depending on their degree of influence in five interacting layers around the child as shown in Figure 1. These layers focus on the systemic and individual factors affecting the child at the centre, and the interaction between these.

These interacting layers include:

1. Individual – this layer represents the child and the personal factors that influence their lives and development including age, resilience, personality, emotional stability, gender, motivation, and ability.
2. Microsystem – this is the most immediate environment which the child has direct contact with. Interactions in this layer are typically between family members, peers, neighbours, teachers, and other social groups.
3. Mesosystem – this layer represents the interactions between two or more factors within the microsystem.
4. Exosystem – the exosystem contains the environmental factors that have an indirect effect on the child, such as parent's workplace or mass media.
5. Macrosystem – these are the cultural values and customs, the economic and political systems, and laws that influence a child's life.

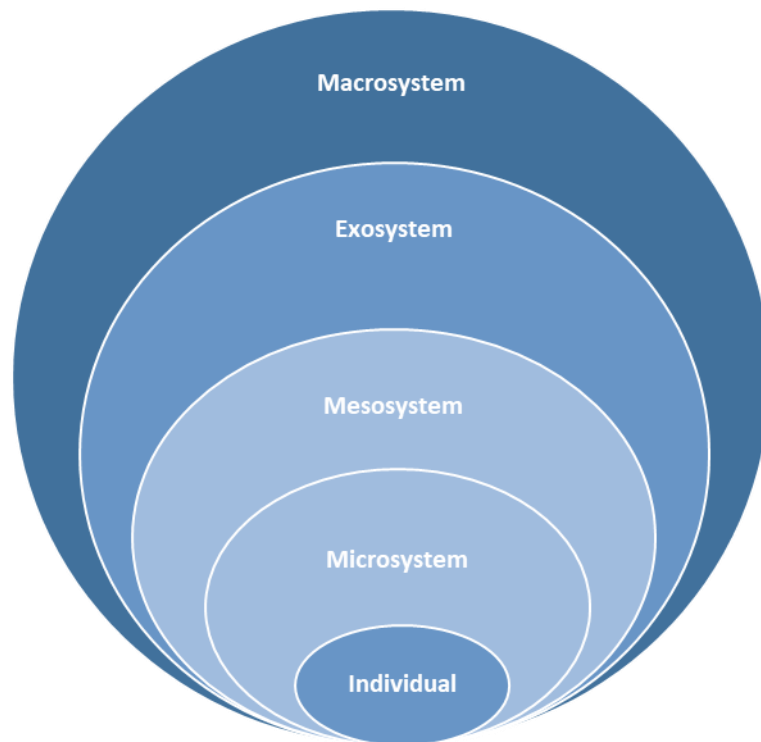


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

While this research focuses primarily on the microsystem and the mesosystem and how these layers of a wider ecological system contribute to inclusion, it is useful to recognise that the individual does not exist independently from their environment. This allows the challenges influencing inclusion in the education system to be reframed. Rather than aiming to understand the specifics of the individual, further perpetuating the idea that the refugee background learners are the problem, the overarching social systems, available resources, and reciprocal social relationships influencing inclusion must be identified (Allen, Vella-Brodrick & Waters, 2016; Kamenopoulou, 2016). Acknowledging these factors through research allows focused attention by education providers, ensuring they help facilitate inclusion rather than act as barriers which negatively impact academic and social success.

Research Design

To allow a more thorough exploration of the factors influencing inclusion in the education system and how the participation, learning, and belonging of refugee background learners can be increased, this study utilised a sequential-explanatory mixed-method research design. This comprised of an online survey and an interview to allow both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected. Spicer (as cited in Searle, 2012) suggests utilising mixed-method research to allow a complex research question to be explored from multiple perspectives. The rationale for selecting this research design for this study was that it would enable a greater exploration of complex phenomena than a single method design. The use of a sequential-explanatory design facilitates a process of complementarity, or the ability to use one method to elaborate on the results of another. This is a key advantage of a mixed-method design and reinforced the value of this approach for this study (Grand Canyon University, 2018).

The quantitative data provided an indication of which particular factors relating to inclusion were affecting the refugee background learner population, with the qualitative measure allowing a deeper understanding of these factors through narrative with the learners. While the quantitative approach can provide useful and often measurable data, it can minimise the role of context when exploring certain phenomena (Vogt, 2007). As this research aims to explore the holistic processes of inclusion, it is important to understand data in context through a qualitative measure. Utilising participant voice by including the qualitative measure was vital to explore experiences of inclusion from the perspective of the refugee background learner participants.

Methods of Data Gathering

Phase One: Online survey

The quantitative data was collected via a structured online survey to provide a broad understanding of the factors influencing inclusion (Watkins & Gioia, 2015) and allowed input from a number of participants to be collected in a short period of time, which was a priority in this research. Using an online survey to reach refugee background learners facilitated access to a population of participants that tend to be less visible, yet are still digitally active, as well as reaching a geographically diverse group (McInroy, 2016). The quantitative data that was collected through the survey enabled the identification of several key themes which could be used as the basis for the qualitative data process.

The survey for this research was created using an online survey tool (www.surveymonkey.com). Online questionnaires are an effective tool allowing participants to access the survey in their own time. The survey link was shared through many avenues enhancing reach to a desired population (Evans & Mathur, 2018). The survey consisted of 51 statements about students' educational experiences (Appendix A). The statements used were predominantly drawn from three existing measures and included several questions created by the researcher to gain specific information about factors relevant to refugee background learners. The existing statements came from the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2017), the Student Engagement Instrument (Appleton, Christenson, Kim & Reschly, 2006), and the Multicultural School Climate Inventory (Marx & Byrnes, 2012). These self-report measures focus on affective and cognitive engagement with school, learners' perceptions of how well their school responds to cultural diversity, and learners' experience of inclusion (Lovelace, Reschly,

& Appleton, 2014; Marx & Byrnes, 2012; Vaughan, 2002). The statements were able to explore the participants' experience of the factors which were identified in the literature review as influencing the inclusion of refugee background learners in the education system. An overview of the factors explored is shown below in Figure 2. Participants used a slider allowing them to place an arrow between 0 (Strongly Disagree) and 100 (Strongly Agree) depending on how the statement resonated with their personal experience. All statements were framed positively, meaning higher scores indicated a more positive experience. It was important that statements were framed this way as it allowed the participants to focus on the positive aspects of their school experience and made the process of contributing to the research more enjoyable. As English is a second language for the majority of refugee background learners, only statements which used basic language were included. The statements were reviewed by an individual for whom English is a second language to ensure their simplicity.

Factors explored	Overview of statements presented
My School	The focus here was to gain participants' feelings towards the school environment. It aimed to identify whether school was a safe, secure, and welcoming place that students felt comfortable to attend.
My Teachers	Identified as a key contributor to inclusion for refugee background learners, this section explored learners' perceptions about their teachers and the relationships they have with them.
My Peers	Peer relationships are crucial for inclusion and social belonging. The statements in this section focused on the participants' interactions with other learners in the classroom and wider school environment.
My Family	This section focused on how engaged parents were in the participants' academic learning and with the school as this has been identified as a primary influence on achievement.
My Culture	Valuing diversity and culture is a key factor for encouraging inclusion. This section explored whether learners had an opportunity to share their culture within the classroom, utilise it when working on academic tasks, and whether it was valued by others.
My Future	This section considered the participants future and sought to identify whether school was providing the skills they need for future success.
My Learning	The focus of this section was the level of autonomy these learners have regarding their learning.

Figure 2. An overview of the online survey subsections.

Following the rating of the statements, participants were asked to provide details about what they particularly liked at school and what things they would like to change. This was important as it enabled participants to give input without being influenced by existing statements (Holland & Christian, 2009). These questions also provided an opportunity to identify other factors which were affecting the school experiences of refugee background learners that had not been identified in the literature review or considered in the survey. Demographic information was also collected. This included gender, age, ethnicity, language spoken at home, year at school, number of years lived in Aotearoa New Zealand, and geographic location. While representativeness was not an aim of this research, this data did help provide more background context of the refugee background learners contributing. The full survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Phase Two: Semi-structured Interview

The qualitative component of this research was a semi-structured interview. There were two purposes which influenced the decision to use an interview in this research (Watkins & Gioia, 2015):

1. A semi-structured interview enabled a greater depth of understanding to be gained around the themes identified as influencing inclusion obtained from the online survey.
2. To provide the refugee background learners involved in the study an opportunity to be active participants and share their lived experience of the phenomena being explored in their own voice and words.

The use of qualitative data with the two purposes above in mind helped to explore some of the key reciprocal relationships which exist in the microsystem and mesosystem of the refugee background learner and identify how these led to enhanced, or hindered, inclusion in the education system. While the use of qualitative data can provide a more in-depth understanding of the factors which influence inclusion in the education system, it is very time consuming (Punch, 2012). By utilising a mixed-method design for this research it is hoped that some of the limitations of each method can be counterbalanced by the other enabling a comprehensive exploration of inclusion can be carried out.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that were identified to influence inclusion in the education system, a semi-structured interview was utilised. The semi-structured design allowed questions to be focused around ideas the research aimed to explore while enabling the participants to contribute information they considered to be relevant or useful (Punch, 2012). This design also enables the interviewer to probe further if items of interest were brought up. The use of the interview encouraged participants to describe how these factors affected them in their own words (Couch, 2011). As a population that is often marginalised and without voice, it was important to include and value the narrative of refugee background learners in this research. This process also creates more authentic and informative research responses (Block et al., 2013). These young people are the experts when it comes to knowing what helps them feel socially and academically included in the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The interview began by asking the participant about where they had come from and the journey that led them to resettle in Aotearoa New Zealand. This helped to build rapport and ease any nervousness they may have had before moving on to the education focused questions. Migration as a refugee can often be traumatic, so allowing the participants to have control over what they shared about their journey without researcher prompting minimised any ‘triggering’ questions. The focus of the questions included the school environment, teacher and peer relationships, opportunities to share and use culture within the class, and family engagement, and for each there was a chance for elaboration (Appendix B). All questions were open-ended providing the participant a chance to share their experience of education in Aotearoa New Zealand with as much or as little detail as they wanted. An opportunity at the end allowed them to add any further information that they might have felt was missed because of the framing of the questions. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes.

Analysis of the Data

The aim of this research project was not to make inferences or generalisations about the refugee background learner population, but to explore the factors that affect inclusion and the consequent participation, learning, and belonging in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. The data collected from both phases of the research was carefully analysed to identify the factors which participants perceived as supportive in their own learning journey, along with the factors they felt could be improved. The data also aimed to explore the influence of the relationships (as per the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory) between the key members of the learner’s microsystem.

Analysis of Phase One: Online Survey

Following completion of the online survey, all data was examined to gain an understanding of the participants experience of the factors known to influence inclusion in the education system and their perspective on participation and belonging at school. As the scoring for the online survey statements ranged from 0 to 100 this was broken down into three categories, enabling the experiences of each participant to be easily interpreted:

1. A positive experience – scores which fall between 65 and 100.
2. A semi-positive experience – scores which fall between 35 and 64.
3. A less-positive experience – scores which fall between 0 and 34.

As all the statements used in the online survey were framed positively, they did not measure negative experiences, which is why ‘a less-positive experience’ is the terminology used. This suggests there were some elements of positivity in relation to the participants individual experience of the factors explored, but these were low. Participants who scored in the centre of the scale were said to have a ‘semi-positive experience’, suggesting both positive and negative experiences in relation to specific statements.

Each theme, individual question, and overall participant scores were examined, and descriptive statistics were used to provide summaries of the results obtained in the survey data. These simply describe what the data shows and do not make any inferences. The findings from the survey data were also used to develop the interview questions. As a sequential-explanatory design, areas of interest which arose in the survey were able to be elaborated on through targeting questioning of the interview participants.

Analysis of Phase Two: Semi-structured Interview

The qualitative data were gathered to make sense of the quantitative data in more depth by exploring the perspectives of the participants. Following the completion of the semi-structured interviews a step-by-step procedure of listening, transcribing, reading, and identifying key concepts, perspectives, and lived experiences was used to analyse the data. This complete process, as illustrated in Figure 3 below, was carried out several times to ensure valuable concepts or lived experiences were not missed.

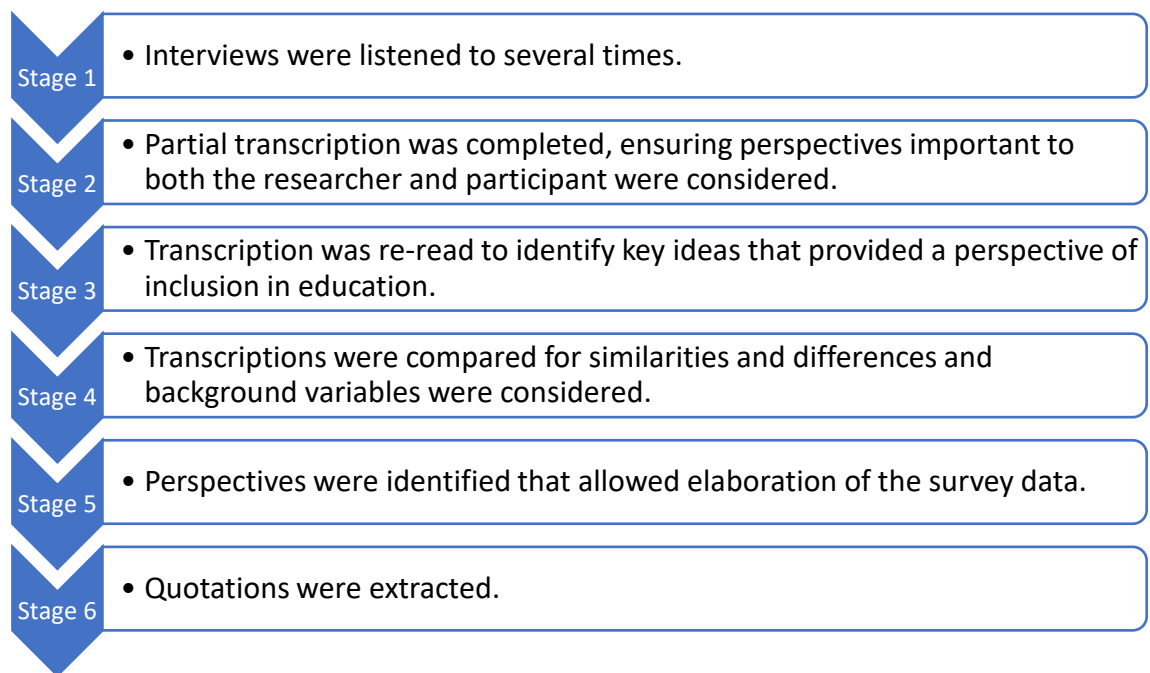


Figure 3. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Participants and Recruitment

Inclusion criteria

The refugee background population is one that is often in a vulnerable position within society, so it was crucial in this research to ensure those included would not be adversely affected (Block, Riggs & Haslam, 2013). To minimise any stress on the participants or their families, inclusion criteria was established. While most criteria are

self-explanatory, several had specific relevance to the refugee background participants as discussed below:

Participants must:

- *Be aged 16 to 18 years.*

This allowed participants to provide consent themselves. Participants under 16 would have required parental consent which may have been difficult to acquire due to language limitations.

- *Have been in Aotearoa New Zealand for a minimum of two years.*

Young people who have been resettled for a longer period are likely to have more familiarity with school and societal expectations and less likely to be experiencing acculturation stress.

- *Have a sound knowledge of basic spoken and written English.*

This is essential to ensure the participants could understand and complete the online survey and the interview. It was determined that participants who were able to read the information seeking participants would have suitable language ability to engage with the study.

- *Currently be attending secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand.*
- *Be of refugee background.*

Participant recruitment

Participants were recruited using a variety of methods. Engagement with Refugees as Survivors New Zealand (RASNZ) provided an opportunity to reach out to the Auckland Refugee Cluster Group made up of representatives focused on the educational needs in refugee background learners in the wider Auckland area. This is made up of several

support services, including ESOL teachers, many of whom were happy to pass the details of this research on to the refugee background learners they worked with, either directly or through their Google Classroom App. Further details of ESOL or refugee support teachers were provided by a Refugee and Migrant Support Advisor at the Ministry of Education. Refugee advocacy and support groups nationally shared the details of the research, as well as ethnic specific organisations, for example, the Afghan Association of New Zealand.

An overview of participants

A purposive sample of 16 refugee background learners was recruited for this research. All participants completed the online survey. Of the 16, six noted that they would like to be involved in the semi-structured interview, however, only three went on to complete this. While a larger number of interview participants would have been helpful to gain a wider range of perspectives, these were carried out at a challenging time of year with many senior learners focusing on exam preparation which limited their availability to engage with this project. Although not all participants gave their demographic information, the data that was collected identified that there was an even representation of males and females, with the majority in their senior years (year 12 and 13) at secondary school. A diverse range of ethnicities was represented, with participants from Sri Lanka, Sudan, Burma, Afghanistan, and Iran engaged in the online survey. For most participants, English was not the language they spoke most often. Most participants were from the Auckland region.

The three participants who completed the semi-structured interviews included Shein, a female from Burma, Erajh, a Sri Lankan male, and Asadi, a male who was born in Iran, but identified as Afghani. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity. All

three have diverse backgrounds and different experiences as refugees prior to resettlement; each arrived between 2012 and 2015. While all arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand knowing little to no English, they all now have excellent language proficiency.

Data collection process

Potential participants were provided with the link to the online survey (either directly or via social media) and were able to choose whether or not to take part in the research. An introduction at the beginning of the survey directed all participants to the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C); it was requested of all participants to read through this prior to beginning the survey. By completing the survey, participants were giving consent to the information provided to be used for this research – this was explicitly stated in the survey introduction. Within the online survey, participants had the opportunity to specify whether they would like to further contribute to this study by engaging in the second phase. Those who noted that they were interested were then contacted via email to arrange a suitable time to complete a video interview.

Once a participant had agreed to participate in an interview, an alternative version of the Participant Information Sheet specific to the interview was emailed (Appendix D), along with the consent form (Appendix E). The semi-structured interview was then completed via Skype which allowed participants to select a time that was most suitable for them and minimise interference with their academic and social responsibilities. Participants were initially asked whether they had read the information sheet, if they had any further questions, and if they gave consent to voice record the interview. Voice recording interviews has several advantages as outlined by Seidman (2013), however, the key purpose of recording in this research was to ensure the participants would have

the full attention of the interviewer. Recording also allowed the interview to be revisited which helped to clarify certain aspects or statements.

To thank the refugee background learners for their contribution to this research, and for the time spent completing the online survey and/or semi-structured interview, all were entered into a draw to win one of four \$50 Prezzy cards. The random draw will be done at the completion of the project and winners will be advised by email. Participants who do not win will also be emailed and thanked for their time.

Completion rates and excluded responses

Of the sixteen participants who took part in the online survey, only twelve fully completed the survey. While four did not provide answers to all statements, their data was used for the sections which they did complete. Participant 9 was excluded from the results as they responded to very few statements, with no full sections complete. Several of the participants did not provide demographic data, however, this was not required as the research does not intend to make generalisations about the refugee background population or any sub-groups within this, rather it aims to explore the individual experiences of these learners.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to gaining ethics approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee a full application was submitted which identified several aspects which would need to be addressed to ensure safe and appropriate research was carried out. These aspects were English language proficiency, working alongside a vulnerable population, confidentiality, cultural diversity, avoiding research with deficit focus and

minimising disempowerment of the refugee background population in Aotearoa New Zealand.

English language proficiency

A key challenge of resettled refugees is limited English language proficiency. This can result in an imbalance of roles and responsibilities within families and disconnect parents from their children's education (Leyendecker, Cabrera, Lembcke, Willard, Kohl, & Spiegler, 2018). To ensure this did not occur in the context of this research, only learners aged 16 to 18 who had lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for a minimum of two years were invited to participate. This removed the need for parents to give consent, minimising any challenges they may have had understanding participant information and consent forms and aimed to ensure the participants had a good understanding of basic English. Liaising with ESOL teachers and refugee support workers within the schools assisted in ensuring the details of the research were only forwarded on to learners who they felt had the language skills to engage effectively.

The vulnerability of the population

While classifying refugees as vulnerable can be problematic (Block et al., 2013) it is important to recognise that they may have experienced traumatic events (Masten & Narayan, 2012). When conducting research with this group, triggering questions must be minimised where possible to avoid re-activating feelings of distress. To ensure support was available to the participants either before deciding to engage, or during either phase of the research, the details of an independent contact were provided on the Participant Information Sheet. The contact provided was Stephanie Oh, Youth Services Team Leader of Refugees as Survivors New Zealand.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is paramount in any research involving human participants. To ensure confidentiality within this research all data collected, both from the online survey and the interviews, is held on a password protected computer which is only accessible by the researcher. Following the completion of the research any voice recordings will be deleted. External transcription services were not used, this was completed by the researcher.

Anonymity

Pseudonyms have been used for all participants who completed the interview to ensure anonymity; any data provided will be recorded against this and real names will not be used in any report or future publication. Those who completed the online survey only are identified only by a number. The details of the schools who shared the research details with their learners, or the school's which participants attended, are not named ensuring they remain anonymous.

Cultural diversity

As researchers in a Western society, it is crucial to be aware that the circumstances, experiences, understandings of phenomena, and communication methods of the researchers may be very different to those of refugee background (Pain, Kanagaratnam, & Payne, 2014). When aiming to understand meaning within the research data collected, it was important to ensure the culture of the researcher did not influence the interpretation. Where possible full quotes have been used to convey the participants' experience of education, and the researcher was careful to avoid framing questions in a way to elicit specific responses. While it was not necessary based on the

participant needs, cultural advice would have been sought had this been required to ensure cultural responsiveness.

Disempowerment

Many refugee background individuals have experienced events and situations where they do not have an opportunity to contribute as their opinions are not respected or valued (O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018). It is hoped that this research can facilitate empowerment by allowing the participants to use their voice, knowledge, and experience to help the refugee background learners of the future.

A large proportion of research about refugee background populations focuses is driven by a deficit focus. By emphasising the limitations rather than the strengths of refugee background learners, the idea that their presence within education creates challenges (Alford, 2014) is preserved and the opportunity for empowerment is minimised. This study aims to focus on positive factors leading to their participation, learning, and belonging, and how these can be built upon to promote educational and social success.

Summary

This research explores the factors that influence the inclusion of a cohort of 16 to 18-year-old refugee background learners within the education system by utilising a sequential explanatory approach. The quantitative data obtained through the online survey phase of this research was able to be explored further using a qualitative interview, allowing a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to inclusion. Learner voice was essential to this research as it provided perspective based on lived experience. Ethical considerations ensured research was conducted in a safe and

Chapter 3: Methodology

appropriate manner, with minimal distress to the participants or their families. The results of this research are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Results

“Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.”

– Malala Yousafzai

In this chapter, the results from both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interview are integrated and discussed. An overview of the findings will be followed by a detailed exploration of the results in relation to the key themes which contribute to the inclusion of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa education system. These include school, teachers, peers, family, culture, future, and learning and were the framework for both the online survey and the structured interview.

The Research Findings – An Overview

The participants involved in this research were generally enthusiastic about their education in Aotearoa New Zealand, with most having positive experiences overall, as shown in Figure 4 below. The mean score for all participants was 66.73, representing a positive experience, with most clustered around this score. While it was not a focus of this research, there were no obvious differences between the male and female participants.

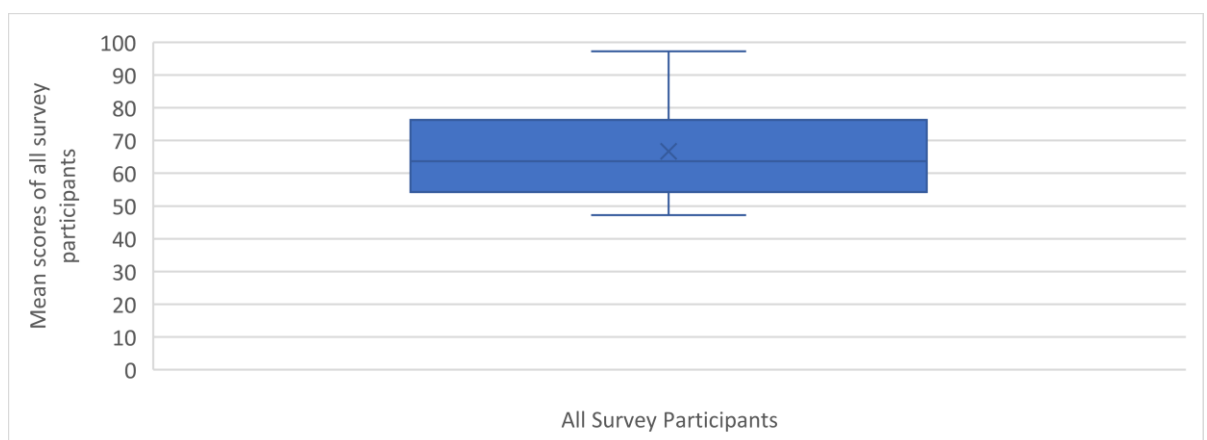


Figure 4. Average participant score - online survey

While overall the scores do appear positive, there are distinct differences between the factors explored as illustrated in Figure 5. This figure shows the mean score for each factor, with X identifying this. Figure 5 also illustrates both the lowest and highest participant scores for each factor explored, as well as the variability between participant scores. Several factors were identified as positively affecting the participant’s inclusion in the Aotearoa education system. While the focus of this research is on the positive features leading to social and academic success, factors have been identified in both the online survey and semi-structured interviews as areas which require some attention to allow education providers to enhance inclusivity of their refugee background learners. All factors are discussed further in the sub-sections below.

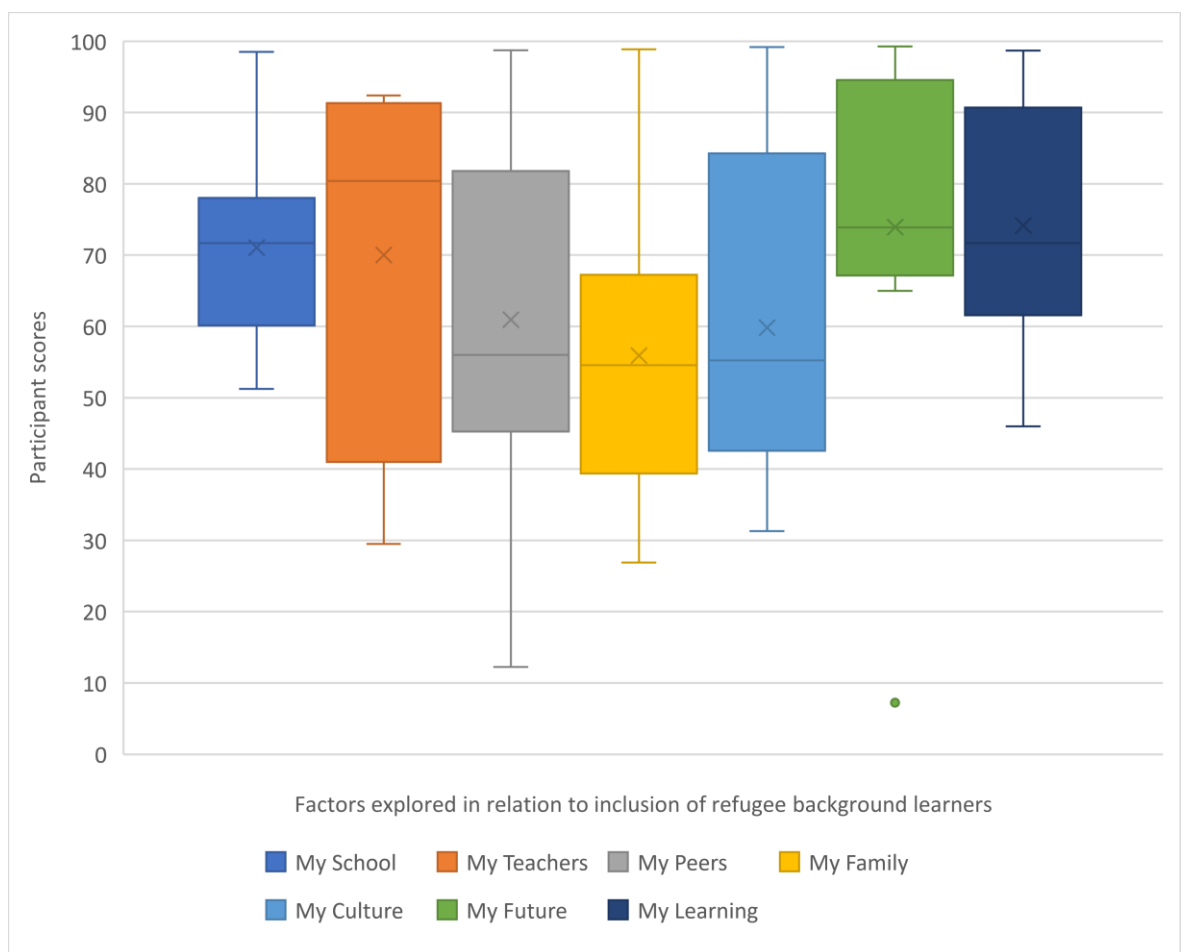


Figure 5. An overview of participant scores on each factor explored. Further details of each factor are discussed in depth in the sections below.

“My School”

This section explored how the participants experienced their school and which factors within this environment facilitated inclusion. It focused on whether learners enjoyed attending school, the relationships between learners and all school personnel, expectations, safety, and opportunities to engage in academic tasks and extracurricular activities.

The mean score for this theme was 71.0 with the narrow range suggesting few differences across participants and that the participants are generally comfortable within their school environment. Eighty-six percent of participants perceived the relationships between learners and adults (including teachers, support staff, and all other school personnel) as semi-positive or positive and all felt listened to by the adults they engaged with in the school environment. All responses were over 50 indicating that each of the participants enjoyed attending school and feels safe within this environment. During the interview a female participant provided the following insight about why she enjoyed school.

Shein: In Burma, I didn't have the chance to get an education – it's pretty exciting to go to school, try to figure it out, and do what you love.

The extra resources provided by schools were a key factor contributing to inclusion for these participants. Guidance counsellors or social workers who checked in with learners every one or two weeks, career advisors, student help centres, and refugee support staff were identified as important. They ensured refugee background learners could seek advice from people who were understanding of their circumstances and hopeful for their future and enabled them to engage meaningfully in the education system.

When focusing on the positive aspects of school as a whole in the open-ended survey questions and the interviews, a recurring theme was identified – opportunity. All participants reported that activities outside formal lessons were available for them to access and the scores suggested that classroom activities fostered academic engagement. For many of the participants, secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand provide more opportunities to encourage academic success which can support future goals than those they attended prior to resettlement. The opportunities mentioned included topic specific short courses over the school holidays, engagement with tertiary providers, after-school homework clubs, and assistance seeking part-time jobs, as well as extra classes to grow the skills required to engage with the curriculum. The chance to be involved in these types of activities helped to develop both the learners academic and social abilities, promoting participation.

An element of perspective also comes into the views around opportunity; many refugee background learners have attended schools in pre-settlement countries where there are many limitations influencing academic engagement. Asadi, a participant of Afghani heritage, stated that although he could attend school, his status as a non-citizen in Iran limited his opportunities for future study.

While the opportunities that school provided were seen a positive factor, some participants indicated that they may miss out on some of these. Ejrah noted that as he began school in Aotearoa New Zealand as an older student he was not aware of all the opportunities available, unlike his peers who had learnt of these in the earlier school years. This lack of familiarity with the local education system was reiterated in the survey by a female learner in relation to school assessment.

Participant 14: *I wish we were told some more information about NCEA and how it works from the very beginning. Especially for students like me who's just moved to New Zealand.*

Overall, the findings from this section are optimistic. The participants are typically comfortable within the school environment, recognise the opportunities education, both formal and informal, can provide them, and the provision of extra resources for those of refugee background is acknowledged and appreciated. The positivity of the refugee background learners is summed up by interview participant Shein who states that while occasionally there are challenges, school is mostly positive.

Shein: *It's good to meet different people at school and subject wise, it's pretty cool to get to do what you want. I don't have anything I don't like about school, even though there are bad things that can happen, everything is an experience . . . bad and good.*

“My Teachers”

This section explored how inclusion can be influenced by teachers and the interactions they have with the refugee background learners in their classrooms. While there was a broad range of responses suggesting wide variability across learners (as displayed in figure 6), the mean score for this inclusion factor was relatively high at 70 suggesting that most participants were experiencing positive teacher-learner experiences. Figure 6 displays the participants experience of four key aspects of teacher-learner relationships, including how comfortable teachers made them feel on arrival at school, if they feel supported by their teachers, and whether they like their teachers, and how well teachers make connections to their home life in the classroom.

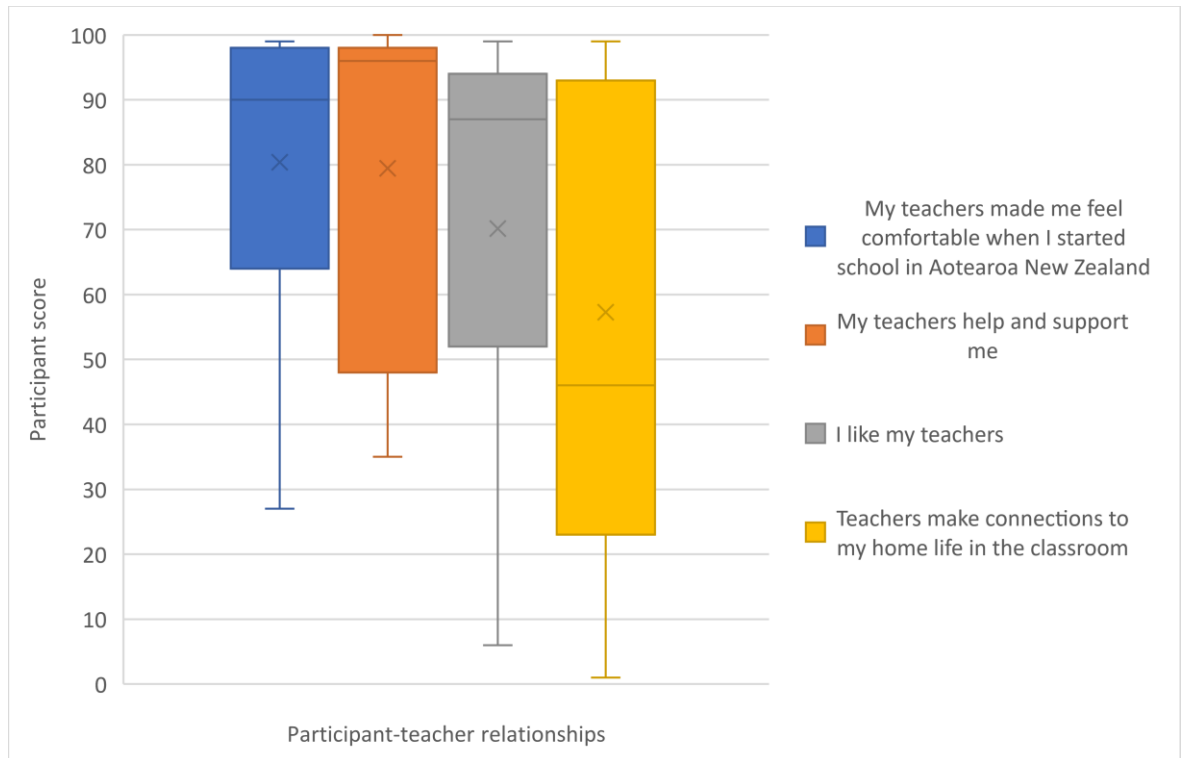


Figure 6. Key relationships between refugee background learners and their teachers.

Figure 6 shows the participant’s mean scores, marked by an X, along with score variability and the highest and lowest scores given. Most participants like their teachers and ninety-one percent reported that their teachers made them feel comfortable when they began school in Aotearoa New Zealand. They also feel they provide help and support, however, there was variability regarding how effectively teachers were able to make connections to the home lives of refugee background learners.

When given the opportunity to elaborate on the factors they liked about school, teachers were a recurring theme. The teachers who had the largest impact on the participants experience of inclusion were described as patient, understanding, always available to listen, and “willing to help *every* student” by the learners who engaged in the interview; Erajh had positive memories of one of his first teachers.

Erajh: He was a great teacher because he supported me even though I couldn’t speak English. He sent me to special classes.

The participants reported that they enjoyed talking to their teachers, and this specific survey question had a mean score of 78.1. The participants who had the opportunity to attend school prior to their arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand agreed that while the education system was very different here, schooling was enhanced by the teacher's engagement with all students. During the interviews, the following key difference was identified.

Erajh: The schooling in India (host country) is just going to class and the teachers teach, but here the teachers interact with us, give us extra help, and a lot of other things. It is better.

When provided a chance to focus on what could be changed about school, several comments relating to other learners' respect towards teachers were identified in the both the survey and interview data, suggesting this is important to the refugee background participants. The participants who contributed to the interviews stated that they enjoyed the classes where they felt respected by the teacher and were provided some agency regarding their learning. This is summarised below by Erajh.

Erajh: The teachers, they don't force the information, like "you have to say this, you have to do this" – they give us options.

Although comfortable to talk to the teacher, there was an awareness of the teacher's workload in a class with many students and an aversion to disturbing them or burdening them with a lot of questions, with one of the interview participants mentioning the following.

Asadi: "Sometimes my question is kind of silly, and she kind of gets angry, but she will be alright to answer".

All the interview participants specified that when they are engaged in challenging tasks, they generally aim to first work things out themselves rather than seeking help from the teacher.

“My Peers”

The statements and questions used in this section focused on how refugee background learners’ relationships with peers in the school environment can help or hinder inclusion. This factor did not score as highly as others explored, with a mean score of 61. Several participants reported very good social relationships with other learners, however, over half responded that their engagement with peers was only semi-positive and one participant described his/her peer interactions as non-positive. The wide range of scores implies that there is a lot of variability around social relationships among these refugee background learners. This variability is evident in Figure 7, which shows participant’s experiences in relation to fitting in with all cultures, how comfortable other students made them feel when first beginning school in Aotearoa New Zealand, and whether peers valued their input.

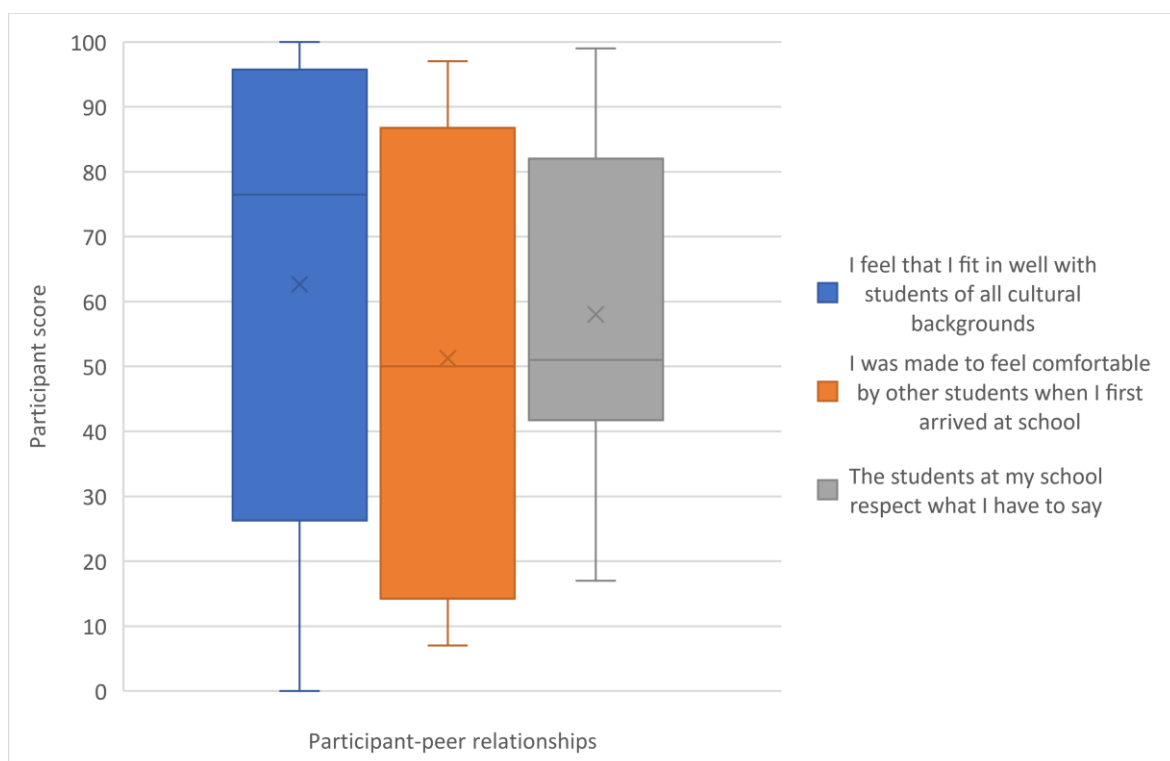


Figure 7. Key relationships between refugee background learners and their peers.

While most learners felt respected by their peers, the survey data did identify that many refugee background learners had less-positive or non-positive peer experiences when they first began school in Aotearoa New Zealand and in relation to fitting in with all cultures and this is illustrated in Figure 7. When discussing how welcome they felt when beginning school following resettlement, the experiences of the interview participants were variable. Erajh described that he made a new group of friends on his first day, and Asadi was supported by his cousins who already attended the school. This is not the case for all refugee background learners though, with some participants in this study feeling uncomfortable when starting school, as identified in the interview data below.

Shien: It wasn't really comfortable because I didn't understand any English, and there's people that have a lot to say about me even though they don't know anything about me.

As this research aims to focus on the positive aspects leading to inclusion within the education system, limited information was gained regarding negative peer relationships. However, in the open-ended survey questions bullying, racism, students engaging in non-compliant behaviour (smoking, drug use, and swearing) were identified as occurring within schools. Bullying was also mentioned by one of the interview participants.

Shein: I got bullied by a person who came from the same country. At that time, I was kind of upset, but I just moved on and didn't focus on him, I just focused on myself and getting my education.

When exploring the aspects which may have led to lower overall scores in the peer relationship section of the survey, it was identified that the students with the lowest scores started school in Aotearoa New Zealand as older learners (15 years old), however, this was not something that could be investigated further within the interviews.

“My Family”

This section explored the influence of family on refugee background learners' learning, participation, and belonging in the education system. To do this, two key relationships were considered. These were the relationship between parents and their childrens' learning and the relationship between parents and the school. The overall results from this section were mixed with a mean score of 56. However, this score was heavily influenced by one specific statement – “my family/guardians want me to continue my education after high school” which had a very positive score of 86. Other than two extremely high responses from the survey participants who scored their

experience in this section very positively, there was little variability among the participants in this section as shown in Figure 5 above.

The survey data showed that the families of almost ninety-five percent of participants wanted them to continue with their education post-high-school, however, seventy-five percent of participants said that their family did not feel involved in what goes on at school, and only half reported that their teachers know their family. A quarter of the online survey participants reported non-positive experiences when asked to score how welcome their family feels at their school.

To get an overview of the differences between the two key relationships this section aimed to explore, these have been illustrated in Figure 8 below. This shows that from the perspective of the learners, while parents are positive and supportive of their children's learning, their relationships with the school were not particularly strong.

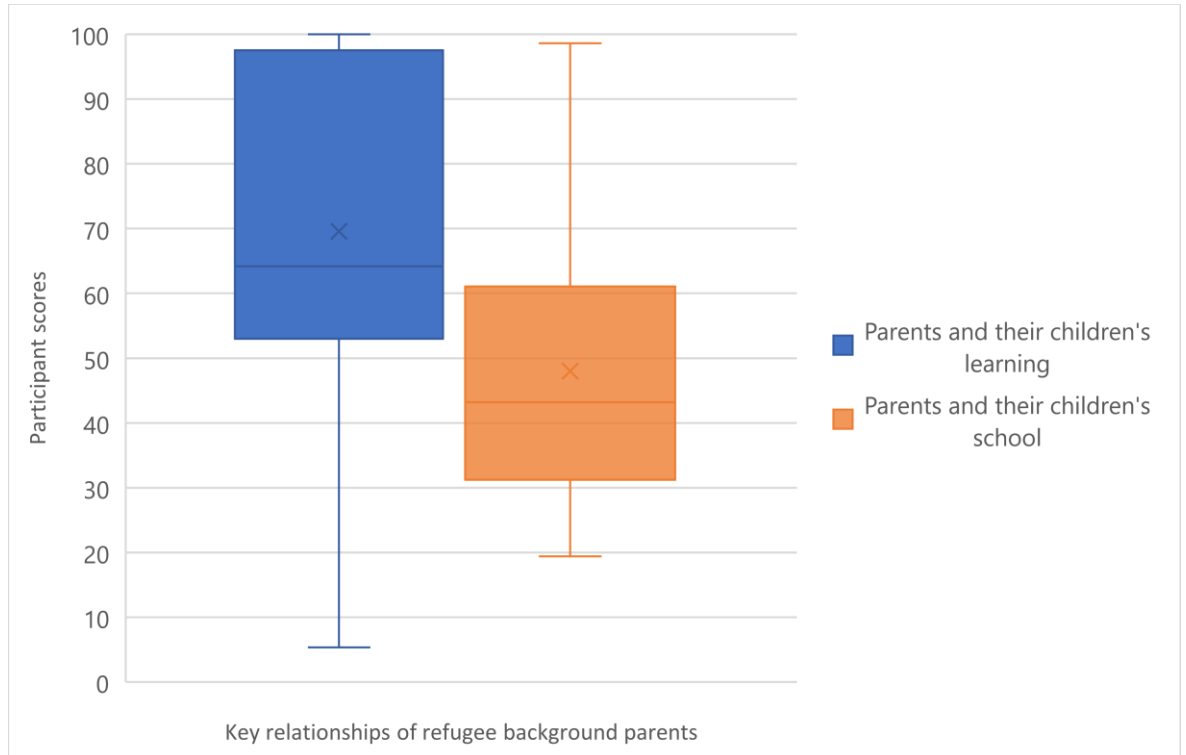


Figure 8. Refugee background parents' relationships with learning and school engagement.

The interviews aimed to further explore refugee background parents' engagement with the school and the responses to this varied significantly between each participant. Asadi's parents were highly educated and interacted with his school prior to settlement, however, they found this challenging in the Aotearoa New Zealand context as described during the interview.

Asadi: My family is not much involved since we came to New Zealand . . . in Iran they were as they knew how the Iranian education system works, but in New Zealand they don't really know about that. They would like to be more involved.

During the interview, Asadi mentioned that while there were occasional opportunities for parents to be involved, these appeared to be limited in frequency and specific to certain aspects of education such as future tertiary education.

When interviewed, Erajh was at his second post-resettlement high-school. The shift from the initial school was driven by his parents to enable more opportunities for him. Erajh's parents are very involved in his school life; they know the teachers, feel welcome, and support Erajh to reach his academic goals. He also has an older sister who attends university who is also a great pillar of support, particularly when he is facing school related challenges. When asked about his parent's involvement, Erajh responded as below.

Erajh: They are highly involved, my parents are always in contact with the teachers, and they always ask me if I am good with everything in school.

Not all the learners had as much support from parents and family, as acknowledged below.

Shein: My mum was never involved in my education . . . I tried to get my mum involved but she kind of just said "it's a waste of time".

Although it would have been interesting to explore further into the quote above, this was something that Shein was not comfortable speaking about. It was clear from other information provided throughout the interview that there were family complexities that were beyond the scope of this research.

“My Culture”

To explore the influence of culture on school inclusion, a series of ten statements were used to gain the learner’s perspective. These statements focused on inclusion of home culture and language in both the school and the classroom, and how valued the learners felt on the basis of culture, including ethnicity and religious beliefs. The range of scores in this section was wide, suggesting that the participants experiences relating to culture are variable. The pie charts below (Figure 9) illustrate how learners perceive their culture being utilised, valued, and respected within the school environment and again, the variable experiences are evident.

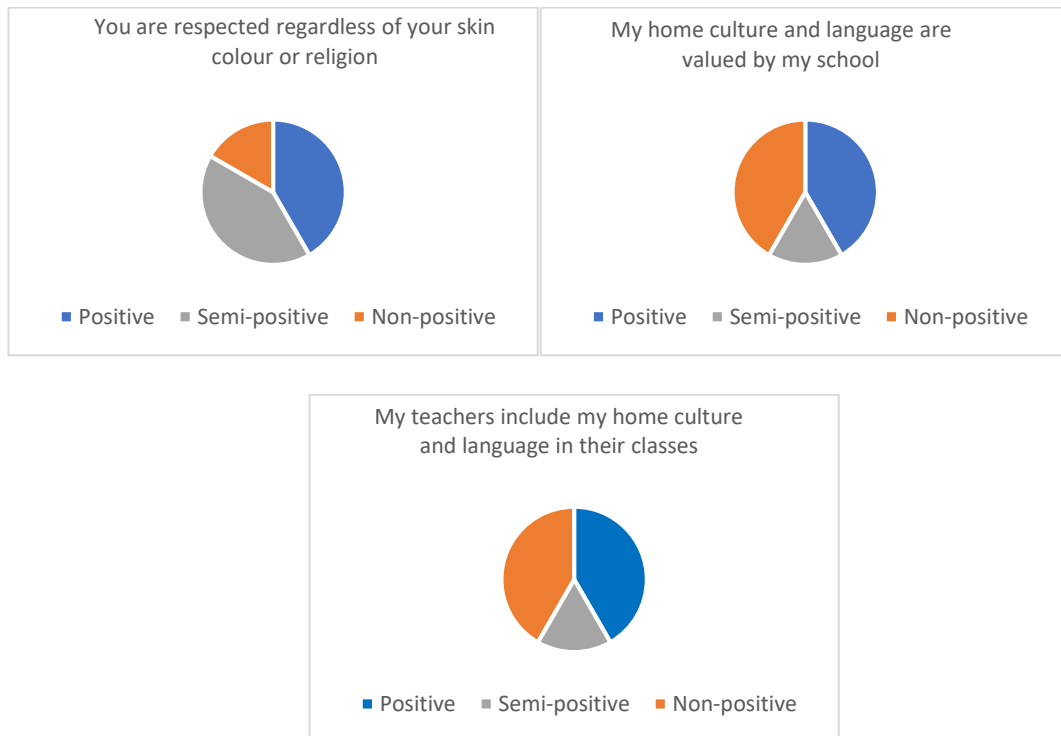


Figure 9. Refugee background learner experiences in relation to culture in the school environment.

Almost sixty percent of participants (those who provided a semi-positive or non-positive response) reported that their home culture and language was not regularly, or in some cases never, used by the teacher and they were seldom provided a chance to use their cultural knowledge in the classroom. The participants who engaged in the interview all stated that they would like the opportunity to share their home culture and home language more within the school environment and the classroom. They believe that these opportunities allow other students and teachers to understand and get to know them better as stated below by Erajh.

Erajh: *Yes, it does definitely help* (teachers and other learners get to know me better).

Shein believed that the chance to share culture and language within the classroom will help to minimise negative judgements and preconceived ideas.

Shein: *A lot of people just put you into a category, like, if you are from Asia you're probably Chinese. They don't recognise your culture specifically . . . and they can make assumptions.*

Many participants noted that they rarely see people with similar culture to them in leadership positions in the school or in school textbooks. The use of resources within the school which portray the culture of refugee background learners were limited, and when these were utilised they typically showed refugees in negative contexts. This was clearly pointed out by one of the survey participants.

Participant 14: *I wish my school had more realistic books about my culture. I don't want to see books about the revolution or refugee crisis only. We're more than refugees, we've got feelings.*

While in the online survey the statements typically addressed culture and language together, it became evident in the interviews that language, and the preservation of this, was something refugee learners felt strongly about. It was also appreciated when others took the time to engage with the participants language.

Erajh: I would like our language to be taught at school . . . it's something really important in our culture . . . some teachers know how to say hello in my language, so every time they see me they say hello in my language and it makes me feel better.

Asadi: We have Samoan language week, Māori language week, and Tongan language week, there should be at least a day for my countries language . . . I think we need to have that.

The interview participants were asked whether they found their home life to be very different to their school lives, and of the three, two found this to be the case. They described this as being “like two different lives”. Typically, at home, the refugee background learners were following their home culture, while at school, in an effort to fit in would “always act as a New Zealander”. However, both participants stated that they do not find this difficult, but, have “got used to it” and found balancing this to have become easier over their time in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Outside of school, the interview participants did have strong cultural connections to either their ethnic communities and/or to the refugee background community. They were engaged in sports and theatre with extended family and refugee background groups, volunteered to help other refugee background learners with their academic learning, and engaged with refugee advocacy and mentoring groups in many different capacities.

“My Future”

Based on the responses from the online survey, the participants who contributed to this study are positive about their future and see school as important to help them reach their future goals with this section having a mean score of 76. The range of scores is quite narrow, showing this positivity is consistent across the participants regardless of their experience in relation to the other factors. Generally, the participants reported that school made them feel good about the future, however, there were several students for whom this was not the case. It was identified that several participants who gave a low score to a statement which related to how good school made them feel about the future also reported less positive peer relationships within the school environment.

Over ninety percent of the survey participants intend to continue their education following high-school and the refugee background learners involved in the interviews were all excited at the prospect of going to university. They felt that school had helped to increase their participation in post-high school education this and saw opportunities which allowed themselves and their families to engage with universities particularly useful.

Asadi: We have a refugee dinner every year. They invite all the refugee students with their family and a presenter from each university talks at this event. This helps parents to know a bit more about the New Zealand education system.

Shein: If you talk to the teachers they will kind of guide you to apply for university and if you need to do courses and stuff they will help.

While the interview participants were particularly focused on their post-high school education in relation to the future, one did state that she hoped to “reconnect

with her culture and other refugees” and hoped to do so through her career goal of becoming a social worker.

“My Learning”

This small section aimed to explore the agency refugee background learners felt they had over their learning within the education system. With a mean score of 74 it appears that generally students feel they are trusted to learn on their own, have a say about what happens to them at school, and are actively involved in their learning. Data provided in the open-ended survey questions identify that students enjoy having subject choice and their needs as refugee background learners are supported by allowing extra time to complete tasks and additional classes allowing them to ‘catch up’ to peers.

While the participants enjoyed having options to pursue subjects which piqued their interest and would help them reach their future goals, they did identify two aspects of learning which had potential to enhance their social and academic inclusion. These were group work and the development of time management skills. The chance to work collaboratively with other students was identified by the interview participants as enabling the improvement of teamwork skills, enhancing their English language proficiency, and contributing to stronger social relationships. One of the interview participants provided the following information about the advantages of working alongside others.

Erajh: *“Learning with friends, like group work . . . it’s teaching us teamwork and that’s enjoyable”*

He also stated that having an opportunity to engage with others in the class and socially was helpful for developing language skills.

Erajh: *“They were fluent in English and my English wasn’t really good, but, with their support . . . I am good at English”*

Time management was recognised as a limitation in the survey data and by two of the interview participants who stated they would like there to be a greater focus on this within the classroom particularly as they head into tertiary education. It was identified that all the interview participants had very active lives both within school and in their communities, with Asadi mentioning that he wants to “experience everything”. They engaged in school council, volunteer work, sports, mentoring programmes, and other educational and vocational training opportunities allowing them to develop a repertoire of skills which will enhance their academic success and social belonging, both within the education system and the wider community.

Summary

Both the quantitative and qualitative data showed that overall the refugee background participants are happy within the school environment, have some sense of control over their learning, and are optimistic about their future. While teachers were identified as influencing positive experiences, there was a wide range of participant scores suggesting variability across teacher-learner interactions. Peer interactions, parent engagement, and culture were the lower scoring sections of the data. While peers were identified as beneficial for inclusion and learning, several participants reported only semi-positive or non-positive social relationships within the school context. Generally, the parents of refugee background learners wanted their children to experience academic success, however, their own engagement with both their children’s education and with the schools was limited. Most participants felt respected

Chapter 4: Results

by their peers and teachers on the basis of their culture and religion, but reported that while they would like to, there were few opportunities to share this within the school environment. A more in-depth discussion of the findings, their connection to the existing literature and the research questions, and the implications of these are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion

“We have a collective responsibility to ensure education plans take into account the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and youth in the world – refugees, internally displaced children, stateless children and children whose right to education has been compromised by war and insecurity. These children are the keys to a secure and sustainable future, and their education matters for us all.”

– António Guterres

In this chapter, the key findings of this study are discussed in relation to the literature. To show how the results of this research answer the research questions, the discussion is structured around these. This will provide a summary of whether the refugee background participants are experiencing inclusion in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system, which factors of those explored are promoting or could promote inclusion, and how the findings from this research can be applied to encourage participation, learning, belonging and learning of these learners in local schools. Due to the nature and purpose of this research, some practical implications are mentioned throughout this chapter.

Research Question One: Factors Influencing Inclusion

The first question posed in this research was “What factors act to include refugee background learners in Aotearoa New Zealand schools?”. The results gained from both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that there are several key factors influencing the inclusion of the participants, each of these are explored in more depth below.

Teacher-learner relationships

This research identified that a principal factor influencing inclusion for refugee background learners are teachers (who are principal members of the learners’

macrosystem, and the relationships between them. It was evident that teachers are highly valued and are key to facilitating participation in academic learning and promoting social relationships. For most survey participants their experiences with teachers were positive and this was reinforced during the interviews. This supports the research of Bartlett et al. (2017) which acknowledges the influence positive teacher-learner relationships can have, both from an academic perspective and regarding social and emotional wellbeing. Teachers who were patient, made an effort to understand each learner, spent extra time helping with academic tasks, and provided resources to enhance their learning stood out for the participants as encouraging their inclusion within the classroom and their future success. The children and young people who contributed to the Aotearoa Children's Commissioner report (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018) recognised trusting and positive relationships as crucial for enhancing their engagement within the education system, and this research shows that this is likely to be the case for learners of refugee background.

The participants stated that they felt respected by their teachers and were given some responsibility over their learning. These are two aspects of robust teacher-learner relationships recognised in both local and international literature as contributing to the development of skills required for future success (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018; Ladika, 2017; Pieloch et al., 2016). A further factor of inclusion is feeling welcome at school (Ministry of Education, 2014) and teachers appear to be ensuring this is the case for newcomer refugee background learners. While most participants like their teachers and feel comfortable to engage with them, it was identified that learners typically attempt to work through challenging tasks on their own rather than disrupt

teachers with “silly questions”, so this may be something that teachers need to be mindful of when teaching refugee background learners.

Extra resources

There was an awareness and an appreciation of the extra resources which are available within schools for refugee background learners to enhance their academic and social inclusion. These varied from homework clubs, holiday programmes and classes designed to enhance English language proficiency and academic and specialist skills (such as photography) through to social workers supporting emotional wellbeing and career counsellors assisting with future planning. While this was not something specifically focused on when exploring the existing research around inclusion of refugee background learners, opportunities to engage with these resources was a recurring theme in this study.

Interview participants described opportunities to participate in extra classes as essential for ensuring they could keep up with classwork and had the pre-requisite skills required for tertiary education. Engaging in classes that promote English language skills enabled social relationships to develop and academic work to be engaged with meaningfully and this is described as a priority in the *Refugee Handbook for Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2016). While language proficiency is crucial to success in the education system, it is also important to minimise refugee background learners’ time away from their mainstream classes as this can impact social and emotional wellbeing and make it challenging for them to keep up with curriculum tasks (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Further research by Dachyshyn and Kirkova (2011) reiterates this, however, in this research, engagement in special classes outside of mainstream learning was not recognised by the participants as having a negative impact.

Cultural diversity and responsiveness

Recognition of cultural diversity and responsiveness to this is one of the key factors identified in the existing literature as influencing inclusion in the education system and this was supported by this research. The data gathered in both the online survey and the interviews suggested that this is an area which the participants believe could be improved within their schools. Although an obvious theme throughout Ministry of Education frameworks and guidelines, the refugee background learners who contributed to this study noted that while they feel respected on the basis of ethnicity, they would like to see their diverse culture and language valued more within the school environment.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a multicultural society and schools do appreciate this with 'language weeks' dedicated to recognising the culture of some of the larger ethnicities represented. One interview participant believes that this concept could be extended to include other minority cultures allowing them an opportunity to celebrate their culture with their peers and teachers. Another participant made note of a teacher who had learned how to use basic greetings in his home language and described this as making him feel good as too him, language was a crucial part of his cultural identity. Seeing one's culture recognised and valued enhances wellbeing and inclusion both within school and the wider community (Sampson et al., 2016). Diversity groups seem to be common within schools and these allow refugee background learners an opportunity to reflect on their culture, however, they do seem slightly counterproductive in relation to inclusion as this can isolate them from the mainstream student population. Effectively these groups encourage the minority learners to engage with each other, rather than sharing and promoting their cultural diversity within the

dominant culture which Keddie and Niesche's (2012) research identifies as supporting equity. A further point regarding cultural diversity was provided by a survey participant who noted that most classroom learning tasks concerning refugees or those of refugee background focused on the plight of refugees and their vulnerabilities and challenges. Hayes (2016) identifies this as perpetuating negative perceptions of those with a refugee background, both within schools and society. These perceptions are often reinforced by mass media, a key factor within Bronfenbrenner's exosystem layer (Figure 1), which has an indirect influence on the learner. The same survey participant stated, "we are more than refugees" and would like this idea to be recognised within the education system.

An aspect of cultural diversity that was identified by Miller et al. (2018) as a key challenge often faced by refugee background learners after resettlement was having to navigate two, or sometimes more, cultures. Two of the interview participants involved in this study did agree that this was something they experienced, though in contrast to the existing research, this was not something they saw as limiting their inclusion.

Peer relationships

A factor influencing inclusion that was identified both in the existing literature and the present study was peer relationships, with survey and interview participants both reporting less than positive interactions. Strong peer relationships have been recognised as essential to minimise exclusion both within schools and the wider community (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017), however, the data gathered suggests these are not always manifesting for refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. Bullying and racism were both referred to by the survey participants suggesting this is something that they are experiencing. One of the interview participants described being bullied by an ethnically similar peer. This experience is important to understand

as facilitating inclusion when learners first begin school needs to be based on the learner and all their needs, not just determined by their ethnicity. Refugee background learners have often been identified as a homogenous group, however this does not lead to inclusion in the education system (Christie & Sidhu, 2006; Hannah, 1999).

The interview participants who did have positive peer relationships described how these were able to boost their development of language skills which is something McBrien et al. (2017) also pointed out in their research as well as the increased well-being social relationships can support. Positive social relationships allow learners to feel safe and secure within the school environment and can also help to develop the skills that can enhance integration, both in the short term and as they shift into adulthood.

Parent engagement

Parent engagement in education has been identified as a key determinant of positive school outcomes, and is a further factor influencing the inclusion of refugee background learners within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system (Rouse & Ware, 2017). There is a plethora of existing research (Block et al., 2014; Georgis et al., 2014; Sampson et al., 2016) which has identified that despite valuing education, refugee background learner's parents are often disengaged from both their children's learning and the school system for a variety of reasons and this was supported by this study. The data gathered showed that the participants experience of parent engagement was generally semi-positive or non-positive. Only one learner reported that his family feel very involved in what goes on at school. The interviews allowed an opportunity to explore this further, however, there was variability around why parents were not engaging. One participant noting that while his parents would like to be involved, they find it difficult to understand the processes and expectations of the local education

system. This has been identified as a common reason for limited parent engagement (Rah et al., 2009). Another participant explained that her mother was not involved in her education as she saw this as a “waste of time”. This was not elaborated further as it was evident that there were some personal complexities contributing to this which the participant did not want to discuss. The interactions between the school and refugee background parents is identified in the mesosystem layer of the ecological systems theory (Figure 1), and these relationships play a key role in the development of the learner.

While the two interview participants who did not have involved parents are actively engaged with the education system, both academically and socially, the interview participant who had the most overall positive experience of school had very engaged parents. This suggests that cohesive environments, in this case school and home, can positively influence inclusion.

Research Question Two: Increasing Participation, Belonging, and Learning

The second research question in this study was “How can the Aotearoa New Zealand education system increase the presence, participation, belonging and learning of refugee background learners?”. This is discussed below by addressing each of the factors identified in this research as influencing the inclusion of refugee background learners and the implications of these for the schools.

Teacher-learner relationships

This research shows that teachers working alongside the participants of this study are generally facilitating inclusion for refugee background learners in their

classrooms. They are making their learners feel welcome, encouraging academic success and enhancing wellbeing by being respectful and patient. However, the participants who contributed to this research reported that they have minimal opportunities to share their language and culture within the classroom. There are two key benefits when these opportunities are allowed by the classroom teacher. First, teachers can understand their learners better, recognise their strengths, and incorporate their existing knowledge into academic tasks encouraging participation and subsequent learning (Due et al., 2016; Edge et al., 2014). Second, it allows peers to better understand their refugee background classmates minimising negative judgement and promoting belonging. Understanding learners also allows teachers to make connections between their home life and the academic tasks they are engaging in. While this is recognised by Dooley (2009) as promoting participation, this research identified that these connections are not often being made.

Extra resources

The provision of extra resources contributes to both participation and belonging within the education system (Miller et al., 2018). Classes which allow refugee background learners to enhance their language and academic skills are especially important for those who have had little or no prior formal education or have experienced interrupted schooling, which is common among this population (Miller et al., 2017). Schools which are able to provide these extra resources are providing refugee background learners with a chance to catch up to their peers and to ensure they are supported emotionally. One interview participant, Shein, described a social worker who worked within the school as a key resource influencing her wellbeing within the education system. Hayes (2016) research stated that parents cannot always provide

emotional support, and teachers often step into this role, however, in Shein's case it was the social worker who could do this which is more appropriate.

Cultural diversity and responsiveness

The data from this study suggests that while the Aotearoa New Zealand education system aims to ensure cultural responsiveness and respect for diversity in theory, there are still several areas where this could be put into practice more effectively. Implementation of inclusive values both as school wide initiatives and within the classroom will promote participation and learning, as well as a sense of belonging. The participants who engaged in this research want the opportunity to share their culture and language with their peers. They believe this will allow classmates to understand them better and minimise negative assumptions, and the existing research acknowledges that when learners who can integrate their home culture into their school life have better academic, emotional, and psychological outcomes (Sampson et al., 2016). Schools also need to ensure learners' cultural identities, both their ethnic and refugee background identity, are shown in a positive light shifting away from the deficit view that continues to dominate narratives (Edge et al., 2014).

Peer relationships

Peer relationships are essential for belonging, and when learners feel safe and secure within the school environment their learning is enhanced. To encourage the development of these, schools need to be mindful to integrate new refugee background learners into classes where they are with age-group peers. Learners are often placed in specialist teaching classes based on their academic level which, because of interrupted or limited prior education, is often with younger children. Not only does this have the

potential to negatively impact self-esteem, but it limits opportunities to develop friendships with same age peers (Naidoo, 2013). As mentioned in prior sections, allowing refugee background learners the opportunity to share their culture with their classmates is also beneficial for the development of peer relationships and subsequent belonging. It was noticed in the data gathered that peer and social relationships appear to be more challenging for refugee background learners who begin school in Aotearoa New Zealand at an older age, so schools should be aware of this and encourage social opportunities.

Parent engagement

Parent engagement can influence participation and learning (Sampson et al., 2016). Parents who understand the academic tasks their children are attending to in the classroom are able to create informal learning opportunities at home enhancing learning (Warsame et al., 2014). While the *Refugee Handbook for Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2016) has a strong focus on family involvement, it is crucial for schools not to make assumptions about limited parent engagement. Each family will have different understandings and expectations of the school's role and different challenges following resettlement, all of which can impact their ability to engage (Georgis et al., 2014). Providing families an opportunity to express this, often through the bilingual support staff, should be a priority to ensure they do not feel disempowered as parents and can effectively support their children.

An overview of the factors influencing inclusion

The factors discussed above are not isolated from each other, which each affecting the influence of another. Referring to the layers of Bronfenbrenner's ecological

system in Figure 1, it is evident that many features of an individual's life influence their development and the successful interaction of these is paramount to positive life outcomes. While there are many factors which could be changed within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system, even focusing on just one or two of these could have a big impact on the participation, learning, and belonging of refugee background learners.

While not a factor that was specifically focused on in the literature review, it is evident from the data gathered in both the survey and interviews that the refugee background learners in this study are optimistic about their future. The survey illustrated that this hopefulness was consistent across all participants with the interviews supporting this. Interview participants all had plans to continue into tertiary education and were excited about their post-high-school lives. Schools and teachers who can reinforce and maintain this optimism are going to ensure their refugee background learners experience future success.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

– Nelson Mandela

In conclusion, it can be identified there are several interacting factors which are influencing refugee background learner’s experiences of inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. These include the relationships between both teachers and peers, the availability of extra resources which provide opportunities to develop skills or emotional support, the appreciation and responsiveness to cultural diversity, and how engaged parents are with their children’s learning. While most of these factors did align with the research explored in the literature review there were some contrasting factors identified, suggesting that not all international literature is relevant within the unique Aotearoa New Zealand context. One of these factors was the ability of the refugee background learners involved in this research to successfully navigate both their home and school cultures, something identified in the literature as a prominent challenge for this population. Based on the data gathered in this study, schools appear to be a positive environment for refugee background learners encouraging integration and leading to improved resettlement. While there are several factors that can be worked on to improve their participation, learning and belonging, particularly around recognition and value of diversity, these would be relatively simple to implement.

The resilience of refugee background learners must also be recognised and commended. All arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand as pre-adolescents, or adolescents, and have had to essentially begin a new life in a country with customs, cultures, and languages that are often vastly different to those they have grown up with. This would be challenging for any young person, but, the experience of refugee background learners

has many more complexities. All interview participants had future goals, appreciate that school can help achieve these and this remains their focus despite challenges occurring.

Limitations of this Study

This was a small-scale research project completed as part of an educational psychology master's programme, therefore, time was a key limitation. Completing this project in such a short time influenced both the type of participants and the number of participants that could be reached. It was important to complete the research respectfully and this meant minimising any stress on the families of the participants. To ensure this the research was limited to learners between the ages of 16 and 18 who currently attended school in Aotearoa New Zealand, which allowed data only to be gathered from a small proportion of learners who are currently affected by the factors the research explored. Had more time been available, families could have been engaged effectively and appropriately by utilising first-language research documentation, and participants under the age of 16 could have been accessed providing an alternative perspective. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context young people can leave school when they reach 16 years of age, so it is possible that learners whose experiences of school was not as positive had already moved on. The timing of the research could have also negatively impacted participant engagement. Many of the senior students who would have fit the inclusion criteria were on study leave suggesting they had other priorities at this time.

A further limitation of this research was that most of the survey participants and all the interview participants were based in Auckland, the multicultural centre and largest city of Aotearoa New Zealand. While this research does not aim to make

generalisation to the refugee background population, there may be differences in inclusive practices nationally. While the Auckland participants provided a mostly positive perspective, it must be noted that refugee background populations in Auckland are typically merged with other cultural minorities and attend schools where teachers have experience and knowledge working alongside these learners. Refugee background learners in regional cities or towns which are more monocultural and/or have been refugee resettlement areas for much shorter periods of time may have vastly different experiences within the education system.

Finally, it is possible that the self-selection process used to engage participants may have influenced which experiences were shared. Refugee background learners who were feeling more challenged within school or were less positive may have been reluctant to share their views. Although this may have not been the case, data gathering processes which would engage a wide range of learners – for example, focus groups - may have seen more variability of learner experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

The refugee background learner population in Aotearoa New Zealand is still relatively small, and the body of research relating to their education is limited. While international research is plentiful, the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand is quite unique in that it is very multicultural – particularly in centres such as Auckland with large Māori, Pasifika, and Asian populations. Therefore, not all international research will be relevant to learners resettled here and a lot of research is still required to understand the educational and social needs of these learners in this context.

To further understand the factors that influence inclusion for refugee background learners, it is recommended that future research focuses on the following:

1. *A wider range of ages.*

This should be a focus as the learners having less positive experiences could potentially be leaving school at 16 and this would not have enabled them to contribute to this research, despite their experiences being valuable.

2. *Geographically diverse participants.*

Most participants in this study were Auckland based and it is possible that the ethnographic makeup of the region could influence their experiences of inclusion. There are several refugee intake cities in Aotearoa New Zealand, so further research that compares and contrasts the differences between these would be useful.

3. *If age of arrival impacts ability to development of peer relationships.*

This research did note that the learners who began their schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand as older teenagers (15 years old), did have lower scores in relation to peer relationships. As belonging is a crucial aspect of meaningful participation in education and society, this would be worth investigating further.

4. *Exploring teacher views regarding inclusion of refugee background learners.*

An exploration of teacher views would be beneficial as it would offer an understanding of what they believe is promoting successful participation, learning, and belonging for refugee background learners, as well as the challenges they face both personally and as part of the education system.

As the refugee background learner population continues to grow within Aotearoa New Zealand, it is crucial that policy makers, school leaders, and teachers can

Chapter 6: Discussion

engage with a range of high-quality research that enables them to understand the needs of this group of learners. This will allow the best possible decisions to be made about how the education system can ensure these learners have equitable education, and are able to participate fully in society, contributing both economically and socially.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Online survey statements and questions

My School:

1. I look forward to coming to school.
2. Adults at my school listen to the students.
3. Expectations are high for all students at my school.
4. Adults and students at my school get on well together.
5. Everyone is welcome at my school.
6. I feel safe at school.
7. Learning activities in class encourage the participation of all students.
8. Activities outside formal lessons are made available for all students.

My Teachers:

9. My teachers seem to understand me and relate to me.
10. When I first came to the school the teachers made me feel comfortable.
11. My teachers help and support me when I need them.
12. Most teachers at my school are interested in me as a person, not just as a student.
13. I enjoy talking to the teachers at my school.
14. I like my teachers.
15. I feel that I can relate to my teachers.
16. My teachers are prepared to help me succeed in school.
17. Teachers are interested in listening to my ideas.
18. Teachers make connections in school to students lives at home.

My Peers:

19. I feel that I fit in well with students of all cultural backgrounds at school.
20. Students at my school help and support me when I need them.
21. The students at my school get on well together.
22. When I first came to the school the other students made me feel comfortable.
23. I enjoy talking to the students at my school.
24. Students are interested in listening to each other's ideas.
25. Students here respect what I have to say.
26. Other students at my school like me the way I am.

My Family:

27. When I have problems at school my family/guardian(s) are able to help me.
28. When something good happens at school, my family/guardian(s) want to know about it.
29. My family/guardian(s) want me to continue my education after high school.
30. Most of my teachers know my family/guardian(s) well.
31. The school provides opportunities for family/guardian(s) of different cultures to share their knowledge at the school.
32. My family/guardian(s) want me to keep trying when things are tough at school.
33. My family/guardian(s) feel welcome at my school.
34. My family/guardian(s) feel involved in what goes on at the school.

My Culture:

35. My home culture and home language are valued by my school.
36. My teachers include my home culture and language in their classes.

37. The school celebrates and participates in events that are important to the different cultures of the school.
38. I see people like me in leadership positions at the school.
39. The school environment reflects the cultures of all students.
40. My teachers respect my culture.
41. You are respected at my school regardless of the colour of your skin.
42. You are respected at my school regardless of your religion or if you have no religion.
43. I see people like me in school text books, pictures, and posters around the school.
44. Teachers provide opportunities for all students to use their cultural knowledge in the classroom.

My Future:

45. I am hopeful about my future.
46. School is important for achieving my future goals.
47. My school helps me feel good about my future.
48. I plan to continue my education following high school.

My Learning:

49. Students are trusted to learn on their own.
50. I have a say about what happens to me at school.
51. I am actively involved and have a say in my learning.

My Thoughts About School:

52. These are the three things I like best about my school.
53. These are the three things I would like to change about my school.

About Me:

54. What is your age?
55. What is your gender?
56. What year are you in at school?
57. How many years have you lived in Aotearoa New Zealand?
58. What city/town do you live in?
59. What is your ethnicity?
60. What language do you speak most often?
61. To gain a greater understanding of the educational experiences of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system, short video interviews are going to be carried out. Would you like to be involved in this part of the research?
62. Would you like a summary of the project findings when these become available?
63. Would you like to go into the draw to win one of four \$50 Prezzy Cards?

Appendix B: Interview schedule

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself, and how you came to be in New Zealand?
2. Do you like school?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why not?
 - What could make it better?
3. What are the things you like most about school?
 - Why?
4. What are the things you like least about school?
 - Why?
5. What things could be changed to make your school a better learning environment?
6. If you do not understand how something is being taught, how do you get help?
7. Are you involved in any activities outside of school, for example, sports or homework club?
 - Do you enjoy these?
 - (If academic) How do these help with your learning?
8. Do you feel that school provides you with skills that will help you in the future?
 - Why/why not?
 - What things could the school do to help you be better prepared for the future?
9. Do you feel that everyone is treated equally at your school?
10. Have you had any really great teachers?
 - If yes, what qualities did these teachers have that made them so good?

- If no, what quality/qualities do you think are most important for teachers to have to help you learn?

11. Did you feel comfortable when you first started at your school?

- What were the things that made you feel welcome?

12. Are there any student behaviours that interfere with your learning?

13. If you are having a 'bad' day at school, who do you talk to?

14. How involved is your family with your school life?

- Would your family like to be more involved?
- If yes, what could help this to happen?
- If no, why not?

15. Do you feel like your home life and school life are very different?

- If yes, how do you feel about this? How do you manage this?

16. Do you get many opportunities to share your home culture and language in class?

- If yes, do you think this has helped your classmates and teachers get to know you better?
- If no, is this something you would like to do?

17. Would you like your school to recognise your home culture and language more?

- Do you have any suggestions on how the school could do more to include your home culture?

18. What are your goals for the future?

19. Is there anything further you would like to add about your school experience?

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet – Online Survey



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INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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Experiences of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system

Participant Information Sheet

Locality: Massey University, Auckland

Degree: Master of Educational Psychology

Lead researcher: Debora Sutton

Contact phone number: [REDACTED]

Contact email: [REDACTED]

My name is Debora and I am an Educational Psychology student at Massey University. This year I am completing a research project about the experiences of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system, and would like to invite you to take part.

This Participant Information Sheet provides details of the research to help you decide if you'd like to take part. It explains why I am doing the study, what you would need to do, what the benefits and risks might be, and what will happen after the study ends. Please feel free to talk about the study with other people, such as family, whanau, or friends before deciding if you want to be involved. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to provide a reason. If you do want to take part now, but later change your mind, you can do so within one week of completing the online survey.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that include and exclude refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system.

There are many factors that influence students' experiences of school; the key to identifying these is to ask the learners themselves – individuals like yourself are the experts when it comes to knowing what can help or hinder you within the education system.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

You have been invited to participate because you have met the criteria to be included in the study. The criteria include:

- Aged between 16 and 18 years
- Currently attending a secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Of refugee background.
- Have lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for more than two years.
- Understand basic written and spoken English.

The study will involve completing an online survey which will take about 20 minutes to complete. The questions will ask about your experiences at school.



WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

Direct benefits of participating in this study include:

- An increased awareness and knowledge of the processes involved in research by actively participating in it.
- Satisfaction in knowing that you are contributing to research that could be used to help refugee background learners in the future.
- The chance to win one of four \$50 Prezzy cards as compensation for your time; everyone who completes the online survey will go into the draw to win this.

The foreseeable risks and discomforts that you may encounter by taking part in this research are minimal, however, support is available by contacting Stephanie Oh, Youth Services team leader at Refugees as Survivors NZ (details below).

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

- Participating in this study is completely voluntary.
- You are welcome to contact the Lead Researcher with any questions or concerns at any time.
- You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to and you can withdraw from the research within one week of completing the online survey.
- You have the right to access any information about you collected as part of this study.
- To ensure your privacy throughout the study you will be allocated an ID number and/or alias; all data provided by you will be recorded against your participant ID number/alias and your name will never be used in any report, correspondence, or publication. Only the Lead Researcher will have details of your name and this will be kept confidential.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STUDY?

The study data, including survey results and interview recordings and transcripts, will be kept securely on a password protected computer for five years, at which point it will be destroyed.

A summary of the findings will be available approximately six months after the completion of the study; all participants have the option of receiving these via email. We anticipate that the results of this study will be published in a peer-reviewed journal. The participants are welcome to discuss the findings of this study with the researcher at any time.

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION OR IF I HAVE CONCERNS?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study at any stage, you can contact:

Lead Researcher: Debora Sutton.

Contact details are at the beginning of this information sheet.



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Project Supervisors: Alison Kearney - A.C.Kearney@massey.ac.nz
06 356 9099 ext 84416
Karen Ashton - K.Ashton@massey.ac.nz
06 356 9099 ext 84445

If you want to talk to someone who isn't involved with the study, you can contact Stephanie Oh, who will be able to give you independent advice about your participation - Stephanie@rasnz.co.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/32.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison (Acting Chair), Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix D: Participant information sheet – interview



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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Experiences of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system

Participant Information Sheet

Locality: Massey University, Auckland

Degree: Master of Educational Psychology

Lead researcher: Debora Sutton

Contact phone number: [REDACTED]

Contact email: [REDACTED]

My name is Debora and I am an Educational Psychology student at Massey University. This year I am completing a research project about the experiences of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system, and would like to invite you to take part.

This Participant Information Sheet provides details of the research to help you decide if you'd like to take part. It explains why I am doing the study, what you would need to do, what the benefits and risks might be, and what will happen after the study ends. Please feel free to talk about the study with other people, such as family, whanau, or friends before deciding if you want to be involved. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to provide a reason. If you do want to take part now, but later change your mind, you can do so within one week of completing the interview.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that include and exclude refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system.

There are many factors that influence students' experiences of school; the key to identifying these is to ask the learners themselves – individuals like yourself are the experts when it comes to knowing what can help or hinder you within the education system.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

You have been invited to participate because you have met the criteria to be included in the study. The criteria include:

- Aged between 16 and 18 years
- Currently attending a secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Of refugee background.
- Have lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for more than two years.
- Understand basic written and spoken English.
- You have completed the online survey part of this research project.

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The study will involve completing a video interview, at a time convenient, via Skype or FaceTime. It is expected to take approximately 20 minutes, and the questions asked will provide an opportunity

for you to speak about your experiences at school. The interview will be sound recorded, and the information you provide will be transcribed to written form which you will have an opportunity to read.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

Direct benefits of participating in this study include:

- An increased awareness and knowledge of the processes involved in research by actively participating in it.
- Satisfaction in knowing that you are contributing to research that could be used to help refugee background learners in the future.
- The chance to win one of four \$50 Prezzy cards as compensation for your time; everyone who completes the online survey will go into the draw to win this.

The foreseeable risks and discomforts that you may encounter by taking part in this research are minimal, however, support is available by contacting Stephanie Oh, Youth Services Team Leader at Refugees as Survivors NZ (details below).

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

- Participating in this study is completely voluntary.
- You are welcome to contact the Lead Researcher with any questions or concerns at any time.
- You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to and you can withdraw from the research within one week of completing the interview.
- You have the right to access any information about you collected as part of this study.
- To ensure your privacy throughout the study you will be allocated an ID number and/or alias; all data provided by you will be recorded against your participant ID number/alias and your name will never be used in any report, correspondence, or publication. Only the Lead Researcher will have details of your name and this will be kept confidential.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STUDY?

The study data, including survey results and interview recordings and transcripts, will be kept securely on a password protected computer for five years, at which point it will be destroyed.

A summary of the findings will be available approximately six months after the completion of the study; all participants have the option of receiving these via email. We anticipate that the results of this study will be published in a peer-reviewed journal. The participants are welcome to discuss the findings of this study with the researcher at any time.

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION OR IF I HAVE CONCERNS?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study at any stage, you can contact:

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Lead Researcher: Debora Sutton.

Contact details are at the beginning of this information sheet.

Project Supervisors: Alison Kearney - A.C.Kearney@massey.ac.nz
06 356 9099 ext 84416
Karen Ashton - K.Ashton@massey.ac.nz
06 356 9099 ext 84445

If you want to talk to someone who isn't involved with the study, you can contact Stephanie Oh, who will be able to give you independent advice about your participation – Stephanie@rasnz.co.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/32.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison (Acting Chair), Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix E: Participant consent form



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Experiences of refugee background learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system

Participant Consent Form

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet. Yes No

I have had the opportunity to speak to someone (family, friend, support group) to help me ask questions and understand the study. Yes No

I understand that taking part in the study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. Yes No

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study. Yes No

I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. Yes No

I agree to the interview being sound recorded. Yes No

I agree to the interview being transcribed (put into written form). Yes No

I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general. Yes No

Declaration by participant:

I hereby consent to take part in this study.

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

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