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Teachers' Perspectives: Challenges in the Integration of Refugee Children Deported from Israel to Uganda

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Abstract: In 2012, Israel deported 500 South-Sudanese refugee children and their families. A year later, a civil war broke out in the young South Sudan and the deportees, along with over one million South-Sudanese citizens, fled to the neighboring Uganda. Since then, many of these children have studied in boarding schools in Uganda. We explore, using qualitative methods, the perceptions and experiences of six Ugandan teachers all working with these children for at least 5 years. The research is unique in studying children who have previously lived and studied in a developed Western environment, and experienced, subsequently, a transition to the global south, with far more conservative social norms and an authoritarian, teacher-centered conception of education. The results show a clear progression in the teachers' conception of the children, beginning with an impression of the children as rebellious, tending to initiate conflicts, and disrespectful. Gradually, they came to view them as being open and assertive, often very articulate and communicative. They observed changes in the children's behavior: acquiring language skills, being cooperative with staff, integrating with the other children and caring. Working with the refugee children had a great impact on the teachers' perceptions and on their personal and professional conduct: they substituted punishments—including physical caning—with other methods of discipline. They endorsed open academic methods based on dialogue in class and between teachers and students, and encouraged experiment-based learning methods. On the other hand, the teachers' initial perception of children's parents as ignorant and disruptive remained unchanged and little effort, if any, was made throughout the years of this educational encounter to include the parents in the educational process. The teachers' recommendations focused mainly on three issues: preparing the children and the staff to the new experience in order to facilitate integration, enhancing the communication and mutual work with the children's parents, and giving more attention to the children's emotional state. The discussion section addresses the limitation of this study, directions for future research, and practical implications.

Keywords: refugee children; education; South Sudan; teacher's perspective; Uganda

1. Introduction

Refugee children around the world suffer from a multitude of problems: loss of parents and other family members; physical and sexual violence; mental health disorders such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety; various behavioral problems; lack of access to essential resources such as housing, health services and nutrition; and a constant fear of deportation, resulting in a constant sense of uncertainty (Bronstein and Montgomery 2011; Harris 2019; Nasiroğlu and Çeri 2016; Tyrer and Fazel 2014). One of the main challenges faced by refugee children is the disruption of their education resulting from their flee, as

well as limited access to educational resources in their host environments, and challenges in adapting to new educational systems ([Kostoulas-Makrakis and Makrakis 2020](#); [Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015](#)). Refugee children who enter a new educational system in the host country have to adapt to a new culture and a new schooling environment. Often, they need to learn a new language and develop a new identity while attempting to survive under harsh conditions.

A review article of 34 studies identified major risk factors for learning problems among refugee youth: parental misunderstanding of educational styles, teachers' stereotyping and low expectations, racial discrimination, pre and post migration trauma, and forced detention. However, these studies also identified factors contributing to successful integration: high academic ambition, parental involvement in education, family support, accurate educational evaluation and grading, teachers' understanding of linguistic and cultural tradition, and support by peers ([Graham Hamish R. and Paxton 2016](#)). Furthermore, refugee children often arrive at a place of asylum with language barriers (e.g., a lack of English); their parents often have low literacy skills and educational accomplishment; they experience difficulties in social integration in school environments; and they may suffer from emotional and behavioral problems related to traumas that they and their families had undergone while fleeing from war zones (for a review see [Dryden-Peterson 2016](#)).

Most of these studies were conducted in the West (Canada, the U.S., and Australia). Less is known about schooling problems of refugee children in developing countries. However, the vast majority of refugees in the world (22.5 millions)—half of which are children—are seeking asylum within their home region. In fact, the ten largest refugee host countries are in Asia and Africa ([Crawford and Roberts 2018](#); [Dryden-Peterson 2016](#)). Therefore, it is crucial to extend the scope of educational research to these regions as well. Furthermore, the majority of refugee children are not fortunate enough to be educated in a stable and safe environment. They usually have temporary asylum in some third country, with constant experiences of uncertainty regarding their future ([Dryden-Peterson 2017](#)). Therefore, it is important to understand the processes of education—a crucial asset in fulfilling future aspirations—under conditions of long-term uncertainty and exile.

In this qualitative study, we explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers in Uganda who taught a group of refugee children from South Sudan for over seven years. Earlier in their lives, these children lived and studied in Israel, where they sought asylum with their families, until they were deported in 2012. During their years in Israel, the children were enrolled in the general education system and became accustomed to life in a Western-oriented country, with relatively high conditions of living and a learner-oriented liberal-secular educational system. Having been deported, they found themselves in South Sudan, facing harsh and almost impossible life conditions in one of the poorest countries in the world, where the educational system is ranked lowest in the entire world. Under such circumstances, the families opted to send the children to a boarding school in the relatively stable, neighboring Uganda. Thus, their transition was from a Western, developed society, where they lived and studied, to a schooling environment in a developing country in the global south, with far more conservative social norms and an authoritarian, teacher-centered conception of education. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study explored such a unique group of primary and secondary school children who were forced to immigrate from a liberal, developed country in the global north to a more conservative, developing country in the global south.

South Sudan is the youngest country in the world, emerging from decades of civil war. The country suffers from a lack of basic services and infrastructure such as roads, electricity, sewage, clean water, health services, and education system. Ethnic clashes within South Sudan, which erupted in December 2013, made the situation even worse, killing over 400,000 people and leaving over two million people displaced. Due to this humanitarian crisis, there is presently a growing flow of refugees from South Sudan to Uganda that began in 2013 and still continues. In fact, the number of South-Sudanese refugees in Uganda throughout 2016 and 2017 had tripled the existing refugee population

in Uganda (Meyer et al. 2019). While Uganda opens its doors to refugees from South Sudan and other troubled countries, the country's capacity to offer the refugees adequate living conditions and necessary services is extremely limited (Meyer et al. 2019). For example, in 2016, UNHCR reported a funding gap of 64% in humanitarian response for the South-Sudanese refugees in Uganda—a gap that contributes to an increase in cases of malnutrition, a lack of sufficient clean water, and a lack of latrines (Meyer et al. 2019; UNHCR 2016).

A study among South-Sudanese refugee adolescents and caregivers living in refugee settlements in Uganda found that the lack of basic needs, such as food and water, negatively influenced the adolescents' psychological well-being, their ability to succeed in school, and consequently, increased the level of violence towards them (Meyer et al. 2019). Clearly, if possible, a private education in Uganda for refugee children and adolescents—a choice preferred by native Ugandan parents as well—would be preferable and safer for these children (Twikirize et al. 2019). For this reason, an NGO by the name "Become", using private donations, began placing refugee children and adolescents who were deported from Israel to South Sudan in private boarding schools in Uganda (the "Come True" Project). This study focuses on the perceptions of the Ugandan teachers who taught these refugee children for several years. Initially, the teachers had minimal information about the background of the children but gradually they become more aware of their history. This focus illuminates the gradual adjustment of refugee children to a new environment as well as developments in the way they were perceived by their Ugandan hosts.

The Come True Project

In the summer of 2012, South-Sudanese asylum seekers were deported from Israel to South Sudan. Among them were 500 children, who had to face challenges they were not prepared for. Most of them experienced illness, hunger, and a disruption of their education. In response to these horrific conditions, the children's parents approached Israeli friends, whom they have known from their years in Israel, and appealed for their support in bringing their children back to school. Given the situation in South Sudan, the parents opted to send their children to boarding schools in Uganda, a safe neighboring country that welcomes refugees. To make that possible, a group of Israelis (including the first author of this article) founded the Come True project, a fully volunteer-based registered NGO that fundraises and supports the education of the deported refugee children. The Come True project is managed locally by a member of the refugee community with full involvement of the children's parents. The school initially chosen for the children was a private boarding school serving mostly Ugandan families of a lower-middle stratum but open to refugee children and other foreigners. The children in the program were between the age of 7 and 17. The official language in Uganda and in all Ugandan schools is English and an English proficiency exam, rather than age, is the criterion used to assign a child to grades in school. As English was the 3rd, and sometimes 4th language of the "Become children" (we use the expression "Become children" and "refugee children" interchangeably), many of them ended up repeating grades that they already went through in Israel, learning side by side with children much younger than them.

On February 2013, the first group of children began studying in their new school in Kampala. Today, the project provides education and accommodation to approximately 200 children. The project pays school fees, health needs, basic school supplies, clothing, footwear, and equipment throughout the year, and cares for the children during the four months of each year when school is out. The Come true project is operating under the auspices of the Become Organization. Become supports children, families and communities in developing countries to overcome poverty and injustice (Become 2019).

2. Theoretical Perspective

Following other researchers who study the integration of refugee children in new educational environments, although concentrating on children who have moved from

developing countries to the West (e.g., [He et al. 2017](#); [Martinez 2012](#); [Valdez and Lugg 2010](#)), we endorse *the community cultural wealth framework* ([Yosso 2005](#)). Yosso describes the framework of “community cultural wealth” as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” ([Yosso 2005](#), p. 77).

The “community cultural wealth” framework describes several assets (or “capitals”) that enable refugee children and other marginalized groups to overcome the challenges of their new situations. They include the following assets: (1) aspirational capital—an internal ability to have future hopes and dreams even at troubled times when such aspirations seem unrealistic; (2) linguistic capital—the ability to communicate in several languages as needed; (3) familial capital—cultural knowledge accumulated through shared history and traditions throughout generations; (4) social capital—community networks and peers that provide social support and resources in harsh times; (5) navigation capital—skills to maneuver through different social situations and social institutions; (6) resistant capital—skills gained through oppositional behavior that challenges social inequalities ([Yosso 2005](#)).

In this preliminary study, we use the community cultural wealth framework to understand the assets, values, and educational norms of teachers who worked for several years with refugee children from Israel in Africa. We asked what assets, according to the teachers’ views, the children utilized in order to overcome the challenges in the new country? We tried to find out whether and in what ways the teachers’ personal assets, values, and norms had undergone change and development through their shared experience with the Become children? In future studies, we will include the voices of the children and their parents as well.

In addition, following the findings of [Dryden-Peterson \(2015, 2016\)](#), we pay attention to three areas in the life of the children, as seen through the eyes of their teachers: their language barriers, their experience of a teacher-centered pedagogy, and their experience of discrimination in school settings.

Language barriers: In most cases, refugee children must learn a new language and thus they devote a disproportionate amount of time learning the school’s official teaching language. Unfortunately, a common strategy for language acquisition in Ugandan schools is to place refugees in lower grades with younger children, a situation that may affect their self-esteem, their ability to cooperate, and their prospects of a successful integration. This matter was important to the refugee children deported from Israel. At home with their parents, the children speak their tribal native languages (mainly Dinka, Nuer, Shuluk and Bari) along with Arabic, that was imposed on the South-Sudanese tribes under the Muslim-Arab central regime. During their years in Israel, the children learned Hebrew and were enrolled in schools side by side with Israeli students. Though English is thoroughly taught in Israeli schools, being the 4th language of most of them, most children ended up learning very little of it. However, English is the official language in Ugandan schools, creating a major challenge to most of the children.

Teacher-centered pedagogy: Often, the education in the country of origin and in the country of asylum is characterized by a teacher-centered pedagogy as opposed to a learner-centered approach—lectures given by the teachers, reliance on factual questions, limited participation by the pupils, and encouragement of children to repeat what the teachers say (for a review, see [Mascolo 2009](#); [Mendenhall et al. 2015](#)). This point is highly relevant to the case of the children deported from Israeli who immigrated from a learner-centered educational system to one with a teacher-centered approach.

Discrimination in school settings: Refugee children often experience, prior to their forced migration, discrimination and persecution by peers, teachers, and local individuals. These experiences are likely to make the children suspicious of the educational staff and peers. Moreover, they may also suffer from discrimination in the host country, a situation that increases their vulnerability and present challenges. In many cases, during their years in Israel, the Become children have experienced various forms of discrimination. However,

such experiences within schools were few in number and in spite of extremely hostile policies towards asylum seekers on the part of the Israeli government, schools served as a relative safe zone for refugee children in Israel. In Uganda, the situation is reversed. While the country's policies towards refugees are highly inclusive, the soaring numbers of refugee children within Ugandan schools potentially exposes the children to harsh treatment within the new school environment.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Six teachers, three men and three women, who worked with the “Become children” in a private boarding school in Kampala for several years, took part in this qualitative study (Table 1). They are regular staff members at this institution, and have been working with the children since their arrival in Uganda.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the project was provided by the relevant local research ethics committee at Ben-Gurion University. The six participants signed a consent form agreeing to take part in this study. The findings of this study were sent to the participants for review, remarks, and approval. In fact, they are joint authors of this paper, describing this study's findings.

Table 1. Participants in this study.

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Formal Education	Teaching Experience	Years Worked with the Refugee Children	Subject	Religion
Alex	Male	39	Married + 3	16 years	19 years	7 years	Science	Christian
Ezra	Male	27	Single	17 years	7 years	3 years	Mathematics	Born Muslim, Converted to Protestant
Flaviah	Female	39	Married + 1	19 years	17 years	6 years	Social Studies	Christian
Aziizah	Female	33	Married + 3	19 years	9 years	6 years	Reading	Muslim
Maureen	Female	41	Married + 3	15 years	19 years	7 years	English	Christian
Elly	Male	40	Single + 2	15 years	17 years	6 years	Social Studies	Muslim

3.3. Data Collection

Two methods were used to collect the data: (1) questions were sent to all participants in advance and they provided their written answers, and (2) a focus group was conducted, led by the first and the last authors, using the same questions that were sent in advance, to orally discuss the participants' ideas and perceptions. The interviews were conducted in 2019 and they refer to experiences of the teachers since the arrival of the children, beginning in 2013, up to the period when the interviews were conducted. The questions covered the following topics:

- A. Initial impressions of the refugee children when first admitted to the school, and typical behaviors of the refugee children that distinguished them from other children.
- B. Changes in the refugee children's behavior and views through the years.
- C. Changes in your educational methods and perceptions that resulted from working with the refugee children.
- D. Interactions with the parents of the refugee children throughout the years.
- E. Recommendations on how to improve the integration of refugee children in schools.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were transcribed and analyzed by qualitative methods. That is, combining a constant comparisons strategy, and employing thematic analysis to detect patterns of behavior and perceptions (Braun and Clarke 2006; Hallberg 2006; Kolb 2012). The first

analysis of the text, including the oral and written text, was conducted by the first and last authors. Then, the findings were sent to all the participants for review, editions and comments. Changes were made accordingly. Thus, the findings of this study are based on the reading and the analysis of both the teachers and the researchers. At the time of data collection, the teachers were not aware that they will become co-authors of this article and their role was solely to give an open and honest information. The invitation to become co-authors was extended to them only after finalizing data collection.

3.5. Validity and Trustworthiness

Various methods were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study. (1) We used two methods of data collection—written answers and focus group discussion—thus we were able to obtain rich data from different sources. (2) We used the authors' experience in working with the refugee children from South Sudan, both in Israel and in Uganda, thus we analyzed the data from wide perspectives due to prolonged engagement with the community. (3) Throughout the data collection process and the data analyses, all participants had reflected on the processes, findings, implications, and interpretations of the data. These communications enabled us to view the texts from various perspectives and base our interpretations on mutual discussions and on rich experiences (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

4. Findings

A. Initial impressions of the refugee children; typical behaviors of the refugee children that distinguished them from other children:

1. Negative impressions—cultural clashes

The cultural differences between the Western Israeli and the Ugandan traditions regarding how children should behave in school and respond to authority surfaced immediately upon the arrival of the children. Being accustomed to conservative norms, the teachers perceived the new arrivals as rebellious, authority challenging, rude, conflict creating, both within themselves and with the staff, insistent on doing everything in their own ways, aggressive, unwilling to take advice and accept supervision, lazy, disrespectful, careless about their property, and noisy. These negative impressions led to intense emotions among the teachers, including confusion, surprise, frustration, and even fear.

Ezra said: "Most of them were so aggressive and on so many occasions abusing, fighting, beating up fellow students, refusal to take heed to advice and in retaliation of offences against them".

Flavia said: "The fact is, they were more egocentric, aggressive and do not easily take advice . . . They had no respect for big people, never admitted being wrong, always defensive, quickly angered, hot tempered".

Maureen added: "Numerous conflicts between the staff and the Become children were cropping up each day".

Elly commented: "Many of us perceived them to be rebellious. We are not used to students who can freely stand up to adults and question decisions taken by bigger people. A typical Ugandan parent raises their kid with a level of control and any insubordination to an adult person's statement is seen as indiscipline. The liberal nature of the kids when responding to adult instructions was a new challenge that took time of many of our conservative colleagues to get used to".

The liberal openness approach to manners of interaction and communication between the genders also confused and irritated the Ugandan teachers. As Maureen said: ". . . Their social interaction between the opposite sexes was contrary to the norms of upbringing the Ugandan children. They would have long hugs and pecks openly; and to them it was okay. We were totally against this as it had culminated into indulging in sexual interactions in the school premises".

She also commented on their dressing style: "The style of dressing was quite different, the girls of Become preferred very short dresses, boys would balance their shorts and they

hated the uniform policy. The school perceived this style indecent and contrary to the school norms and the community at large”.

2. Positive appreciations

After recovering from the initial shock, the teachers were able to appreciate some of the characteristics of the refugee children that distinguished them from the Ugandan children, including openness, creativity, assertiveness, boldness, pride, tendency to stand up for their rights, solidarity among themselves, and ability to learn fast.

Alex said: “. . . Become students will need a reason why he should do a punishment even when he/she has been implicated with wrongdoing. Local students are brought up being submissive. As a cultural norm, kids are not supposed to challenge orders from superior or elders”.

Alex also mentioned pride: “Even when they seem not to have enough clothing, they put up an impression that they are classy. Most Become students won’t put on second hand shoes or clothes. They have taste of class”.

Alex commented on their solidarity: “Become kids have solidarity amongst themselves and always identify themselves as a group unlike the independent solitary Ugandan kids”.

Elly wrote: “Open mindedness and feeling free to express their opinion especially in conversations with adults . . . Being bold is another trait I recognized. A become kid is willing to stand up to any action that they perceive questionable and more often than not they will question any disciplinary actions against them, asking for explanations and this is unlike our Ugandan kids few of whom can muster such guts”.

Aziizah wrote: “Become students are open to everyone in that they easily tell the people whom they stay with what has hurt them and what they have liked . . . Also the become children are hard working. When they don’t know anything and you teach them how to do it, they do it whole heartedly; I think it is the major reason as to why they perform better in class”.

She also commented on their social solidarity: “They are also cooperative with others. This is shown when their friends need help; they are always present to help them unlike the Ugandan children”.

3. The vulnerability of the refugee children

The teachers, even though confused and irritated by the refugee children’s behavior and attitude, were able to recognize their difficulties and vulnerability. Firstly, and most prominently, in terms of language barriers. To a lesser degree, the teachers paid attention to their emotional vulnerability, and to their separation from their families. However, viewing the children as lucky to have sponsors from abroad, the teachers tended to ignore their emotional difficulties and family separation.

As noted, language barriers were especially noticed. Elly said: “My first encumbrance was to do with the language barrier as I found out that the new students didn’t know how to speak English, I could barely communicate with the many willing friends as the faces were showing and most times my conversations could not go beyond the usual salutations of ‘How are you, I am fine’. The connection was there and willingness to converse with me was evident but alas! in which language”?

He also added: “I discerned a sense of frustration, disappointment and surrender among the pupils especially the older ones. They were in a new environment, with little mastery of the language of the community and many of them were being placed in classes with kids smaller than them in physical sizes and no one in school establishment seemed to offer them a proper explanation for their proper integration”.

Aziizah thought: “I also got the impression that in the process of teaching them, they would take long to learn English language being the fact that they were older . . . having come from a more developed country I had an impression that those who were in a lower class in Israel would be in a higher class in Uganda, but they instead (due to inability to speak English) went to a lower class”.

Regarding emotional vulnerability, Alex noted: “The kids looked vulnerable and some were sickly . . . Sometimes they feel the world hasn’t been fair to them, yet local kids look at them as more privileged due to having sponsors from abroad! . . . I looked at them as being lucky to have sponsors from Israel”.

Regarding separation from their families, Aziizah wrote: “Being the fact that many had taken long without seeing their parents, I got an impression that they would be lonely and make the learning process difficult”.

B. Changes in the refugee children’s behavior and views over the years:

All teachers observed changes in the refugee children’s behavior, which they perceived as positive and perhaps as an indication of their successful educational work: learning English, adjusting to the Ugandan system, being cooperative with staff, integrating with the other children, becoming less rebellious, and caring. In some cases, they even viewed the refugee children as future leaders and as excelling even in relation to local children. The teachers seem to ignore the possibility that the children learned to be submissive in order to avoid trouble. However, it is possible that they did not ignore it but viewed these changes as worthwhile, and as an essential part of a successful education process.

1. Adjusting to the Ugandan system

The teachers tended to perceive the changes as voluntary, and thus praised the children for their efforts. They did not question these behavioral changes, and perceived them as a genuine internal emotional transformation.

For example, Ezra wrote: “ . . . The ones that were aggressive became humble and social to fellow students and staff. In my opinion, no student left Trinity the way he/she came. I do believe that these students can now fit in any good society wherever they go”.

Aziizah noted: “They also started listening to elders and positively followed the given instructions unlike before”.

Flavia said: “After a few terms they adopted social positive traits of friendship. They have genuine love. They became helpful more so to teachers than before”.

Maureen noted: “There was tremendous progression in their behavior. This has been my best experience to see children transform from worse to better, yet it wasn’t easy”.

2. The refugee children as excelling

Some of the refugee children were perceived by the teachers not only as transformed to fit the Ugandan system, but also as excelling and possibly as future leaders, combining the best of two worlds—the creativity and boldness they brought from Israel with their ability to adjust to the Ugandan culture.

Elly wrote: “of great note is their unbelievably quick adoption of the Ugandan curriculum evidenced by their very good performance over the years in all classes. Their quick mastery of the English language did not only baffle us but also offered us an insight into the learning ability of children . . . ”

And Maureen noted: “ . . . Become students were almost thriving in everything aspect at school. They could do their assignments faster than anybody, their spoken English improved and they even started to befriend the native children. They taught the native children skills and games”.

3. Submission versus genuine change

Only one teacher, Elly, perceived these changes as a survival necessity. He acknowledged:

“The reward and punishment system of the school of course made a good number of them to adjust to the school norms and etiquette. Furthermore, in their complete submission to school routine and etiquette—compliance to uniform rules took long to take root with them, but now it is hard to distinguish become students from the rest of the students because they have a similar presentation, which was not the case in their earlier years at Trinity—they had a rebellious streak against school rules . . . but this has totally disappeared”.

C. Changes in your educational methods and perceptions that resulted from working with the refugee children:

Working with the refugee children who were brought up in a liberal and open, learner-oriented education system had a great impact on the teachers' perceptions and behavior. Two major changes were prominent: altering discipline methods and revising teaching methods.

1. Discipline methods

The teachers substituted punishments—including physical caning—with other methods of discipline, such as talking to children and explaining to them what is expected from them. The teachers attested that they now avoid corporal punishment in their school with respect to all students. It should be mentioned that corporal punishment is outlawed in Uganda but is still very common.

Ezra wrote: "Before these students joined us, the method of disciplining our students was caning/beating, but when they joined us, that practice was banned . . . This was so because these students were from schools in Israel that promoted nonviolent means of disciplining students. The corporal punishments that we used to give our native students stopped because become students resisted that method so our disciplinary practice was changed to nonviolent".

Alex said: "Use of force and corporal punishments was stopped. We learned that kids can be talked to and they understand".

Aziizah noted: "I also learnt the different ways of disciplining the children when they go wrong . . . like talking to them and also telling them how you feel when they do wrong".

Flavia explained: "Ugandan children are forced to learn even when not interested but with become students I learnt not to force pupils but rather create a positive friendship and bring them close to effective learning".

2. Teaching methods

The teachers elaborated how working with the refugee children has transformed their educational methods and perceptions. Overall, they moved towards more openness, willingness to have a dialogue with their students, ability to accept challenges to authority, making room for creativity and self-learning rather than regurgitating materials, acceptance of cultural difference, listening and talking rather than issuing commands, and approaching the students in a friendly, emotionally supportive manner. These changes in the teachers' methods and attitudes were part of a process of mutual influence between the teachers and the students: the more the teachers opened up, the better the students integrated and vice versa. Examples are ample:

Aziizah said: "I learnt to let children do research on their own . . . This encouraged me to use research as a method of teaching. I also learnt to always seek for children's view when teaching . . . I also learnt to teach children some art work".

Maureen wrote: "First of all I learnt that children won't care how much they learn until they learn how much a teacher cares. With my change of attitude, I started by taking keen interest in their culture, experiences, paying minimal attention to their negatives, promoting their culture. I noted they could learn well when they realize that they were emotionally and socially safe with me as their teacher. It required me to get closer to them to understand their challenges and needs".

Flavia summarizes the changes that apparently all had experienced to a certain degree:

- "As a teacher, I am not the sole source/provider of knowledge but I can as well learn a lot from my students.
- I realized as a teacher, I am meant to have friendly relation with all my students.
- Children's rights and feelings must be respected.
- My role is to guide my children and allow them discover some facts by themselves.
- Children learn best when left to be free and allowed to express their views.
- Children are young adults so should be respected as well as their views.
- It's vital for children to be assertive and free with each other.

- Effective education takes place if children are not forced but told the benefits of learning”.

D. Interactions with the parents of the refugee children throughout the years:

In Israel, parents tend to be involved in their children’s education, communicate regularly with teachers, and have a say about school’s policies and practices. By contrast, not only are such practices far less common in Ugandan schools, the parents of the refugee children, being refugee themselves, could not visit their children for prolonged periods and therefore their involvement in their children’s lives in school was minimal. Unfortunately, when they did have contact with the teachers, the experiences were mostly negative. The teachers and the parents could not speak to each other due to language barriers; and the parents were perceived as uncaring, demanding, and even ignorant and disruptive. Indeed, very little effort was made to include these parents in the educational process of their children. The teachers’ views of the parents seem to be similar to their initial views of the children prior to the transformation that both sides had experienced—but in the case of the parents—no transformation had taken place.

Alex said: “Most of the parents are uneducated! As a result, they can’t fully participate in guiding their children on academic and carrier path. The parents’ input has been minimal, leaving the students in the hands of school staff . . . The parents are too demanding and appreciate less . . . They are authoritative and always use force to obtain favor. They follow no protocol . . . they can decide to come to school and demand to visit their kids during lessons without official permission or waiting for scheduled visitation days . . . Most parents are idle. They have failed to get local jobs to sustain their families hence putting burden on sponsors. They are living example of beggars . . . As the result from the above, many parents lost power and authority over their children something that pains them a lot. Their kids can’t listen to them”.

Azzizah wrote: “Most of the Become parents do not admit that they are wrong and they always do not accept their mistakes unlike the Ugandan parents . . . they think that all the Ugandan children do not like their children thus making their children to misbehave unlike Ugandan parents”.

Ezra noted: “I found that most parents didn’t know English. I would find challenge communicating with them . . . Non-effective communication between parents and teachers is a big barrier in shaping the children academic and moral upbringing in school . . . Become parents are not concerned about their children’s academic performance as long as they are healthy and in school. The other parents would put us on pressure to make sure their children improve on their academic grades each day which isn’t the case with Become parents”.

Maureen wrote: “Become parents cared less about protecting the image of teachers before their children. They would vehemently refuse to follow school cultures . . . they defended their children even on their bad habits. They believed whatever their children told them instead of joining hands with the school to help their children”.

E. Recommendations on how to improve the integration of refugee children in schools:

The teachers’ recommendations focused mainly on three issues: preparing the children and the staff to the new experience in order to facilitate integration, enhancing the communication and mutual work with the children’s parents, and giving more attention to the children’s emotional state.

1. Preparing children and staff

The main recommendation of all teachers was to prepare the staff and the children in various ways, including training and mentoring, to the new experience. Such preparation would facilitate mutual understanding of each other’s cultural norms and behavior, and would thus minimize confusion, frustration, and miscommunication.

Azzizah writes: “Refugee children need to be in a home for a period of a month and they get a Ugandan parent to talk to them on the reason as to why they are going to school

and some of the expectations from them. Also, they should also be taught about the culture of the different schools where they are to be taken before they go to the given schools”.

Maureen wrote: “Refugee children need to be assigned mentors to give them social and educational support. This can create a difference by reducing the difficulties they face in their transitional stages”.

Ezra said: “Come true project should train schools and communities on how best the refugee children can be well taught and handled. The project shouldn’t only look at integration of the children but also the education system, this should be done by equipping staff of host schools with knowledge of the previous curriculum of the refugee children”.

Falvia noted: “Refugee children should be taught the culture and behavior of the people they are to associate with, e.g., respect for elders, proper sanitation, etc.”.

Elly put it shortly: “Making prior sensitization to the refugee students about the expectations of the host communities. Sensitizing the host communities about the rights of the refugees”.

And Alex suggested: “Train school staff on how to handle people with conflicting cultures”.

2. Enhance communication with the parents

Some of the teachers were aware of the lack of communication with the children’s parents and the need to improve this shortage. Sometimes, however, the recommendation was to change the parents’ behaviors and attitudes rather than working together as equals.

For example, Flavia wrote: “Become parents should be given relevant skills, knowledge and advice to discipline their children and help in behavioral moral development”.

Other recommendations emphasized the need to work together. Alex suggested: “Call for meetings between local and refugee parents . . . Elect parents’ representatives who can work closely with school authorities . . . Ensure that parents have periodic and organized visits in schools”.

There was also concern about the parents’ future and advise on how to help them. Ezra suggested: “Come true project should help Become parents and students completing studies to start up income generating projects in Uganda and South Sudan to help them support themselves and their children in case Come True project is faced with financial constraints”.

3. Attention to the children’s emotional needs

Most teachers gave little attention to the emotional and psychological state of the children. Thus, most recommendations did not address this area. Only Alex addressed this matter: “Have professional counsellors to handle kids with deviant behaviors or emotional and psychological challenges”.

5. Discussion

We explored, using qualitative methods, the perceptions and experiences of six teachers in Uganda who taught South-Sudanese refugee children deported from Israel in 2012. Thus, their transition was from a Western, developed society, where they lived and studied, to a schooling environment in a developing country in the global south, with far more conservative social norms and an authoritarian, teacher-centered conception of education.

This study identifies risk factors hindering the children’s integration in their new environment that were identified in other studies conducted in the West. Among them are: teachers’ stereotypes and low expectations, pre and post migration traumas, language barriers, low literacy skills of parents, and parents’ difficulties in social integration in school environment (Dryden-Peterson 2015, 2016; Graham Hamish R. and Paxton 2016; Kostoulas-Makrakis and Makrakis 2020)

The findings indicate that in the beginning, the teachers perceived the new arrivals as rebellious, creating conflicts, and disrespectful. Later, they were also able to view them as open and assertive. Overtime, they observed changes in the children’s behavior: learning English, being cooperative with staff, integrating with their fellow, native students, and

caring. Working with the refugee children had a great impact on the teachers' perceptions and behavior: the teachers report substituting punishments—including physical caning—with other methods of discipline. They moved towards greater openness, having dialogues with children, encouraging self-learning, and listening and talking to children. The teachers tended to perceive the children's parents as ignorant and disruptive, and made little effort to include these parents in the educational process.

Following other researchers who study the integration of refugee children in a new environment, we used the community cultural wealth framework (Yosso 2005). This theory describes assets that enables refugee children to overcome the challenges of their new situation, here as perceived through the eyes of their teachers.

1. Aspirational capital—an internal ability to have future hopes and dreams even at troubled times. Overtime, the teachers were able to view the refugee children not only as loud and rude, but also as creative, having future plans, and able to stand up for their rights.
2. Linguistic capital—the ability to communicate in several languages as needed. Overtime, the refugee children learnt English and even excelled in their oral and written communication in this language.
3. Familial capital—cultural knowledge accumulated through shared traditions over multiple generations. Unfortunately, the teachers did not develop sufficient communication channels with the children's parents and hence, did not use this asset as a source of support in their teaching processes.
4. Social capital—community networks and peers that provide social support and resources in harsh times. The children's peers tended to be a great source of support to them. Later on, the teachers themselves tried to be more understanding and supportive.
5. Navigation capital—skills to maneuver through different social situations and social institutions. The children, as described by their teachers, used various maneuvers to adjust: learning English, sticking together, learning the Ugandan code of behavior, and demanding human and students' rights, including the abolishment of physical punishment, and demanding of the teachers to listen to their requests and various appeals.
6. Resistant capital—skills gained through oppositional behavior that challenges social inequalities. As noted, the children used protesting, assertiveness, and boldness to oppose physical punishment, demanding that they be allowed to voice their needs, wishes and aspirations. They had an influence on the staff's attitudes and behavior, although they themselves learnt to mellow down and adjust to the Ugandan system.

Following the findings of Dryden-Peterson (2015, 2016), we pay attention to three areas in the life of the children, as seen through the eyes of their teachers: language barriers, teacher-centered pedagogy, and discrimination in school settings. Regarding language, the refugee children learned English quite rapidly and thus, were able to improve their academic integration. Their parents, however, did not learn English, a situation that prevented proper communication with the staff at school, leading to mutual negative feelings such as frustration and animosity.

Regarding teaching pedagogy, the education in Uganda is characterized by teacher-centered pedagogy as opposed to the learner-centered approach that is common in the global north (including Israel). The teachers' pedagogy made it harder for them to understand the children's behavior and attitudes, and only in time—when both sides had changed—were they able to communicate with them. The refugee children learned gradually to adjust better to the Ugandan system, showing more respect to elders and to those in authority, being less demanding, more cooperative, and less challenging of authorities. At the same time, the teachers learned to recognize more than just rudeness and disrespect in the assertiveness of the refugee children, their open mind, and their ability to fight for their rights (or at least, to what they took to be their rights). Indeed, the teachers moved to a certain degree towards a more learner-centered pedagogy, while still preserving their

general Ugandan pedagogical outlook. This gradual transition supports Mendenhall's and his collaborators' claim (2015) that teacher-centered and learner-centered pedagogies should be viewed as forming a continuum, rather than a dichotomous, categorical distinction (see also [Barrett and Tikly 2010](#); [Schweisfurth 2013](#)). The transition that the Ugandan educators have undergone is notable in light of the difficulties in implementing a more learner-centered pedagogy in the context of Ugandan settings including "the nature, expectations, and timing of reform; material and human resources; the lack of alignment across pedagogical preparation, curricula, and examination and inspection systems; and social and cultural conditions". ([Mendenhall et al. 2015](#), p. 97).

Regarding discrimination in school setting, it seems that the teachers paid little attention to the children's prior experience including deportation, discrimination, and separation from their families—experiences that are likely to be responsible for their tendency to be suspicious of the educational staff. Only later, when both sides came to know each other better, were they able to understand, to some degree, the children's behavior as partially explained by their traumatic experiences such as the experiences of forced migration, of life amidst war and persecution and of the ongoing separation from families.

This study has several limitations. It is based on a small number of teachers, it includes only qualitative findings, it does not include the children's and the parents' voice, and it does not provide longitudinal findings. Another point of limitation is that this study is based on the teachers' current and retrospective experiences combined. Their descriptions of their earlier views could have been influenced by later developments in their perspectives of the children. Future studies should provide longitudinal, quantitative, and qualitative data that provide input from children and parents as well.

Other methodological concerns and practical limitations of this study result from the fact that the nature of the partnership between the sponsoring organization, Become, and the school is based on a business model. The organization pays the fees for over 100 students in the school. Thus, the school has a major financial interest in satisfying the customers, and making the necessary adjustments to ensure the continuation of the partnership. This aspect of the partnership should be considered as an additional factor underlying the teachers' transformation of their methodologies, ideologies and pedagogical practices. As the teachers describe the transformation in views and practices, it is portrayed as a radical shift from a highly authoritarian, teacher-oriented methodology into a very liberal learner-oriented methodology. To approach a more comprehensive view of these motives, it is worthwhile exploring, in further studies, whether such changes affected the teachers' educational practices in relation to Ugandan students, whether such changes have led to a backlash from Ugandan parents and if so, what were the teachers' responses to them.

These findings suggest some practical implications regarding the integration of refugee children, particularly in Africa but also in the rest of the world. First, this study highlights the crucial importance of preparing the staff and the children to the new experience. Such preparation will facilitate better mutual understanding of each other's cultural norms and behavior, and thus reduce confusion, frustration, and miscommunication. A recent model that may be useful is the CARE methodology that was designed to prepare teachers to implement student-driven learning activities for refugee children: "The CARE learning design framework involves four interactively functioning processes, starting from conceptualization of a learning intervention through activating learning processes to critical reflection and student engagement". ([Kostoulas-Makrakis and Makrakis 2020](#), p. 185). As the model was developed in schools in Egypt, its potential value for other educational systems in the global south, such as the system in Uganda, should be considered.

In addition, the children's parents should not be ignored. They are an essential resource for their children's development and well-being and can be an asset for emotional support, for resolution of conflicts between students and staff and for better integration within the new environment. Parents should be included in the educational process and daily routines, and perceived as important partners in the academic process. This can be

achieved using translators, and mutually planned meetings and communication. When possible, any support provided to integrate parents into the new society is likely to have a valuable impact on successful integration of students. Even in cases where parents are absent, as is the case for many who live in refugee camps in neighboring countries, regular communication with them could take place via the internet and phone conversations. Lastly, the children's emotional and psychological state should not be ignored. Professional group and individual counselling must be provided to address the children's prior experiences that are often harsh and traumatic, as well as their current confusions, fears, anger, and aspirations.

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