

*Fostering Educational Success for
African Refugee Students*

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Research Problem



- **8,190 refugee immigrants between 1998 and 2005**
- **Half were school aged population (0-24 years)**
- **Increase in refugees from Africa and Middle East**

Three reasons for research attention

- Unique educational needs as youth from war-affected and disrupted schooling backgrounds
- Unique difficulty with integration: phenotype; ethnicity; language; religion
- Lack of effective, targeted support programs

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- High dropout rate, anti-social behaviours
 - A growing problem in the inner-city (winnipeg Free Press, 2006)

Research Questions

- **What do African refugee students need to succeed in Canadian schools?**
- **What are the barriers to their success?**
- **What kinds of interventions are needed to overcome these barriers?**

Research Questions

- **Educational needs include:**
academic, social, psychological,
cultural, linguistic, and economic
needs.

Target Group

- **African students from refugee, war-affected and disrupted schooling backgrounds in Winnipeg and Edmonton high schools**

Target group

- **Specifically: Refugee students from Ethiopia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia (205) students mainly in 6 high schools in Winnipeg & Edmonton), selected because:**

Rationale for selection

**Refugees from these countries
account for a large proportion of
Manitoba's newcomers of refugee
origin (reflected in refugee school
population)**

Rationale for selection

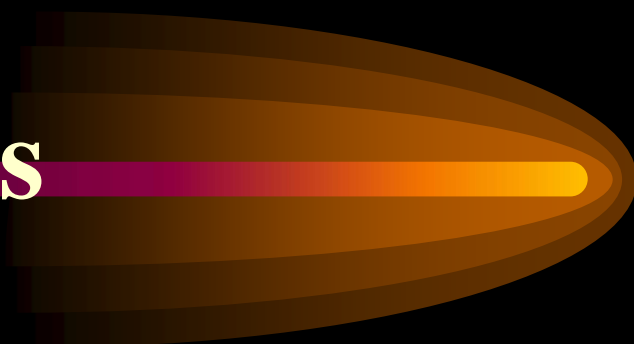
**Significance of the challenges they
pose for educators, schools, and
Manitoba community**

Research Procedures

Participants: African refugee students, principals, teachers, parents, community leaders; school dropouts

- **Focus groups**
- **Individual interviews; “opportunistic”**
- **School and classroom observations**
- **Visit to two refugee camps in Liberia**

Research Results

- **Academic challenges**
 - **Economic challenges**
 - **Psycho-social challenges**
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Academic Challenges

- Limited English language proficiency
- Lack of academic support at home
- Separation from family and Canadian peers
- Cultural dissonance, including academic cultural dissonance
- Difficulty with academic skills
- Acculturation/bicultural stress

Academic Challenges cont.

- Knowledge gaps due to disrupted schooling
- Fast-paced curriculum
- Fear and distrust of authority figures
- Fear of speaking out in class
- Difficulty with grade placement

Academic Challenges cont.

Teachers

- Expressed great interest and hope
- Have invested time and resources
- Listed similar challenges as the students
- Intensification of teachers' work
- Support from individual teachers
- Not much adaptation in curriculum and pedagogy

Academic Challenges cont.

Principals: Initiatives

- Refugee transition centers/Work prep progs
- Fund teachers to attend PD workshops
- After-school programs for students, parents and other community members
- Hired Arabic speaking EAs, full-time clinical psychologist and social worker
- Work with refugee agencies

Academic Challenges cont.

Supports required : Mainly funding for

- PD for teachers and administrators
- Extended EAL programs/Resource rooms
- Hiring more EAs (culture)
- Hiring liaison staff
- Expanding after school programs
- Specialized bridging curricula

Academic Challenges cont.

Parents

- Preoccupation with economic survival
- Non-recognition of prior qualification
- Slower pace of acculturation and adaptation
- Limited or no English language proficiency
- Cultural difference with respect to parental involvement with school

Academic Challenges cont.



Community leaders

Successes

- University entrance
- Soccer clubs
- Ethnic community centers
- Summer classes

Academic Challenges



Challenges

- Youth going to jail
- Culturally inappropriate recreational facilities
- Funding needed for more initiatives that keep youth safe


Economic Challenges

Poverty as a barrier to social integration and school success

- Many students reported working full time
- Non-recognition of prior qualifications
- Families remain restricted to gov't subsidized housing in tough neighborhoods
- Prey to predatory gangs and drug pushers

Psychosocial Challenges

- Difficulty moving on from traumatic experiences
- No medical treatment for traumas
- Isolation, exclusion, and loneliness
- Perceived racism
- Changes in family relationships (e.g., gender role expectations, role-reversals, loss of parental authority)

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- A decorative graphic consisting of a horizontal bar with a color gradient from dark purple on the left to bright yellow on the right. To the right of the bar is a teardrop-shaped graphic with a gradient from dark brown to light brown.
- Lack of recognition for prior learning and qualification
 - Parental loneliness and frustration—nowhere to go for advice or conversation

Conclusions

- **Clearly, untreated pre- and trans-migration psychological stresses and post-migration academic, economic, and psychosocial challenges pose barriers to integration and school success for African refugee students**

Conclusions

- **When these challenges are compounded by perceived attitudes of prejudice, racism, and exclusion, refugee students' confidence and self-concepts are eroded, setting the stage for dropout even when unintended**

Conclusions

- **Parents' beliefs about authority and parenting and parents' own acculturation and confusion in their quest for social integration and economic survival leave them ill-equipped to provide the emotional support their children need to succeed academically and socially.**

Conclusions

- **Lack of sufficient resources available to schools and isolation among the various service providers—educators, housing and family services, and healthcare providers—can severely impair the ability of these agencies to provide services**

Policy Implications

**Federal and provincial governments
and schools need policies in place
that would help minimize the
educational, economic, and
psychosocial challenges facing
African refugee students and their
families**

Policy Implications cont.

Federal level:

- **Significant increase in the number of Canadian immigration personnel in African regions would accelerate refugee screening and acceptance for resettlement**
- **Improved modes of incorporation of refugees—
e.g.,**
- **Forgiveness of federal loans for resettlement**
- **Recognition of foreign credentials for some trades/professions and upgrading opportunity for others (should be streamlined)**

Implications con't

Provincial Government (Manitoba)

- **Financial supports to improve the micro-system inhabited by African refugee students, e.g., schools and families and community support programs**
- **Increased provincial funding will strengthen schools' capacity for specialized programming**
- **Psychological treatment facilities**

Implications cont.

- Better housing in safer neighborhoods
- Better coordination of refugee support services

Implications cont.

Schools

- **Do more to live up to their rhetoric of diversity and inclusiveness and make schools more welcoming places**
- **Introduce more inclusive practices**
- **Collect and disseminate accurate information and cultural knowledge**
- **Maintain conversations about diversity**

Implications cont.

- **Institute better practices in initial testing and grade placement of refugee students**
- **Develop better community relations with parents**
- **Desegregate EAL students**
- **Hire more experienced EAL teachers**
- **Increase teachers personal and collective efficacy for working with African refugee students**

Implications cont.

MECY

- **Bill 13**
- **Integration of newcomers**
- **Attending to needs**
- **Finding of ESL Program Review**

Implications cont.

- **Manitoba Labour and Immigration: Partnership with MECY, school divisions, and settlement agencies; ESL Programming Review recommended collaboration**

Implications cont.

- **3 economic growth priorities in Manitoba are: Improvement of immigrant labour; investing in workplace education; and increasing labour market participation by new immigrants and Aboriginals**
- **Given the link between K-12 schooling, advancement to post-secondary institutions, and economic mobility, study will have policy implications for Manitoba Labour and Immigration.**

Thank you

