Received: 24 June 2023 | Accepted: 3 March 2024

DOI: 10.1002/berj.4005

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

BERJ BERA

An integrated conceptual model for enhancing refugee education

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Abstract

This paper introduces a unified conceptual framework for understanding refugee identity construction within educational contexts, drawing on theories of social justice (Fraser, 2008), affective relations (Lynch, 2012), the resumption of ordinary life (Kohli, 2011) and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Addressing a gap in the existing scholarship, the model emphasises the importance of affective relations in shaping refugee identities in education alongside other factors. The study examines the macro constructs of redistribution, recognition, representation and relational affect, highlighting their impact on refugee children's educational experiences. Further, it considers the micro constructs of safety, sense of belonging and success in integration and attainment in educational environments. The constructs are examined across various levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, demonstrating the complexity of refugees' needs. This model aims to facilitate a holistic, justice-oriented approach to refugee education, which is crucial given the rise in global displacement. The study has significant implications for refugee education research and policymaking, potentially informing targeted interventions and programmes that foster academic success, overall well-being, and practice in refugee education.

KEYWORDS

affective relations, refugee education, refugee identity construction, social justice

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

This paper highlights the inadequacy of a comprehensive framework for understanding refugee identity construction within educational contexts, especially in terms of integrating affective relations and broader socio-ecological factors in refugee education.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

The paper offers an integrated unified conceptual model combining theories of social justice, affective relations, ecological systems and the resumption of ordinary life. It highlights the multi-layered influences on refugee identity within educational contexts, advocating for a holistic, justice-oriented educational approach.

INTRODUCTION

Education is essential to humanitarian assistance to ensure refugees' long-term stability and well-being. With the increasing number of displaced people worldwide, including 103 million according to UNHCR (2022), more research is being conducted on refugee education (see *British Educational Research Journal*, 47/4; *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 5/1&2). Indeed, it is crucial to understand children's educational experiences and needs to ensure that children and young people can (continue to) thrive in these circumstances.

Many studies of refugee education have drawn upon Fraser's (2008) theory of social justice (Lee, 2021; McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). Although significant, some researchers have criticised this theory for failing to account for affective relations adequately (Hanlon, 2022; Lynch, 2012; Zembylas, 2022). Other researchers on refugee education (McIntyre et al., 2020) have employed Kohli's (2011) resumption of ordinary life, which suggests that refugees displaced by conflict or persecution can rebuild their lives and return to normalcy. Recently, McIntyre and Neuhaus (2021) combined the theories of social justice and the resumption of ordinary life and proposed a theoretical framework for reforming refugee education policy and practice. However, while this framework is more inclusive, I contend that it fails to consider the affective relations that affect the evolution of refugee identity.

As a refugee scholar, I am concerned about the inadequacies of the current theoretical frameworks for refugee identity construction, specifically within educational settings. To this end, I propose an integrated and cohesive conceptual model that considers affective relations along with the subsequent core constructs: Fraser's (2008) theory of social justice, Lynch's (2012) theory of affective relations, Kohli's (2011) resumption of ordinary life and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory. Each of these constructs will be thoroughly analysed and discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper, providing a comprehensive understanding of their interconnectedness and implications for the education of refugee children. I build upon the contributions of prominent scholars in refugee education, aiming to facilitate a more comprehensive view of this important and complex topic. This study has substantial implications for research and practice in refugee education, particularly for policymakers, as it will aid in developing targeted interventions and programmes that promote academic success and overall well-being for refugee students.

While this paper proposes an integrated model for refugee education, it is important to recognise the real-world constraints that often impede its implementation. The current political and economic climate, characterised by uneven resource distribution and varying political ideologies, poses significant challenges. Educators, despite their commitment and understanding of the need for inclusive education, often find themselves constrained by these external factors. This acknowledgement serves as a prelude to exploring how the model can be realistically adapted and applied within these limitations.

I bring a unique perspective to this research as both a scholar and a refugee. I was raised in Iran by my parents, who had sought refuge there after fleeing from Afghanistan during the rise of the Taliban. Once, as a refugee, I no longer had access to free education in Iran, we returned to Afghanistan. I studied and worked there, becoming a lecturer and scholar for a decade until Afghanistan once again fell into the hands of the Taliban. In recent years, my journey as a refugee led me to the UK through a relocation scheme. Living temporarily in several hotels alongside other refugees before resettlement, I experienced first-hand the challenges displaced individuals face, particularly those related to education. These experiences extended into my academic pursuits and family life in the UK. My desire to access higher education, my wife's language learning journey through ESOL courses, and my son's adaptation to a local nursery were all facets of our refugee experience that intersected with education. These personal insights have deeply shaped my research approach, providing a grounded understanding of the complex realities that refugee students navigate. As a result, this work is not only an academic exploration but also a personal quest to improve the educational experiences of refugees.

The paper begins with exploring refugee identity construction, social justice theory and ecological systems theory concerning refugee education. It then proceeds by scrutinising the macro construct, investigating how *redistribution*, *recognition*, *representation* and *relational affects* shape the educational experiences of refugee children. This approach is informed by McIntyre et al.'s (2020) adaptation of Kohli's (2011) three key concepts: safety, belonging and success, as fundamental to refugee education. Following this, it delves into the impact of the micro constructs—*safety*, *sense of belonging*, and *success*—on the integration and attainment of refugee students within their new educational environments. Throughout the paper, these constructs are navigated across various levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, emphasising the complex needs of refugee students and advocating for a holistic, justice-oriented approach to providing inclusive and supportive education for refugees.

REFUGEE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Identity is a complex, dynamic and pluralistic concept (Varghese et al., 2005). This view of identity marks a departure from the essentialist assumption that cultural and biological features affect social groups' characteristics and behaviours, thereby affecting their identity (Bucholtz, 2003). Instead, identity is constructed by contextual social processes (Miller, 2009), meaning that identity is 'crucially related to social, cultural, and political contexts—interlocutors, institutional settings, and so on' (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 23).

Refugees construct their identity through various encounters and experiences, including crises (Beauregard et al., 2017), traumatic events, displacement (Chao, 2019) and resettlement (Dykstra-DeVette & Canary, 2019). During their journey, they may lose different kinds of resources and capital, such as linguistic capital (Kennedy et al., 2019), cultural capital (Smith et al., 2019), social capital (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Morrice, 2007), economic capital (Stempel & Alemi, 2021), psychological capital (de Graaff et al., 2020) and emotional capital (James et al., 2019). As refugees interact with their surroundings, they continuously adapt and reshape their sense of self and identity based on the context (Norton, 2010).

In light of these considerations, it can be argued that identity is based not solely on relational aspects but also on experiential factors (Tsui, 2007). That is to say, identity is 'relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transforming, and transitional' (Miller, 2009, p. 174). Therefore, when conducting research with refugees, it is crucial to investigate how they shape their identities and understand the recognition refugees receive from others, especially in educational settings, upon their arrival in a new environment and during their integration process (Morrice & Salem, 2023).

REFUGEE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Building upon the earlier discussion, my proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) unifies various theoretical notions. To provide a comprehensive understanding, I delve into each theoretical aspect, which includes Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory, Fraser's (2008) social justice theory, Lynch's (2012) affective relations theory and Kohli's (2011) concept of resuming ordinary life.

This integrated conceptual framework builds on the concentric rings of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST). It delves deeply into the many layers and levels present in the context of refugee educational experiences, consequently creating spaces for interaction and engagement.

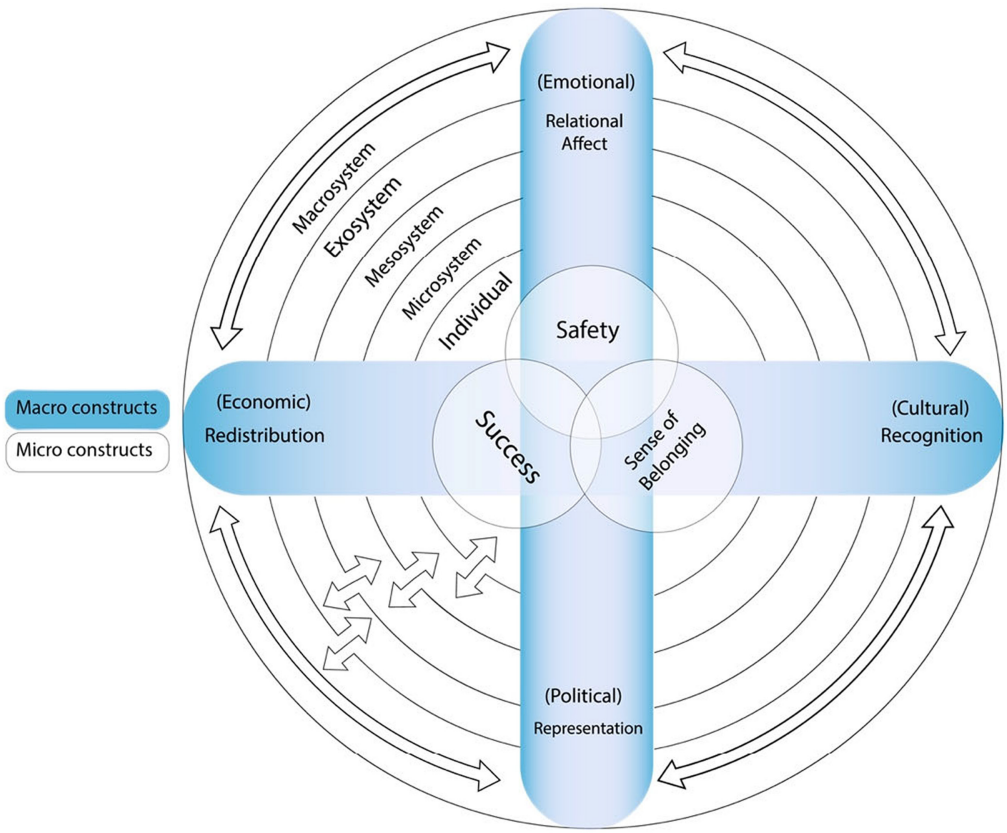

FIGURE 1 Refugee identity construction within educational contexts. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Four fundamental macro constructs are distinguished within this framework: (i) *redistribution* refers to economic issues; (ii) *representation* is linked to political factors; (iii) *recognition* encompasses cultural components; and (iv) *relational affect* involves emotional considerations. These constructs exert a considerable influence on the formation of refugee identity. Moreover, these macro constructs find their expression within the various layers of the ecological systems that refugee children navigate: the individual, micro, meso exo, and macro levels.

At the core of the model reside three micro constructs: *safety*, *success* and *sense of belonging*. These constructs play a critical role in shaping refugee identity, yet their influence can be directly or indirectly adjusted by the directives at the macro constructs.

REFUGEE EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

The EST of Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposes that various interconnected levels of the environment or context influence children's development. Anderson et al. (2004) augment this theory by considering the different ecological contexts that refugees encounter across various stages of their journey. There are four nested levels in Bronfenbrenner's EST: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) employed the analogy of 'a set of Russian dolls' (p. 3) to propose that each level is nested within the others and engages in ongoing causal interactions with one another. This suggests that the individual is at the centre of a concentric circle containing a wide range of contextual influences, and that these occur within a chronosystem that encompasses transitions across time (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST can be applied to contextualise refugee education research, as demonstrated in the example in Table 1.

Notably, I have acquainted myself with Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem models (1986), which are crucial for appreciating the influence of evolving environments on an individual's developmental journey over time. This is especially significant when evaluating the educational trajectories of refugee children and individuals within diverse temporal contexts. However, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory has been critiqued for neglecting the physical environment, which includes the biosphere and nature, aspects proposed as key determinants of development (Elliott & Davis, 2020). The environment is embedded within my proposed model (e.g. neighbours, neighbourhood, school buildings). However, exploring this aspect in depth is beyond the scope of this paper, and it requires further attention in future research.

Viewing refugee education through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's EST highlights the need to acknowledge and meet the distinctive needs of refugees within the context of their experiences. This approach aligns with Anderson et al. (2004), who emphasise the importance of considering the different stages of migration and their impacts on refugees, especially children, in their adaptation to new educational environments. This involves understanding the various levels of the EST and their impact on refugees to consider how to develop effective educational policies and programmes. As I will elaborate in the subsequent section concerning the theory of social justice, recognising the importance of these factors is crucial in promoting social justice and creating a more equitable education system for all. Thus, I have positioned the diverse constructs of my proposed model under the umbrella of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems to provide a comprehensive perspective on shaping human development, including developing a refugee's identity across different contexts.

TABLE 1 Integrating refugee education with ecological systems theory (EST) at different levels.

Level	Definition	Refugee-related instances	A pertinent research study
Microsystem	Interactions within the individual's closest immediate environment or context	Family, school, neighbours and childcare settings shape refugee education by promoting support, social integration and inclusive learning environments. For example, schools providing language assistance and multicultural events facilitate better adaptation, academic success and appreciation of diverse cultures.	Pucino (2018) underscored this by showing how Iraqi refugee-background youths experienced and responded to discrimination within the school environment. Also, Erdemir (2022) utilised interpretative phenomenological research to examine the Home-Based Early Childhood Education programme's effect on Syrian refugee and Turkish families, uncovering enhancements in early development, parent–child communication, family unity, social connections and maternal empowerment, substantiating the programme's effectiveness.
Mesosystem	The interconnectedness and interactions between microsystem structures	Home activities can affect a refugee child's school performance and progress, and reciprocally, school experiences may impact their home life. For example, a child's household responsibilities can reduce their homework time, and school-related stress can cause tension within the family.	Ragnarsdóttir's (2020) explored 11 Syrian refugee families' experiences in Iceland, using semi-structured interviews, emphasising their opportunities, educational achievements and obstacles, including illiteracy and communication issues within schools and society, and expectations between the school and homes.
Exosystem	The external environment impacts development via social and microsystems interactions	Factors impacting family members inevitably shape children's development, including that of refugee children in a school setting. For example, the professional environment of a parent and the parents' social connections can significantly affect a refugee child's learning and progress at school.	Korntheuer et al. (2021) examined the role of family education programmes in aiding the integration of refugee families in German society, emphasising the significance of emotional stability, social connection, and peer-to-peer outreach strategies.
Macrosystem	Cultural consistencies across micro-, meso-, exo-systems (e.g. economic, social, legal, political systems manifested), representing underlying beliefs, ideologies.	Unacknowledged cultural values, unique needs and customs of refugee children can lead to academic disparities owing to insufficient cultural awareness in legal/political systems, social/economic support and education policies.	Gezer (2019) investigated the inadequate access to quality education for Syrian refugee children in Turkey and emphasises the importance of multicultural education, particularly through multicultural literacy practices, in cultivating cultural awareness and understanding among students, educators, and communities. Also, Pucino (2018) highlighted how societal belief systems, including Islamophobia and xenophobia, can influence the microsystem of the classroom, affecting refugee students' experiences. This illustrates the significant impact of macrosystem factors on refugee children's daily educational experiences.

SOCIAL JUSTICE THEORY AND REFUGEE EDUCATION

Fraser (2008) defined justice as *parity of participation* and acknowledged the impact of globalisation on the evolving perspectives towards justice. She added that social arrangements must allow all participants to participate in social activities equally for justice to be achieved. To eradicate injustice, institutionalised barriers that restrict the participation of some individuals in social interactions must be eliminated. According to Fraser (2008), three kinds of obstacles impede individuals' full engagement in parity of participation. She categorised the barriers as (i) redistribution, (ii) recognition and (iii) representation.

In Fraser's (2008) view, redistribution is an economic distribution aspect. If economic barriers hinder the attainment of inclusion and justice, the solution may entail redistributing material and human resources (McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). As a refugee who has recently faced the challenge of relocating my family, I have witnessed how economic and societal factors complexly interact in the exosystem and macrosystem, significantly affecting the educational support available to refugee families. This experience, illustrating Fraser's (2008) concept of redistribution, also reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological perspective, showing how shifts in external circumstances and societal attitudes impact the family's immediate environment and, consequently, children's education. Our struggle to secure stable housing, among the complexities of societal attitudes towards refugees, underscored the urgent need for equitable resource distribution and cultural recognition in educational settings. This personal experience underlines the importance of developing policies and educational frameworks that are aware of the multifaceted challenges faced by refugee families, ensuring that they receive the necessary support and are treated with respect and dignity within the educational system. Our struggle to secure stable housing, intertwined with the complexities of societal attitudes towards refugees, highlights the broader issue of distributive injustice (Fraser, 2008). This injustice, often rooted in society's class structure, leads to difficulties in integration and equality owing to restricted resources and social standing, particularly for refugees. Such circumstances can trigger segregation and exclusion. Therefore, my personal experience underscores the urgency of equitable resource distribution and cultural recognition in educational settings, emphasising the need for policies and educational frameworks that acknowledge and address the diverse challenges faced by refugee families, ensuring they are provided with the necessary support, respect and dignity within the educational system.

Cultural hierarchies can also inhibit people from interacting on an equal basis; in this case, they are subjected to status inequality or misrecognition, which Fraser attributes to recognition. The problem, according to Fraser (2008), could be attributed to the status order. Fraser (2008) argued that despite the causal relationship between class structure (distribution dimension) and status order (recognition dimension), there is no neat mirroring of the two dimensions. Recognition and distribution alone cannot provide adequate insight into justice; this can only be achieved by integrating both elements. For example, despite excelling academically, a refugee student may still encounter marginalisation or misrecognition in school owing to existing cultural hierarchies that undervalue their cultural heritage, thereby illustrating the complex interplay between the dimensions of distribution (academic achievement) and recognition (cultural status).

Moreover, Fraser added that although redistribution and recognition are influenced by power and politics, the political dimension of her theory is more specific as it 'concerns the scope of the state's jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation' (Fraser, 2008, p. 38). According to Fraser, the political dimension provides the arena for debate concerning distribution and recognition. In response to the critiques on her dual systems theory (Young, 1997), Fraser added the political dimension, which, according to her, provides the arena for debate concerning distribution and recognition. Designed to address

membership issues and procedural concerns, the political dimension of justice focuses primarily on representation. Fraser (2008) postulated that 'misrepresentation occurs when political boundaries and/or decision rules' are erroneously applied to ignore some people's equal opportunity in social interactions, such as in political ones (p. 40). Besides establishing decision rules, the political dimension determines how contests are staged and resolved concerning distribution (economic dimension) and recognition (cultural dimension). For example, a refugee child might be overlooked in local education policy decisions owing to their non-citizen status despite being a significant party impacted by these decisions, illustrating Fraser's concept of misrepresentation within the political dimension of justice.

McIntyre (2021a) considered Fraser's theory of social justice as a normative moral frame that aids in comprehending how individuals' voices participate and influence dominant political conversations. She further noted that Fraser's theory allows us to achieve a deeper understanding of the experiences of refugee children in educational environments by exploring how systemic factors affect how schools and their members respond to these children's needs. Now, having explained each construct of Fraser's theory, we can delve into how they specifically relate to refugee education and their implications in this regard.

REDISTRIBUTION (ECONOMIC)

Since economic inequality and the equitable distribution of wealth substantially influence the quality of education, 'distributive features of justice have been a feature of equity and educational policy' (McIntyre, 2021a, p. 34). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) underscores this point, highlighting how societal and economic structures in the macrosystem impact the equitable distribution of educational resources and opportunities, thereby affecting the development and well-being of refugee children. This assertion is substantiated by the fact that when economic disadvantages prevail, access to fundamental necessities, such as food and healthcare, is restricted, adversely affecting refugees' educational advancement.

The World Bank–UNHCR report (2020) indicated that the international community has assisted many governments in providing more inclusive and integrated educational opportunities. Nevertheless, the UNHCR (2022), drawing from data collected in 40 countries, asserted that compared with non-refugee children, a greater number of refugee children lack access to inclusive, quality education. The report further presented that 48% of refugee children globally are not enrolled in school, with insufficient funding being the primary cause in most instances. As the UNHCR (2022) presented, 'financing for education for refugees has too often been short-term, fragmented and unpredictable' (p. 28).

In certain countries, governments and policymakers allocate budgets to schools intending to furnish supplementary assistance to refugee children. For instance, in England, the government employs a National Funding Formula to determine budget allocation for schools, considering the number of students with special needs, such as refugees requiring English language support. However, the constraints of the allocated budget lie in the absence of specific guidelines on expenditure and the need for measures ensuring that funds are designated for certain groups. As McIntyre (2021a) states, 'decisions about how to spend the overall budget are left to individual schools' (p. 35). Also, budget reductions have detrimental effects on schools, particularly those situated in impoverished areas (Reay, 2017). Such cuts may lead to decreased support and resources available for students, including those specifically designed for refugee students.

It is crucial to note that not all countries adhere to this approach of allocating funds to schools to address the needs of refugee children. Refugee children residing in camps across numerous countries, while awaiting the processing of their refugee applications, frequently

encounter distinct and less favourable circumstances. For example, in Turkey, 400,000 Syrian refugee children of school-going age are not attending school (UNICEF, 2023).

As such, the redistribution element of Fraser's social justice theory is critical for a socially just education for refugees. Addressing economic inequalities and ensuring equitable distribution of resources allow equal access to quality education for these children. Collaborative efforts among various stakeholders, such as governments, non-governmental organisations, the international community and refugees, are crucial in formulating sustainable funding strategies. This enables the (re)distribution of resources to schools serving significant refugee populations, fostering an inclusive educational environment that encourages active societal participation for refugee children.

RECOGNITION (CULTURAL)

In educational settings, a cultural hierarchy can impede individuals from participating fairly in an environment that promotes social justice, consequently giving rise to status inequalities or misrecognition. The UNHCR (1981) employed the slogan, 'A bundle of belongings isn't the only thing a refugee brings to his new country. Einstein was a refugee', to highlight the various non-economic forms of capital that refugees contribute to the context they join. This notion relates to Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of cultural and social capital, encompassing access to cultural commodities and social networks and cognitive concepts, such as values, attitudes and norms. Fraser's notion of recognition also emphasises the significance of acknowledging and appreciating the cultural origins and identities of refugees because 'child development is a process that involves active, interrelated roles of children and their social, cultural worlds' (Rogoff, 2016, p. 184).

Recognition is a relevant issue in educational settings where refugees' cultural backgrounds and identities may frequently be neglected or underestimated (Chopra, 2020). Emphasising the value of cultural diversity and appreciating the role of cultural background in constructing refugee children's identities and perspectives are essential. This appreciation aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST, where the interaction between the mesosystem and exosystem influences the cultural recognition and identity formation of refugee children. Schools should serve as safe spaces for refugee children, where diversity is appreciated and respected, thereby fostering a sense of being understood, connected and empowered among these children (Louise, 2023). Integrating culturally relevant content into curricula (Rapanta & Trovão, 2020) and offering opportunities for refugee children to access culture-specific materials and resources through both curricular and extracurricular activities can shift the focus from viewing culture as a static feature of people to focusing on methods of life (Rogoff, 2016).

Additionally, establishing secure and welcoming environments in educational contexts can promote multicultural education, which 'aims to respond to the presence of diversity and inequality in society' (Jackson, 2014, p. 12). Incorporating culturally responsive teaching is vital in this context because it integrates 'the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them' (Gay, 2018, p. 31). An example of such teaching practice is translingualism, which embraces diverse linguistic capabilities to explore language's multifaceted, dynamic characteristics (Canagarajah, 2021). This would contribute to the acknowledgement of cultural diversity.

This approach can also facilitate the identification of refugee children's skills and aptitudes, nourishing them by creating opportunities to share their cultural experiences and perspectives, engage in mutual learning and increase growth. Such endeavours have the potential to challenge traditional power dynamics in the teacher–student relationship, where

the teacher traditionally assumes the role of the knowledgeable and authoritative person, while the students are perceived as the less informed party (Valdez & Park, 2021). Through this lens, rather than labelling refugee children as deficient within the framework of the host system, we acknowledge and cultivate their inherent strengths and potential, thereby nurturing a more positive self-perception.

Moreover, considering Bronfenbrenner's (1977) mesosystem and exosystem, creating an enriching and inclusive space that fosters recognition and admiration of refugee students' unique perspectives and talents can be facilitated through ongoing communication and collaboration between schools and families (Celik et al., 2021). Such collaborations would lead to achieving culturally sustained pedagogy, which as Paris and Alim (2014) noted, 'seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change' (p. 88).

REPRESENTATION (POLITICAL)

Representation, as Fraser (2007) mentioned, 'allows us to problematize both the division of political space into bounded polities and the decision rules operating within them' (p. 313). However, the efficacy of representation in refugee education can be influenced by underlying power dynamics. Political authorities and institutions exerting influence over educational policies often determine the extent to which the voices of refugees are included and valued in decision-making processes. This issue highlights the need for an examination of these power structures to confirm equitable representation and address the needs of refugee students. Nevertheless, representation is a complex phenomenon for refugees because labelling the needs and experiences of such a large and diverse group under one umbrella is complex and can lead to tokenistic representation (McIntyre, 2021a). In refugee education, representation means including and valuing the voices and perspectives of diverse stakeholders, such as refugees themselves, in decision-making processes and the development of education policies (Bahou, 2015).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST reinforces this aspect, highlighting the impact of the macrosystem, such as political policies and societal attitudes, on the educational experiences and representation of refugee children. Representation allows a critical examination of the power dynamics, inclusion and decision-making processes within the governing bodies, educational institutions and systems responsible for refugee education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016, 2022). Fraser's (2008) slogan, 'No redistribution or recognition without representation', is relevant here because 'the ability to exercise political voice depends on the relations of class and status' (Fraser, 2008, p. 333). In this perspective on social justice, refugee children are not required 'to have access to the same kind of inputs'; instead, they need diverse support and resources to develop their educational capabilities (Tikly, 2016, p. 415).

Unfortunately, in many countries, educational policies fail to address the specific needs of refugee children. For example, refugees in some countries, such as Iran where Afghan refugees are given access to education, are required to follow the same national curriculum as resident children (UNHCR, 2023). The imposition of national curricula in schools often undermines the refugees' cultural values and culturally diverse educational experiences, resulting in unequal treatment and social arrangements as they are not recognised as citizens of their host country (Morrice & Salem, 2023). Such examples create a situation where schools are not required to accommodate these needs and may not be held accountable if they fail. This policy invisibility is a political act of injustice that affects both inclusive and non-inclusive schools, as pointed out by McIntyre (2021a): 'Policy invisibility is a political act of injustice that affects both those schools that want to be inclusive and those that do

not' (p. 40). Perhaps there is an opportunity for countries globally to draw valuable insights from the success of the curriculum framework for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank (UNRWA, 2023).

Misrepresentations occur when political decisions negatively impact the distribution and recognition of resources (Fraser, 2008). In the case of refugee children and their parents, educational policies that impede their active and equitable participation and representation can lead to misrepresentation and injustice, perpetuating anti-immigrant discourse and rhetoric such as 'economic migrants' (Paynter, 2022). To address this issue, it is important to embrace diversity in schools, consider recruiting teachers from diverse backgrounds, including refugee teachers, and adopt assessment models that are not based on dominant cultural norms (McIntyre, 2021a). Hence, examining political space and decision-making rules regarding representation and utilising political clarity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999) can help promote more equitable and just education opportunities for refugees.

RELATIONAL AFFECT (EMOTIONAL)

In this model, the fourth macro construct highlights the importance of the relational and affective dimensions of social justice, which integrate emotional elements and relationships, underlining the role of love, care and solidarity in fostering egalitarian thinking and justice. The concept of relational affect, previously referred to as affective equality (Lynch, 2009) and affective relations (Lynch, 2012), is notably missing from Fraser's social justice theory. While Fraser's concept of justice through parity of participation is comprehensive, it might need to pay more attention to the role of emotions and affective relations in achieving egalitarian thinking (Lynch, 2012). To address this gap, Lynch introduced the notions of love, care and solidarity, arguing that most social justice theories concentrate on the public domain of life, such as culture, economy and politics, while neglecting the affective domain and its connection to justice.

Receiving love and care is crucial not just during early childhood or periods of vulnerability (Lynch, 2009) but also during schooling years. In the context of refugee education, schools can become havens for recovery (McIntyre, 2021b). They can serve as stabilising factors for refugee youth, whose lives are often marked by turmoil and upheaval (Matthews, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST complements this by illustrating how each system, from the immediate microsystem to the broader macrosystem, plays a role in nurturing or hindering these affective relations, thereby influencing the emotional well-being and development of refugee children. However, when responsibilities and advantages related to affective relations are unevenly shared, it leads to disparities in emotional labour and affection (Lynch, 2009). Refugee students constitute a diverse group and more than merely offering English as an additional language support is required. Specialised policies, guidance and ongoing professional development for educators are essential to effectively address children's relational affect and emotional needs across various developmental stages (McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021).

To achieve this, schools must consider and prioritise the emotional aspects of social justice because 'love in education is the breath of life' (Kaukko et al., 2022, p. 744). By doing so, they can foster a fundamental understanding of the significance, worth and inclusion, ensuring that refugee students feel respected, needed and nurtured (Lynch & Walsh, 2009). In other words, emphasising the emotional dimensions of social justice in educational settings can create a supportive environment that fosters emotional well-being (Zwi et al., 2018), serves as a holistic model for social integration (Cerna, 2019) and contributes to academic achievement (Wong & Schweitzer, 2017). Additionally, this approach develops resilience (Samara et al., 2020). It supports refugee students' 'relational becoming', an open and

experimental process exploring coexistence, sustainable futures, distributed agency and ethical responsibility (Barratt Hacking & Taylor, 2020).

EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL: SAFETY, SENSE OF BELONGING AND SUCCESS

At the central nexus of the model (Figure 1), safety, sense of belonging and success (Kohli, 2011) are present, which function as complementary and essential components to each other. None of these constructs holds superiority over the others; each is interdependent and mutually influential, critical for all aspects of refugee children's lives in different settings.

This emphasis on psychological safety, as outlined by Kohli (2011), aligns with Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, where the immediate environments like family and school play a pivotal role in shaping a child's sense of security. The nurturing of this sense of safety within these environments is fundamental for the effective functioning of the ecological systems surrounding refugee children.

Fleeing war and conflict and reaching a secure place does not necessarily mean that the person is experiencing safety, especially psychological safety (Kohli, 2011). Obtaining legal permission to remain indefinitely in the country of asylum is the basis of safety for many refugees and asylum seekers (Kohli, 2011). After resettlement and completion of documentation procedures, an additional dimension of safety for numerous refugees involves reestablishing a sense of normalcy through the perception of security and protection akin to their peers. This concept holds relevance for child refugees in educational settings. While access to education and enrollment in a new or resettled environment are essential, they alone do not ensure a child's safety, as other factors may continue to exist and contribute to their overall sense of insecurity (McIntyre, 2021b). Ensuring safety in refugee education necessitates the addressing of myriad issues. These include offering supplementary language support (Newcomer et al., 2021) and implementing culturally responsive and sensitive teaching materials (Pinto-López et al., 2021) to facilitate refugees' engagement with the curriculum (Soylu et al., 2020).

Belonging, representing a feeling of security and a sense of being 'at home' (Yuval-Davis, 2006), is crucial for refugees and is often determined by their integration and relationship-building within host communities (Antonsich, 2010). To further illuminate the concept of belonging, Tree's song 'Human Kindness' (Tree, 2019), which resonates deeply with the refugee experience, beautifully encapsulates the essence of finding a place where one feels accepted, secure, and valued.

> Home is where we can belong.
> Home is where our children grow strong.
> Home is where the fire burns long.
> Home is where peace can come from. (Tree, 2019)

Tree's (2019) poem conveys that home and belonging go beyond mere geographical origins and birthplace, incorporating factors such as acceptance, residency and access to resources, thus creating an emotional connection (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Just as a plant can grow strong in new soil, so too can refugee children flourish in an educational context that welcomes them. Initiatives like the Universities of Sanctuary in the UK, which extend Sanctuary scholarships to individuals from refugee backgrounds, particularly asylum seekers, play a key role in helping refugees find a semblance of home within the educational context. This poem enriches

our comprehension of the emotional depth and the concrete necessity for a sense of home among refugees. It acts as a powerful reminder of the universal search for a place to call home, where one is no longer viewed as an outsider. This holds particular significance for individuals who have experienced displacement, highlighting how educational environments can serve as sanctuaries of safety and comfort for refugees. By creating a space where these children are embraced and appreciated, educational settings can enhance their feelings of belonging and overall welfare.

The development of a sense of belonging, as explored by Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich (2010), can be seen through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem. The interactions between different microsystems, such as home and school, significantly influence refugees' feelings of belonging. Creating inclusive educational settings that foster belonging thus resonates deeply with the interconnectedness inherent in ecological systems theory.

Refugee children often struggle to feel like they belong because the dominant society may dispute their nationality, causing confusion and uncertainty about their identity. In my own experience and observations, many of my relatives, former students and friends who have sought refuge, fleeing from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries, face substantial barriers in countries like Iran and Pakistan. For example, in Iran, Afghan refugees are prohibited from entering 16 provinces, a restriction that limits their access to education and increases their sense of exclusion. Similarly, in Pakistan, Afghan refugees awaiting their refugee application process frequently encounter social stigmatisation and systemic barriers that impede their integration and access to basic services. Antonsich (2022) argued that how individuals are labelled can have a profound effect on their sense of belonging, as exemplified by the strategic adoption of labels such as 'second generation' and 'new Italians' by Italian children of migrants in Italy, which enabled them to assert their national belonging and advocate for more inclusive nationality laws. The process of developing a sense of belonging to a space is complex and involves not only individual factors but also social dynamics (Antonsich, 2010). Belonging is, therefore, fundamentally concerned with establishing and preserving boundaries (Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020).

Dryden-Peterson (2021) introduced the notion of 'pedagogies of belonging'. These are grounded on the principles of predictability, defined as 'the safety created through knowing, understanding, and trusting', adaptability, encompassing 'the capacities to analyze, negotiate, pivot, and transform pedagogies to meet individual and collective purposes of education', and future building, interpreted as 'learning how to make what seem like unknowable and impossible futures knowable and possible' (Dryden-Peterson, 2021, p. 371). Such pedagogies help frame the understanding and practices of nurturing belonging in educational settings.

Fostering a sense of belonging is critical for enabling refugee children to establish relationships with their surroundings, encompassing the place, nature (Sampson & Gifford, 2010), schools, and the wider community (Çelik & İçduygu, 2019). This aspect is significant in refugee education (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021). A sense of belonging can be effectively fostered through a lens of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007), which ensures equal opportunities for all refugee children to generate, acknowledge and utilise diverse sources and forms of knowledge (Hall et al., 2020; McIntosh & Wilder, 2022). By placing refugee students at the core of the educational experience and nurturing positive relationships with peers and teachers, their participation and engagement in the learning process are positively impacted. Furthermore, cultivating a secure, welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages social interaction among all students, including refugee children, promotes a sense of belonging (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). This necessitates a conducive environment to allow refugee students to express themselves freely, as the applications of Fraser's model in education lack clarity on the inclusion of classroom decision-making (Milligan, 2022).

Recognising the invaluable contribution of refugee children to the school and classroom community is essential, as they bring a wealth of cultural and social capital (Bigelow, 2007). Implementing pedagogies centred on love (Hooks, 2000) alongside empathy and care fosters interpersonal communication, peer connections and diversity celebration, ultimately enhancing refugee children's sense of belonging and educational success. As hooks (2003) stated, 'When teachers teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter, which is knowing what to do on any given day to create the best climate for learning' (p. 34).

Kohli's (2011) third construct in the resumption of ordinary life involves success, wherein individuals can actively participate in and contribute to society by leveraging their unique abilities and talents. This aspect resonates with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) exosystem and macrosystem, considering the broader societal, economic and political structures impacting refugee children's lives and opportunities for success. Refugee children frequently display persistence and a strong drive for educational and social success in their new environment (Kohli, 2011). When a refugee child embarks on their educational journey, escaping life-threatening situations, various factors can still contribute to their success since success is an ongoing process, not a mere end product (McIntyre, 2021b). I would argue that educational success for individuals from a refugee background is complex, varying in definition based on the learner and their experiences, whether it is in accessing education, benefiting from inclusive teaching, recognising prior qualifications, receiving support services or finding pathways to higher education and employment.

Drawing from my experience as a refugee and considering Fricker's (2007) epistemic injustice and Sen's (2009) capability approach to justice, the success of refugee students in schools can be compared with the growth of an exotic plant. Just as these plants need specialised care to flourish in non-native environments, refugee children, like my own, require tailored support to excel academically, socially and emotionally. Recognising these students' diverse backgrounds and experiences calls for individualised attention and resources to nurture their strengths and overcome barriers to success, thus enabling them to realise their full capabilities (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Similar to providing sufficient irrigation and fertiliser for a plant, refugee students benefit from suitable educational materials, culturally responsive teaching practices and a positive learning environment that fosters resilience and self-efficacy. McIntyre & Neuhaus (2021, p. 807) provide an essential perspective on this process, stating that 'succeeding is predicated upon feeling authentic, knowing how to make meaningful choices about next steps, and feeling valued'. Their observation highlights the fundamental importance of authenticity, choice and value in promoting success, principles which are integral in shaping a nurturing environment for refugee students. However, external factors, such as discrimination or bullying, can act as 'weeds', impeding their development. Identifying and addressing these barriers is essential for creating a safe and inclusive environment that supports equitable and just opportunities, in line with Sen's (2009) concept of justice.

In my situation, I noticed that nursery teachers use the same development questionnaire for my child, who is a refugee, as for other children, neglecting their bilingualism and past traumas. As a result, I believe that such children need more time to reach speech development milestones than their UK-born peers who have not encountered similar challenges, aligning with Sen's (2009) emphasis on the importance of considering individual capabilities when evaluating justice and equality.

For a comprehensive comprehension of the interrelation between macro and micro constructs in this integrated conceptual model, refer to Table 2, which depicts the complex needs of refugee students with relational and affective elements at its heart. By intertwining these elements from the foundation of safety, success and belonging, an inclusive, supportive and

TABLE 2 Integration of macro and micro constructs in refugee education.

Macro constructs	Micro constructs	Connection and contribution to resumption of ordinary life in education and school settings
Representation	Safety	Adequate representation of refugees' needs in policies and decision-making processes ensures that safety measures are tailored for refugee students. This involves addressing psychological safety, language support and teacher training, in line with the microsystem level of EST.
	Sense of belonging	Effective representation of refugee students' experiences and perspectives allows for the development of curricula, school activities and policies that promote an inclusive and welcoming environment, fostering a sense of belonging. This can be achieved by actively involving refugee students in curriculum design, reflecting Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem.
	Success	Including refugee students' voices in educational policies and resource allocation ensures that their unique needs are considered in creating support systems and interventions, promoting their success in schools. This approach aligns with the exosystem level of EST, where external community factors influence school settings.
Recognition	Safety	Recognising the unique experiences of refugee students helps schools and educators identify and address potential threats to their psychological and emotional safety, such as racism, bullying and discrimination, an action situated within the microsystem of EST.
	Sense of belonging	Recognising and affirming refugee students' identities, cultural backgrounds, and unique experiences facilitate the development of an inclusive educational setting in which they feel valued, acknowledged and connected to their fellow students and educators, thereby promoting a sense of belonging. This involves integrating cultural understanding into teaching practices, resonating with the mesosystem level of EST.
	Success	Acknowledging the strengths, resilience, and capabilities of refugee students allows for providing individualised support and resources to help them overcome barriers to success. This method, reflecting the exosystem level of EST, involves external support systems influencing the educational environment.
Redistribution	Safety	Equitable distribution of resources ensures that refugee students have access to necessary support systems and services that contribute to their safety, such as mental health support, language assistance and anti-bullying programmes. This action is crucial at the macrosystem level of EST, involving policy and resource allocation.
	Sense of belonging	Fair allocation of resources helps in the provision of culturally responsive teaching materials, extracurricular activities, and community-building initiatives that promote inclusivity and belonging among refugee students, a practice aligned with the mesosystem level of EST.
	Success	Ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities, resources and support systems allows refugee students to develop their full potential and overcome barriers to success in their academic and social lives, a key aspect of the macrosystem level of EST, where broader societal and policy factors are involved.

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Macro constructs	Micro constructs	Connection and contribution to resumption of ordinary life in education and school settings
Relational affect	Safety	Positive relational affect within host communities fosters an environment where refugee students feel protected and secure, as community members actively work together to address challenges to their safety. This approach, situated within the exosystem level of EST, emphasises community involvement in addressing safety challenges for refugees.
	Sense of belonging	Emotional connections and positive relationships between refugee students, their peers, educators and the broader community contribute to a strong sense of belonging, as they feel welcomed and included in their new environment, reflecting the mesosystem level of EST where the interaction between different microsystems is crucial.
	Success	The supportive relationships established between refugee students and their peers, educators and community members contribute to their motivation, resilience and overall well-being, thus promoting their success in school and beyond. This is a manifestation of the exosystem level of EST, where external factors support internal educational dynamics.

Abbreviation: EST, Ecological systems theory.

successful educational environment can be fostered, facilitating the resumption of ordinary life for refugees in school through a social justice lens.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a unified framework for understanding refugee education, uniquely integrating theories of social justice (Fraser, 2008), affective relations (Lynch, 2012), the resumption of ordinary life (Kohli, 2011) and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It examines macro and micro constructs through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's EST concentric rings, offering a comprehensive perspective on refugees' complex needs. By revisiting previous critiques of these theories, specifically their independent applications in refugee education, this study emphasises the importance of a relational approach, thereby countering critiques regarding the lack of relational affect in Fraser's work. This inclusive, justice-oriented model addresses these critiques and bridges a gap in current literature, indicating the potential for well-informed approaches and policies in refugee education.

The implications of this model extend to policy and practice, calling for the active engagement of governments, educational institutions and other stakeholders. Recognising the unique needs of refugee children, policymakers should integrate these constructs into their policies, ensuring adequate representation and consideration of refugees' experiences in decision-making processes. Moreover, resource distribution should be equitable, enabling access to necessary support systems and services to promote safety, success and a sense of belonging for refugee students.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in translating this model into practice. They should provide comprehensive training for teachers and staff to enhance their understanding of the challenges faced by refugee children and equip them with the necessary skills to address their academic, social and emotional needs effectively. Creating inclusive and nurturing environments where diversity is celebrated and cultural backgrounds are

respected fosters a sense of belonging and supports the success of all students, including refugees.

Future research needs to explore adapting this model to diverse political and economic contexts, considering the unique challenges of different regions and education systems. Such exploration is helpful for enhancing the model's applicability and effectiveness broadly. Investigating its implementation across contexts and educational levels, particularly through longitudinal studies, can provide insights into the long-term impacts of applying these constructs on refugee students' academic achievements, social integration and emotional well-being. Also, exploring the intersections of resilience and sustainability within this framework can deepen our understanding of how these elements contribute to refugee children's resilience, well-being and educational outcomes. In reflecting on the relationship between Fraser's (2008) and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theories, we see the importance of considering the various ecological levels—from the immediate environment to broader societal factors—in shaping the educational experiences of refugees. This perspective, informed by personal and academic insights, further validates the need for a responsive, adaptive educational approach that accommodates the diverse realities of refugee lives. It is important to note that this conceptual model is not limited to a specific refugee context but offers a comprehensive approach applicable to diverse settings. By acknowledging the unique needs and experiences of refugee children, grounded in social justice principles, this model holds the promise of creating educational environments that promote equitable opportunities for all displaced students, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.

As a refugee scholar, I have both a personal and academic investment in enhancing refugee education. I believe that it is crucial to involve refugees, including those who are scholars themselves, in discussions and decisions about refugee education. This study is a testament to the importance of refugee voices, having lived the experiences that theories and concepts strive to explain. My experiences have guided the development of this model and have given me a profound understanding of the unique needs of refugee students. The involvement of refugee scholars, students and parents enriches the dialogue and can lead to more effective, holistic and culturally sensitive educational practices and policies. In future research and policy work, let us ensure that the narratives and insights of refugee scholars continue to be a foundation for understanding and improving refugee education.

Lastly, the integrated conceptual model provides a robust framework to address the multifaceted challenges refugee children face in various educational settings. By recognising the importance of representation, redistribution, recognition and relational affect, in conjunction with ensuring safety, success and a sense of belonging, governments, educational institutions and stakeholders can work towards fostering inclusive and supportive environments that promote the holistic development and well-being of refugee students. Further research can continue to explore and refine the implementation of this model, ultimately contributing to improving refugee education globally.

In conclusion, while this paper presents a comprehensive model for enhancing the education of refugees, it is important to reemphasise the real-world constraints that could impact its application. The unequal distribution of power and resources, along with varying political agendas, are significant barriers that educators and policymakers must navigate. This model, therefore, is not just a theoretical construct but a call to action for educators, researchers and policymakers to innovate within these constraints, advocate for change, and work towards a more inclusive educational landscape for refugee students.

FUNDING INFORMATION

There was no funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

No new data and therefore no data availability statement.

ETHICS STATEMENT

There are no ethical issues and so no requirement for ethical approval.

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How to cite this article: Miri, M. A. (2024). An integrated conceptual model for enhancing refugee education. *British Educational Research Journal*, *50*, 1857–1877. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4005