How do Syrian young adult refugee life experiences, pre- and post-resettlement, influence their aspirations and life chances in the adult education system in Montreal?

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Abstract - English

Canada is globally known for its response to conflicts and worldwide disasters such as in the resettlement of over 74,000 Syrian refugees, between 2015 and 2019, with the second largest proportion settling in Québec. Education is a provincial responsibility; therefore, Québec is responsible for the reception and integration of refugees in its communities. However, there is a growing understanding that education programs for refugee background students fail to consider the specific challenges these youth face. Navigating the education system in their resettlement country is particularly difficult for young adult refugees (YAR) with disrupted education and financial worries, often creating anxiety and hopelessness which can lead to academic attrition. The expectation is that the educational systems promote equity. However, paradoxically they exclude the marginalized by reproducing the class system. Little research is dedicated to this population and specifically to their progress within, and through, the adult education (AE) system. Drawing upon semi-structured interviews with 29 Syrian young adult refugees, and 12 practitioners in Québec's adult education system, the study findings suggest that although AE has a social mandate offering a second chance to mature students, minorities, such as refugees, are sidelined in this education system unintentionally because of insensitivity on the part of those who make policies and those who teach. The conceptual framework marries Critical Race Theory, which examines the systemic issues found in AE that create inequity, hinder inclusion, and negatively influence integration, with Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach which allows for an understanding of the refugee agency. Québec educators must address the reality facing YAR and those of their practitioners. Because minorities, such as refugees, are subsumed into educational systems that have not sufficiently considered their learning experiences, requirements or aspirations, educational policy change must ensure that they *thrive and not just survive*.

Résumé Français

Le Canada est mondialement connu pour sa réponse aux conflits et aux catastrophes mondiales, comme dans la réinstallation de plus de 74 000 réfugiés syriens, entre 2015 et 2019, dont

beaucoup se sont installés au Québec. L'éducation est une responsabilité provinciale ; donc, le Québec est responsable de l'accueil et de l'intégration des réfugiés dans ses communautés. Cependant, on comprend de plus en plus que les programmes d'éducation pour les étudiants issus de réfugiés ne tiennent pas compte des défis spécifiques auxquels ces jeunes sont confrontés. Naviguer dans le système éducatif de leur pays de réinstallation est particulièrement difficile pour les jeunes réfugiés adultes (YAR) qui rencontrent des difficultés scolaires et des soucis financiers, créant souvent de l'anxiété et du désespoir qui peuvent conduire à l'attrition scolaire. Il existe peu de recherches consacrées à cette population et plus particulièrement à son cheminement au sein et à travers le système d'éducation des adultes (EA). S'appuyant sur des entrevues semi-structurées avec 29 jeunes réfugiés syriens adultes et 12 praticiens du système d'éducation des adultes du Québec, les résultats suggèrent que bien que l'EA ait un mandat social offrant une deuxième chance aux étudiants adultes, ce système d'éducation exclut involontairement les marginalisés, tels que réfugiés, à cause de l'insensibilité des gouvernements et de ceux qui enseignent. La théorie critique de la race (CRT) examine les problèmes systémiques trouvés dans l'EA qui créent des inégalités, entravent l'inclusion et influencent négativement l'intégration ainsi que la concept des Capabilités d'Amartya Sen examine la motivation intrinsèque des réfugiés. Les éducateurs québécois doivent faire face à la réalité à laquelle sont confrontés les YAR et ceux de leurs praticiens. Étant donné que les minorités, telles que les YAR, sont subsumées dans des systèmes éducatifs qui n'ont pas suffisamment pris en compte leurs expériences d'apprentissage, leurs exigences ou leurs aspirations, le changement de politique éducative doit garantir leur épanouissement et pas seulement leur survie.

Acknowledgements

The dissertation which follows explores the aspirations and life chances of a sub-group of refugees often overlooked: Syrian young adults who have aged out of high school and nonetheless seek to complete their secondary-level diploma in adult education institutions. These participants, through their narratives, revealed their personal stories, pre- and post-resettlement, in Montreal. I would like to thank them for their great generosity and sincerity in sharing their life experiences for this study. I would also like to thank the Adult Education practitioners who agreed to share their involvement in working with refugee-background students. Educators play

a significant role in the lives of learners, and future citizens, and I would like to thank them for agreeing to participate.

I would like to thank my precious and amazing sons, Jeremi, Joshua and Benjamin who mean the entire world to me and who I love '*bigger than the sky'*. My M.A. thesis, supervised by Dr. Ratna Ghosh, was dedicated to Jeremi who was born while I was a graduate student in Education at McGill University, over 30 years ago. This time my doctoral thesis is dedicated to my three sons. I would like to thank my children for their encouragement: *"You got this mom!"* inspiring me to keep going especially when life seemed overwhelming. I thank Benjamin for his technical support on which I often depended. I am thankful to Joshua for stepping in at times to take care of meals so I could concentrate on writing. My wish is for my sons to learn from my Ph.D. experience, and to believe that although we may be late bloomers we must never give up on our dreams. We must trust in ourselves and if we have trouble doing so, we must listen to the ones who know, for they will carry the light to lead the way back, to make sure we reach our highest potential.

I thank my beautiful, uplifting siblings Denise, Ingrid, Patri, Peter Vinoo, Richard, Maria, Cheryll, Brian and Derek for their unending inspiration and love. We are blessed to be a big family with immeasurable support for each other. Specifically, I would like to thank my brother Dr. Brian Maraj for his academic support. I would especially like to thank my sister, Dr. Cheryll Maraj Sweetnam for her endless commitment these years; and for supporting me through her scholarly expertise in reviewing and editing my drafts for publications and this dissertation thesis. Moreover, I must underscore the unending love, support, and encouragement my sister Maria has afforded me all my life, particularly to the finish line of my doctoral work. I have immense gratitude to my mother, Sybil, for although she is no longer with me, she has always believed in me even when I have not, reminding me to not give up on my dreams. And to my father, Basil, who left too soon to see where his daughter ended up. I believe he would have been so enormously proud.

I would like to acknowledge with inestimable gratitude my supervisor Dr. Ratna Ghosh for giving me the opportunity to work on the FRQSC project from which this manuscript PhD stems. Moreover, I am greatly appreciative of the lifelong years of advice and guidance, both

personally and professionally, that Dr. Ghosh has provided me. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Jalil Akkari, and Dr. Shaheen Shariff for their respective feedback and advice. Additionally, I thank my co-authors Dr. Milagros Calderon-Moya and Dominique Sherab for their support. I am grateful to Dr. Marta Kobiela for her selfless support and guidance during my recent years as a graduate student at McGill. Lastly, I was fortunate to have a great support group from my cohort class of September 2020. We started our PhD journey together at the height of a pandemic, getting to know each other through a Zoom screen! We finally met on the campus, post-Covid, in real life. I have made meaningful friendships and connections with my doctoral classmates and wish them all the best!

I started my doctoral project two times: the first time in Paris, France in 1992 and the second time in Geneva, Switzerland in 2008; however, both times I had to concede to family responsibilities as a wife and mother. The third time is the charm. Despite this academic journey being fraught with challenges including (TBI) traumatic brain injury from a car accident, a difficult divorce after 35 years of marriage, and losing my dear brother Derek to cancer, I stayed the course. I was finally able to complete my PhD, at my alma mater McGill University, with my mentor and supervisor, Dr. Ratna Ghosh. I am eternally grateful to my destiny.

Distinct Contribution to Original Knowledge

Academia has mobilized to document Syrian refugees' experiences and challenges in Canada. However, there have only been a few studies initiated about Syrian YAR, given the predominant focus has been on refugee children's integration into the schooling system (Dodd, et al., 2021; Ghazyani, 2018; Guo et al., 2019; Stewart, 2017; Stewart et al., 2018; Morland & Ives, 2018). For example, although Stewart and Martin's report (2018) dedicated to addressing issues for refugee children in the classroom is an important development, its mandate does not extend beyond high school. l. Literature that includes, or focuses on, youth does not appear to directly be related to AE nor focused on YAR. Limited research on this sort of population (Baffoe, 2006; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Jowett 2020; Kanu, 2008) is among the general literature on immigrants (Ficarra, 2017; Hos, 2014; Lukes, 2011; Ratković et al., 2017) including higher

education for forced migrants (Crettenand & Reusse, 2019; Gruttner at al., 2018; Metraux, 2017).

This doctoral research thus fills a specific knowledge gap around the retention and success of Syrian YAR in AE schools in Montreal and will offer original insight into the specific challenges that resettled refugees, and their practitioners, face within the AE system. No study has yet undertaken such a combined effort. Moreover, this research contributes significant literature about the support needs of refugee students revealing an understanding of this subgroup of the AE population, distinct and diverse from the mainstream AE students. Without proper attention to resettled YAR, they may risk little chance of reaching their aspirations, encounter limited life chances, and as a result just end up forgotten, warns UNESCO (2016).

Given the increasing numbers of forced migrants throughout the world, the onus is on educational policymakers to support YAR to successfully claim their safe place in the context of resettlement; to ensure their productive membership and contribution to their social and economic progress, as well as to that of their new host home. I hope to increase the awareness of the challenges faced obtaining academic integration for YAR, and similar marginalized and minoritized young adults in Montreal. Through their narratives, Syrian YAR share their life experiences as students who do not fit within the traditional role of AE students. They are nonetheless highly motivated because schooling is essential as a first step to academic integration and subsequently into the working world, or onto higher education, on their path to reclaiming their future.

The significance herein is that governments and stakeholders must ensure scholarly success for newcomers, especially those in need of support, such as YAR, for the betterment of a common societal good at a local, national, and global level. The consequences of inaction are severe. This dissertation serves as a reminder that YAR, without a High School diploma and who are unable to access education or fulfilling employment, are vulnerable to social exclusion which can encourage their participation in anti-social activities such as gangs and crime (Bajwa et al., 2017; Boys and Girls Club, 2017; Fast, 2017; Ghosh, 2016; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009), and exacerbate xenophobic agitation. The possible social catastrophe of refugees dropping out of school, leaving them with only low-waged and low-skilled employment options, or becoming

delinquents (Portes, 1995; Schissel, 2001; Wilkinson, 2002), is grave at a socio-economic level but shameful for Canada at a humanitarian level, having promised sanctuary to Syrian refugees.

Contribution of Authors

This dissertation follows a manuscript-based format. As expected in this format, there are some repetitions in the text. Some of the data for this thesis comes from a project awarded to Dr Ghosh by The *Fonds de recherche du Québec en Société et Culture* (FRQSC), a section of the Quebec Ministry of Education. The two manuscripts included in this thesis are presented in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. The first manuscript entitled Shifting aspirations: The experience of Syrian refugees in adult education, a chapter in *Education for refugees and forced im/migrants across time and context*, is co-authored with Sherab, D., Calderón Moya, M., and Ghosh, R. It has been published by eds Wiseman & Damaschke-Deitrick. Emerald. The second manuscript entitled Reflecting on the experiences of Syrian refugee young adults in adult education in Quebec: The practitioners' perspective**,** is co-authored with Calderón Moya, M., Sherab, D., and Ghosh, R. It has been published by the *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*.

As the first author of the two manuscripts, I was responsible for producing the majority (90%) of the two papers. I formulated the research questions and determined the methodological approaches using Narrative Inquiry. I proposed and developed the general framework based on the Critical Race Theory and the Capabilities Approach for the first manuscript. I suggested and developed the theoretical framework based on Critical Race Theory for the second manuscript. I carried out the data collection for both manuscripts with Domenique Sherab. For the data analysis for both manuscripts, I developed the themes with feedback discussions with Domenique Sherab. Contributions to the data analysis of both papers included conducting some cross-checking which involved both Domenique Sherab and Milagros Calderón Moya. These contributing co-authors also helped ensure the accuracy of the data interpretation which involved some proofreading and some editing suggestions. My doctoral supervisor, Dr. Ratna Ghosh has always been my first reference for my inquiries and feedback requests. She provided me with a lot of constructive and valuable advice which helped me improve the arguments for both papers.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale

a) A World-Wide Refugee Crisis

Change is the only constant. The world continues its perpetual destabilization implicating players who must shape new ways in which communities function in society, work, school, and their life experiences. The 21st century has seen an escalation in global instability, especially for forced migrants seeking sanctuary, obligated to escape war, violence, conflict and/or persecution in their homeland leaving behind their homes, jobs, possessions and loved ones (UNHCR, 2022). With the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria, the already fragile existence of the Syrian people, due to the protracted war, is exacerbated. Such global catastrophes socio-politically pluralize government responsibility to minimize the precarity and challenges faced by those displaced (Baban et al., 2021; Hathaway, 2021); however, in world politics, migration is positioned as something to control (Simmons, 2019).

The 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR) defines a refugee as *someone unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion*. The UNHCR (2022) estimates that over one million children were born as refugees between 2018 and 2020. The average time refugees spend in displacement limbo is between 2030 years (Mendenhall et al., 2017). Globally, there are 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced people and 4.6 million asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2022). Family separation, as a diasporic reality, creates loneliness as displacement fractures the feeling of home (Baban et al, 2021). These numbers are mounting with the continual global displacement of families fearfully fleeing conflict raging on their land (IRCC, 2022). Yet, out of all the refugees worldwide, less than one percent are resettled (UNHCR, 2022). Homelessness, including the loss of the socio-economic and political structure that refugees were once part of, is the greatest tragedy (Arendt, 2017).

What do those privileged with safety and security, advantages which cultivate aspirations and life chances, understand about escaping terror and risking life to have a safe life? Uncertainty is the only unceasing reality as people run away from everything they know and love in search of asylum, in search of humanity. Alas, refuge is not guaranteed for all. For example, in 2015, the world was shocked by the atrocity and consequence of conflict, evoked by the photo of a lifeless Syrian toddler, Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach. Alan, his brother, and his mother drowned fleeing the human calamity unfolding in their home country, Syria. They were hopeful to join loved ones in Canada (Elgot, 2015) but sadly, the Kurdi family were not among the over 74,000 refugees that Canada has since welcomed (Almadi, 2020). This devastation of displacement was seared into the minds of so many.

Internationally, children and families, before the Kurdi family and after them, have, and will continue to risk their lives in search of a better life, even if, for some, the dangerous journey ends in such heartbreak. Recently, 18 Afghan migrants, including a child, were found dead in a truck illegally transporting them through Bulgaria (Nenov, 2023). Fleeing their home in search of safety means risking their lives and often paying human traffickers, with no guarantee of protection. The latest tragedies on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea ended in the death of over 60 Afghani, Pakistani, and Iranian refugees, including many children and a baby (Atkinson, 2023). Desperate people crossing from the Global South to the Global North has resulted in thousands of deaths on these waters, many unidentified. In 2013, almost 400 Eritrean refugees died in a most fatal and perilous passage off the Italian coast (Tondo, 2022).

Host countries have a moral responsibility to ensure conflict-free resettlement and that refugees have equal opportunities to succeed (Lenette, 2016; Luu & Blanco, 2019). Yet the unwillingness of host nations through the hardening of borders (Simmons, 2019) illustrates the systemic racism and Eurocentrism (Chomsky, 2018; Maitra & Guo, 2019) asylum seekers face even when risking death in pursuit of refuge (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). What the world is witnessing, in response to forced migrants' request for protection, is inhumanity. On the one hand, homogenous societies are afraid of losing their culture and way of life. For example, the increase in *would-be* refugees entering Quebec illegally at Roxham Road, which borders the US, was as high as 40,000 crossing in 2022 (Freytas-Tamura, 2023). According to the province's

premier, Francois Legault, asylum seekers in Quebec should be sent elsewhere because the province is saturated. Moreover, he warns, that the large numbers of asylum seekers threaten the stability of Quebec's language and culture (Serebrin, 2023). On the other hand, many in the Global North worry for their relative peace, security, and economic prosperity: a crisis of responsibility, according to Hannah Arendt (2017). Meanwhile, the others, often from the Global South, wither away fleeing conflict, uncertainty, and economic hardship as the world stands by watching the injustice unfold.

The United Kingdom and France are examples of this social and racial discrimination. In 2015 the Calais refugee camp on the northern coast of France, dubbed the *Jungle,* was home to thousands of distressed migrants, including Syrians escaping conflict, until it was dismantled. This great humanitarian crisis witnessed evicted migrants hiding in woods, ironically this time fleeing the persecution of the French police and policies which restricted charitable organizations from providing refugees with essentials such as water and food (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This was a time globally referred to by many humanitarians as imposed desolation and demeaning treatment of hopeless people in search of peace and security (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The UK government, through the recent Nationality and Borders Act, sanctions the rejection of all asylum-seekers whose applications are deemed inadmissible. Given a one-way ticket to Rwanda, the claims of those seeking sanctuary in the UK are processed far away, and out of the way, although Ukrainians were treated differently (UK Parliament, 2022). All refugees are therefore not created equal! Indeed, the hypocrisy and racial divide are clear when comparing the treatment of white Ukrainians to non-white refugees of the Global South (Traub, 2022). The claims that Ukrainian refugees are not threats like other refugees, such as Syrians, because Ukrainians are European, Christian, and educated reveals the racism inherent in the treatment of certain refugees (Esposito, 2022).

World leaders' reference to illegal migrants is disturbing as seeking asylum is likened to a criminal, an illegal act. The UNHCR, in reference to the Illegal Immigration Bill, the *Stop the Boats* rhetoric, and similar anti-refugee discourse in the UK are 'profoundly concerned' (UNHCR, 2023). As the economist Joseph Stiglitz insists (2016), inequity is not just the result of economic forces but of politics and policies. Political processes themselves are affected by the level and nature of inequity.

Impediments to migration through border barriers worldwide mean migration is experienced as a challenge to societies (Simmons, 2019). Powerful countries impose restrictions to limit sanctuary as a way of keeping asylum seekers on the other side of the wall; to defer, and deter, the futures of these migrants. Global policies do not reflect the refugee reality of displacement (Arendt, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2022). Indeed, as Bacchi (2009) denotes, policies do not address problems but rather only serve to acknowledge them. Migrants seeking refuge are tossed around, like pawns, from border to border (Simmons, 2019). Similar to many countries in the Global North, transferring these unwanted migrants elsewhere is the solution. For example, in North America, the heartless treatment of people in need of shelter and security resulted in asylum-seekers being bussed out of Florida to New York, a supposedly refugee-friendly state. Those seeking refuge in New York, however, were transferred, with a free bus ticket courtesy of the state, to the Canadian border (Freytas-Tamura, 2023).

The movement of communities across the globe due to calamities reveals a progressively precarious and unsure world wherein global instability leads to a greater awareness of the *other* (Chomsky, 2018; Simmons, 2019; Galabuzi, 2006) as people continue to relocate to foreign lands in search of shelter (UNHCR, 2022). Considering the persistent global refugee crisis, equity concerns have gained importance. Resettlement, and diasporic networks, are major elements influencing global integration at all levels (Baban et al., 2021; Rapoport, 2016). While economic and socio-political perspectives impact globalization, this phenomenon is also of great significance in education and society. However, forced migration and education continue to be fraught with difficulty (UNHCR, 2020). Indeed, the UNHCR found that in the Global North, in industrialized welcoming countries such as Canada, less than 25% of refugees start high school and only 1% enter post-secondary education (2016). Quality education in national systems must offer displaced learners preparedness and resilience for life in their host communities (OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2017; UNHCR, 2022).

b) <u>Refugee Crisis and Education</u>

We are living in an era of '*forced migration and globalization'* therefore appropriate education knowledge is required (Ratković et al., 2017, pg. 21). Global policies must integrate

refugees into education systems with, at its centre, an integral sense of belonging which provides educational stability enabling refugee learner aspirations (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). Unlike immigrants, refugees arrive with serious trauma and mental health challenges, requiring attention beyond standardized settlement services (Baffoe, 2006; de Lambert, 2018; Hamilton et al, 2020; Neuner, et al., 2004; Nickerson et al., 2010; Renner et al., 2012; Sharifian, et al., 2021). Consistent with the guarantee to *leave no one behind* as outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNHCR, 2015), to combat inequality, refugees must be allowed to benefit from national services in receiving countries and be incorporated as part of national growth. Not only are these opportunities essential for refugees but also for those welcoming them because as studies show, supporting refugee ambitions for education not only benefits the wider society but contributes to the socioeconomic development of the resettlement country (Lenette, 2016; Luu & Blanco, 2019). The inability to integrate refugees would, in the long run, be an economic and social burden to the host society.

As much as the discourse of international organizations, including the UN, encourages the inclusion of the marginalized, such as refugees, there is an incongruence between what is theorized and what is lived (Akkari & Maleq, 2020; Dryden-Peterson, 2022). Permanent relocation in the Global North is seemingly the remedy to the problems refugees face, yet the challenges YAR encounter in the resettlement contexts frequently lead to a sense of exclusion, preventing them from fairly realizing their full potential (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Van Heelsum, 2017). Whereas studies consistently attest to the importance of incorporating inclusive policies and practices in school systems (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Ghosh et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2021), a Canadian federal-level report by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council found that provincial authorities in charge of education were ill-prepared to support the academic needs of Syrian refugee youth when they arrived and this was notably the case in Quebec (Ratković et al., 2017).

The refugee students in asylum, or resettlement countries, face challenges which are innumerable and daunting (Block et al., 2014; Hamilton et al., 2020; Keddie, 2011; Shakya et al., 2010; Taylor & Sidhu 2012). These difficulties stem from being uprooted from their home and relocated, financial pressures, lack of knowledge of their host society, obvious and cloaked forms of racism, and cultural differences including learning approaches, all of which create a sense of

abandonment, discouragement and overwhelming (Baffoe, 2006; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2021; Kanu, 2008; Shakya et al., 2010). Consultations conducted with 1,482 youth of refugee background, in 2015 and 2016, revealed that young people struggle with exploitation and discrimination, and lack a sense of safety and security (UNHCR, 2016). Some face challenges in learning and speaking the local language of their host country and/or adapting to school and host culture with which they are unfamiliar (Lukes, 2011; MacKay & Tavares, 2005; Maraj, et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2023; Ghosh, et al., 2022; Potvin et al., 2014; Shakya et al., 2010; Streitwieser, et al., 2020). Confronting cultural conflict and structural barriers in the foreignness of the receiving country, refugees bring significant social, emotional, and educational challenges to the classroom, which impede their scholastic success (Attar & Kücükşen, 2019; Betancourt et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2012; MacNevin, 2012; Reed et al., 2011; UNHCR, 2022). Moreover, educational systems lack significant resources to address and resolve the unique needs of these youth who are often victims of psychological and physical trauma (Haffejee, 2015; Maraj et al., 2022; Ratković et al., 2017; Sharifian, et al., 2021).

Refugee students require steadfast school-based assistance as they adjust to foreign contexts, communities, and cultures (Luu & Blanco, 2019; Maraj, et al., 2022; McBrien, 2005; Ratković et al., 2017). Therefore, education systems must incorporate comprehensive practices aligned with both refugee students' future and their need for constancy (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). Facing academic rejection limits life chances for employment and education opportunities for refugees, augments stress, and complicates fitting into their new world (Brough et al. 2003; Khawaja & Milner 2012; Lamb, 2019; Poppitt & Frey 2007). Unequal opportunity structures limit life chances and frame refugees in educational marginalization which excludes and discriminates, limiting opportunities for community, political, and social contribution (DrydenPeterson, 2022). Given that refugee youth face overwhelming challenges to their academic integration, inclusion is the only way, insists the UN refugee agency so that refugees *thrive and not just survive* (2015).

Research Objective

a) <u>My story</u>

My research objective is based on my profound passion for equity and academic achievement focused on supporting marginalized and minoritized students to cultivate a sense of inclusion at school and in society, to ensure their life chances and hopefully to propose educational policies to this end. Growing up in Ontario, from the time I arrived from the Caribbean as a child and attended school, I felt socially disadvantaged being a brown, visible minority immigrant, female, and poor. At school and in society I faced racial discrimination, prejudice, and isolation. Fitting in was difficult for me. Although English is my mother tongue, my Trinidadian accent and lack of knowledge of the dominant culture in Canada caused me difficulty.

A sense of community was cultivated in my large family of nine siblings, with my parents keeping our Trinidadian culture alive at home. Indeed, I often felt safe at home and that the outside was cold like the people in my new country. I never felt like a 'Canadian.' My parents had high academic expectations for their children. I left Canada to live and study abroad after my B.A. in cultural anthropology and world religions. I was fascinated by the *other* and how they experienced life. I was never considered a Canadian in my travels because I am not white. I was always asked but where are you really from? Even when I said I was born in Trinidad that wasn't enough because I look Indian, given my ancestry. Often, I felt compelled to give a history lesson on colonialism to explain why I look the way I do and that I can be Canadian from the British Caribbean!

In many of the countries I lived, I witnessed families facing poverty and challenges. For example, when I lived in Lebanon, Syrians, pre-war, were escaping the difficulties at home for anything better across the border, accepting to live in destitution under bridges. These Syrian migrants were not welcomed, facing xenophobic reactions to their relocating to Beirut. As humans we have a lot in common, we all want to live to our highest potential and we hope that we get a fair chance to do so, to hold onto aspirations for lifelong goals. Universally, parents especially strive for the betterment of their children and that is why they choose to migrate, even if they are forced to do so, they do it willingly for a chance for their children to *thrive and not*

just survive. My parents told us it was for a better chance at life and education that we left Trinidad. They, like other immigrants, had a choice whereas refugees do not.

As an expatriate family, my three sons faced difficulties moving around the world as we followed their father's career. Our lifestyle uprooted my children every two to three years, not knowing what country we were going to next for their father's projects, facing new cultures and languages, with no friends or family support in our new homes. This uncertainty impacted my sons' sense of self and academic success as they often felt they did not fit in. It was a reality I struggled with as well. I empathize with the refugee parents who have relocated their children, and families, for a better life. I feel a personal connection to my research as a visible minority immigrant because I understand how difficult it can be for Syrian refugees to arrive in a country, such as Canada, that is so different from their home; leaving behind family, friends, community, and culture for a place about which they know little. Syrian young adult refugees aspire to a better life and a chance to get their education. They are attached to, like many newcomers, their family community and culture but seek integration and success in their new home.

However, arriving in Québec they face challenges including unfamiliar languages and a way of life far different from what they know. Being uprooted is destabilizing even in the best conditions, like for my sons, let alone in the worst conditions, like for refugees. Moreover, supporting Syrian refugee integration in Québec poses an obstacle as claims of xenophobia in the province are on the rise. I too have experienced racial discrimination and prejudice in Québec. Despite being fluent in French, I have, and still feel, a sense of exclusion, as if I do not belong. I feel very connected to my participants for this study as they too are *othered.* I know how important it is to feel part of something, especially a place one calls home. The integration of those excluded from society/schools motivates in me a strong feeling for justice and remains the focus of all my endeavours, aligned with my goals to promote and sustain equity and academic achievement. Indeed, my international perspectives and my personal and professional experiences have always served to advocate for the inclusivity of the voiceless.

b) Research Question

How do Syrian young adult refugee life experiences, pre- and post-resettlement, influence their aspirations and life chances in the Adult Education system in Montreal?

This dissertation presents the reader with a literature review of refugee education from an international perspective and narrowing the focus to Canada as a nation, the province of Quebec, which is unlike the rest of Canada, and then specifically its cosmopolitan capital Montreal. The challenges Syrian YAR face in Adult Education schools in Montreal may not be representative of the experiences of this refugee sub-group elsewhere in Quebec (Villatte & Marcotte, 2013) due to several factors such as difference in language and its implications. After Canada's historic acceptance of three times more refugees than ever, since 2015, provinces have been challenged by the overwhelming responsibility to educate Syrian newcomers, notably in Quebec (Ratković et al., 2017).

The *Fonds de recherche du Québec en Société et Culture* (FRQSC), a section of the Quebec Ministry of Education, made a call for projects and funded this project which was aimed at understanding the support needs and psychological well-being of displaced Syrian YAR, and similar at-risk youth, enrolled in Quebec's AE system. Although some of the data for this thesis is based on the data gathered in this project, the focus of this dissertation is my interpretation of the data examining the lived experiences of Syrian YAR concerning their aspirations and life chances. This doctoral study focuses on YAR educational goals and the challenges which impede their ambitions and influence their life chances as resettled refugees in Montreal, with consideration of YAR pre- and post-resettlement experiences.

As much as extensive literature can be found focused on the access of refugee children to education and their academic achievement (Boyd, 2002; Gunderson, 2002; Guo et al., 2019; Hou & Bonikowska, 2016; Kanu, 2008; MacKay & Tavares, 2005; MacNevin, 2012; Wilkinson, 2001) little research considers the specific challenges refugee youth and young adults face (AMSSA, 2018). Due to the extent of their disrupted education arising as a consequence of war, their uncertain lengths of displacement, and their frequent need to find work, the question of

YAR academic integration has not been sufficiently researched. Navigating the education system in their resettlement country is particularly difficult for YAR with lost years of schooling (Hou & Bonikowska, 2016; Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012) because although invited to relocate to the Global North, refugees are seemingly forgotten once relocated (Bonet, 2018; Morrice, et al., 2020; Ratković et al., 2017). School and societal experiences have a bearing on how refugee students acculturate as they participate in their new reality and can negatively impact the realization of their personal and professional goals (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Guo et al., 2019).

Many Syrian YAR start their transnational journey as children, evolve into adolescents often in countries of asylum where they reside temporarily, and resettle as young adults in countries, such as Canada, with the dream to reconstruct their lives. Too old (over 16 years), *aged out* of the traditional school cycle, YAR are encouraged into AE institutions as the only education route. For this age group, if they aspire to attain a High School diploma for minimum wage employment or further education, AE is the only choice. This doctoral research seeks to shed light on Syrian YAR aspirations and life chances in the AE system in Quebec, noting that the conditions of pre-and post-resettlement influence their future, and their successful adaptation to their resettlement home (Dryden-Peterson, 2022) and that without feeling a sense of belonging, refugee students, such as YAR, struggle to establish and invest in lifelong sanctuary in Canada (Jowett, 2020).

The continued experience of disruption Syrian YAR face in their education and their lives in Quebec, from the pressures and obstacles encountered attending school at AE institutions, significantly builds frustration and isolation, limiting YAR aspirations and life chances, perpetuating refugee students' pre-resettlement destabilization. The findings of this study are essential to understanding the impact that the Québec institutional fabric of AE, founded on systemic exclusion, has on the advancement of minorities, such as on Syrian YAR.
This research intends to fill the gap in the literature regarding YAR students' struggle for academic integration. Through their shared stories of life experiences, which shape their ability to fulfil their aspirations in their newly adopted home in Québec, YAR provides an acute reflection on the challenges faced proceeding in and out of the AE sector in the Montreal

education system and its subsequent impact on their life chances. Additionally, this dissertation voices AE practitioners' perspectives on the challenges and needs of YAR, given that these educators work closely with refugee student populations.

Focusing on essential elements in education, including equity and inclusion, this research examines the AE sector in Montreal as a path to scholastic success and lifelong achievement for these forced migrants. Many refugee students face several barriers to the realization of their aspirations including a sense of confusion and isolation when faced with deciphering a complicated, foreign system with little to no guidance (Baffoe, 2006; Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2022). Although highly motivated, YAR must make choices within the societal structures found in Québec, their resettlement home (Morrice et al., 2020). Nonetheless, despite academic obstacles, the pursuit of their educational goals remains predominant for Syrian refugee students (Bonet, 2016; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2010; Stevenson & Willot, 2007)

Chapter 2

Literature Review

1. The Setting: Syrian Young Adult Refugees' Journey to Quebec, Canada

This section provides the reader with some understanding of the context within which the research participants for this study are situated. Syrian YAR escape their homeland with their family to seek refuge. These forced migrants ultimately arrive in Quebec, Canada where they attend school at AE institutions and work closely with AE practitioners. It is essential to situate the study population within their context, that is, not only as refugees but as previous students with hopes, dreams, and plans for their future. Refugees arrive with experiences and interests that impact their integration (Chavez, 1993). Their past and pre-conflict life experiences are crucial and influence their life in the new society (Kyriakides, et al., 2018; Matthews, 2008; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Rutter, 2006). Displacement, political instability, disrupted education, insufficient schooling experiences in countries of first asylum, as well as possible experiences of violence, are some of the distressing elements which affect refugee physical, psychological, and emotional safety (Ferede, 2012; Phifer & Hull, 2016; Slade & Dickson, 2021).

a) <u>Syrian YAR Pre-Resettlement</u>

Building on and acknowledging the pre-migration factors in refugee students' academic success highlights its relevance and is an approach in line with research findings (BlanchetCohen et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2018). The Syrian war began as a peaceful movement against the Assad regime on March 15, 2011, but soon descended into a civil and proxy war that continues to this day and has caused the largest displacement of people of our time (UNHCR, 2022). This ongoing complex crisis tremendously impacted children's mental, physical, and social health inside, and outside, Syria (Guo et al., 2019). Now in its 12th year, more than half of Syria's pre-conflict population remains displaced, with 13.5 million Syrians relocated inside the country and 6.7 million hosted in 128 countries (UNHCR, 2016). Where these refugees end up is not evenly distributed on a global scale. Of the Syrians forcibly displaced, 73% live in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt where they first arrived after fleeing Syria, and 86% live in low to middle-income countries with limited resources (UNHCR, 2022). Many of these host countries are a holding ground for refugees, intended to be a steady present with short-term objectives (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). However, what nations are facing is a protracted refugee displacement reality, for example, 25% of the population of Lebanon are refugees (UNHCR, 2022).

The war in Syria has caused immense disruption to the education of Syrian students. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Syrian refugee youth remain outside of formal education in countries of first asylum (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Before the instability caused by the crisis, school attendance was steady and consistent in Syria compared to other countries in the Middle East (Kolstad, 2018). Education in pre-war Syria was mandatory and free with a strict, teacher-centred pedagogical approach known to be very disciplined, and the education system to be very rigorous and challenging (Al Hesan et al., 2016; Economou & Hajer, 2019). Most schools were publicly owned and operated. The first nine years of school and the subsequent national exam are necessary to obtain the Basic Education Certificate called *Shahadet Al-Taleem Al-Asasi.* The final three years of the required 12 years of study culminate in another national exam conditional to obtaining a high school diploma and being admitted into Syrian highly competitive universities (Al Hesan et al., 2016; Economou & Hajer, 2019).

The war changed all of this, with a significant decline in enrolment and attendance (UNICEF, 2015). Although there was international monetary assistance and programs structured to provide basic schooling, there was limited attention in their temporary homes directed toward youth's inability to access education (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2014). As the war progressed, enrolment in secondary schools in Syria dropped from 76.06 % in 2012 to 49.31% in 2013 and out-of-school adolescents jumped from 217, 251 in 2012 to 1,050,405 in 2013 (UNESCO, 2018). As reported by UNICEF, education access expansion has been critically compromised for more than two decades, witnessing large numbers of YAR unable to complete education because of displacement and aging out of the school-age bracket (2015). In 2021, 2.4 million Syrian children remain out of school in Syria (UNICEF, 2021). The clearest reason why students were unable to attend school relates to the whims of war and limited access to education within conflict-affected settings. With over 7,000 schools destroyed or abandoned (UNICEF, 2018), some schools moved underground or even into caves to enable the continuation of education (Armstrong, 2016; Ashawi, 2017) destabilizing life for Syrian children, parents, and educators.

While substantial numbers of Syrians were unable to access education within Syria during the conflict years, the disruption continued in countries of first asylum (UNHCR, 2018; UNICEF, 2015). The humanitarian community mobilized to ensure access to education in host countries but although enrollment progressively improved, 40% of Syrian refugee children in neighbouring countries remained outside of school (Their World, 2018). Importantly, these figures do not reflect the number of students who were not able to complete secondary education. In terms of educational services available, evidence attests to the lack of support provided to YAR between 15-18 years (Mercy Corps, 2016), and much less to those between 1624 years who were even further disadvantaged with vastly insufficient educational services available to this age-group across countries of first asylum (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). With this reality in mind, in 2013 UNICEF and World Vision spearheaded an education plan to support vulnerable children and youth affected by the Syrian crisis, which UNESCO (2016) later launched as the *No Lost Generation* initiative entitled *Bridging Learning Gaps for Youth*. This *Education in Emergencies* program was a strategy aimed at enrolling 50,000 Syrian YAR into secondary schools across the crisis-impacted areas.

Given the difficulty to attend school and the pressures to make money to survive (Chopra & Adelman, 2017) these numbers were most likely not reached and reflected in the lack of data available regarding the outcomes.

There are several reasons why children and youth were unable to continue their education in neighbouring countries, all of which require an understanding of the multiple barriers impacting their access. Some variables include direct and indirect costs associated with education, such as financial difficulties, distance from schools, and parents' fear of their children's vulnerability (Paul et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2015). Rampant child labour to support refugee family income (UN, 2018) kept children and youth from school because of their need to supplement the cost of refugee life (UNICEF, 2015). In neighbouring countries, these refugee children worked in various industries, such as construction and agriculture (UN, 2018). When access to education was possible, many complained of the marginalization of Syrian children, the perceived lack of quality education compared with nationals, and reduced school hours for refugees in overcrowded classrooms (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2014; Paul et al., 2023). Additionally, poorly trained teachers offered a low-quality service during second shift schedules which were introduced to accommodate Syrian refugee children (Paul et al., 2023; Satev et al., 2016).

Furthermore, government policy in these countries of first asylum played a significant role in whether students could access education. In Jordan, to be registered in a school initially, parents were required to bring in certain documentation that many Syrians did not have. The Jordanian government also has a policy that students who have been outside of formal schooling for more than three years are unable to re-enter. Similar barriers existed in Turkey and Lebanon (UNICEF, 2015). Therefore, access has not been uniform across or within the countries, with major discrepancies between urban and camp-based refugee populations. Camp-based refugee populations had greater access to basic education given the space and focus on refugees whereas, in urban schools, less space and time was available to refugee students attending local schools. For example, in Turkey, 80% of students in camps were attending school while the number dropped to 30% for urban-based students (UNICEF, 2015). Indeed, the quality of education for Syrians in neighbouring countries was questionable. Despite best efforts, funding was generally

tied to basic school education and not to post-basic education (UNESCO, 2016) therefore little research focused on YAR (Feuerherm & Ramanathan, 2015).

The education context of YAR before resettlement, as noted above, is recognized by researchers to be a decisive element in understanding scholastic success (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Hannah, 1999). Indeed, refugee children and youth integration into new educational systems are linked to their pre-migration educational trajectory including what is learned within classrooms, the socio-political setting of the school and the social environment (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Paul et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2018). The education of refugee students is influenced by their different and, for some, traumatic pre-resettlement experiences, which influence their mental and physical health, as well as their worldviews (Matthews, 2008; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Rutter, 2006).

b) <u>Syrian YAR Post-Resettlement in Canada</u>

An important contribution from the literature focuses on refugees entering new educational systems in receiving countries. Appreciating and acknowledging post-settlement factors within a student's educational trajectory (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2018) must be considered concerning refugee academic integration. Of the millions of refugees fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic (UNHCR, 2020), Canada accepted an unprecedented number of refugees as a rapid response to the humanitarian crisis (Almadi, 2020), the first time in nearly four decades (World Vision, 2018). Globally, very few forced migrants are chosen to resettle permanently, contingent on the willingness of receiving countries to consent (Shapiro et al., 2018). With the recent announcement of new measures to welcome more refugees in the most vulnerable category (Dickson, 2021), Canada continues to be a global leader in refugee resettlement (Gibney, 2004; Hampshire, 2013; Salehyan & Rosenblum, 2008). As a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Rights of Refugees (UNHCR), Canada has a responsibility to meet that agreement and is committed to a long-standing charitable tradition. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's compassionate policies toward receiving Syrian refugees reflect combined charitable, diplomatic, economic, and demographic concerns as an example of an inclusive and morally strong society (Ghosh, et al., 2019).

The Operation Syrian Refugees program introduced by the Trudeau administration in 2015, welcomed Syrian refugees through three resettlement streams. The government sponsorship, the Government-Assisted Refugee, or GAR program, helps individuals who have been referred to Canada for resettlement by the United Nations Refugee Agency. The Private Sponsorship of Refugees, or PSR program, allows members of organizations and groups, citizens, and residents to sponsor refugees from overseas (Macklin et al., 2018). The BlendedVisa Office Referred, or BVOR program is a combined program comprising of a cost-sharing arrangement whereby Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and private sponsors contribute financially to support the refugees (Labman & Pearlman, 2018). Through these paths, relocated refugees not only benefit from permanent residency on arrival but share all rights and entitlements that Canadians have, such as the right to work, healthcare and education. After three years of residency, resettled refugees can become citizens giving them the right to vote.

Most of the Syrian refugees arriving in Canada resettled in Ontario and Quebec (Perkins, 2021). For example, between 2015-2016, there were 25, 035 Syrian refugees resettled in Canada with 10,210 welcomed in Ontario and 5,295 in Québec (StatsCan, 2019). Of great concern is that these forced migrants tended to arrive with a low level of education and an extremely limited knowledge of English or French (Lowrie, 2017). In Canada, education is regionalized therefore refugee integration largely falls to provincial governments (Jeram & Nicolaides, 2018). While 50% of the Syrian refugee population arrived under the age of 18, with the primary concern focused on their schooling (Ratković et al., 2017), there was no public or policy attention dedicated specifically to YAR students who arrived above the mandatory school-age of 16 with no high school credentials. Undoubtedly, after years of absence from formal schooling, the idea of sitting for prolonged periods to get a high school diploma, to continue to either higher education or vocational training, is highly discouraging for refugee youth (Kanu, 2008; MacKay & Tavares, 2005; Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2015). For YAR, entering school at an older age is difficult for their self-esteem, creating a sense of anxiety and incompetence even though academic integration is the route to successfully adapting to their host society (Brewer, 2016; MacKay & Tavares, 2005).

The many challenges faced by refugees post-resettlement, including their displacement, administrative challenges, financial pressure, language barriers, discrimination, and prejudice due to racism, unfamiliar culture in society and school, and in Canada the extreme climatic conditions leave the refugee students in a particular vulnerable position, susceptible to feeling overwhelmed, marginalized, and ultimately unwilling to stay in school (Baffoe, 2006; BlanchetCohen et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2021). Given that the Canadian government's response, like many countries receiving refugees, was to focus on child education and supporting adults' employment, YAR were seemingly forgotten as limited support systems and services were available to ensure their academic continuation and success (Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj et al. 2023).

The secondary school diploma marks a significant stage for many youths, evoking a sense of achievement often a shift from adolescent to adulthood. In many countries, not having a high school diploma limits life chances and is a major barrier to obtaining even minimum-wage jobs. This is a reality experienced by newcomers who arrive in the province without any qualifications. With almost all jobs in Quebec requiring at least grade 10 education and some basic knowledge of English or French, the only option for YAR to continue their studies is within an adult school system, not designed for them. These forced migrants aspire to rebuild their future; to ensure their employability and successful academic integration but their particular status, due to circumstance and age, is yet another hurdle.

Non-white refugee youth populations not of the dominant culture are susceptible to the damage that racialization inculcates, such as insecurity and rejection (Sanchez & Romero, 2010; Guo et al., 2021). Refugee life experiences vary greatly from the norm and for some refugees these experiences are often traumatic, weighing heavily on both mental and physical health. Hence, it is of foremost importance that educational policies and programs support refugee needs (Loewen, 2004; MacNevin, 2012; Ratković, et al., 2017) and also support and recognize their strengths (Selimos, 2017). Research on refugee youth shows education is a priority for this population despite academic obstacles encountered (Bonet, 2016; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2010; Stevenson & Willot, 2007). Yet when they feel marginalized and experience

a sense of injustice, refugees are less inclined to feel part of the new host society (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Guo et al., 2017; Spencer & Charsley, 2016; Van Heelsum, 2017).

c) <u>Quebec as a Sanctuary: Socio-Political Environment</u>

Post-migration socio-political settings influence refugee education and must also be considered to understand resettled refugee educational aspirations and life chances (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Matthews 2008; Pillay & Asadi, 2012; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Shakya et al., 2010). Quebec accepted much of the responsibility in settling the second-largest number of Syrian refugees in the nation, with the majority settling in Montreal (Houle, 2019; IRCC 2018). Although some Canadians hold opposing opinions on welcoming immigrants and refugees (Bagley, 2017) most Canadians, and world views, agree on Canada's inclusive attitude towards newcomers (Alhmidi, 2020; Perreaux, 2018). However, only 50% of the Quebec population approves of refugee intake (Anderson & Coletto, 2017). Under the Canada-Quebec Accord[1], the government of Quebec is responsible for the reception and integration of refugees in its communities since education is a provincial responsibility. Quebec, Canada's only Frenchspeaking province (except for New Brunswick which is bilingual), requires that newcomers, young and old, learn the local language through government-run programs. For many non-
French-speaking immigrants to Quebec, linguistic challenges compound integration difficulties.

As a newcomer to Québec, learning French is essential and begins with welcoming classes: *francisation* or *classe d'acceuil*, sponsored by the provincial government's Ministry of Immigration, Francisation, and Integration. These services are intended for immigrants and refugees whose knowledge of French is insufficient for everyday activities. It is questionable whether these language programs are successful in their approach to language immersion for immigrant children and adults in Quebec (Buccitelli & Denov, 2019; Ducass, 2018; Severinsen

[1] The Canada–Quebec Accord Relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens refers to Quebec's full responsibility for the reception of immigrants received by Canada based on humanitarian considerations.

et al., 2018) as some claim they are unmotivating, create social segregation (Steinbach, 2010) or provoke power dynamics between newcomers and native speakers (Lightbown & Spada, 2021).

Moreover, in 2017, both the *Conseil supérieur de la langue française* (CSLF) and the *Verificatrice generale du Quebec* (VGQ) agreed that the francization program is flawed in terms of academia and employment (Ducass, 2018). The *Table de Concertation des Organismes au services des personnes Réfugiées et Immigrantes* (TCRI) expresses concerns that despite significant efforts to learn French, newcomers to Quebec struggle with this obligation (Ducass, 2018). More challenging for migrants to this province is the recent law, Bill 96 (2022) which imposes the French language at all levels of services including in the justice, education, health, and employment sectors in Quebec. According to Janet Cleveland, a researcher at Québec's SHERPA Institute, Bill 96 is excessive and indeed a real obstacle for refugees and new immigrants who after six months in the province must communicate in French only (Carpenter, 2022).

In favour of patriotic choices and to secure Québécois control over migration, in 2019 the provincial government created Bill 9 to limit economic immigration. Through a selective process, applicants are chosen, if judged acceptable based on Quebec's official language and if their moral values are aligned with those of the dominant culture (*Assemblée Nationale du Québec*, 2019). As a result, Bill 9 resulted in the withdrawal of 18,000 applications for immigration to Quebec putting families already separated in further distress (CBC, 2019). It is a step backward to reduce immigration by 20 %, as making this political choice works counter to economic development needs in this province due to the significant lack of human resources (Keung, 2021). Counter to Quebec's policies, the federal government has put in place a program to grant permanent residence status to 90,000 international students who recently graduated from Canadian universities to boost immigration (Keung, 2021).

Since the 1800s, nationalism for the Québécois people has been a battle for recognition as a distinct political and cultural entity within Canada (Theriault, 2001). In 2019, the newly elected Quebec Premier Francois Legault advocated for the restoration of Quebec nationalism, emphasizing the term popular to justify his relentless majoritarianism policies. With great confidence, Legault declared to the Canadian Press news agency that there is no shame in being

nationalist (Valiante, 2019) and that it was time to set some rules to show how things are done in Quebec (Henriquez, 2019). This government, therefore, promotes an ideology which resonates with the famous Quiet Revolution slogan *maîtres chez nous* (masters in our own house). With an agenda to prioritize local businesses and to assert the Quebec identity, Legault intends to nationalize nationalism by bringing to the forefront, policies on social and cultural boundaries (Dufour, 2019). Moreover, the recent declaration by Premier Legault that the concept of multiculturalism dilutes Quebec nationalism (Adam, 2022) resonates with Quebec politics, policies, and practices, which see minorities as threats to the majority culture and language. The insidious political agenda herein is the hope that by enhancing and concretizing Quebec values and distinctiveness, diversity will subsequently be curbed.

According to a report by the Human Rights Commission (CDPDJ, 2019), Quebec tops all provinces in terms of discrimination, racism, and police profiling of visible minorities. Amir Attaran, a professor at Ottawa University, asserts that systemic racism can no longer be ignored, calling Quebec the Alabama of the North (2021). Undoubtedly, there is a growing concern for what is considered Quebec islamophobia since the law on secularism (*laicité*), Bill 21, was accepted (Saad, 2019). State-based restrictions on religion have a causal impact on social conflict and discrimination (El Karoui, 2016). This *laicité* law not only complicates the integration of Syrian refugees but is considered contentious, racist, and discriminatory as some claim it disproportionally targets Muslim women, specifically teachers who choose to wear the hijab as an act of faith at their workplace (Saad, 2019). The fact that many of these Syrian refugees are Muslim, adds to their exclusion and epitomizes their otherness as Islamophobia is on the rise (Bonet, 2018; Chomsky, 2018). Evoking a policy of rescue (Kyriakides et al., 2018), the Quebec Premier proclaims that Bill 21 ostensibly protects subservient Muslim women forced to wear a head scarf imposed by their religion. Furthermore, Legault suggests that before choosing Quebec, a newcomer must remember that this province respects women and therefore no religious symbols (that are seen as anti-feminist) are allowed in public service (Shingler, 2019).

There is a greater awareness of the other (Chomsky, 2018), which will only grow exponentially as more refugees continue to arrive in Canada. Most recently, the federal government pledged to take in 40,000 Afghan refugees (Gladstone & Austen, 2021) and is receiving Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of their homes (IRCC, 2022).

Consequently, moral, and ethical questions about new relationships may lead to anxieties and insecurities for these newcomers in search of cultural identities. Indeed, this situation can be particularly concerning given the deteriorating governmental atmosphere in Quebec towards those not of the dominant Quebecois culture (Breeden, 2019). Furthermore, the UNHCR cautions that refugees can be depicted as threats to jobs and security in their host countries and can be targets of discrimination (2018).

Future-building, although not a linear process, is the way to support refugees; however, policies and xenophobic constraints on refugee access to resources and opportunities serve only to halt their growth (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). Therefore, given that the milieu refugees resettle into influences and frames their career aspirations and life chances (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020), how will Syrian YAR fare within the socio-political climate found in Quebec? Culturally, linguistically, religiously, and ethnically diverse refugees are caught at an intersection (Crenshaw, 1990; Kundnani, 2017), adding to an already wearisome challenge of resettling in a foreign land such as Quebec, and fulfilling their ambitions for a better life.

d) Adult Education in Quebec

The question of refugees and mandatory education in Québec has been brought to the forefront since 2015, with the extraordinary arrival of thousands of Syrian refugees (Kalata, 2021; Perkins, 2021). For refugees who have aged out of traditional high school, over 16, there is no other educational route to complete their secondary school certification than adult education (AE) in the school system (Potvin et al., 2014). The adult education sector is a system distinct from the Continuing Education programs offered by universities. The AE sector in Québec was originally intended for dropouts, displaced labourers, the jobless, and the illiterate; for the adult autonomous learner (DEAAC, 2009). Many subfields such as language learning, vocational and skills training, amongst others, comprise the AE sector. From a historical perspective, AE provides an opportunity for many mature students to learn and/or relearn; to pick up their studies again, at their own pace. Adult education holds an important social justice decree offering sidelined communities an invaluable and accessible second chance to return to school. While AE is generally for adults with low levels of education, the YAR participants did not have low-level

education, nor had they failed high school. For YAR, such institutions provided the opportunity for educational progress.

Conventional schools in Québec's education system incorporate preschool, elementary (grades 1-6), and secondary (grades 7-11) levels administered by both English and French school boards. Higher education starts at CEGEP[2] and continues to university. Adult education is located and governed within the secondary level of this education sector's budget. This education branch follows a curriculum approved by the Québec Ministry of Education; however, the mode of teaching differs across schools. Although, for now, mandatory schooling in Québec's official language does not apply to AE students, French is required for vocational and other licensing, and employment in the province. Under Bill 101 (1977), the Charter of the French language, instruction at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels in Québec is given in French. The exception is given to students whose parents (or parent) are Canadian citizens and who carried out the majority of their education in English in Canada. Post-secondary education may be given in French or English although that is under threat at the present moment (Bill 96).

In the youth sector, refugee learners who are below the age of 16 must first enter the *classe d'accueil* (welcome class) organized within their school, which is an integration-style language program to learn French. Refugee students who arrive in Québec above the age of 16 and have not completed secondary school, are encouraged, though not obliged, to attend the francization program, a year-long program in which new allophone[3] students participate in classroom discussions and activities in French (Steinbach et al., 2015). Although francization courses may improve newcomers' ability to communicate in French, they fail to support the academic, professional, or social needs of new immigrants and refugees in Québécois society (Ducass, 2018). Given the importance of local language learning for new immigrants and refugees (Carson, 2009; Severinsen, et al., 2018) and the difficulties students face in AE due to insufficient competencies in the host language, support concerning academics is essential (Crettnand & Reusse, 2019; Ghosh et al., 2022; Lightbown & Spada, 2020; Maraj et al., 2022; Potvin et al., 2014). Most of the literature on AE and immigrants is focused on linguistic

[2] CEGEP (College of General and Professional Teaching) serve as community colleges for some students whereas for others it provides the Diploma of College Studies, which is required for university admission in Québec.
[3] Allophone is a term used is Canada to describe people whose mother tongue is neither English nor French.

acquisition (Gibb, 2008), with some focus on teacher strategies to support students learning (Wood, 2011).

Due to a general perception that it caters to the marginalized (Potvin et al., 2014; Walker, 2022), AE is socially stigmatized. In Canada, the AE system is not mainstream proposing the prospect to learners of all levels of society a path outside the traditional academic track, yet this education sector remains relegated in terms of best practices, in terms of its student population and staff, and in terms of its budget (Walker, 2022); a reality found in the province of Quebec as well (Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2022). Research portrays AE, both in Canada and internationally, as the bin in which unwanted at-risk students end up (Maynard, 2020; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Morrice et al. 2020; Potvin et al., 2014; Walker, 2022). The province of Québec has the lowest rate of secondary school graduation in Canada (*Institut du Québec,* 2018), and the highest dropout rate in Montreal (*Réseau Réussite Montreal*, 2021), a concerning reality for resettled refugees in Montreal who need a high school diploma. Therefore, as warns Dryden-Peterson, incorporating refugees into a system already struggling with education equity, and which is failing nationals, indicates a lack of the indispensable conditions needed for refugee access to opportunities (2022).

The AE sector receives much less financial support from the provincial government, compared to the primary and secondary sectors (CSSDM, n.d.), which results in limited resources available to teachers to provide individual attention and help to students (DEAAC, 2009; Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2022; Walker, 2022). For the Québec Ministry of Education, AE is not a priority if the 2020-2021 budget is taken as a reference. The AE sector was allotted less than half of the budget (3.88%) than high schools (9.13%) which gets half of the budget given to primary schools (19.08%) (CSSMD, 2020). The limited funds that authorities assign to the education of dropouts, and recently of YAR, can be explained, according to Cole (2017) through an understanding of how capitalism functions, wherein education is synonymous with the provision of equal opportunities for all learners, despite some learners (working class) not receiving the means to a real education. Other studies posit that AE is used as a funnel by the youth sector to push out problem students, many of whom are recent immigrants and refugees (Potvin et al., 2014).

Since the changes in Canadian immigration policy in the 1990s, the AE student population has grown younger and more varied (DEAAC, 2009). During the 90's there was a need for immigration due to an economic recession, therefore the government increased its intake of immigrants which increased population growth, diversity and the economy (StatsCan, 2003). The Québec Ministry of Education acknowledged, in a 2009 report, that AE students have diverse needs and require individualized attention and support to ensure their progress through, retention in, and advancement out of the sector. The report recommended special education and resource teachers, psycho-educators, psychologists, social workers, and social intervention specialists, amongst others (DEAAC, 2009); however, budgetary constraints limited the widespread availability of such services. Moreover, research shows that the Canadian AE sector requires attention nationwide (Walker, 2022). The arrival of Syrian refugee students to Québec AE schools signifies greater student diversity in this education sector for adults, therefore the need for even greater attention is required by educational policymakers and stakeholders to support the diverse student body, especially in the provincial capital, Montreal.

The adult sector of education works on the premise that students can work independently at their own pace and seek assistance when/if required; an approach designed for autonomous independent learners (DEAAC, 2009). Most schools provide only individualized modules for each subject assuming student self-government, and only approaching teachers as needed, as opposed to teacher-led classes that are more common in the youth sector (DEAAC, 2009). A study by Villatte and Marcotte (2013) found that the AE system in Québec promotes a positive student-centred pedagogical approach which encourages motivation, agency, and autonomy; a method much appreciated by these students. The participants in that study represent a homogeneous group of traditional mature students, in a rural setting. The sample group was of the dominant Francophone or Anglophone culture, and familiar with the local education system (Villatte & Marcotte, 2013). Guo (2015) found that the AE student population is classified as a homogeneous group disregarding the diverse needs and varying backgrounds of the students, resulting in many adult immigrant learners from various countries feeling excluded (Guo, 2010). Refugee students have dissimilar needs than conventional AE students, therefore being in a foreign educational culture they are faced with difficulties in the classroom, without enough guidance and support (Baffoe, 2006; Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj, et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2023).

Moreover, given their age, they are also in a hurry to complete the requirements for the school leaving diploma that will enable them to either study further or find employment. Yet little research exists on YAR plight in navigating alternative educational paths, such as AE, to complete their studies.

The AE system was not envisioned for untraditional students such as forced migrants, or similar at-risk groups of diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. Recent research asserts that refugee students face challenges completing their high school diploma at AE schools because they are unfamiliar with the AE pedagogical approach as used in the French system in Quebec (Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2023). Approaches and methods to better assist academic achievement of these students include studies on methods and strategies for retention of immigrant adult learners such as programmatic approaches (Booth, 2009), additional classroom support such as tutors and bilingual tutors (Al Hariri, 2018; Crettenand & Reusse, 2019), mentoring programs (Atkinson, 2018), the recognition that a comprehensive approach to learning (Onsando & Billet, 2014), and building connections with various organizations to provide specialized support (Calaf, 2017; Prins et al., 2018) are needed.

For traditional Québécois students, AE offers a positive approach to their learning and a pedagogy which empowers them, providing the motivation and sovereignty to move on with their lives; to complete their high school diploma and subsequent future employment (Villatte & Marcotte, 2013). While student-centred pedagogy is essential to allow students to contribute in what, how and who is learning (Carson, 2009; Severinsen et al., 2018), researchers have found that such methods do not always accord with principles of equity as some learners lack the requisite resources and skills to be independent learners (Bourdieu, 1990; Britton et al., 2018) and not all students can function as self-directed learners. Syrian YAR, who had only been exposed to a traditional teacher-centred learning approach (Al Hesan et al., 2016), require more guidance and attention than conventional adult learners who have more experience with independent learning (Britton, et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2023).

e) <u>Education Practitioners and Refugee Learners</u>

Education practitioner is used in this manuscript as an inclusive term which refers to teachers and guidance counsellors. among other educators, who work closely with students in a school system. According to UNESCO (2016), the greatest defy facing refugee education is guaranteeing that teachers understand the requirements of this specific minority population and can meet them. Pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development for refugee students in stable, developed nations are exceptional (Gagné et al., 2017; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019). For this reason, teacher education and classroom practice must focus on refugee learners' strengths to overcome rather than perceive such students as weak (Cortez et al., 2023; Faizi, 2023; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Guo et al., 2021; Versmesse et al., 2017). In order not to essentialize an already marginalized group, as noted in other research, pedagogical methods must be aligned with the lived and distinct experiences of each refugee, including their exposure to distressing events (Phifer & Hull, 2016; Slade & Dickson, 2021). Thus, much attention must be paid by educators to the refugee students' approach to learning and the necessary support for their academic achievement, moving beyond a basic comprehension of vulnerability and agency (Correa-Velez et al., 2017; Cortez et al., 2023; Gateley, 2015; Haffejee, 2015; O'Higgins, 2012).

Teacher education needs to include training for educators who often feel unprepared to instruct refugee students (Gagné et al., 2017; Gunderson, 2007; MacNevin, 2012; Stewart, 2007, 2011; Voyer et al., 2021; Whiteman, 2005). Most education systems are not tailored to the complex needs of refugee learners (UNESCO, 2016; UNHCR, 2022). As a result, insufficient attention has been given by receiving countries to address the teacher training necessary to accommodate the needs of refugees (Sidhu et al., 2011; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019). To promote fairness and a sense of inclusion, which will keep refugee youth in school and embrace their adopted nation as citizens, school practitioners must be equipped with the appropriate support tools (Ghosh, et al., 2019; Gibbons, 2015; Maraj et al., 2022; Thomas, 2016; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019). Conventional classroom teachers are often ill-equipped to meet the needs of refugees who settle in their communities and attend local schools (Capacity Building K-12, 2016; Maraj, et al., 2022; Ratković et al., 2017), especially for refugee students with interrupted schooling (Arnot, et al., 2009; Britton, et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2022; Ferede, 2012; Maraj et al., 2022; Rutter & Jones, 1998). Therefore, a network of assistance is paramount for educators who

support refugee learners for successful integration (Brewer, 2016; Correa-Velez et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2018; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019).

There is a racial and cultural gap between teachers and refugee students (Barek, 2020). Most teachers in schools and classrooms in resettlement countries of the Global North are of the dominant culture, white, female, monolingual, and middle class (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). Educational practitioners must introspectively interrogate their pedagogical practices and competencies to understand the complications of their students' migration experience and its impact on the educational input of these learners (Bukus, 2021; Paul et al., 2023). Western individualistic approaches differ culturally from the communal approach of refugee learners from the Global South; therefore, teachers must be aware of their own biases including the power dynamic inherent in the teacher/refugee student relationship (Paul et al., 2023). These educators often have little training, if any, in pedagogies addressing the unique requirements of refugee youth related to, for example, their language, identity, or mental health (Barek, 2020; Naidoo, 2013). Facing cultural conflict and structural barriers, refugees bring significant social, emotional, and educational challenges to the classroom in receiving countries, which impede their academic success (Hamilton et al., 2020; UNHCR 2022). Therefore, academic support from educational agents is essential for students adjusting to foreign contexts, communities, and cultures (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; McBrien, 2005; Saldaña, 2001). However, the knowledge students bring with them cannot be ignored. Practitioners need to build on refugee students' existing knowledge through an asset-based pedagogy which is further discussed in the section entitled Deficit Model in the literature below.

Education policies and practices can best support refugee students in resettlement countries through research which takes a global approach to understanding refugee education for pre-service and in-service teachers (Ficarra, 2017; Sidhu et al., 2011). For the newly arriving refugee student, schools must not only recognize and speak to their educational and cultural gaps, diverse needs, experiences, and strengths but also provide staff and resource support within the school (Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Stewart & Martin, 2018). Much research confirms the relevance and importance of teacher preparation and pedagogy to work with refugee students (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; UNHCR, 2015; Voyer, 2021; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019), yet there is little literature available on this important subject. Educational systems require significant

resources to address and resolve the unique needs of refugee youth who have faced physical and psychological trauma (Gagné et al., 2017; Haffejee, 2015; Paul et al., 2023), for example, of utmost importance, trauma-informed training must be provided to educators to better assist refugee students who have endured displacement and distress (Maraj et al., 2022; Phifer & Hull, 2016; Slade & Dickson, 2021).

A culture of care, civility, and safety (Bellion et al, 2023; Noddings, 2015; hooks, 2003) is of utmost importance for teachers' understanding of, and familiarity with, refugee students to build a sound alliance. Core features of a trauma-informed pedagogical approach include a safe environment, trustworthiness, providing choice and control, collaboration, and empowerment (Fallot & Harris, 2009 in Davidson 2017). Humanistic education with emotional and caring skills should permeate the curriculum to promote a sense of belonging (Noddings, 2015). By creating a space to hear refugee stories and approaching these learners as individuals and not as a 'group,' teachers can learn about their students (Paul et al., 2023; Versmesse et al., 2017). Teachers may not know how to help their students, lacking the skills or capacity; therefore, supporting practitioners' professional needs can provide them with strategies and tools for refugee education (Capacity Building K-12, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Gamboa, 2018).

Educational systems must provide funding and services for all stakeholders, especially for teacher education, to address the distinctive needs of refugees (Hos, 2016; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019) through coaching and workshops for practitioners to learn strategies and skills to enable them to work with the specific needs of such populations (Gamboa, 2018; MacNevin, 2012; Voyer et al., 2021). Some teacher initiatives and encouraging programs to support refugee students in Canadian schools have been documented (Ayoub, 2020; Brewer, 2016; Capacity Building K-12, 2016; Stewart, 2017) including schemes and strategies for refugee primary and secondary student assimilation (Ayoub 2020; Cacciatolo 2013; Ficarra 2017; Ennab, 2017; Georgis et al., 2014; Szente et al., 2006).

According to research by Voyer et al. (2021), AE teacher preparation for the independent learning pedagogy is insufficient. Adult education practitioners expressed a sense of inadequacy, lacking familiarity with appropriate teaching methods and students' learning culture in terms of facilitating the academic success of their students who struggle to succeed within the AE

independent learning approach (Voyer et al., 2021). In the context of AE in Québec, there is very little recourse for overworked and under-resourced practitioners to access additional funding to ensure the appropriate support and services that YAR need, as it could be argued that this is a result of the marginalized status that AE holds within the education system as a whole (Cole, 2017; Maraj et al., 2022; Walker, 2022). Québec authorities should consider the systems into which refugees are integrated and how best to build refugee self-reliance. As outlined by the UNHCR's *The Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion* (2015), countries in the Global North are offered a critical opportunity to create tangible solutions dedicated to sponsoring the access of education to refugees and the necessary pedagogical training for teachers (UNHCR, 2015). The success of marginalized groups, such as refugee youth, through educational opportunities, rests on prioritizing teacher education as an indispensable element in the academic success of forced migrants (Bukus, 2021; Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Kanu, 2008; Lopour & Thompson, 2016; Paul et al., 2023; Richardson, 2018; Stewart, 2011; UNESCO, 2016; UNHCR, 2015).

2. General Literature on Refugee Education

This section provides a broader examination of the academic scholarship on refugees and education, adding to the pertinent literature cited above. The review of the international works available, thus far, touches on the generalizability of refugees as a minoritized and marginalized group, such as immigrant groups. Although this is true to an extent, it must be acknowledged that refugees, unlike immigrants, are forced into homelessness and as such mourn their past as they rebuild their future. The combined struggle and resilience of Syrian YAR to own their space in their new home in Montreal, and to achieve their aspirations and life chances, is the backbone of this study.

The general research literature pertinent to this study touches on issues facing foreign newcomers not of the dominant culture, in terms of discrimination and prejudice, challenges in society and at school, learning the local language, and family implications. Some research theorizes on the integration of refugees, while others focus on refugee capabilities and structural barriers. Other research examines the agency and vulnerability of refugee learners in terms of socio-economic barriers and academia. Most of the literature on refugee education deals with

students in primary and high school with a considerable gap in knowledge about YAR who have aged out of the youth sector. There is no apparent focus in the literature on YAR; and no awareness at a policy level of the diverse needs they may have, including distinct services and supports. The small body of literature focused on this sort of population (Baffoe, 2006; BlanchetCohen et al., 2017; Jowett 2020; Kanu, 2008) is often found incorporated with more general works about immigrants, second-generation immigrants and other marginalized populations (Lukes, 2011). These studies are not explicitly on forced migrants, nor age-specific but are rather inclusive of a broader category of immigrants (Ficarra, 2017; Hos, 2014; Lukes, 2011; Ratković et al., 2017). Much research on refugee academic integration can also be found focused on access to higher education (Crettenand & Reusse, 2019; Gruttner et al., 2018; Métraux, 2017).

a) <u>Fair and Inclusive Education for Refugees</u>

Global phenomena such as wars and natural disasters displace people because of economic, political, and cultural subtleties and unstable priorities thus impacting education and its purpose (Stromquist & Monkland, 2014; UNHCR, 2022). As a basic human right, education is the foundation of societies concerned with equity and fairness, playing a key role in building a nationhood of citizens (Moskal, 2017; UNHCR, 2022; Wiseman et al., 2019). Prospects of gaining access to schooling and labour markets not only enhance refugees' self-reliance and ability to build skills but contributes to host economies and promote community development (Lenette, 2016; Luu & Blanco, 2019; Moskal, 2017; Shakya et al., 2010; Stevenson & Willott, 2007; Wiseman et al., 2019). While the UNHCR (2022) strives for comprehensive education for refugees aiming to combat inequality, how do societal systems guarantee the responsible development of non-citizens, for example, of forced migrants, who will eventually become citizens?

Significant obstacles regarding education, including policies and practices, are brought to the surface when societies embrace diversity through immigration and welcoming refugees; however, this is not sufficiently understood (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; UNESCO, 2020). Although theoretically, education systems endeavour for equity, in practice sections of the population are excluded (Dryden-Peterson, et al., 2019) due to problems rooted in societal structures which

schools perpetuate (Bourdieu, 1981; Carter, 2012; Piff et al., 2018). As such, the purpose of education is queried, as are its consequences for refugees (Pinson & Arnot, 2020). Moreover, the costs of dysfunctional education systems for refugees are concerning. Education is important not only for each refugee but also for their children, who would otherwise struggle with intergenerational issues, which are more pronounced among poorly educated newcomers (OECD, 2016).

Refugee children and youth induction into their host culture ensues within their educational environment (Ficarra, 2017; Hos, 2014; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Ratković et al., 2017; Rousseau et al., 2005; Tavares & Slotin, 2012; Wilkinson, 2002). Schools represent the vital connection between refugee learners and the community at large (Ficarra, 2017; Timm, 2016). It is especially important that refugee students feel safe in their learning environment to be able to study and develop (Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Fecser, 2015; Guo et al., 2021). One of the key objectives of the UN resettlement program for refugees is social and economic integration (UNHCR, 2022), with education positioned at the center of the socialization of newcomers and reflected in government policy on managing diversity (Kia-Keating & Ellis 2007; Rousseau et al., 2005; Tavares & Slotin, 2012; UNHCR, 2019; Wilkinson, 2002).

Education empowers, yet for many refugee learners to be able to claim their knowledge and skills; to rebuild a productive and fulfilling life, such probabilities are limited (DrydenPeterson, 2022; Paul, et al., 2023; UNHCR, 2022) as their post-resettlement experiences are laden with educational and life challenges (Baban et al., 2021; MacNevin, 2012). For example, studies focused on Syrian refugees in the Global South reveal that refugees face similar barriers in the Global North which include adapting to host languages, and to systems which lack the sociocultural and academic support particular to refugee needs (Baban et al., 2020; Sarmini et al., 2020). Fleras and Elliot (1996) note that youth from *distinct cultures* from that of the host country may experience systemic discrimination, but also less subtle racism and subliminal racism (Wilkinson, 2002), in other words, micro-aggressions that negatively affect their experiences (Potvin et al., 2022).

Education, in theory, provides a chance to embrace aspirations and life chances. School culture is fundamental in determining a student's sense of inclusion. Students who are unlike the

dominant group, such as refugees, may experience an unsympathetic atmosphere; and a sense of exclusion especially if they do not see themselves represented in the classroom (Baffoe, 2006; Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014; Guo et al., 2021). Schools can cultivate social justice and equity by acknowledging and embracing diversity and by addressing the psychosocial and emotional needs of their students (Block et al., 2014; Keddie, 2011: Taylor & Sidhu 2012). Ideally, education systems must accommodate the reality associated with embracing diversity and cultivating the citizenry of migrants, most notably, those who are invited as their life chances are contingent on how they are received and supported by resettlement countries.

Fair and inclusive education for refugee students implies a holistic and comprehensive approach that connects parents, local agencies, and the wider community to the school (Arnot & Pinson 2005; Block et al., 2014; Cortez, et al., 2023; Pugh, et al., 2012). Equity in education should include prospects for students to learn what exists in terms of opportunities, connecting with the community and making friends. Outside the classroom, networking occasions and community connections for students increase refugee social capital and aid in resettlement (Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Wilkinson & Lloyd-Zantiotis, 2017). Ignorance of the social systems, such as education, of how these structures work or what to expect, put newcomers at a disadvantage. Restricting access to the right information, networking and connections, limits and slows down refugee and immigrant integration, revealing the disparity and inequity in opportunities between minority and dominant groups (Lloyd, et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Refugees desire to be part of the larger society (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). For example, a community outreach project in Scotland, aligned with Edinburgh University, links Syrian refugee high school students with Arabic-speaking university students to tutor, mentor and encourage these youth on their education path (Syrian Futures, 2022). Building social and cultural connections also proved to be successful based on community workshops involving refugee parents, students, and their teachers, carried out in Turkey (Karsli-Calamak et al., 2020). Networking and community building are essential for social inclusion to provide direction to assist refugee students. It is incumbent on educational institutions to foster and validate learners' knowledge inside and outside school.

b) Marginalization, Perseverance and Aspirations

To claim their future, and their life chances, and fulfill their aspirations, newcomers like YAR have to feel they belong, and that they are part of their new home (Ainscow, 2020). Inclusive and equitable education systems must address and prevent marginalization, ensure the clarity of the learning process, and embrace student diversity as learning opportunities (Driedger, 2011; UNESCO, 2017). For academic and socio-economic success, a sense of fairness and belonging is crucial for learners in an unfamiliar school environment (OECD, 2012). However, marginalization and exclusion are a reality faced by refugee students in Canadian schools (Guo et al., 2021; Kanu, 2008; Dei & Rummens, 2010; Stewart, 2011; MacNevin, 2012), which creates a sense of abandonment, discouragement and overwhelm, influencing refugee mental and physical health as well as their worldviews (Baffoe, 2006; Kanu, 2008; Hamilton et al., 2020; Matthews, 2008; Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Rutter, 2006). Other structural forms of marginalization include the lack of connections and community. Studies advocate that linking students to their community is essential (Jacquet & Masinda, 2014; OECD, 2016) especially for minority groups at a disadvantage (Lloyd, et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

The numerous challenges such as language acquisition, financial struggle, lacking educational documentation from pre-resettlement times, and/or placement in lower academic levels, result in refugee youth feeling unacknowledged and marginalized (Ferede, 2010; Morrice et al., 2020; Shakya et al., 2010). High aspiration for their studies is often met with high attrition rates and low university entrance which leave refugees feeling excluded (Lamb, et al., 2019; Naidoo, 2013). Facing academic rejection limits life chances for employment and education opportunities for refugees, augments stress, and complicates fitting into their new world (Brough et al., 2003; Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Lamb, et al., 2019; Poppitt & Frey, 2007). All practices of discrimination, according to Pierre Bosset (2021), together form a system which excludes, including students being obliged to adapt to unfamiliar teaching methods, to complete tasks at a specified time, or cultural values different from their own. Moreover, a sense of rejection created from experiences of discrimination can lead to mental health challenges such as low self-esteem and depression, violence and/or addiction (Khanlou, et al., 2014).

Aspirations beyond secondary school are obscured due to these obstacles whereas the possibility of higher education, as research claims, would greatly afford refugees excellent life chances including socio-economic clout and the ability to contribute to societal betterment (Ferede, 2012; Khoo, 2010; Lenette, 2016; Lenette & Ingamells, 2013; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017), Marginalization of refugee learners within the school environment stunts academic growth and devalues their sense of worth; therefore, it is of supreme importance that schools acknowledge and address the educational and cultural gaps, diverse needs, experiences, and strengths of newly arriving refugee students to assist them in overcoming the barriers they face, as well as provide staff and resource support within the school (Cummins, 2001; Dooley, 2009; Georgis et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2021; Gunderson, 2000; Hones, 2007; Kanu, 2008; Kirova, 2019; Loewen, 2004; MacNevin, 2012; Stewart, 2009).

Studies outline multiple approaches and methods to better assist refugee primary and secondary students' integration at school (Ayoub 2014; Cacciatolo 2013; Ficarra, 2017; Ennab, 2017; Georgis, et al., 2014; Stewart & Martin, 2018; Szente, et al., 2006). Recognizing student need for support, the idea of scaffolding within the classroom (Gibbon, 2015) as in the education system more broadly, becomes essential. Indeed, an approach that promotes and considers the diverse needs, experiences, and strengths of newly arriving im/migrant students results in greater involvement between schools, families, and the local community which facilitates a sense of belonging and connections essential for learners (Ainscow, 2020; Block et al., 2014; Cortez et al., 2023; Jacquet & Masinda, 2014; OECD, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

To obtain a high school diploma, move on to university, occupational training, or access minimum wage jobs, YAR must make a drastic transition into the classroom. As much as successful integration is connected to education (Ager & Strang 2008; Ficarra, 2017; Hos, 2014; Ratković et al., 2017), entering school as a young adult with multiple unknowns including language, culture, and pedagogy, creates a sense of worry and impossibility (Kanu, 2008; MacKay & Tavares, 2005; Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Yet YAR persevere because if they want to return to their studies in Québec, after having faced war, conflict, and lost years of their adolescence, it must be in an unfamiliar setting with an unfamiliar pedagogical approach and an unfamiliar language with no guidance (Lukes, 2011; Potvin et al., 2014; Maraj et al., 2022).

Despite their non-linear struggles and hindrances endured due to their predicament, attending alternative school systems such as AE is a choice YAR make to move forward with their education and lives (Jowett, 2020; Lukes, 2011).

Academic achievement in resettlement countries is an anticipated way out of the difficulties after a life as a refugee; a path out of poverty and a way to secure a better quality of life (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Rousseau et al., 2005; Shakya et al., 2010; Tavares & Slotin, 2012; Stevenson & Willott, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002). Notwithstanding the disruption to their lives and the barriers that they encounter, YAR cultivate life goals and are determined to achieve them (Bonet, 2016; Jowett, 2020; Kanu, 2008; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2010; Stevenson & Willot, 2007). Most recently, Jowett (2020) explored the issue from a policy perspective with refugee students in Manitoba which recognized the tenacity of these students to succeed despite challenges and obstacles. Although they are highly motivated, YAR students face several barriers to the realization of their goals and aspirations because they must make choices within societal structures found in their resettlement home (De Hass, 2011; Morrice et al., 2020).

The transcontinental journey of refugee youth and their families, through geographical space and time to finally arrive in resettlement countries, such as Canada, does not deter their immense value for education, as research posits. Influenced by social, economic, and political conditions their educational aspirations are nonetheless very high (Boccagni, 2017; Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Dei & Rummens, 2010; Shakya et al., 2010; Stermac, et al., 2010; Van Heelsum, 2017) illustrating great perseverance and motivation geared towards their goals despite the many difficulties and challenges endured as refugee learners (Joyce, et al., 2010; Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; Roy and Roxas 2011; Stevenson & Willott, 2007; Streitwieser et al., 2020; Zeus, 2011).

c) <u>Language</u>

Further to the literature on language acquisition for refugee learners mentioned earlier, much research addresses the problem of local language learning, perceived as a great obstacle for all allophone newcomers, whether forced migrants or not (dela Cruz, 2023; Galante et al., 2020; Gibb, 2008; Guo, 2015; Luu & Blanco, 2021). In a country of multiculturalism and multilingualism,

Canadian societies and communities often use different languages, switching from one to the other (Piccardo, 2019). In this reality, for example, 21% of Montreal residents are reportedly trilingual (Statistics Canada, 2019) and identify as plurilingual and pluricultural (Galante & dela Cruz, 2021). Much research proposes pluralistic approaches to language learning wherein newcomers' language and culture are used as a resource for learning the dominant language (dela Cruz, 2022; dela Cruz, 2023; Galante et al., 2023; Payant, 2020). Plurilingual instruction is derived from the sociolinguistic theory which views language development based on learners' lived experiences in relation to social context (dela Cruz, 2022; dela Cruz, 2023; Galante et al., 2020; Galante et al., 2023; Payant, 2020). Given the increased global immigration and linguistic diversity, the use of language and cultural knowledge as an inclusive plurilingual pedagogy, rather than uniquely dominant language approaches in the classroom, is highly recommended for refugees (Reddick, 2023). For allophones in Québec, research suggests that the official monolingual policy is a policy of exclusion (dela Cruz, 2023), ignoring allophone identities and plurilingualism in language education.

Studies concur that acquiring language competency is a priority for newcomers to participate in society, yet it remains a preoccupation as a major barrier (dela Cruz, 2022; Galante et al., 2023; Nourpanah, 2014; Stewart, 2017; Wilkinson et al, 2017). Nonetheless, language competence is essential for migrants to feel part of their adopted home and to be able to function within the unknown environment (Aras & Yasun, 2016; dela Cruz, 2023; Ertong Attar & Kücükşen, 2019; Karadeniz & Paksoy 2016; Luu & Blanco, 2021). For asylum seeker and refugee students, studies posit that language attainment is a stumbling issue given their challenges to learn in targeted languages of instruction and excel in greater educational pursuits (Ghosh, et al., 2019; Gladwell & Elwyn, 2012; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Schneider, 2018; Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Indeed, language, insist Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), can serve to keep foreigners out because without knowledge of the language of instruction, refugee students are at a disadvantage forfeiting academic achievement and engagement in their future.

For YAR who are allophone and have an agenda to get through high school quickly, content-based language teaching, wherein the teaching of a second language and academic subject are integrated with language learning, is highly recommended internationally, but not in Québec (Lightbown &

Spada, 2020). For example, based on studies in Switzerland (Crettnand & Reusse, 2019), second language learning with an academic focus on newcomers returning to an educational path is highly supported. This research is focused on access to higher education and language learning for refugees in Geneva. The findings suggest that language of instruction plays a paramount role in resettled refugees' ability to aspire to academic and life goals, confirming that oral and written comprehension, academic writing, and argumentation, including exams, notetaking, and presentations skills are what refugee students require for scholastic success (Crettnand & Reusse, 2019). Such academic abilities greatly differ from the basic French taught in Geneva, or Québec, for newcomers. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to local-language learning for resettled YAR pursuing their education, but this Swiss example shows that an adapted approach is more appropriate. Research in Canada indicates that refugees attaining adeptness in academic vocabulary in French or English is an exceptional educational defy (Felix, 2016; Shakya et al., 2010; Streitwieser, et al, 2020).

d) <u>Deficit Model</u>

For refugees, the struggle for language acquisition is a disqualifier in their attempts to access socio-economic status as their inability to speak the host language divides the insiders from the outsiders, positioning this population within a deficit model (Keddie, 2012; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Limbu, 2009; Luu & Blanco, 2021; Pan, 2014; Rajaram, 2002; Versmesse et al., 2017). Much literature portrays young immigrants and refugees, who are neither fluent in the national languages nor familiar with host cultural norms or pedagogical approaches, as destitute, vulnerable, and helpless (Gruttner et al, 2018; Luu & Blanco, 2021; Selimos & Daniel, 2017; Versmesse et al., 2017). Studies show that although caring, educators assume refugee learners are incapable, lacking skills and understanding, and in need of assistance (Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; Matthews, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Wilkinson, et al., 2017). Moreover, research posits that educators tend to group all at-risk youth as having difficulties hampering these students' ability to participate dynamically in their own lives, rather than focusing on their strengths (Cortez et al, 2023; Luu & Blanco, 2021; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018; Selimos & Daniel, 2017).

Educators' low expectations of refugees manifest through overlooking the significance their shared perspectives can have in the classroom, negating refugees' worthiness (Baak, 2018;

Pastoor, 2017; Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018). Subsequently, a sense of exclusion is created, dampening refugee educational aspirations and life chances (Ghosh et al., 2022; Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; Maraj et al., 2023). Furthermore, research reveals that refugee and immigrant students are disproportionately placed into lower-level programs and inferior grade levels (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996; Wilkinson, 2002; Yau, 1995), which delays their progress compared to those without education gaps resulting in elevated levels of student dropouts amongst this group (Wilkinson, 2013). Pre-resettlement refugee adolescents were the most severely affected by disrupted education (Wahby et al., 2014), and often arrive in resettlement homes without their qualifications and educational credentials (Felix, 2016; Loo, 2016; Streitwieser, et al, 2020; Tobenkin, 2006). Education gaps can have a profound impact on refugee experiences in attempting to access services, including in education.

Although many forced migrants have lived through violent disruption and lost years of schooling (Helmer & Eddy, 2003; Sheikh, et al., 2019; Stewart, 2012; MacNevin, 2012) their traumatic reality does not define them (Krause & Schmidt, 2020). Humanitarian discourse tends to dictate, from an external perspective, the passivity and feebleness of refugees reliant on international aid (Brun & Shuayb, 2020; Malkki, 1995) rather than develop the internal narrative from the perspective of refugees' assets (Cortez et al., 2023; Luu & Blanco, 2021; Rajaram, 2002). With regard to how educational systems can accommodate refugees, educational policies often focus on what refugees need and what they lack, as opposed to focusing on what this population may already have, their cultural wealth (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Yosso, 2005).

From a critical race perspective, Yosso (2005) suggests a community cultural wealth theory which takes an asset-based approach wherein all cultures within a diverse society are valued, not just the dominant culture. For refugee learners, and other minorities, diversity should be considered a strength, and schools should promote and foster an inclusive environment with staff that are culturally diverse (Block et al., 2014; Kanu, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu 2012). For example, some of the forms of capital outlined by Yosso (2005) include the strength to hold on to aspirations despite barriers, or resistant capital which refers to building on struggles against experiences of injustice. Refugees and similar marginalized populations have cultural capital wealth that must be recognized. Schools must promote an asset as opposed to a deficit perspective to build positive connections wherein diversity of cultures and values is prioritized, especially where immigrant and

refugee students are concerned (Cortez et al., 2023; Sorensen, 2023). Certainly, a perception that values rather than marginalizes refugee students' cultural knowledge, which stems from diverse experiences, is an important pedagogical practice (Brewer, 2016; Ghosh et al., 2019).

The literature on refugees calls for a shift in focus from victimization and missing years of education (MacDonald, 2015; Malkki, 1996; Shapiro, 2014), to focus on resilience and agency (Gruttner et al, 2018; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017; Sorensen, 2023). The assumption is that refugees arrive lacking the social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge of their host country and must adapt rather than the host society transforming for the refugee newcomer community (Bowskill, et al., 2017). Thus, the host must compensate for this deficit, creating on one hand cultural dependency for refugees and the other hand, resentment from the host population (Bowskill, et al., 2017). Learning programs, policies, practices, and opportunities must align with refugee students' educational history, goals, and strengths rather than perspectives based on oppression (MacDonald, 2015; Malkki, 1996; Shapiro, 2014; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017); beyond normative assumptions of refugees (Gateley, 2015; Guo et al., 2021; O'Higgins, 2012). Collaborating with refugees for feedback and perspectives on educational programming and policies which concerned them, prioritizes opportunities to be heard (He et al., 2017). Refugees want to contribute to their education and provide asset-based input for policy development where they are not only the benefactors but decision-makers (Sorensen, 2023).

As much as what is considered refugee neediness can influence forced migrants' experiences in attempting to access services, including in education, when perceived by social services to be high-performing or highly functional, refugees can be denied admittance to services or support (Gateley, 2015; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; O'Higgins, 2012). Consequently, weakness is a guarantee to receive assistance in countries of asylum or resettlement (Gateley, 2015; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; O'Higgins, 2012). Refugees are stuck in an obvious duality in terms of how they are recognized, that is, as either defenceless or empowered with personal agency. This disposition is problematic because it encloses refugee background students into a certain profile: they must claim vulnerability to receive assistance or have their experiences, knowledge and skills diminished because they are not fluent in the national language or familiar with Western or advanced pedagogical approaches.

e) <u>Mental Health and Family</u>

For refugee children, the structure and regularity of school attendance not only contribute to their safety but also, to their emotional and social needs, and local integration, and motivate their future hopes and plans (Lynnebakke & de Wal Pastoor, 2020). However, entering AE schools as YAR, or immigrant young adults, juggling academic uncertainty and the financial choices to compromise an income by going back to studies, can cultivate great worry and fear (Kanu, 2008; MacKay & Tavares, 2005; Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2015), which can lead to abandoning the idea of going back to school (Baffoe, 2006; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Kanu, 2008). Refugee youth resettlement and well-being are enabled when they can make sense of their experiences and feel a connection with school, home, and society (Bartlett et al., 2017; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Jacquet & Masinda, 2014).

There is a vast amount of literature that attests to the mental health challenges migrants endure which hamper their scholastic success (Alemi et al., 2014; Cheng, et al., 2015; De Anstiss & Ziaian, 2010; Ertong Attar & Kücükşen, 2019; Hamilton et al, 2020; Iqbal et al., 2022; Murphey, 2016; Pereira & Ornelas, 2011; Riggs et al., 2016; Sharifian, et al., 2021; Slewa-Younan, et al., 2017; Yayan et al., 2020). The literature suggests that many refugees struggle with anxiety and emotional grief post migration confronting challenges at intersections of finances, linguistics, culture shock and difficulties understanding the legal and administrative aspects associated with their displacement. Issues of psychological well-being are associated with the life refugees leave behind much of which includes violence, struggle, disaster, trauma, exploitation, death, and loss (de Lambert, 2018; Nickerson et al., 2010; Sharifian, et al., 2021, Renner et al., 2021). Furthermore, the consequential destitution and social exclusion experienced by refugees have an immeasurable impact on the emotional and mental state of displaced migrants (Hamilton et al, 2020; Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Because trauma hinders healthy development and creates countless behavioural problems (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Kaplan et al. 2016; Lamb et al., 2019; Zilberstein, 2014), the disruption and upheaval of forced migrants and its damaging human significance cannot be underestimated.

Cultural conflict is also a reality for refugees relocated to foreign places as the way of life and expectations in their new education environment may differ greatly from anything they are

used to (MacNevin, 2012; Steinbach, 2010). For example, Steinbach notes a cultural difference in that the individualistic approach valued in Québec culture is distinct from, and opposed to, a communal approach found in the Global South (2010). Religious exclusion through reported experiences of racism and Islamophobia can lead to disruptions in school life, conflicts with practitioners and/or academic failure (Pendakur, 2020), all of which impact students' sense of worth and mental health and are even more concerning for refugee students. Discrimination and prejudice are barriers to refugee resettlement in Canada (Guo et al., 2021; MacNevin, 2012). But when faced with such treatment in schools, refugee students may recoil, and their academic goals suffer subsequently (Guo et al., 2021; Hamilton et al, 2020; Shakya et al., 2010; Sharifian, et al., 2021). Despite refugee learners' challenges due to mental health concerns, mental health services are often unsolicited even when they are readily available to this population at no cost (Maraj et al., 2022; Maraj et al., 2023; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016) because, among other reasons, issues surrounding mental health are culturally linked (Murphey, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

Furthermore, research indicates that refugee students may have difficulty trusting their teachers or other school practitioners due to their experience with traumatic events preresettlement (Brown, et al., 2006; Dooley, 2009; Faizi, 2022; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010; Hones, 2007; MacNevin, 2012; Miller, 2009). Refugee learners may not have the capacity and perseverance to invest in school and life in a foreign home due to psychological strain (Alisic, 2012; Birman et al., 2005; Fazel & Stein, 2002; Paul et al., 2023; Rousseau & Guzder, 2008; Rousseau et al., 2005; Stewart, 2017; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). Teachers need training and cultural understanding to support the mental health needs of students (Capacity Building K-12, 2016; Paul et al., 2023; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011; Saldaña, 2001) to foster educational settings where students feel a sense of security and safety, feel heard and supported, and feel engaged and stimulated, especially refugee students (Government of Canada, 2022).

Education is highly valued by refugee youth and their families (Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Rummens & Dei, 2010; Rummens, et al., 2008; Stermac, et al., 2010; Stewart, 2007, 2011). Research shows that many refugees, especially the educated, aspire to third-country resettlement such as in Canada to establish a safe and stable milieu for their children, to freely practice their faith and obtain legal recognition (Chatty & Mansour, 2011). A major obstacle to academic

integration and achievement is the lack of financial resources post-resettlement endured by refugee youth and their families; losses often due to having to flee their homes (Ferede, 2012; Kanu, 2008; Gruttner et al., 2018; Lamb et al., 2019). Monetary strain is especially devastating for parents who can no longer provide for their children. The sense of shame for the family is humbling, obliging refugee youth to seek employment to provide for themselves and their families financially rather than obtain an education (Morrice, 2013; Stevenson & Willott, 2007, Gruttner et al., 2018). Even if schooling is pursued alongside employment, working takes time and energy with little left to focus on educational aspirations (Gruttner et al., 2018).

Moreover, the challenges of accreditation for refugee parents for their professional qualifications combined with their lack of language skills result in a heavy dependence on their children on low-status and menial jobs (Eruyar et al., 2018; Kanu, 2008). Refugee children act as drivers and interpreters, as they often learn the host language with ease compared to their parents. Refugee youth are saddled with a great responsibility that is fundamental to their families' resettlement; a responsibility that flips the hierarchy, a role reversal, and requires an adjustment for refugee parents who have little choice (Eruyar et al., 2018; Hynie, et al., 2012; Kanu, 2008). Furthermore, refugee youth and parents face challenges in understanding their host culture, are unaware of, and lack the social support necessary to find appropriate information to assist in their settlement whether for education or any other need and may end up misinformed and/or confused (Bajwa et al., 2017; Hanley et al., 2018).

A comprehensive approach to embracing family is important for healing the trauma faced by refugees who have escaped the terror they are fleeing. Attachment to the family is primordial when experiencing fear-based displacement and this connection provides strength to grow out of the trauma (Rabiau, 2019). Mental health challenges interfere with the integration process therefore families, community and the collective can provide a positive impact on refugee resettlement (Paul et al., 2023). Therefore, this process of intergenerational resilience must involve the family to heal (Denov et al., 2019; Rabiau, 2019).

f) Perspectives on Refugee Integration

While academic discussion regarding immigrants and minorities often focuses on their integration into the majoritarian mainstream, there is disagreement within the theoretical literature as to what the concept of integration encompasses (Bucken-Knapp et al., 2019; Castles 2001; Castles et al., 2002; Kuhlman 1991; Phillimore, 2011). Based on refugee studies literature, local integration is often considered in relation to the official inclusion of a refugee into the country of asylum (Hovil & Maple, 2022; Polzer, 2009). In reference to the refugee resettlement process, integration involves the formal legal inclusion of a refugee into the country (Berthold & Libal, 2019; Ghosh et al., 2019; Long 2009). Some research suggests local integration as accompanied by economic integration and social connections (Crisp 2004; Fielden 2008; Jacobsen 2001) and others, as an informal procedure of negotiating rights (Dryden-Peterson, 2006; Polzer, 2008; Polzer, 2009). Perspectives on this phenomenon, on one hand, focus on politics and markets and another on immigrant experiences (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022; Castles & Miller, 2009). The route to employment, education, and wealth, as indicators of comprehensive and successful integration for refugees, is not linear but rather multidimensional and dynamic (Korac, 2003; Phillimore, 2021).

Commonly, the term integration has largely been synonymized with adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, and incorporation associated with the arrival of newcomers (Borselli & van Meijl, 2020; Bucken-Knapp et al., 2019). Receiving governments in resettlement countries centre policies on refugee assimilation into society, including learning the host language and culture; however, many international organizations, scholars, NGOs, and the UNHCR, suggest that integration is a two-way process (Borselli & van Meijl, 2020; Bucken-Knapp et al., 2019; Klarenbeek, 2019). National policies are geared towards the assimilation of the newcomer to a dominant set of standards and comportments so that they fit in with the majority (DamaschkeDeitrick & Bruce, 2019; Phillimore & Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017; Valtonen, 1998). While both ignorant of, and seemingly uninterested in the refugee's life experience pre- and post-resettlement, the receiving nation pushes policies which are driven to simply reproduce (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020; Carrera, & Atger, 2011; Klarenbeek, 2019). Refugee relocation in a foreign land is a complex process, affected by the accessibility of services and support, the individual's

circumstances, and the perspectives and comportments of the host society (UNHCR, 2020; Yu et al., 2007).

Ager and Strang (2008) posit that for refugees and immigrant children, language, knowledge of national and local procedures, customs, and cultural expectations, as well as education, are a major institution of socialization for a country's citizenry. However, integration from the standpoint of state discussion and outcomes as a process over time (Ager & Strang, 2008) neglects the opinions and life experiences of the refugees themselves (Bucken-Knapp et al., 2019; Van Heelsum, 2017). Considerable research on refugee resettlement and integration disregards refugee perception of their life experiences and as a result discounts refugee agency and resourcefulness stemming from their intrinsic motivation (de Haas, 2021; Klarenbeek, 2019; Van Heelsum, 2017). As they move from one setting to another, recognizing refugee agency in rebuilding and remaking their new identities within the structural limits of their new home is essential for understanding refugee experiences (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022; Castles & Miller, 2009).

The broad literature review above provides the reader with an understanding of the challenges that resettled YAR face in attaining academic integration in a foreign country. The literature emphasizes the need to consider refugee students' pre- and post-resettlement lived experiences. Moreover, other issues refugees must face are considered such as mental health problems, marginalization and discrimination, language barriers, including the social, financial and emotional stress on refugee students and their families as they adjust to the unknown. Although little research is available regarding Syrian YAR and AE schooling, the literature insists nonetheless that asset-based learning, which values refugee knowledge, as well as teacher preparation and training to work with refugee populations is essential. Furthermore, the research reveals that refugee learner perseverance, resilience and aspirations are important factors which impact their life chances.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

The combined perspectives of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) and that of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provide a clear outlook to frame this research focused on Syrian YAR educational aspirations and life chances in the Québec adult education system. Combining micro and macro-level characteristics to explain (forced) migration (De Haas 2011), CA encompasses the strength and personal drive of these young refugees, reflecting a micro-level perspective, while the CRT illustrates the systemic barriers against which they struggle, a macro-level standpoint. Sen's CA (1985) is a conceptual framework which enhances understanding of expectations and aspirations as motivators for marginalized subgroups such as YAR. The CA targets the quality of life that people can achieve and claims that the freedom to attain well-being is a matter of what people can do and be. The CRT framework is the appropriate tool to explore and identify exclusion within education systems; and to understand inequality of opportunity of non-majority students, such as newly arrived refugees.

a) Capability Approach (CA)

Amartya Sen, the distinguished Nobel Laureate economist, developed the Capabilities Approach in the 1980s, an alternative view on economic theories of development, which focuses on what people can do and be if they choose to do so, and the quality of life they can achieve. For Sen, capabilities represent the freedom to promote or achieve things that a person values to obtain a good life (Walker 2005), or what Sen later refers to as *functionings* (Nussbaum, 2009; Robeyns, 2017). Attention to capabilities allows for a greater appreciation of agency alongside opportunity structures (De Haas, 2011; Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018). Aspirations connect with capabilities as they are the future perspectives of realizing a satisfactory life (De Haas 2011; Van Heelsum 2017). Moreover, the CA literature emphasizes the critical association between a person's proficiency to transform various resources and public goods (means) into *functionings* and the real (or viable) political, social, and economic conditions that allow these opportunities to achieve a person's goals (Fibieger Byskov, 2020). Thus, as much as CA acknowledges that people have unique needs, migrants/refugees may face systemic obstacles that may significantly limit their capability set (Burchardt & Hick, 2016).

The Capability framework allows for a better understanding of life after migration from the perspective of refugees themselves (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020; Van Heelsum, 2017) and serves to analyze the circumstances in which decisions are made and understand choices. Migration, whether voluntary or forced is a social process that functions in terms of both competencies and aspirations (De Haas, 2011; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). Migrants have agency; however, exercising agency or capability is also contingent on the structural environments which govern, and which subsequently determine the freedom to make sovereign choices (De Haas, 2011; Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018). Brought into the context of integration, the CA enables a greater appreciation and consideration of the different trajectories of the refugee as an agent with aspirations that may or may not fit within the structure of the receiving society (Van Heelsum, 2017). Significantly, research has found that the discrepancy between refugees' aspirations and their ability to actualize them contributes to their difficulties in reaching their goals (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020). This points to the importance of analyzing factors of agency alongside opportunity structures in understanding the dynamics involved and the outcomes required in the context of policy.

Sen defies the widespread notion of income per capita, the conventional method of assessment based on one's resources used as a measure of human development across nations (Bruni et al., 2008), and instead proposes a more relevant method to compare and evaluate life based on choice, or substantive freedom, as a value, and a framework for the development of a society (Bruni et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 2009). Indeed, Sen's concept of capabilities has taken root over more than 30 years, applied as a basis for critical policy interventions in widespread areas such as the philosophy of education, public health ethics, development ethics, etc. (Bruni et al., 2008; Fibieger Byskov, 2020; Robeyns, 2017). It is the basis of the Human Development Index.

The field of social sciences has largely embraced Sen's concept of capabilities, but it has been nonetheless criticized for not having sufficiently seized the much broader view of interpersonal variations and what social justice looks like beyond the attainment of basic rights (Robeyns, 2017; Fibieger Byskov, 2020). An attendant capability paradigm to social justice was proposed by the political philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000), based on Sen's work. Embracing a more personal approach, which emphasizes the need to distinguish fundamental rights from those

that are trivial, Nussbaum (2009) calls for all governments to guarantee rights for *all* citizens through freedoms and opportunities to choose a life that they value (Boyadjieva & IlievaTrichkova, 2021).

The essence of the CA is found in its innovative measurement of an individual's progress in the society in which they live, by placing at its center freedom in opportunities, choices, and public values such as well-being, independence, and justice (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2021; Robeyns, 2017). Through the work of Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000), researchers can examine the extent to which people have genuine access to *functionings* (López-Fogués & Cin, 2018) as it highlights the challenges faced in attaining basic capabilities, such as education and personal development. Indeed, education plays an important part herein, manifesting in the development of powerful voices, challenging the theories and practices which serve to undermine learner well-being (López-Fogués & Cin, 2018) and underlining the aspects which celebrate life chances as an essential element for collective justice.

The CA offers a lens through which the experiences of Syrian YAR in Québec can be explored, as they integrate into the AE system, in terms of the success of freedoms they seek, and the choices taken to develop their competencies geared towards the kind of life they want for themselves. The CA informs the researcher who seeks to analyze the circumstances in which YAR make decisions to understand the reasons behind their choices in the pursuit of their goals in their resettlement home, specifically how the experiences encountered in a foreign education system affect their aspirations. Refugees, although forced to migrate, show agency when they decide to move from one country to another, often dependent on having access to varying resources and capacities from which to choose (De Haas, 2021; Sen, 1999).

Refugee aspirations for their educational plan, to ensure their life chances as they rebuild their future, are accompanied by evidence of tenacity and purpose (Mangan & Winter, 2017; Shakya et al., 2010), despite numerous *défi* along the way (Joyce, et al., 2010; Stevenson & Willott, 2007; Streitwieser et al., 2020; Zeus, 2011). Studies confirm refugee youth's inherent motivation to succeed (Isik-Ercan 2012; Roy & Roxas 2011, Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018). Considered dynamic and invested in their resettlement, refugees muster heroic efforts and agency to access the

resources they need (Lamba, 2003); to make choices (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010), keeping the focus on academic integration (Bonet, 2016; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2010; Stevenson & Willot, 2007).

Learner diversity including socio-cultural context, cultural backgrounds, belief systems and life experience must be acknowledged for the equality of abilities in education (Sen, 1999). Moreover, the CA posits that within fair and inclusive education systems learners can express their capabilities and aspire to their educational objectives (Gruttner et al., 2018) and for refugee students, rebuilding the life they dreamed resettlement would afford them. The experiences of Syrian YAR, the circumstances in which they make decisions and the reasons behind these choices, as they integrate into the AE system in Québec, can be analyzed through the perspective of CA, which measures the effectiveness of these refugee students' freedoms and the decisions to develop their capabilities in pursuit of their aspirations. As Amartya Sen posits (1999), agency allows an individual to seek, without restriction, what they value and aspire to accomplish in life (Walker, 2005).

From this perspective, if the refugee students are understood as agents with aspirations, then greater regard is allowed to them in terms of decisions, reasons, and choices to pursue varying paths (Van Heelsum, 2017). Conversely, research has found that when a refugee loses hope of reaching his/her goals and/or developing capabilities this can influence the feeling of inclusion in a new society (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Spencer & Charsley, 2016; Van Heelsum, 2017). Implementing agency, or capability, must be understood within the structural settings of the new host society which rules and regulates freedom to choose (de Hass, 2011). Refugees have agency but must make choices within structures (Morrice, et al., 2020). Critical race theory is an analytical tool which provides insight into societal structures to examine the educational exclusion of refugees.

b) <u>Critical Race Theory (CRT)</u>

Critical Race Theory raises questions about equity and equality by examining the relationship between society and culture as they relate to racism and power. Based on the notion that race determines the economic prospects of individuals, CRT influences politics and shapes the

conduct of law enforcement (Bell, 1995; Dei,1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Racism is understood in CRT as a structure of oppression (Cabrera, 2018), resulting from elusive social and organized structures and forces, which create incongruent educational outcomes for certain groups. Providing a background to examine differing educational outcomes, CRT focuses on the subtle social and institutional systems rather than individual and intentional prejudices and attitudes (Cabrera, 2018; Gilborn & Ladson-Billings, 2020).

Several critiques of CRT suggest that the lack of racial theory allows for little insight into the systemic nature of racism (Horowitz, 2006; Kennedy, 1989; McWhorter, 2000). Others warn of the danger of racial essentialism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), the belief in a biological or genetic essence that defines all members of a racial group. Furthermore, Cole's (2017) neo-Marxist position claims CRT gives undue attention to racism rather than to other critical issues such as class divisions. Cabrera, however, confirms CRT's legitimacy adding that the use of hegemonic whiteness clarifies what constitutes racism (2018). White hegemony of social and economic structures is rooted in a liberal belief that equal opportunity exists for all, oblivious of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic oppression minority groups face.

Indeed, liberal democratic assumptions promote academic achievement contingent on hard work only (Crenshaw, 2016; Zamudio et al., 2011); an idea challenged by CRT and other critical literature. Such claims see school success structured on choice, agency, and motivation, concepts associated with freedom, equality, and individual rights. Yet these liberal norms are misaligned with reality. It is a societal myth that meritocratic values justify and legitimize academic achievement. The ability to make choices is contingent on enfranchisement. Refugees lose much of their power to make choices during their journey to safety (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). In their resettlement homes, despite their aspirations, determination, and freedom there remains an inequality in their abilities to make choices because of societal and institutional hurdles which block their advancement (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018).

Education is not an equalizer because it reproduces the class and racial structures of society. This is consistently evidenced by the failure of liberal education policies to reduce the gap between whites and non-whites across many societies (Bhopal, 2018; Taylor, 2006). Race is understood as

a social paradigm creating a racial hierarchy found in structural and political systems and is used to determine who is worthy of opportunities and who is not (Razak, 2004; Said, 1995). The French hegemony in Québec participates in the racialization of minorities because control of social and economic structures by the culture in power stems from a belief that everyone has equal opportunity, ignorant of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic domination minorities endure. Therefore, understanding the way racialization affects the learning and educational needs of non-dominant immigrants/migrants, like Syrian YAR, signifies that schools must take accountability and endorse solutions that promote an equitable chance for the marginalized (Ianinska et al., 2013). According to Thobani, Canada veils its white settler colonial identity with the illusion of tolerance within a postmodern, multiracial, and multiethnic society (2007).

In contrast to liberal claims that education guarantees equality and fairness for all, critical research has pointed to systemic malfunctioning of education institutions, structured to reproduce and legitimize inequalities in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Orlowski, 2012). The historical and institutionalized nature of racial inequality has served as an important explanation as to why some non-whites do not get ahead (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016), with class-based exclusion and lack of (dominant) cultural capital as other important considerations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Yosso, 2005). Critical race theory explores and identifies the role of institutional discrimination and thus recognizes disparity of opportunity for minoritized students resulting in dropouts, failures, and exclusion of these side-lined communities (Anyon, 2014); a non-colour coding racism (or marginalization). Side-lined groups are often thought of as socially deficient (Crenshaw, 1990); however, CRT challenges the traditional idea those excluded are socially lacking and instead focuses on their cultural wealth in various forms (Bourdieu, 1981; Kyriakides et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). The intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016; Potvin et al., 2022; Zambio et al., 2011) with which refugee students have to contend is of great significance, as CRT argues. Refugee students are caught at cross-sections of life which include school responsibilities, as refugee learners, at home, as children and parent support, at work as employees, and in society as allophone foreigners. Having to financially support themselves and help their families implies that refugee youth have to work and study at the same time. For some students, it is not possible to do both.

As a theoretical framework, CRT provides the capacity to illustrate the implications of refugee demographics on school policies and practices and exposes the invisibility of difference and structural narrowmindedness found within a system intended for a specific kind of student. In society, the structural and political systems support and validate dominant (white) superiority because a racial hierarchy is built into the social structure (Razack, 2018). The white dominant culture produces, internalizes, and subsequently maintains the status quo (Thomson, 2019). The refugee, therefore, is positioned in a passive role in contrast to their host (Said, 1995). Control of social and economic structures by the culture in power is rooted in a belief that equal and fair chances exist for all, ignorant of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic subjugation of marginal groups and their educational needs (Ianinska et al., 2013). When disparities in a system affect only certain groups, and politics and practices do not provide access to education at an equal level, this is considered systemic racism (Potvin et al., 2022). Hegemonic whiteness is normalized in the systems of power (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Maitra & Guo, 2019) and is a tool of culture (Withers, 2017) that influences the academic and life chances of the *other*, in this case, Syrian young adult refugees in Québec.

Cultural difference in students' educational performance and life chances, is explained by CRT which challenges the traditional idea that marginalized groups are socially defective (Crenshaw, 1990, Kyriakides et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). Applying CRT in the field of education helps to explain cultural differences in students' educational performance and their future, considering intersections such as gender, race, mental health challenges, levels of income, class, and religion (Crenshaw et al., 2016). Combining these factors of life which intersect must be considered to avoid essentializing groups (Potvin et al., 2022). Critical race theory explores and identifies the role of institutional racism and thus recognizes inequality of opportunity for minoritized students, such as Syrian YAR. There is a need to radically address the systemic problems found in educational institutions which normalize inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The current approaches to integration, especially through education policy, ironically serve to exclude. Research contradicts the deficit model and the 'neediness' of refugee students illustrating that their struggle stems from the system and not their lack of ambition (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018; Maraj et al., 2022; Razak, 2004).

Both CRT and the Capabilities approach marry well to uncover the structural factors, which may impede marginalized groups from accessing opportunities and pursuing their life goals. This dissertation integrates both frameworks to enable consideration of micro as well as macro perspectives, which are useful in examining diverse ways refugees experience exclusion. Accounting for the YAR subjective level decision making and capacities enhances research knowledge on their resettlement experience because it allows for a comprehensive view of life after migration from the perspective of refugees themselves. Research confirms that exercising agency or capability is contingent on the structural environments which govern, and which subsequently determine, the freedom to make choices. Individual motivation and choice are not enough when faced with systemic obstacles. Although people are dynamic beings guided by subjective preferences, their life goals change, contingent on social, economic, and political conditions. Progress through AE for YAR is impacted by structural forms of exclusion and presumptions that all students possess the individual capacities to thrive in AE. Together, CRT and CA appropriately serve to ascertain the structural, as well as agentic, components of the marginalised refugee student's academic experience in Québec.

Chapter 4

Methodology

a) Narrative Inquiry

For this research study, a qualitative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) was employed to explore refugee youth's experiences and the meaning that is attributed to these experiences. As Oliver (1998) notes, Narrative Inquiry, positioned in the ontological stance of constructivism, is empowering as it allows for research that is "on, for and with" the people who are the focus of the study (pg. 256), therefore fostering a relationship built on trust, which is an essential part of an interpretive qualitative methodology (Morse et al., 2002). This research methodology allows for the development of a caring rapport between researcher and participant, building on confidence as a fundamental element of the process. Narrative Inquiry allows for a more insightful understanding of participants' experiences by giving space to the subjectivity essential to understanding individual experiences; that whatever the individual says is accepted as their truth, based on their lived experience, influenced by social, cultural, familial, and historical elements (Bell, 2002;

Clandinin, 2006; Gergen, 1985; Lindsay & Schwind, 2016; Oliver, 1998). Narratives provide researchers with a framework full of valuable stories which paint a picture of the ways humans experience their world and social reality (Arnett, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007) bearing in mind their complexities (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

I chose Narrative Inquiry because it allows the researcher to go beyond the participants' words and position data collected concerning the broader processes (Merriam, 2002). This methodology is about contextualizing and understanding the participants' perspectives (Gergen, 1985). Syrian YAR shared their stories voicing their struggles and needs in the AE system. Narrative inquiry allowed for research to enhance learning and understanding about the experiences of Syrian YAR who attended AE schools in Montreal, rather than to make predictions about a phenomenon. Through their dialogue, they revealed their aspirations of resettling in their new home in Canada. Given the gap in the literature, the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method facilitated gathering rich data from the research questions, enabling participants to focus on the predetermined questions while still offering an opportunity to provide some additional information and clarify their responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I paid special attention to the protection of my participants as relating past experiences could have induced bad (traumatic) memories (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). Moreover, as a researcher, I recognized that my values and perceptions played a role in the study findings (Munhall, 2001).

Measures were taken to ensure a sense of trust during interviews with all 41 participants. Gupa maintains that there are certain criteria used by qualitative researchers to demonstrate the trustworthiness of a study, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (1981). Processes to ensure confirmability in my study included addressing researcher bias, reflexivity, and thorough descriptions of the research method and analysis procedures (Krefting, 1991). Transferability was addressed through a detailed description of the phenomenon under study, explicit references to the study data, and descriptions of participant demographics. Moreover, through the detailed description of the study's geographic setting (AE centers), transferability was ensured as social experiences must be studied within their natural setting (Polit & Beck, 2008) which is fundamental to interpretive research assumptions that life experiences cannot be separated from their socio-historical context. Therefore, contextual variables, including

geographic location and study setting in my qualitative research took place in naturalistic settings even if that could limit the generalizability of conclusions.

All names of students referred to in this dissertation are pseudonyms and all practitioners are referred to by a number from 1-12 to maintain anonymity. My attempt to be authentic with the student participants involved greeting the Syrian students in my limited Arabic and speaking with them about my years living in Lebanon. As a French citizen, my fluency in the French language and culture cultivated a sense of ease among the group of Francophone practitioners. To establish credibility, I created an atmosphere of confidence and promoted honesty when I engaged with my participants. This sense of safety was accomplished during the data analysis process by a thorough review of each participant's transcript, checking for similarities and differences among respondents (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Moreover, strategies to establish credibility included feedback from study participants, as well as my reporting of the study findings verbatim from the perspective of participants under study (Shenton, 2004). I ensured honesty and minimized any threats to my study's internal legitimacy (Lewis, 2009; Morse et al., 2002) by verifying the accuracy of the study data so as not to diverge from descriptions given by my participants or mistake their experiences.

b) <u>Positionality</u>

I recognized and considered where I was situated in my research, careful not to project my voice as a mother, daughter, sister, teacher, or researcher, and was mindful of others' meaningmaking. I developed my research relationship with participants based on who I am, that is, my life experiences, my ethnicity, my professional background, my accent, my gender, the colour of my skin, that is, my sense of self. Another researcher, with a different background, may have developed a different relationship with the participants. Researcher identities encompass their beliefs, perspectives and values which are often unspoken but are part of the research process (Ngo et al., 2014; Shapiro et al, 2018). As an academic, therefore, I accounted for and interrogated my perspectives regarding my research and gave a rigorous account of them. As a researcher, I am not a neutral observer. For this reason, I have an ethical responsibility to make explicit my positionality, acknowledge the complexity of the issues at hand, and consider the impact research scholarship has on the educational communities (Ngo et al., 2014; Shapiro et al, 2018), but also present findings

in ways that are accessible and relevant for the refugee students and practitioners with whom I worked on this study.

c) <u>Study Recruitment</u>

I joined the research study in 2019 after the funding was received from the *Fonds de recherche du Québec en Société et Culture,* therefore, formalities such as the approval by the Research Ethics Board of McGill University, and letters for permission sent to school boards regarding the study and its purpose, were already arranged. These letters also sought permission to contact and interview the educators (teachers, principals, social /psychoeducators and guidance/career advisors) which was accorded by the three school boards. Identification of educators interested in participating in the study was facilitated through contact by email and telephone with the AE school administrative heads. Informed consent is a necessary part of the research process (Bolderstone, 2012; Rowley, 2012). Documents to all participants were distributed to describe the study purpose, procedures, type of data to be collected, nature of the commitment, participant selection, potential risks and benefits, the right to withdraw, and a promise of confidentiality. The offer of an incentive of $25 for their participation and contact information were also provided. The participant names and those of educational institutes in my study remained anonymous.

Several school boards outside of the Montreal area were approached regarding their involvement in this study and despite repeated solicitation, there was no willingness. This lack of success may have been due to the high pressures on AE administration, staff turnover, and /or practitioners' inability to prioritize participation in a research project. The ethics approval of school boards led to direct communication with individual schools to request their permission to conduct interviews with their staff and students, in accordance with school policies. I joined the project at this time, as we sought participants. Despite repeated attempts with multiple schools, this did not lead to the participation of all schools contacted. The seeming lack of interest on the part of school boards begs the question, or may be indicative, of the value AE is given. Nonetheless, two schools were actively engaged in the recruitment of students and practitioners. Alongside recruitment efforts through schools, ten community organizations connected with Syrian refugees were also approached. These organizations were requested to post the research project recruitment material

to their social media pages, but this mode of recruitment did not lead to eligible participants for the study sample based on being Syrian, over age 18 without High School credentials, and having studied in AE centers in Québec. All those who did reach out were ineligible, having already completed high school, seeking to learn French or English or to get their Syrian qualifications recognized.

The participants were first identified by a goal-directed sampling approach (DiCiccoBloom & Crabtree, 2006). It was exceedingly difficult to find Syrian YAR who were willing and available to participate in this study. Some were not free because they had to juggle work and school, making it too tiring to give up their free time. Others had been solicited by the media because of the interest in the Syrian refugee crisis which for some participants was a reason to avoid any more focus on them. To increase student participation, one AE school permitted the presentation of the research project to all their francization classes and adult general education classes. Despite some students indicating interest to participate on the day of the presentation, no eligible students came forth for an interview. Accordingly, this mode of recruitment did not lead to the involvement of YAR participants. Ultimately a snowballing tactic (Browne, 2005; Creswell, 2007) was used to recruit based on snowballing so that participant connections wherein a friend told a friend, and so on, and so on was the only method used to find Syrian YAR participants. The interviews started in 2019. The coronavirus pandemic consequently halted further planned contact with school practitioners and YAR students because the school chose not to continue facilitating access to support students' transition to online learning. Due to the travel constraints caused by COVID-19, interviews after March 2020 took place via social distancing on Zoom video. All interviews with practitioners, and all but five interviews with students, were completed by the time of the shutdown due to the pandemic.

d) Participant Sample

This study was comprised of 15 YAR men and 14 YAR women. These 29 student participants were between 15-21 years old upon arrival in Canada either through the GAR program or the PSR program in Montreal. Almost 75% of the Syrian YAR participants spent years in a country of asylum, five participants lived all their lives in Gulf countries, and three transited

through another country for brief periods. Although the participants had diverse trajectories when they arrived in Canada, they came to Québec between 2015 – 2018 via asylum countries including Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Syria, and the USA. While some students stayed in these countries for only weeks, others stayed for years, impacting their education dramatically. Of the student participants, the level of education completed was wide-ranging from grade 5 to grade 11. Their level of disrupted education varied from none to four years. One student explained that she was not allowed to go to school in Lebanon because her parents worried for her safety. Another student shared that he could not go to school in Jordan due to schooling costs and because he needed to work to help his family survive. One student arrived in Canada via the USA having attended school in the UAE, with no disrupted education and an advanced level of English.

Although there was diversity within the refugee sample group, including gender, class, socio-economic levels and religion, these variations were not considered for this study. This thesis focused on the post-resettlement aspirations of these refugee students despite their varying preresettlement journeys to Canada. All the Syrian YAR participants had high aspirations which were geared towards higher education to prepare for professional careers such as medicine and engineering. Some went to lengths to complete their high school diploma as fast as possible, others decided to take time off schooling to help their family financially. Based on the lengthy and challenging process of attaining their High School diploma, many students decided to adjust their career ambitions to study, for example, interior decorating or mechanics. Nonetheless, it is important that refugee individuality be recognized, and their differences legitimized rather than lump all refugees into a homogenous category as mere victims (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Almost all students were living with immediate family at the time of the interviews. Their knowledge of the official Canadian languages, English or French, varied on arrival; however, the majority of the students had none to basic levels. A few students only had advanced levels of English. Most students were also working at the time of the study. The interviews were in the language of their choice, English, French, or Arabic (with a translator) and held at AE centers.

Additionally, practitioner participation in this study involved 12 AE professionals who support the educational journey of Syrian YAR. The study sample included teachers (5) and

nonteaching professionals such as psychoeducator/social workers (3), guidance/career counselors (3), and school administration (1). All 12 interviews were held in the practitioner's office or classroom at AE centers and were carried out in French. None of the practitioners had a refugee background. While all practitioners were white Quebecois francophones, only one was of immigrant (Arabic) background who shared that he felt he could connect with the students as a role model. He also shared that he was able to understand his Syrian refugee students thanks to their cultural similarities. One practitioner, a psychoeducator, seemed very tired during the interview and cried as she explained how difficult her task was with little staff support.

e) <u>Data Collection Methods and Procedure</u>

Interviews are the primary tool to collect data in a Narrative Inquiry study (Polit & Beck, 2008). Interview questions were developed following the theoretical framework of this research (Bowen, 2005; Laverty, 2003). Participants consented to the audio recordings of the interviews which were held face-to-face in a quiet setting, often lasting 90 minutes. Using in-depth, openended, pre-established semi-structured research questions, the dialogue was promoted (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Broad narrative prompts and intermittent follow-up questions (Bernard, 2017) offered an opportunity to provide some additional information and clarify participant responses. Interviewees were asked to introduce themselves initially. Questions focused on the supports, challenges and needed support services within AE. Notetaking during discussion (Basit, 2003) allowed for comparing summaries with the audio recordings during the analysis stage. Although YAR interviewees were given the option to speak in either Arabic, English or French, all of the students, bar two, chose to have the interview in English. All interviews were conducted over 2019-2020. It is important to note that only 5 YAR interviews were not face-to-face but were online using Zoom. No differences were found in the narratives of the 5 YAR interviews online, in terms of sentiments and perspectives shared, compared to in-person interviews. All names of students referred to in this dissertation are pseudonyms and all practitioners are referred to by a number from 1 to 12 to maintain anonymity. Proper management including accurate records of contacts and interviews was ensured (Polit & Beck, 2008; Shenton, 2004).

f) Data Analysis

This study adopted a thematic inductive approach, and an iterative process of coding themes (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Bowen, 2005; Clark & Braun, 2018; Creswell, 2011; Polit & Beck, 2008). The thematic analysis was by the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Although thematic analysis is appropriate for both inductive and deductive data, the research coding of inductive data was supported through this analytical tool to produce themes both explicit and implicit (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, et al., 2016; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The thematic narrative analysis method involves initially identifying and reporting patterns of meaning in the data (Reissman, 2008). Given that this is not a linear process, I referred back and forth to the data throughout the entire analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Audio files of interviews and notes taken were transcribed before analysis. All data in French and Arabic were transcribed into English. All logged data were reviewed through multiple readings to become familiar with narrative content and develop preliminary ideas and thoughts (Reissman, 2008).

Taking notes and engaging with the findings from a holistic perspective revealed links with the research questions and theoretical framework which led to identifying codes or meaning units (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of coding data through identifying and providing brief descriptions for meaning units led to grouping codes into potential categories and developing possible themes (Saldaña, 2013). The themes were developed and examined to determine relevance to coded units and to determine if these themes were meaningful within the context of the overall data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, et al., 2016; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Through repeated analysis, and reference to overall data and codes, descriptions and definitions for themes were generated and built upon (Patton, 1987). Lastly, through drafting the report, the analysis findings were discovered. Based on the findings, recommendations for necessary changes targeted to address the challenges YAR faces as students in the AE sector in Montreal were developed.

When engaging with all participants, a sense of authenticity was established and therefore, credibility through an atmosphere of confidence, promoting honesty. A sense of safety was also cultivated during the data analysis process by a thorough review of each participant's transcript, checking for similarities and differences among respondents (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Moreover, strategies to establish credibility included feedback from study participants, as well as

reporting of the study findings verbatim from the perspective of participants (Morehouse 2012; Shenton, 2004). Honesty was safeguarded while minimizing any threats to the study's internal legitimacy (Lewis, 2009; Morse et al., 2002) by verifying the accuracy of the study data so as not to diverge from descriptions given by participants nor mistake their experiences. To minimize misinterpretation and maintain credibility, transcripts of each participant's experience were reviewed and cross-checked to confirm capturing the essential information as well as to check for similarities among participant descriptions (Morrow, 2005). Transcribed data from audio tapes were listened to repeatedly, and field notes were reread, to reverify the data for accuracy (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Systematically documenting the research process, grounding the literature, and presenting points of view all added credibility to this qualitative research (Morrow, 2005).

Chapter 5

Manuscripts

Common Theme

The following are two published manuscripts, stemming from this study on Syrian YAR attending AE schools, which represent the views of all 41 participants in individual papers, one reflecting perspectives of 29 Syrian refugee learners in AE schools and the other of 12 AE practitioners who work with refugee students in Montreal, Québec. The two manuscripts contributing to this doctoral dissertation focus on the challenges facing Syrian YAR, in Montreal, attending school in the AE sector. Both papers discuss the needs of these students to manage the unfamiliarity of this education system in Québec. The commonality in the two manuscripts originates in the findings. The interviewees describe the difficulty Syrian YAR learners had navigating a foreign education system which ultimately influenced the aspirations and life chances of these students; and their hope to complete their High School diploma in the Québec education system. The challenges underlined in both manuscripts are linked to the francization program and its ineffectiveness for the academic learning needed in AE. Both papers relate the issues YAR faced with the AE pedagogy of independent learning, and the difficulty these refugee students had functioning in an education system, and culture, foreign to them. All participants emphasized the

need for more government support for AE institutions to provide school material, as well as teaching and tutor support staff.

Manuscript number one is a book chapter entitled Shifting aspirations: The experience of Syrian refugees in adult education in Québec. It was written by Maraj, A., Sherab, D., Calderón Moya, M., and Ghosh, R. and was published in *Education for refugees and forced im/migrants across time and context*, by eds Wiseman & Damaschke-Deitrick. Emerald, in 2023. This paper addresses the experiences of 29 Syrian YAR students who reported facing difficulties as they traversed the AE system in their new life post-resettlement in their host country. The findings narrate their transition from asylum to resettlement and how this life experience influenced their expectations and ambitions for their new life in their new home as they sought academic integration. This manuscript drew upon the insecurities stemming from the destabilizing journey Syrian refugees endured while fleeing conflict in their homeland. From an academic angle, this chapter calls upon a Migration/Aspiration framework referencing Amartya Sen and the Capability Approach. Additionally, Critical Race Theory provided a theoretical perspective to understand the level of disruption YAR encountered in the pursuit of their education due to cultural and structural barriers. The qualitative methodology used to collect the data centred on an interview protocol using open-ended semi-structured questions. This methodology provided YAR with a voice to attest to their journey to sanctuary and to the challenges they faced once arrived. This manuscript argued for further attention to the YAR subgroup experiences which illustrated the limited post resettlement education options that were available to them. The contribution herein is significant in that education policymakers are provided an opportunity to understand how the protracted disruption to YAR life affected attending AE schooling, adding to their distress. The paper informs stakeholders such as the Québec Ministry of Education of the Syrian YAR crisis (in terms of academic achievement) as it plays out in this province. Indeed, the lack of necessary consideration of these refugee students may lead to their being left to the waste side in their place of sanctuary, inculcating a greater tragedy than the one they left behind in their war-torn home.

Manuscript two focuses on the perspectives of the 12 practitioners who worked closely with Syrian YAR students. This manuscript is entitled Reflecting on the experiences of Syrian refugee young adults in adult education in Québec: The practitioners' perspective**.** It was written

by Maraj, A., Calderón Moya, M., Sherab, D., and Ghosh, R. and was published in 2022 by the *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*. This manuscript provides data on the experiences and challenges faced by AE practitioners such as classroom teachers, principals, social workers/psychoeducators, and career/guidance counsellors supporting refugee-background students. Through open-ended semi-structured interviews, this qualitative methodological study offered the opportunity for AE practitioners to share their experiences, challenges and concerns working with YAR. Narrative inquiry gave voice to practitioners who revealed strategies needed to enable this Syrian refugee student population to flourish and attain their objectives. The practitioners were unanimous in their call for more attention from education policymakers to provide the support lacking, and desperately needed, to enable YAR to reach academic achievement. Critical race theory and Sen's Capabilities approach established the conceptual framework which guided the analysis of the findings for this publication. This paper supports the voices of YAR in that it gathers an understanding of the effectiveness of AE approaches for these students, based on the insights provided by the practitioners. These institutional agents concur that the AE student body has changed demographically most recently, especially with the arrival of Syrian YAR. Practitioners reiterate that this reality must be taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education because as it is, the current AE approach excludes, albeit unintentionally, at-risk populations such as YAR.

The findings presented in both manuscripts suggest that although AE offers a second chance to adult students to go back to school, this Québec education system involuntarily ignores side-lined groups such as refugees, because of inattentiveness on the part of policymakers and school staff. Critical race theory guides the analysis of the data presented in both manuscripts, along with reference to refugee agency from Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach to reveal the foundational issues in the AE education system that need to be confronted. The findings reveal the systemic issues in Québec societal structures, which create an unfair playing field for YAR. Navigating a foreign education system such as the AE system, without having completed secondary level education, needing to learn one or two new languages, and with no exposure to independent learning is particularly challenging, as reiterated by both Syrian YAR students and AE practitioners in both manuscripts. The essence of these papers is that all 41 interviewees acquiesce that the Québec education policy makers need to support YAR and their practitioners in the AE system.

Manuscript One

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Chapter 6

Shifting aspirations: The experience of Syrian refugees in adult education in Québec

Arianne Maraj, Domenique Sherab, Milagros Calderon-Moya, and Ratna Ghosh

Chapter Abstract

Transnational shifts experienced by Syrian refugee young adults disrupt their lives. Many start their journey as children, transition into adolescents often in countries of asylum, and for some have the opportunity to resettle as young adults in countries such as Canada where the dream of rebuilding their lives appears possible. Too old (over 16) for the traditional school cycle, these young adults are encouraged into adult education (AE) as their only choice to complete their high school diplomas to obtain minimum wage jobs or continue on to higher education. Their progress through this education system continues their destabilization, particularly in terms of their aspirations, hopes and dreams. We focus on the educational journeys of refugee young adults in particular because they have largely been forgotten by policies and programs for refugee integration in countries of first asylum and resettlement contexts. Drawing upon 29 interviews with Syrian refugee young adults in Quebec and using a theoretical framework of migration/aspirations and critical race theory, we highlight the disruption that these young adults experienced prior to their arrival in Quebec and show how this is perpetuated in their education after their arrival, demonstrating ongoing disruption rather than stability.

Key words:
aspirations, agency, im/migrants, refugees, critical race theory, marginalization, disruption, equity and equality in education, inclusion

Subject index terms: adult education, missed school, Syrians, refugee education, disrupted education

Introduction

Aaron was 14 when he left Hasakah, the capital of Al-Hasakah governorate in northeastern Syria. He always loved school and despite the conflict he managed to finish grade 10 before his family made the difficult decision to leave and move to Lebanon. Like many other Syrian refugee families in Lebanon, Aaron's family struggled: unable to attend school or find decent work, they ran through their savings quickly after 6 months. Ultimately, they made the decision to leave again, this time to a country in West Africa where some of their relatives were already living. Here Aaron initially tried to go to school but found it difficult without strong abilities in English. He decided to, as he says, 'work, work, work' during the day and his mother tried to teach him English in the evenings. When they finally made it to Canada, Aaron was just shy of 18 and was not allowed to enter a traditional secondary school being above the mandatory age of education (16). Through the advice of his local school board, he made his way to an Adult Education (AE) centre where he was told it would take one and half years for him to complete the requisite courses to obtain his high school diploma. He was excited: he would finally be able to get back on track to study towards his dream of being a doctor. Yet, his time in AE did not go as planned. Faced with many challenges and continual delays moving through AE, he ultimately decided to go into construction to at least ensure an economically stable life.

Aaron is one of 29 Syrian refugee students with whom we spoke attending AE in Quebec. 'Aged out' of mandatory education, AE, viewed predominantly as a place for 'dropouts,' was their only option to continue their education. AE was not what they expected. Despite refugee students' enthusiasm and motivation to advance, AE turned out to be a continuation of disrupted education. This chapter seeks to contribute to literature focused on the education of refugee young adults; to highlight the transnational shifts in, and the disruption to, the lives of Syrian refugee young adults many of whom start their journey out of their homes as children, transition into adolescents (often in countries of first asylum) and end up as young adults in a country of resettlement. Theirs is a story of shifting, starting in Syria and eventually leading them across the world to Quebec, Canada. Notwithstanding the disruption to their lives, these refugee young adults cultivate life goals along their transcontinental journey through geographical space and time, influenced by social, economic, and political conditions but nonetheless are guided by subjective aspirations (Boccagni, 2017; Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2012; Van Heelsum, 2017).

Globally, very few forced migrants are chosen to resettle permanently, contingent on the willingness of receiving countries to accept (Shapiro et al., 2018). However, Canada has shown an exemplary humanitarian position in tripling its number of refugee intake since 2015 for Syrian refugees (Alhmidi, 2020). Our study focuses on the journeys of young adult refugees who were welcomed but largely forgotten by policies and integration programs in resettlement contexts (Morrice, et al., 2020; Bonet, 2018). Specifically, we aim to highlight how Syrian refugee young adults continue to experience disruption to their education in their lives post-resettlement in Canada. We contend that the pressures and obstacles Syrian refugee youth encounter attending school at AE institutions greatly impede their sense of inclusion and significantly build frustrations and isolation. We argue as well that the environment they have settled into influences their career aspirations and life chances.

Indeed, as Mohamed Afify (2020) reiterates, Syrian refugee young adults have resettled in Canada while rising attitudes of Islamophobia (Beirich & Buchanan, 2018) and xenophobia (Bricker, 2019) fury throughout the Western world; a time where "[a]nxieties about migration and resettlement have fueled a rise in anti-establishment and nationalist sentiment among voters

in a number of countries" (Shapiro et al, 2018 p. 2). School and societal experiences therefore have a bearing on how refugee students acculturate as they integrate and can negatively impact the realization of their aspirations. We assert that students face these challenges because the AE sector in Quebec was not envisioned for those who are not the traditional type of mature adult students, usually from the dominant Francophone or Anglophone groups and are not familiar with the education system here. Consequently, disruption continues as they journey to complete a high school diploma, in a foreign land with little to no understanding of the Quebec educational system, and as allophones, with little to no knowledge of Canada's official languages.

Theoretical framework: Migration/Aspiration Theory

Considerable research on refugee resettlement focuses on the forced migrants' integration into their new home; however, understanding refugee integration through state rhetoric and outcomes (Ager & Strang, 2008) disregard the refugee perspective (Van Heelsum, 2017). With the aim of adapting, acculturating, assimilating, and incorporating, integration policies tend to conform newcomers to a dominant set of values and behaviours for them to "fit in" (Damaschke- Deitrick & Bruce, 2019; Phillimore & Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017; Valtonen, 1998). This policy driven assumption is oriented towards goals set by the welcoming nation while disregarding the previous and current experiences of newcomers gained in and out the new country unnoticed (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020; Carrera, & Atger, 2011; Klarenbeek, 2019).

Refugees, although forced to migrate, show agency when they decide to move from one country to another, often dependent on having access to varying resources and capacity from which to choose (de Haas, 2021; Sen, 1999). Studies on refugee youth show that despite academic obstacles encountered, education remains the focus of their aspirations (Bonet, 2016; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2012; Stevenson & Willot, 2007). To better understand life after migration from the perspective of refugees themselves (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Van Heelsum 2017) researchers consider migration, whether voluntary or forced, as a social process which relates to individuals' capabilities and aspirations (de Hass, 2011). Indeed, Amartya Sen posits in his Capabilities approach (1999) that agency allows an individual to seek, without restriction, what he/she values and aspires to accomplish in life (Walker, 2005). From this perspective, if the refugee is understood as an agent with aspirations, then greater regard is allowed to them in terms of decisions, reasons, and choices to pursue varying paths (Van Heelsum, 2017). Conversely, research has found that when a refugee loses hope of reaching his/her goals and/or developing capabilities this can influence one's feeling of inclusion in a new society (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Spencer & Charsley 2016; Van Heelsum 2017). Moreover, implementing agency, or capability, must be understood within the structural settings of the new host society which rule and regulate freedom to choose (de Hass, 2011). Refugees have agency but must make choices within structures (Morrice, et al., 2020). Critical race theory, as explained below, is an analytical tool which provides insight into societal structures to examine the educational exclusion of refugees.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

As a well-established theoretical framework, CRT examines the relationship between racism and power based on the notion that race determines economic prospects of individuals, influences politics and shapes the conduct of law enforcement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). This theory raises questions about fairness and provides a framework to examine the educational

outcomes of certain groups resulting from social and institutional structures and forces rather than intentional biases (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2020). Inequality in academic achievement is linked to structural factors which reproduce and legitimize inequalities in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) resulting in dropouts, failures, and exclusion of marginalized groups (Anyon, 2014). Moreover, marginalized groups are often thought of as socially deficient (Crenshaw, 1990). Schools are structured on claims that academic success is achieved by merit, that a student has choice, agency, and motivation. Indeed, liberal democratic assumptions promote academic achievement contingent on arduous work only (Zamudio et al., 2011); an idea challenged by CRT.

Education is not an equalizer and cultural differences in students' educational performance and life chances must be recognized (Yosso, 2005). Race is understood as a social paradigm creating a racial hierarchy found in structural and political systems and is used to determine who is worthy of opportunities and who is not (Razak, 2004; Said, 1995). The French hegemony in Quebec participates in the racialization of minorities because control of social and economic structures by the culture in power stems from a belief that everyone has equal opportunity, ignorant of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic domination minorities endure. Therefore, understanding the way racialization affects the learning and educational needs of non-dominant im/migrants like Syrian refugee young adults, signifies that schools must take accountability and endorse solutions that promote an equitable chance for the marginalized (Ianinska et al., 2013). Both CRT and the Capabilities theory marry well to uncover the structural factors which may impede marginalized groups from accessing opportunities and pursuing their life goals. This paper integrates theoretical frameworks to enable consideration of micro and macro perspectives (De Hass, 2011) useful in examining diverse ways refugees experience exclusion.

Background: Syrian refugees in the world and Canada

The ongoing Syrian war has reached its 10th year. More than half of Syria's pre-conflict population is still displaced, with 13.5 million Syrians displaced inside the country and beyond. According to UNHCR, 6.7 million Syrian refugees have been hosted in 128 countries of which 80% migrated to neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Turkey has exceptionally supported the Syrian exodus by welcoming 3.6 million refugees, mainly in the city of Istanbul. Lebanon followed with 1 million refugees. Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt host together over 1 million displaced Syrian (Todd, 2019). It is worth mentioning that the history of migration in the Middle East is based on a solid tradition to generously grant asylum to strangers in need, with Syria being a preeminent case in welcoming Armenians, Kurds, and Palestinians (Todd, 2019).

Since 2015, Canada has taken a leading role in resettling a historically high number of Syrian refugees, admitting over 74,000 individuals between 2015-2020 (Alhmidi, 2020). Most Syrian refugees have been welcomed to Canada through the Operation Syrian Refugees with people arriving either through the government sponsored program, the privately sponsored program or the Blended Visa Office Referred program which is a public-private sponsorship partnership. Regardless of their admissions category, Syrians received permanent residence on arrival and were sent to each of the 10 provinces and three territories of Canada, with the majority settling in Ontario and Quebec, and thus had access to the same rights and entitlements as citizens, except the right to vote. After three years of physical presence within the country, they can apply for citizenship.

Although welcoming refugees is a policy of the Canadian government, refugee 'integration' falls to provincial governments in Canada's decentralized system (Jeram & Nicolaides 2018). Depending on their admissions category, resettled refugees receive services from either the government or their sponsors for their first year after which they are integrated into mainstream services. Children and youth have access to schools on arrival, which are provincially controlled. Research suggests that provincial authorities in charge of education were ill prepared to support the academic needs of Syrian refugee youth when they arrived, and this is notably the case in Quebec (Ratković et al., 2017). This is despite consistent research attesting to the importance of incorporating inclusive policies and practices in school systems (Ghosh et al., 2019). This is the case of newcomers who are not of the dominant culture, such as non-white refugee youth, because of how such students can be racialized, which can breed insecurity and exclusion (Sanchez & Romero, 2010). This emphasizes the importance of being prepared with policies and programs to support refugee needs (Ratković, 2017) and we would add to also support their strengths. Because so much of refugees' experiences are provincial, we consider the specific context of French Quebec, where our participants are located, and which has several differences from the rest of English-speaking Canada.

Quebec for les Québécois?

Quebec is the only French-speaking province in Canada. Since the 1800s, nationalism for the Québécois people has been a battle to be recognized as a distinct political and cultural entity within Canada (Theriault, 2001). The differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada are often espoused. This is no less so in the case of immigration. Although the majority of Canadians value diversity, immigration, and globalization, including refugee intake, only 50% of the Quebec population agree with Canada's plan for welcoming refugees (Anderson & Coletto, 2017). In 2019, the newly elected Quebec Premier Francois Legault advocated for the restoration of Quebec nationalism, emphasizing the term 'popular' to justify his relentless majoritarianism policies. With great confidence, Legault declared to the Canadian Press news agency that there is no shame in being nationalist (Valiante, 2019) and, furthermore, that it was time to 'set some rules' to show how things are done in Quebec (Henriquez, 2019). This government therefore promotes an ideology for the supremacy of a particular group, resonating with the famous Quiet revolution slogan 'masters in our own house.' With an agenda to prioritize local businesses and to assert the Quebec identity, Legault intends to 'nationalize nationalism' by bringing to the forefront policies on social and cultural boundaries (Dufour, 2019). Clear in Quebec politics, policies and practices is the suggestion that minorities are a threat to the majority. The assumption being that by enhancing and concretizing Quebec values and distinctiveness, diversity will subsequently be curbed.

Politics, policies, practices: a problem

In favour of patriotic choices and to secure Québécois control over migration, in 2019 the provincial government created Bill 9 to limit economic immigration. Through a selective process, applicants are chosen if judged acceptable based on Quebec's official language (French) and if their moral values are aligned with those of the dominant culture (Assemblée Nationale du Québec, 2019). Furthermore, Bill 9 resulted in the withdrawal of 18,000 applications for immigration to Quebec putting families already separated in further distress (CBC, 2019). It is a step backwards to reduce immigration by 20 % as making this political choice works counter to economic development needs in this province due to the significant lack of labor. Counter to Quebec's policies, the federal government has put in place a program to grant permanent

residence status to 90,000 international students recently graduated from Canadian universities to boost immigration (Keung, 2021).

For non-white, mostly Muslim Syrian refugees, the socio-cultural climate in Quebec is indeed worrisome. The law to uphold secularism or laicité, Bill 21, means absence of religion whereby all 'conspicuous religious symbols' (such as the Muslim hijab or chador or Jewish kippah) are banned from public institutions, including in primary and secondary schools. This law, created in 2019, is veiled behind the idea of liberalism and freedom of religion, the separation of state and religion. Legault suggests that before choosing Quebec, a newcomer must remember that this province respects women and therefore no religious symbols are allowed in public service (Shingler, 2019) evoking a policy of rescue (Kyriakides et al., 2018) which proclaims that Bill 21 ostensibly protects subservient Muslim women forced to wear a head scarf imposed by their religion. Quebec's approach to laicité is like France's far-right party leader Marine Le Pen who acquiesces to the need to save Muslim women (Breeden, 2019); however, Muslim women have not asked to be saved. Certainly, this laicité law not only complicates the integration of Syrian refugees but is considered contentious, racist, and discriminatory as some Muslims claim it disproportionally targets Muslim women, specifically teachers who choose to wear the hijab as an act of faith at their workplace (Saad, 2019). The fact that many of these refugees are Muslim adds to their exclusion and epitomizes their 'otherness' as Islamophobia is on the rise (Bonet, 2018).

Additionally, a recent Human Rights Commission study (CDPDJ) placed Quebec at the top of all provinces in Canada in terms of discrimination and racism (2019). The same study reported that visible minorities are unjustly and randomly targeted by police (CDPDJ, 2019). Amir Attaran, professor at Ottawa University, asserts that systemic racism can no longer be ignored, calling Quebec the 'Alabama of the North' (2021). A study by the organization Femme Justice found that hate crimes and Islamophobia have increased since 2017, after the wanton killings of innocent worshipers in a mosque in Quebec City by a nationalist Quebecois youth (Saad, 2019). Clearly, state-based restrictions on religion have a causal impact on social conflict and discrimination (El Karoui, 2016). Within such a socio-political climate, the culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse Syrian refugee youth in Quebec are caught at an intersection (Kundnani, 2017), adding to an already wearisome challenge to resettlement and their aspirations for a better life.

Refugee education in Quebec

In Quebec, education is based along French and English language lines; however, French is the language of business and institutions, legally established in 1977 by the Charter of the French language, Bill 101. With very few exceptions, education is in French in all public schools in Quebec. The Ministry of Immigration, Language, and Integration promotes and provides for the learning of French, as well as Quebec's culture and values through language classes (classe d'accueil/welcome class) in both elementary and secondary schools with the intention to gradually integrate newcomer students into regular classrooms. For those 16 and over, a similar program is offered (*francisation* /Frenchification) free of cost. As of age 16, schooling is no longer mandatory in French; however, to obtain any professional certification a certain level of knowledge of French is required.

Students who arrive in the province above the age of 16 have the option to continue their education through AE institutions, which are not subject to the language law. AE institutions have an important mandate to serve the adult student who returns to obtain academic credits

required to complete their high school diploma and education beyond high school into postsecondary studies; however, AE students are not prioritized in terms of admittance into postsecondary studies in Quebec. In the last 30 years, the Quebec government has noted that the demographic profile of the AE student population is getting younger (DEAAC 2009). This could be due to the high rate of high school dropouts in Quebec (CTV, 2018) who return to AE as a 'drop in' centre. Unlike in secondary schools, the AE student is encouraged to learn at their own pace, independently, with minimal need for teacher support (Villatte & Marcotte, 2013). Compared to other levels of education, AE is not prioritized in terms of funding and resources (Maraj et al., forthcoming). The participants for this study are young adult refugees who have arrived in Canada too old (over 16) to be admitted to primary or secondary schools, and yet still have not completed high school. AE becomes their only option. Compared to other resettlement contexts such as France, where there is no AE system, or US, where school is highly privatized, the very existence of AE is positive for refugee students. Yet they have not 'dropped out' as AE students are commonly perceived but rather 'aged out' and see themselves obliged to learn in a school system they don't know (Potvin et al., 2014). After experiencing disruption in their education prior to arriving in Canada, our research aims to comprehend how the education system and socio-cultural environment in Quebec influence these young adults' aspirations and life chances.

Methodology

Our research was conducted with 29 Syrian refugee young adults (18-24 years of age) in AE centres in Quebec over 2019-2021. We obtained ethics approval from McGill university. There were 14 women and 15 male participants. Our hour-long interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, allowing for natural dialogue from participants. We offered a CAD$25 incentive for their participation. We conducted collaborative narrative analysis through an iterative process of inductive and deductive coding of themes. Funded by a research grant from the Quebec provincial government, our research team consisted of five female immigrants to Canada. We utilize a general framework of migration/aspirations and CRT to focus on education, future hopes for employment to discover the ongoing disruption to refugee young adults' lives and the consequent challenges refugee youth face obtaining their goals.

Findings

To understand the aspirations and frustrations students hold it is important to situate their experiences in AE in a continuum with their previous educational experiences in Syria and the countries they were in before arriving in Canada. We present our findings below grouped around their (disrupted) educational experiences in Syria, in countries of asylum and then in Canada.

(Disrupted) Education in Syria

Whether students experienced disrupted education in Syria is dependent on where they lived and their exposure to the conflict. Several students indicated that they continued to go to school right up until the moment they left. Abeer told us that:

> *"I stayed studying in Syria until the last minute even before I travelled. I finished the year I was in before moving to Lebanon. I finished 8th grade."*

Ikhlas from Swaida, a predominately Druze (minority group) area in Syria, told us that she did not experience disrupted education in Syria:

"…I was going to school, the whole time."

Hana was also able to continue her schooling in Aleppo despite the conflict but mentioned that the circumstances of going to school during a war were difficult:

"…it was very difficult, all the final exams…trimester exams… without electricity, without internet. It was hard."

Others faced immense difficulty because of the conflict, with their homes and schools destroyed. Caleb, from Daraa in the south of Syria, for example, experienced significant disruption to his education as this town was under intense bombardment for a long time.

"It was very hard to be honest. It was a lot of pressure and a headache. You didn't know how you could live later and if you'll continue your studies. You can expect (the) worse and something else can happen. You'd lose family or not continue your studies. A lot of schools got destroyed in the war."

Caleb mentioned how a school would be destroyed which would inevitably impact the ability to study there, forcing students to travel further to go to another school. With very few schools in the area, accessing them was difficult. He said, consequently, "I slacked with school a lot because of the circumstances of the war" but in fact, Caleb showed much resolve in going to any school he could, one day for humanities and then the next for science. Similarly, Samar and Jameela mentioned how going to school in Aleppo and Damascus, respectively, depended on the situation in their areas:

"One week we went and then the other week you can't. Sometimes a month passes, and we cannot go to school." (Jameela).

Mariyah, Jameela's sister, mentioned how her family was internally displaced, moving from place to place, and how this impacted their schooling as well:

"… yes, we missed a lot of days because we moved from place to place because of the war… we lost a lot of our friends."

Reem's house was destroyed by a bomb which led her family to flee and stop school. Depending on the intensity of the conflict in their respective areas, students faced varying threats to their lives and consequent barriers to continue their education in Syria. This has been widely reported in other research about Syrians' access to education during the war, with schools in rebel-held areas going to ground with over 7,000 schools being destroyed or abandoned (UNICEF 2021; Popplewell, 2018; Armstrong, 2016; Ashawi, 2017).
In contrast to the perception that people immediately flee to other countries for safety, many families moved from their homes to other cities or areas within Syria before finally seeking asylum elsewhere. They stayed for shorter or longer periods of time in Syria depending on their family circumstances, with students not always being able to continue their education there.

This is a strong reminder that for many Syrian students, including some of those we spoke with, the disruption of their education started a decade ago.

(Disrupted) Education in country of asylum

Among our student group, their journeys from Syria to Canada varied although they were all refugees. In fact, there were four types of students. We have a minority of students who lived all their lives in Gulf countries (Mohamad, Tareq, Karim, Farrah, and Fadi). These students had largely not experienced disrupted education having been able to go to school as residents of the country where they lived. Another minority of our students reported that they only left Syria to come to Canada and, as such, only transited through another country for very brief periods of time (Samar, Emir, Karimah). These students reported to have experienced some disruption to their education in Syria, as noted above. Reflecting the typical journey of Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021) and refugees in general (Dryden-Peterson, 2016), most of our students spent years in a country of asylum where they stayed temporarily before being sent to Canada by UNHCR (Aaron, Reem, Naima, Mariyah, Hadi, Jameela, Abeer, Ikhlas, Hasan, Laila, Ibrahim, Abdul). Another large minority of students spent 6 months or less in a country of asylum (Lina, Ahmad, Amina, Omar, Yusuf, Roula, Hana, Caleb). Because of the different lengths of time students spent in the countries they found themselves in, the changing education policies there, and the expense associated with schooling, not everyone was able to continue their education. Within a week that her home was bombed in Syria, Reem and her family moved to Lebanon where she reports never leaving the house nor going to school. She says she tries not to remember most of that destabilizing time, instead seeking solace in English books, which she read vociferously. Having family in the US meant that she was brought up bi-lingually and loved the escape that books provided her. She stayed like this for four years until she came to Canada. Reem's experience is mirrored by Abeer, who having not experienced any disruption to her education in Syria, told us that she was eager to start studying in Lebanon but faced barriers to entry which made her think it would be better to return to Syria to continue with her studies, despite the conflict:

"I expected that I was going to study, I loved studying. Then I tried private schools and they did not accept me at all. I tried to go back to Syria for 9$_{th}$ grade so I can get the certificate, but my dad could not send me back."

Ibrahim, at 14, was led to believe that school in Lebanon was only for children, and not 'old' Syrians like him:

"I did not go to school while I was in Lebanon. I was working because Syrians were not allowed to study. At least "old" Syrians, I mean not in elementary school. From grade 7 and up; we were not allowed to study. Only kids. So, I was working with my dad."

Reem, Abeer and Ibrahim's experiences of facing barriers to enter school in a country of asylum like Lebanon is common. In 2014 it was reported that 64.29% of Syrian refugee children 6–14 years old were out of school and 92.26% of children 15–18 years old were out of school in Lebanon, clearly indicating the increased challenge for 'older' students (Watkins &

Zyck, 2014), consistent with refugee youth experiences in other contexts (Dryden-Peterson 2016). One of the major factors contributing to the low enrolment of refugee children in countries of first asylum in the early years of the conflict related to government restrictions on who could enroll, when and how (UNICEF 2015). As has been widely reported, another major factor that impacted refugee students' ability to go to school was the need to support family by working (UNICEF 2015; Chopra & Adelman 2017), as Aaron and Hadi explain:

"Because living there- look if I was working, my father is working, we will never survive there. We will always put money from our pockets, you know what I mean?" (Aaron). "No, I had to work…education is very hard." (Hadi)

All the five young men (Aaron, Hadi, Abdul, Caleb, Ibrahim) who spent years in a country of first asylum worked, whereas no young women reported to work. Existing data supports the gender division we see in our data with predominantly young men, rather than young women, going out to work to support their families. Many reports refer to the heightened fears about safety as a reason young girls remain at home (DeJong, et al., 2017; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). Those students who only stayed a brief time in a country of asylum indicated that they neither worked nor went to school and instead spent their time studying alone and preparing for their arrival to Canada, like Ahmad who mentioned:

"I was not in school, but I started by myself to improve my English..."

Hana mentioned something similar:

"No, we didn't go to school because it was really really expensive … so I didn't go to school, but I studied French…. I studied French myself."

In contrast to most students who were unable to continue their studies in countries of asylum, Roula, Naima, Hasan, Ikhlas, and Laila were lucky: they were able to go to school. So, when asked if he experienced disrupted education Hasan responded quickly referring to his age:

"I was at school, because...I was a kid in Lebanon, when we left Aleppo, I was like 10 years old." (Hasan).

Naima explained that after arriving in Lebanon her family went back and forth to Syria to collect things, including her school documentation so she could enroll in school in Lebanon where she attended a private Armenian school for four years, at first paid by her parents and then for the following years by scholarships, she received. Though she did experience some difficulties having to repeat a full grade to be able to learn in English, Naima spoke a lot about the support she received in the school she attended because of the differences in schooling styles between Syria and Lebanon and because of her need to improve her English when she found out she would be going to Canada. Naima's positive experience of school in a country of asylum differs drastically from the experience of other Syrian students in schools in countries of first asylum (Chopra & Adelman 2017), and refugee education elsewhere (Dryden-Peterson 2016).

Disrupted education in AE

On arrival students had varying capacities in English and French, from none to advanced. School was of primary importance to students and entry into the schooling system depended on their age. Students who arrived at 16 or younger were contacted by their local school boards to enroll them in language classes in a nearby school (Lina, Ahmad, Tareq, Karim, Farrah, Laila, Hasan, Abeer, Samar, Roula, Hana, Caleb, Emir, Jameela, Fadi). These students spent from one to three years in language courses, depending on their progress, and had varying experiences there. While Hasan found learning French frustrating, Abeer was happy to learn and gained support from her teachers.

Once students turn 16, they are eligible to move into AE and some schools encourage their allophone students to do this to be able to go at their own pace and not be dictated by the pace of the curriculum. However, some students were not properly explained the reason for their transition to AE, as Samar explains:

"I was expecting to go to a regular class…my teacher said that I was more improved than the rest of the class. One day, on my birthday, she said that I would be going to adult school. I had an idea of what it was, that it was about students who failed. I had that idea and was crying on my birthday and my friends were trying to comfort me. My parents thought that I got bad grades, and they started reprimanding me about my grades and it was a lot of pressure and very stressful."

Unlike Samar, Tareq and Ahmad already knew they did not want to stay in the French secondary school. They had done their research and discovered that it was possible to do AE in English.

"English is much better for us…we have more vocabularies and ability to study in English than French so… why to wait and waste another year in accueil? …learning the French language while studying… like, I do not want to risk my future … so I said, …let's do English." (Tareq)

In contrast to those under 16 who are guided into education on arrival, students over 16 are largely unattended to, left to discover their route back to education themselves (Reem, Naima, Mariyah, Hadi, Karimah, Ikhlas, Yusuf, Omar, Amina, Ibrahim, Mohamad, Abdul). For example, Reem's parents received a letter for her younger brother to enroll in school and nothing for Reem although in their eyes she should be in school at just 16. These students had to be active in finding how to get back to school. Some first went into French adult language classes, because of the importance of the French language in Quebec, and then found their way to AE, oftentimes in English.

Experiences in AE

Regardless of their experiences prior to their arrival in Canada, whether they were able to study in Syria, in the country they moved to or had to work, or whether they started in Quebec secondary schools or adult language courses, the students' experiences in AE were very similar and marked by challenges. After Abeer was transferred to a French AE centre because of her age,

she faced many challenges. In fact, before we even had a chance to ask her any questions, she spoke non-stop for 15 minutes to tell us everything that she had faced:

"I went through a lot of hardships. I explained to you a story of 4 years in less than 15 minutes, but I suffered a lot. I work fulltime and I finish school and I went to school. I am not a girl who just wants to have fun, go out and laugh. No, I am very… serious… I do not play. I want to work, I want to study, I want to graduate, and I am not coming to play in Canada. I am here to study. There is time to laugh and play but the most important thing is studying."

Many of the challenges Abeer faced are shared by other students we spoke with. These challenges impacted students' ability to go at their own pace and crucially progress within a reasonable period which impacted their aspirations and sense of self in relation to their friends and community. Some of the challenges students faced included being placed in low grade levels (Bonet, 2018), the independent learning pedagogical approach in AE which was very new and difficult, and scheduling issues, which we have explored elsewhere (Ghosh et al., 2022; Calderon Moya et al, forthcoming; Maraj et al., forthcoming). The challenges students faced through the school led many to shift from school to school, stop and start again and change what they were aspiring for. We will consider each in turn.

Placed in low levels

Having not experienced any disruption to her education in Syria, and having managed to complete grade 10, Karimah was confident in her academic abilities and yet when she went to speak with the AE advisor about being placed in classes:

"…the advisor told me that "we can't accept you now, we can't do anything for you, you have to take more English" … Like they don't look at your marks. I was in Syria; my marks were very good. But they did not look at it…if they did …they put me in higher level in Math. I didn't deserve to be in level 2."

Hadi had a similar experience. After four years in Lebanon where he was unable to study, he arrived in Canada ready to study and work. He took some English language courses to improve his abilities and then

"... in 2018, I started back to (AE) high school. But instead of doing the grade 9 they put in grade 7 …secondary one."

Mariyah, who had spent four years of school in the US, having already entered grade 12, she was advised by family in Canada to apply for CEGEP[1], which only requires grade 11 completion.

She had a particularly shocking experience when her application was rejected and was directed to AE. Once there she expected that she would only need to complete the remaining courses for year 12 but instead was told to re-do everything:

"They put me in level zero of Math. And they put me level two English. And yeah...And everything was hard."

Placement in low levels was a major source of frustration and sadness for many students like Mariyah, Hadi and Karimah and experienced by students in both the French and English AE sectors. Some students accepted their placement in grades lower than their abilities because they recognized the need to improve their language skills, like Ikhlas who arrived with no knowledge of English or French, or precisely because they had been outside of school for so long, like Reem.
She disagreed with her English placement, but, like other students, did not know that she could complain, or how to do so, and feeling socially isolated had no one to ask:
"I didn't question it because…I didn't know like if I could complain or not. So, I just went with it… And add to it…I didn't have friends for many years. I was okay with it but still, seeing that people are interacting and me…just standing alone next to the room…waiting for the class to start. It was also…discouraging at first because…I didn't know… they obviously knew what they can and can't complain about, I didn't. But I also didn't have anyone to ask."

Naima, who had been to the Armenian private school in Lebanon, had a similar experience. Although she had already studied two years in a Vancouver high school in English, Her AE school did not accept her transcripts and asked her to sit a placement test. She was initially excited as she expected that she might be able to skip a level, so confident in her abilities. Instead, the opposite occurred, and she was placed in beginner level for all subjects. Consequently, she told us that:

"…the first semester, the first three semesters I didn't study. I remember I came back home "I know everything, I don't need to study" – because I have repeated those almost three times."

She did query her placement with the school and was informed that the placement test she did was not good. Like Reem, Naima did not think this was accurate, but unsure what to do she stayed put. After three semesters a teacher finally noticed that Naima was well above her peers and queried why she was in such a low grade. The teacher told Naima that she should have asked to retake the exam,

"(a)nd that's when I was like "I'm giving up" you know?!...now no one is going to help me, because the time that I had to take action, I didn't because I didn't know what to do."

For students in the French AE sector, the challenge was getting the French skills they previously learnt through welcome class recognized in AE to allow them to transition to higher academic levels. Abeer, Samar, Maher, Roula, and Caleb were all still in French secondary 3 when we spoke with them, despite all having spent at least one and half years in the welcome class, passing through the last grade of the adult language course (francisation) and spending a year or

more in secondary 3. This was a source of great frustration as students were desperate to move ahead and saddened that they were not able to do so.

Shift in education styles

Another major challenge for students which disrupted their progress through AE was the distinct pedagogical approach of AE which required them to work independently and largely without instruction from teachers. As Caleb said, "It's very hard to advance alone... There's no teacher following up and are just waiting for you to finish the book and send you to the text." Farrah highlighted how this independent pedagogical approach bred an independent culture, which left students vulnerable to failure and largely slipping through the cracks: "If you stayed 20 years doing nothing (in AE) no one will tell you anything… Whatever you do, you do it." This was a challenge for even the most advanced students with limited disruption to their education and high levels of English or French, like Ahmad and Tareq. After having a very positive learning experience in the US, Mariyah was not prepared for the independent learning approach she found in AE:

"my teacher just gives us a book, and some questions and you have to answer them. Ah when you finish, come show me I will tell you if it's right or it's not. But how I'm gonna do it? You didn't explain for us. You know?"

Students even expressed hesitation to ask for help when they needed it because teachers may be with other students, as Caleb mentioned:

"... with studying problems you'd hesitate to see the teacher because they might be busy or working with another student. It wasn't easy or helpful to approach. I wasn't facing problems, but I wasn't advancing quickly."

Having only completed primary school prior to arriving in Quebec, being left largely alone to study was a major challenge for students like Abdul, who found the pace of class rapid and the support of teachers minimal:

"[The teacher] always… give us activity and subject and said finish it fast-fast-fast… I need time to understand it I cannot finish it without understanding. I told him that, he said he cannot because the school board gave me specific time and program I have to finish."

The independent learning approach was something that students simply needed to adapt to and as Ikhlas said *"You have to be[come] your own teacher"* to be successful.
For some students learning to adapt meant first failing subjects, wasting time, and only after speaking and learning from friends figuring out the best solution for them.

Focus on future/shift in aspirations

Despite the challenges they faced in moving through AE, students were future oriented. As Hana mentioned:

"at AE … I tried to focus on my future… needed lots of energy… I wanted to choose a career for my future."

Other students referred to their age to indicate that this was the time for them to be focused on studying, they did not want to be doing anything else, so they worked tremendously hard to achieve the best results possible (Tareq and Ahmad). Students were particularly impacted by the fact that their friends in Syria and elsewhere were advancing ahead of them, whether having already finished high school, started college or university. This was a major point of sadness and motivation for students. As Lina said:

"Yes, I am very upset, and I do not want to talk about this subject because it gets on my nerves. I cried a lot because it is not fair that all of my friends in Toronto, they are already going to university."

Naima mentioned something similar:

"I was doing fine until I started seeing a lot of people graduate and actually go to college and see myself not being done and that's when I started getting disappointed and frustrated. I never thought of giving up as an option … I always thought "I'm just gonna study, that's the only thing I'm gonna do in life" because it's the best thing to do …now I have friends in Syria and Lebanon, and they're married and have family. And I was like "That's not gonna be me, I'm gonna finish, I'm gonna work." "Yeah, I'm gonna do something with science." I was like maybe doctor or something when I was in Syria."

After all the years she spent trying to complete her high school and seeing the long road ahead of her, Naima decided to pursue interior design and told us that

"If the school affected me in a way, it was to change my mind in doing what I like. What I love actually."

This explicit story of the institutional environment of AE impacting how students moved on to the next stages of their lives was mirrored with Aaron, who told us that he had always wanted to be a doctor:

"I was studying so, so hard to make it. But at the end, I see that it's a long journey…"

Continuous negative interactions with a teacher in AE made him reconsider his dream:

"After the second time, the third time I said "uh sir, still like I don't understand" he says "You know what? I don't have time for this, let's move on" … And I was so- when he told me this- like another student in an Adult Centre would tell him "What is your job as a teacher?" would tell him "Why are you getting paid? For what? For just like doing your hour and then you go home. Your job is to make us understand!" You know? … So, I don't know …it's so crazy. I don't wanna …remember that…I just told him "Thank you sir"."

Like Naima, Aaron decided to switch his aspiration of becoming a doctor to focus on construction. Unambiguous examples like Aaron and Naima sit alongside less obvious examples of students shifting their aspirations as they become exhausted by the demands of AE and their expectations, and their families, of where they should be in their lives. Speaking directly to these personal and intergenerational pressures, Aaron said,

"... what do you want me to do? You want me to go to the moon and study as well?"

Discussion

Our paper is supported by our theoretical framework: CRT allowed us to analyze structural challenges that young adult students face in AE which impede positive learning progress and negatively affect their high motivations to achieve their academic objectives. The Capabilities Approach allowed us to uncover the students' aspirations which fueled their desire to stay in school despite adjustments and obstacles to their goals. In tandem, both theories revealed the exclusion refugee young adults encounter in the educational structures in the Quebec system. This framework reveals that refugee's previous experiences, transitions/journeys, as well as the institutional environment in which they resettle are essential in understanding refugee aspirations.

We note the importance of aspirations in better understanding the experience of the student and refugee integration. Refugees hold on to their aspirations for life-long plans despite the enormity of the interruption in their life trajectories (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020). The possibility of coming to a resettlement context, such as Canada, after so much disruption gives refugees hope that they will be able to continue their lives as planned and aspire for more than what was offered in a country of asylum. Young adult refugees hold education as a major avenue for improving their lives and that of their families. Through education they aspire for stable lives to realize their aspiration of a better life, a good life, a comfortable life. Our study shows that a preference for education is reflected amongst all participants, regardless of the extent of previous disruption to their education and their challenges on their journey to resettlement (Carling & Collins, 2018). Our findings indicate that movement through AE in a resettlement context disrupts the dream of a smooth pathway. Although the system is purported to be designed around an independent adult learner, students face structural barriers that constrict their choices, simple things such as sitting for an exam when they believe they are ready or scheduling their own time, to being placed in lower levels than their abilities. While some students can navigate the complexities of independent learning, new languages, and eliciting appropriate academic and career support when they need it, others are not able to effectively mobilize themselves to confront the challenges they encounter (Stermac, et al., 2013; Taylor, & Sidhu, 2012), which impacts their aspirations. Students eventually learnt to resist the limitation of their choices by demanding resolutions to problems from school authorities, changing schools or going to multiple schools simultaneously while others repeat or fail classes, drop out or change their life plans.

The extent of disruption that students face in AE has no apparent relationship with the extent of previous disruption that students faced to their education. This is important because so much literature about refugee education notes the importance of acknowledging these previous experiences. Naima faced the same problems as Aaron in AE although she was able to continue school in a country of first asylum, while he was not. After facing continual challenges in AE,

they ended with the same conclusion: better to lower their expectations of what they can achieve through the system and aspire to less academic vocations. This conclusion is mirrored in other contexts where young adult refugee students are forced to make difficult decisions about their life chances, which appears clearly related to a lack of institutional and systemic support to enable them to continue their chosen education path (Bonet, 2018, McWilliams & Bonet, 2016, Morrice et al., 2020). This is deeply concerning considering that refugee youth are already the most marginalized population in terms of access to education in countries of first asylum (Dryden-Peterson 2016; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). Our findings confirm what Morrice et al. found in the UK: 'despite the promise of educational opportunity and transformed life chances enshrined in the notion of refugee resettlement, many of the experiences and barriers to education [that refugees face in resettlement contexts] are not dissimilar in kind to those facing refugee youth in countries of first asylum.' (Morrice et al., 2020).

Our findings underscore the fact that arriving in a war-free country is not a panacea for refugee young adults above the mandatory age of schooling who are interested in finishing their high school diploma. We have found that the inflexible education policies applied to youth refugees aged-out of secondary school contrasts with those applied to children, thus maintaining a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability of ever completing their high school education. This is not to dismiss the opportunity that resettlement offers to refugees but to highlight the need for greater attention to the institutions to which they will be welcomed to ensure that their educational exclusion is not perpetuated, and their aspirations can be realized.

Liberal approaches to integration in Quebec, reflected within AE policies, fail to evaluate, and subsequently adapt to the heterogeneity of their growing student body. Such failure, together with diverse intelligences, varying levels of knowledge of national language/s, limited exposure to independent learning approaches, previous experiences of disruption to their education, potential trauma, family pressures, and a need to study full time, indicates how inequitably the AE sector measures these students against false meritocratic standards. This disproportionately affects young adult refugee students' abilities to continue studying and achieve educational and social integration.

Ministries of Education in resettlement contexts such as Canada must consider that AE policies neglect the needs of refugee students, and similar at-risk students. Therefore, critically acknowledging the ongoing young adult refugee experience once resettled is essential to integrally guarantee their access to education, from pre-school to post-secondary, and prevents them from being assimilated by a low wage economy (Bonet, 2018, Morrice et al., 2020).

Conclusion

One particularly pernicious effect of AE on students appears to be the lowering of their expectations and aspirations due to the lack of acknowledgement of their diverse background, their different learning style as well as their emotional well-being. Dreams of being a doctor are quashed into seeking vocational training such as in construction. This points to the impact of the continual disregard of the needs and desires of allophone non-white immigrant students and what would support them to thrive to realize their aspirations. Other students resolve to never allow the AE system to prevent them from reaching their goals. Even as they face many years attempting to get their high school diploma, these refugee young adults are aware of the obstacles ahead.

For refugees, countries like Canada seem like the cure-all, a place where all their problems will be resolved. Indeed, refugee children are ensured an uninterrupted education. However, refugee young adults, who find themselves in an exclusionary environment in Quebec, face barriers obtaining a high school diploma. The paradox is that this is a marginalized population trying to fit into an education system (AE) that is itself marginalized. AE provides an important avenue through which marginalized adults can be integrated 'back into' society; a 'second chance' school. And yet our findings show that the second chance offered to students with refugee backgrounds is filled with struggle and frustration and impacts students' choices and tempers their aspirations. We argue that rather than resettlement offering an opportunity to realize their aspirations, they experience ongoing disruption simply because of their age and the fact they are immigrants. We suggest that our findings are generalizable for all young adult allophone nonwhite newcomers attending AE in Quebec and elsewhere.

Significance

This chapter fills an important gap in knowledge about the experiences of refugee young adult students who do not fit within the mandatory school age bracket and thus are 'aged out' of schooling despite not having completed their high school diploma. Our chapter argues that without further attention to this subgroup of resettled refugees, resettlement education 'second choice' options prolong the disruption to their lives rather than provide a resolution to their crisis. Without attention, they, and others like them, will continue to be the 'Lost Generation.'

1 CÉGEP: acronym from the French term Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel which means a publicly funded college.

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Chapter 6 Manuscript Two

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Reflecting on the experiences of Syrian refugee young adults in adult education in Quebec: The practitioners' perspective

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Abstract

Much research focuses on schooling for refugee children in resettlement contexts; however, limited research addresses young adult refugees (YAR) between 16-24 years in the adult education (AE) system. This paper strives to fill this gap by providing the perspectives of 12 AE practitioners who welcomed and worked with Syrian YAR in Quebec, Canada. Practitioners' experiences and challenges faced with this refugee population reveal strategies needed to enable YAR to flourish and attain their objectives, including a call for systemic change in AE. Critical Race Theory and the Capabilities Approach set the conceptual framework guided by a narrative inquiry methodology. Semi-structured interviews provided the data that were thematically analyzed through collaborative work. From our understanding of the effectiveness of AE approaches for YAR, it is clear, based on the insights provided by the practitioners, that the face of AE has changed, and its current approach does not work for the YAR population.

Keywords

adult education, Syrian refugee young adults, immigration, integration, critical race theory, Quebec

Introduction

For the first time in nearly four decades, Canada admitted the largest number of refugees in 2016, over 25,000 (World Vision, 2018), of which 10,000 settled in Quebec between 2015-2017, with the majority settling in Montreal (IRCC, 2018). Although welcoming refugees is a policy of the Canadian government, refugee 'integration' largely falls to provincial governments in Canada's decentralized system (Jeram & Nicolaides, 2018). Considering that 44.2% of Syrians who arrived in 2016 were between the ages of 0-14 (Houle, 2019), there was an understandable push to focus on getting school-aged children into primary and secondary education. Yet, there was little focus on those who had 'aged out' of the youth sector (over 16 years old) and were still without high school credentials. This paper is part of a larger study which explores the experiences of Syrian young adult refugees (YAR) in Quebec's adult education sector (AE) to understand how the system is responding to their inclusion. The perspectives of AE practitioners from three school boards in Montreal and Laval help answer the following research questions: 1) what were the practitioners' perceptions of the challenges faced by Syrian YAR? 2) What strategies are currently in place to assist them? And 3) what resources and strategies are needed to expand support to enable students to persevere, thrive and reach their goals?

Literature review

Adult Education is a broad level of education which comprises many subfields such as language learning, vocational and skills training, amongst others. There is significant literature across most of these areas and an especially healthy section of the literature related to immigrants. Most of the literature on AE and immigrants is focused on language learning (Gibb, 2008), with a focus on teacher strategies to support students learning (Wood, 2011). There is also a particular interest in skills retraining and the difficulties associated with this for highly educated immigrants; however, many adult immigrant learners feel excluded from AE because they are treated with the 'sameness' approach (Guo, 2015). If all immigrant learners have the same needs and come from the same backgrounds, then elements of diversity and complexity are eliminated (Guo, 2010). Of this broad literature focused on AE and immigrants, there is a small section dedicated to youth and young adults focused on their experiences, aspirations, and motivations alongside the challenges they face in pursuing education (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Lukes, 2011).

Research shows that many refugees, especially the educated, aspire to third-country resettlement such as in Canada to establish a safe and stable milieu for their children, to freely practice their faith and obtain legal recognition (Chatty & Mansour, 2011). For young refugees, the structure and regularity of school attendance not only contributes to their safety but also their emotional and social needs, local integration, and motivates their future hopes and plans (Lynnebakke & de Wal Pastoor, 2020). The effects of personal control over their lives in Canada positively contributes to YAR aspirations of obtaining a high school diploma and pursuing higher education. However, the literature highlights how after years outside the formal schooling system, refugee and immigrant young adults face the daunting prospect of being in school for long periods to get a high school diploma to continue to higher education, vocational training or simply to access minimum wage jobs. While education is widely accepted as an important basis

for successful integration, entering school at an advanced age can create a sense of anxiety and hopelessness (MacKay & Tavares, 2005). Adding to the displacement experience, financial pressure, language barriers, overt and covert forms of racism as well as the different approaches to teaching and learning leave refugee and immigrant young adult students feeling overwhelmed and unsupported, often leading them to abandoning their education (Baffoe, 2006; Kanu, 2008). Moreover, refugee youth are often placed in lower grades and take longer to progress than youth whose education has not been disrupted, leading to high levels of student drop out amongst this group (Wilkinson et al., 2013).

The challenge for these students is that returning to school is a *choice* (Lukes, 2011). As Lukes mentions, "[w]hen they pursue education, it is in options that have been labeled 'second chance' mechanisms, often designed for adults" (2011, p. 8). Many of these young individuals have been unable to continue their education because of war, conflict, or inability to access education previously; therefore, arriving in a foreign school system is challenging (Potvin et al., 2014). Indeed, the AE system, focused on individual motivation geared towards enabling a second chance for adults (DEACC, 2009), is not designed with YAR in mind who often arrive with limited official language abilities and experience in other school norms. Moreover, developmentally this age group is in an 'in-between' phase; still young with need for guidance and yet at an age designated with adult responsibilities. Consequently, an appreciation of both adult and adolescent development and learning is required because, as Lukes notes, without one, half of the "puzzle" is missing (2011, p. 5).

There is no dearth of literature focused on refugee children in education in countries of resettlement (Ficarra, 2017; Hos, 2014; Ratković et al., 2017). There is a particularly healthy body of literature focused on refugee students in Canadian schools and the varying attempts teachers and schools make to support these students (Ayoub, 2014; Brewer, 2016; Stewart, 2017). Other research on immigrant youth has pointed to the importance of connecting schools, families, and the local community to design targeted interventions for youth (Jacquet & Masinda, 2014). According to Stewart and Martin (2018), for students to overcome the barriers they face, it is paramount for schools to acknowledge and address educational and cultural gaps, as well as to provide staff and resource support within the school. In short, a comprehensive approach is promoted to account for the diverse needs, experiences, and strengths of newly arriving refugee students.

Of the literature focused on approaches for immigrant adult students in AE, several strategies have been employed to enable their continuation through this system. These strategies focus on programmatic approaches (Booth, 2009), additions to classroom instruction such as tutors and bilingual tutors (Al Hariri, 2018), mentoring programs (Atkinson, 2018), and an awareness of the need for an integrated approach to the learning environment (Onsando & Billet, 2014). Other strategies include professional development for staff to enable them to work with the specific needs of such populations (Gamboa, 2018) and partnerships with different agencies, if the school is unable to provide the specialized support needed (Calaf, 2017; Prins et al., 2018). However, most of this literature is not specific to age and not necessarily focused on refugees, but inclusive of a broader category of immigrants. Would these approaches work in AE for YAR? What have been the experiences of practitioners working with Syrian YAR in Quebec AE

centres? What has been trialled to support them and what could be changed to enable their progress?

Before considering the results, it is important to position the experiences of practitioners within a broader awareness about the Syrian refugee student population and the education system in Quebec. Despite youth being the most severely impacted by disrupted education (Wahby et al., 2014), there was limited attention drawn to this population of refugees upon arrival in Quebec; too old for the youth sector with no other choice but to attend AE to complete their education.

Quebec education system

The education system in Quebec has five levels: preschool, elementary (grades 1-6), secondary (grades 7-11), and AE (located within the secondary level) administered by both English and French school boards, *CEGEP*s[1] and university. To understand the position of AE, it is essential to examine the historical and political elements reflecting tensions between acknowledging diversity in Quebec society and the need to protect the distinct French language and culture in a predominantly English speaking North American context. The aim of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s was to preserve and protect the Quebec identity and resulted in the implementation of the French Language Charter (Bill 101) in 1977, legislating French as the province's official language. This law obliges all immigrants to attend French-language schools until the end of secondary school, or until the age of 16, whether in a public school or a government-subsidized private school. Bill 101 does not apply to AE unlike the youth education sector. Students above 16 can choose English AE centres to complete their high school certificate, rather than staying in the French system. However, knowledge of French is a necessity to attain professional status, for example, in medicine or law.

In Quebec, the threshold for immigrants and refugees to learn French begins with welcoming classes: *francisation* or *classe d'acceuil*. Sponsored by the provincial government's Ministry of Immigration, Francisation and Integration or Ministry of Education, these services are intended for immigrants and refugees whose knowledge of French is inadequate for everyday activities. With the objective to teach newcomers about *Québécois* culture, values, and society and to prepare students to communicate in French, these programs are free-of-charge and represent an important transition in the French learning trajectory. *Classe d'acceuil* serves to integrate students under 16 into the youth sector. Newcomers, including students above 16 years, are highly encouraged, but not obliged by the government, to attend *francisation,* with the Ministry of Immigration offering a financial stipend as an incentive.

There is a healthy and critical discussion concerning the success of this approach to language immersion for immigrant children in Quebec (Buccitelli & Denov, 2019; Severinsen et al., 2018). The ambiguous balance between protectionism and diversity in Quebec is reflected in its educational policies and practices concerning intercultural education and the integration of newly migrated students. Indeed, the Quebec government claims to focus policies on school integration and intercultural education when in fact, little attention is given to the host society's part in this process. Baffoe indicates that the *classe d'accueil* "killed [students'] interest in academic programs" (2006, p. 177). Certainly, learning French in isolation, whether in *classe d'acceuil* or *francisation*, is not motivating as it can create social segregation (Steinbach, 2010)

or power dynamics (Lightbown & Spada, 2021) between newcomers and native speakers, thus limiting their interaction. Further, despite significant investment by the Quebec government, an Auditor General report from 2017 indicates poor language acquisition by most immigrants who go through the *francisation* course (La Presse Canadienne, 2017).

Students can enter AE if they are 16 years or older, regardless of whether they have completed the *francisation* course or mastered French in the *classe d'accueil.* It is important to note that AE across Quebec follows a curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education for the high school diploma; however, the mode of teaching differs across schools. Most AE schools provide only independent learning options, requiring student autonomy, as opposed to teacherled classes that are more common in the youth sector. Our research is focused on YAR who have managed to enter AE in Quebec. Our questions focus on practitioners' perspectives on how these students are progressing in the AE system and what support services are in place to meet their needs.

Within refugee studies the concept of integration has come to be understood as a dynamic process, which includes multiple elements such as knowledge of language, access to employment and education, sense of safety and ability to make connections, amongst others (Ager & Strang 2008). Education is seen as a major site through which refugee children are socialised and integrated into a society (Rousseau et al., 2007) but it is also a major site for exclusion and discrimination (Banks, 2015). Accordingly, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a useful framework to better explore and identify exclusion within education systems and understand inequality of opportunity of non-majority students, such as newly arrived refugees. Additionally, Sen's Capabilities approach (1985) is a framework which enhances our understanding of expectations and aspirations as motivators for marginalized subgroups such as YAR. The capabilities approach targets the quality of life that people can achieve and claims that the freedom to achieve well-being is a matter of what people can do and be.

Theoretical framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) raises questions about equity and equality by examining the relationship between society and culture as they relate to racism and power. Based on the notion that race determines economic prospects of individuals, CRT influences politics and shapes the conduct of law enforcement (Bell,1995; Dei,1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Racism is understood in CRT as a structure of oppression (Cabrera, 2018), providing a background to examine the differing educational outcomes for certain groups resulting from subtle social and institutional structures and forces rather than individual and intentional prejudices and attitudes (Cabrera, 2018; Gilborn & Ladson-Billings, 2020). Several critiques of CRT suggest that the lack of racial theory allows for little insight into the systemic nature of racism (Horowitz, 2006; McWhorter, 2000; Kennedy, 1998). Others warn of the danger of racial essentialism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, Cole's (2017) neo-Marxist position claims CRT gives undue attention to racism rather than to other critical issues such as class divisions. Cabrera, however, confirms CRT's legitimacy adding that the use of hegemonic whiteness clarifies what constitutes racism (2018, p.227). White hegemony of social and economic structures is rooted in a liberal belief that equal opportunity exists for all, oblivious of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic oppression minority groups face. The superiority of the dominant culture is normalized in the systems of power (Awokoya & Clark, 2008) and influences the academic and life chances of the *other*, positioned in

a passive role in contrast to their host (Said, 1995). However, CRT challenges the traditional idea that marginalized groups are socially deficient and instead focuses on their cultural wealth in various forms (Kyriakides et al., 2018).

Applied to the context of education, CRT and other critical literature have highlighted how schools are structured on claims that academic success is achieved by choice, agency, and motivation; concepts associated with freedom, equality, and individual rights. Indeed, liberalism promotes the idea that if you do not work hard enough, failure is your fault (Zambio et al., 2011). However, it is a societal myth that meritocratic values justify and legitimize academic achievement. This is consistently evidenced by the failure of liberal education policies to reduce the gap between whites and non-whites across many societies (Bhopal, 2018; Taylor, 2006). In contrast to liberal claims that education is an equalizer, critical research has pointed to how education institutions are structured to reproduce and legitimize inequalities in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Orlowski, 2012). The historical and institutionalized nature of racial inequality has served as an important explanation as to why some non-whites do not get ahead (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016), with class-based exclusion and lack of (dominant) cultural capital as other important considerations (Yosso, 2005). Critical race theory explores and identifies the role of institutional discrimination and thus recognizes inequality of opportunity for minoritized students (Anyon, 2014). It provides the capacity to illustrate the implications of refugee demographics on school policies and practices and exposes the invisibility of difference within a system designed for a particular kind of student. Therefore, understanding the way racialization impacts the learning and educational needs of youth denotes educators' responsibility to promote equity in schools (Ianinska et al., 2013).

To better account for the subjective level decision making and capacities, we also include the Capability approach to our theoretical framework. Amartya Sen's Capability approach (1985) enhances research knowledge on resettled refugees because it allows for a better understanding of life after migration from the perspective of refugees themselves (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Van Heelsum 2017); a 'social process' which functions both in terms of competencies and objectives (De Hass, 2011). Exercising agency or capability is contingent on the structural environments which govern, and which subsequently determine, the freedom to make choices (De Hass, 2011). Although people are dynamic beings guided by subjective preferences, their life goals change, contingent on social, economic, and political conditions. Held together, CRT and the Capabilities approach enables us to ascertain the structural as well as agentic components of marginalised students' experience in AE.

Methodology

This paper is based on data from 12 interviews, carried out in French and English, with AE practitioners (teachers, psycho-educators, orientation counselors, and administrators) from three school boards in the Montreal metropolitan area. Interviews were audio-recorded and followed a semi-structured style with intermittent follow-up questions. The transcripts were reviewed, analyzed, and categorized into themes and read alongside theoretical literature. This collaborative research involved a team of immigrant women drawing upon our experiences as citizens, immigrants, mothers, students, and teachers. Our backgrounds inevitably influence the

way that we understand the data collected and may have influenced the way that the participants answered our questions.

Findings

Pedagogical approaches: Module and Cadre

Module-individual learning approach

Practitioners reflected on the different pedagogical approach that is found in AE and how this is perceived and experienced by students from diverse backgrounds. They indicated that predominantly an independent learning modular approach is adopted in AE, which involves students largely studying by themselves on the same subject but oftentimes at different levels. A classroom teacher provides support. If the students have questions, they put their name on the board and then wait for the teacher to come to them. Practitioners think the module system is a positive approach to learning for some students because it allows them to go at their own pace and work independently on their workbooks until they feel ready to take their exam. Practitioners were keenly aware; however, that this was not the case for all students.

> "This module requires a lot of autonomy, maturity, and strategy. Evidently, many students can find themselves wasting their time because they lack those strategies." (Interview 7, p. 10).

For many students, the movement from the *classe d'accueil* or the youth sector to AE is an aggressive shift.

> "I would say that the transfer from *classe d'accueil* to adult education is made in a brutal way, those students are already fragile for different reasons and problems, and they are lost." (Interview 6, p. 8).

As the practitioners pointed out, Syrian refugee students face the challenge of learning in one or two new languages, after being outside of an educational context for many years, and of having only experienced teacher-driven educational contexts.

Cadre - learning as a group

In recognition of the problems that Syrian YAR face in their transition from the *classe d'accueil* or *francisation* to AE, one school established a pilot program, which they called *Cadre*, to address those students' specific needs. The pilot centered on Syrian refugee students, aged between 16-18 years old, grouped them with the same teacher who applies a hybrid method of teaching: independent learning and lecture/group-based learning. Practitioners from this school reported that grouping students by age is more motivating and brings stability, consistency, and a sense of inclusion to the classroom.

> "The idea behind this project is to avoid the brutal change from a lecture that has a teacher speaking to individualized courses." (Interview 6, p. 10).

The practitioners from this school indicated that this approach to learning created a sense of solidarity and support, which students found encouraging as it decreased isolation.

> "Often friendships are made very rapidly in *Cadre* group. So that is very good. I think that in the humane aspect, these people become less isolated than others in other groups." (Interview 8, p. 4-5).

Because of the success of this pilot project's pedagogical approach (where students work both on their own and as a group) *Cadre* is being expanded within this specific school board.

The challenge of learning French

Practitioners were aware that for many of their students French is a complex language to learn and this can slow their pace of progressing through the education system.

> "They are slowed, particularly by the French language [subject] because in math and science they are very performing." (Interview 7, p. 7).

Practitioners indicated that even though students have learnt French through the *classe d'accueil* or *francisation program,* this has not prepared them for academic level work. This has resulted in students failing courses, becoming demotivated or dropping out. As one teacher explained:

> "The training they have received in *accueil* is not recognized… when students pass from *accueil* to [French] secondary 1, they feel discouraged." (Interview 6, p. 5).

The challenge for practitioners is that students want to move as fast as possible despite their low levels of French. Practitioners know that this can, and does, have detrimental impacts, which result in slowing the students down further. As another practitioner explained, each independent learning module (in French) is like a "suitcase" and oftentimes the suitcase is too heavy for students which leads to their failure. This greatly contributes to student frustration as they attempt to progress through AE.

Pressure

Practitioners contend that the reasons why students seek to move as fast as possible relates to pressure from parents and self-imposed pressure because of their age.

Parental pressure

Syrian YAR feel a sense of responsibility to their parents. Given their parents' financial and personal sacrifices, YAR feel obligated to succeed, maintaining a strong sense of duty to

family in comparison to the culture found in western societies. These individuals often end up as a "parent to their parents" as one practitioner put it. Financially supporting their families means that many students work full time and study full time. Consequently, students come to school exhausted and distracted, which contributes to performance anxiety and a fear of failing. This can then lead to course repetition, absenteeism and students dropping out. While common to Syrian students, it is important to note that practitioners mentioned this for other students also.

> "I have many students in the group *Cadre* that study full time and work full time to help the family. That is too heavy for them and sometimes we see their psychological stress." (Interview 9, p. 1).

Some practitioners connected this pressure for students to study and work at the same time to a distinction in culture:

> "It is incredible how much influence they [parents] can have, in contrast to our values here in Quebec." (Interview 8, p. 3).

Practitioners explained that parents place pressure on their children based on expectations of where their child should be in their education at their age. One practitioner referred to this pressure as a prison for his students:

> "It is a prison made by the parents. 'How did you do in your home country? Where is your exam? Why isn't there progress?' I, as a teacher, often observe this pressure on my students." (Interview 6, p. 3).

Further, practitioners indicated that parents not only put pressure on their children to study fast but to succeed fast as well. Practitioners maintain that parents expect students to pursue only certain types of higher education, particularly medicine or engineering, which meet the cultural and financial expectations Syrian families have for success. Unfortunately, as practitioners indicated, such aspirations are not always linked to their children's objectives nor their well-being. Practitioners reported that parents equate school failure with lack of life chances, and they share this belief with their children. These parents' aspirations are for their children to start a university career, often comparing them to others who are getting ahead faster. Such parental pressure causes *mental unavailability* for the students to learn.

> "Perhaps if they [parents] push students less, they will be more available [to learn] and be accepted by the family." (Interview 7, p. 17).

Parental idealistic ambitions often build sentiments of discouragement, demotivation, and frustration on students.

> "It makes the child suffer; we have to recognize it. They don't have the means for their ambitions… Perhaps they want to do something else, what matters is that he is happy." (Interview 6, p. 7- 8).

Self-imposed pressure by comparing themselves to others.

Practitioners also noted the pressure that students place on themselves. These refugee students feel a pressing need to "get on with their lives," understandably. As one teacher commented:

> "It is tough. Students, they tell me: 'I want to conclude secondary sir… why? because my friends have already concluded secondary 5'." (Interview 6, p. 4).

There are several factors at play here, for example, the perceived notions of where they should be at a certain age. Exacerbating this is a sense of competition and comparison which pushes them forward because they see themselves falling behind compared to friends who have remained back home or in other countries and have already finished high school or university. We know from other research we have conducted with Syrian YAR in Quebec that these students initially have high expectations of what they can achieve educationally as they first enter the AE sector, but many progressively become disheartened because of the challenges they face (Maraj et al., 2022), confirming the practitioner's perspective of the pressure students place on themselves.

Recognition of refugee experience

The other factor that practitioners raised related to the impact that forced migration and integration plays on the student's ability to focus during class.

> "I think that there are many students that are not available for learning given that there is a lot, a lot of stress, post-traumatic stress, stress here for knowing where to address, where to restart, the fact that it is not necessarily their choice either – the process of immigration" (Interview 3, p. 2).

Practitioners acknowledged that these experiences could come up at any time and inevitably distract students from focusing on their studies. Some examples given were how some students have been startled by heavy rain and shaking windows, or others, scrolling through social media or the news and unexpectedly seeing what is happening in Syria, in their hometowns, to their houses. The point is that despite being physically present in Canada, the impact of the conflict in Syria remains for many. Practitioners indicated that they are not trained to deal with such situations and they themselves get impacted.

Practitioners' role in supporting students

Teachers as first line of support but not the end

Practitioners reported that the first line of support comes from the teacher who plays an essential role in providing a sense of belonging, whether teaching in groups or to individuals.

One teacher indicated that students must sense that the teacher has credibility, compassion, and humor to be open to learning. Another teacher explained that his role as a teacher for Syrian students is a double job precisely because of the close attention he needs to pay to the psychological well-being of his students, alongside typical teaching strategies to support their development.

> "But to do that double job, psychological support, and language improvement – at the same time? Ufff. It is not easy." (Interview 6, p. 8).

Practitioners were clear that teachers are not, however, the last line of support and there is an established system in place to provide support to students outside of the classroom. Indeed, as one psycho-educator indicated:

> "Teachers don't have the training to help students with anxiety, PTSD, triggers, insomnia etc., so they send them to the counsellors." (Interview 8, p. 10).

In some schools, workshops are given from time to time about balancing studies and work, the Quebec school system, and career possibilities to better prepare students for their current studies and the future.

Teamwork as a method for effective support

One of the striking comments arising from these interviews was the importance placed on having a strong team to foster a sense of community within the school manifesting in greater support for the students. Practitioners emphasized that working with a team over several years has developed stability and strength enabling the efficiency of their work.

> "Because any time there is an issue or a conflict or something we need to resolve, there's always more than one person involved, and the communication is always very easy to flow." (Interview 4, p. 7).

Practitioners reported that in a well-established collegial environment, struggling students can be identified and directed to the appropriate service within the school or outside of it. While practitioners agree that the services already provided at school such as language support, psychoeducation and career guidance are very good, there is nonetheless a need for more personnel and resources to be more effective.

Relationship building as a form of support

Building healthy relationships based on trust enables practitioners to better learn about the individual's difficulties; however, it is difficult to really know the needs of every person to apply the right approach. Importantly, AE practitioners want to make sure that students' educational objectives are realistic so that they make the best decisions to achieve their target objectives.

> "When we start to earn their confidence, they understand it. Then rapidly we build confidence, and they see our intentions…" (Interview 7, p. 3).

Approaching mental health indirectly

Due to cultural perceptions regarding mental health care and its stigmatization socially, practitioners indicated that students initially refrain from requesting such services. However, practitioners mentioned that if the service was not explicitly presented as a mental health service and rather as a service focused on supporting the individual to get through their daily struggles with parents, with work, with the inability to progress in school, such as with the support of a career advisor then students were more agreeable to sharing and feel less shame.

> "Kids feel judged if they go for talk therapy, so they are going for career guidance as a pretext." (Interview 8, p. 10).

> "When we talk about psychosocial services, the first obstacle is often cultural." (Interview 9, p. 5).

Limits to the support for students within the school

There was a sense that there is a limit to how much practitioners can assist. Speaking about the fact that some students inevitably must drop out of school because of challenges they are confronting in their lives, one career advisor indicated:

> "Practitioners must face their powerlessness by accepting many of these student's inability to commit to their studies." (Interview 10, p. 3).

This awareness plays heavily on the minds of the practitioners, as one centre director explained:

> "Especially young teachers who are trying to help say they need this "they can't buy bread this weekend." I tell them: 'listen, we help them, there are resources, but we can't place all the problems in the class on your back, it's not right.'" (Interview 9, p. 8).

Practitioner support for students is limited by the amount of administrative work required of them, which takes up much of their time. Should the school be unable to provide the support needed for the student, they are referred to outside services.

> "The school is not self-sufficient as an educational structure. We do partnership, create ties, and invite partners, their parents." (Interview 7, p. 22).

Finally, it is important to note that some practitioners indicated that not all their colleagues share the same level of commitment or interest in ensuring the success of their

students. The limits to the support offered to students, in such instances, are stark: As one practitioner explained diplomatically:

> "Adult education teachers need to have their competences evaluated… reviewed. There are some teachers here who are not invested in their work. (...) These teachers need to be taught about refugees' reality; to be more aware and committed to their students." (Interview 12, page 5).

Funding Limitations

Practitioners commented on how AE is not generally considered a priority for school boards and consequently does not receive enough funding to ensure all the support services students need.

> "The budget will always go to primary and/or secondary schools first. Adult education cannot be the poor kid of the school board" (Interview 8, p. 9).

Practitioners reported significant needs in AE. There is a need for nurses, speech therapists and psychologists, but budget restrictions inhibit this. Practitioners lamented the lack of funding for infrastructure, facilities, technological equipment and for addressing learning difficulties. For instance, pedagogical ortho-services or material (such as iPads) can help with dyslexia and provide other accommodations for learning disabilities.

> "Our budget is too limited for example even to buy a cake! There's not enough staff, a need for personnel and resources so we can reduce the administrative work on teachers, counsellors etc., to be more efficient." (Interview 8, p.11).

Practitioners spoke of the lack of resources in relation to the needs of Syrian refugee students:

> "When students first arrive at the adult school, there should be services provided such as psychological diagnosis or to check for learning difficulties. But they are never diagnosed due to a [lack of] resources whereas more specialized guidance [is needed]." (Interview 3, p. 1-2).

> "The terror that young adult Syrian refugees have witnessed needs to be dealt with and a psychologist at school can help but the money in the budget does not allow for this." (Interview 8, p. 11).

A final comment can be made in relation to the precarity of many of the roles that practitioners find themselves in. Employment insecurity affects long term commitments to working at AE centres.

Discussion

This study contributes to the scarce literature on YAR education. Critical race theory illustrates that progress through AE for YAR is impacted by structural forms of exclusion. This theory has helped to unearth how the presumption of all students possessing the individual capacities to thrive in AE masks the systemic oppression inherent in white hegemony and serves to maintain a dominant-culture (French/English) agenda and consequently marginalize newcomers. Practitioners concur that AE is of the lowest of education priorities for school boards and the government. At the same time, we know that AE is used as a funnel by the youth sector to push out problem students, many of whom are recent immigrants and refugees (Potvin et al., 2014).

Although CRT does not explain teachers' workload, non-colour coding racism (or marginalization) can be elucidated by the limited funds that authorities assign to the education of "drop-outs" and recently more and more refugees. Indeed, from Cole's (2017) perspective, teacher overload is explained through an understanding of how capitalism functions, wherein education is synonymous with the provision of equal opportunities for all learners, despite some learners (working class) not receiving the means to a real education. In the context of AE in Quebec, there is very little recourse for practitioners to access additional funding to ensure the appropriate services that YAR need. This could be argued as a result of the marginalised status that AE holds within the education system as a whole, because of the types of students that it serves. Despite the limitations of funding available, practitioners nonetheless utilize the resources they have and their individual commitment to best support students; invested in their roles despite being overworked and under resourced. The interviewees recognized the need for funds and strategies to expand support to enable YAR students to thrive including support outside of the classroom, such as psychologists and greater language support (Booth, 2009).

Practitioners' perceptions of the challenges faced by Syrian refugee young adults confirm a swathe of literature about the refugee integration process; that the pre- and post-migration experiences of refugees impact their mental health and learning capabilities (Boyden, 1994; Kos & Zemljak, 2007). Although they agree that the strategies currently in place, such as support networks at school, strengthen students' sense of belonging (MacKay & Tavares, 2005) there is a need for teacher strategies to support student learning (Voyer et al., 2021; Wood, 2011), especially within a context of independent learning. Teacher training programs should incorporate cultural exposure to diversity. When most teachers are white, female, monolingual, and middle class (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014) then, undoubtedly, there is a racial and cultural gap between teachers and refugee students (Barek, 2020). There should be cultural exposure to diversity, including colonial and imperial history taught in teacher training programs and subsequently in the classroom so that learning does not remain Eurocentric. Teachers must also be trained to deal with mental health issues, among other challenges, which affect many students and not only refugees (Barek, 2020). Educational practitioners need support from the government who must provide funding for necessary services (more social workers, guidance counsellors, and school psychologists) that take the weight off teachers (Booth, 2009).

Alongside the need for different supports within the school, practitioners recognize the stressors, as reported by students elsewhere (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Lukes, 2011), created by a school system in a different language, with unfamiliar curriculums and norms. Practitioners agree that the independent learning approach is suitable for learners with autonomy and maturity. They believe, however, that it is an aggressive shift from teacher-led learning and does not bode well for students who have experienced disrupted education, are learning in new languages and are at a pivotal developmental age, with a host of responsibilities and pressures. The hybrid approach to AE found in one school demonstrated the potential to scaffold the individualized approach to better address the specific characteristics of the student population. Such an approach is reported to have fed other benefits beyond the academic for the students: nurturing greater collaboration, closer friendships, a sense of togetherness and belonging, all of which reduced the isolating nature of AE. In our other work focused on Syrian students in AE we found that teachers positive perceptions of the cadre system did not mirror directly on to the experiences of students themselves. This points to the need for greater engagement with the student body to understand their needs, desires and experiences in systems that are designed for their explicit support.

An attendant point of the critique to the independent learning approach relates to the difficulties experienced in learning the language. The significance of this cannot be underestimated as language is a central component of integration (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Our findings confirm the consistent criticism against the *classe d'accueil* approach to teaching French which does not serve students who must go on to AE (Buccitelli & Denov, 2019; McAndrew, 2001). What we have found is that while the French language is complex and slows the pace of progress for non-Francophone learners the complexity of the language is not the sole problem. Rather, it is the discrepancy between what students have been prepared for in language courses and what is required of them in adult high school. This highlights a systemic gap in the education system, ignorant of the perspective of Syrian YAR students themselves. This is understandable since AE in Quebec was initially developed to accommodate high school dropouts and displaced workers, rather than immigrants or young adults. However, the face of AE has changed considering the significant number of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, with little knowledge of French or English, arriving in Quebec over recent years. There is a concerted need to address the original AE program as it is de-motivating for this population of students.

Our research on Syrian YAR student perspectives (Ghosh et al., 2022) indicate that all students were initially aspiring at least for higher education, with a focus on high status careers. However, our findings point to the fact that placing YAR in contexts such as AE does not foster their agency and motivation but rather creates an environment ripe for failure as they attempt to maintain their motivation and deal with life challenges and pressures. Moreover, practitioners view family values and parental pressure as challenges faced by YAR which impede student achievement. As Sen (1985) maintains, agency or capability is determined by the structural environments which reign. The capabilities approach sheds light on the pressure and aspirations that both YAR and their parents place on success. However, individual motivation and choice are not enough when faced with systemic obstacles. In this sense, practitioners proposed gathering with students and parents to explain the educational and career options available to them in Quebec to explain a complex system but did not propose changing the way the system functioned to better insure the inclusion of this important subgroup of students.

The structural issues in AE point to interesting questions about education for refugees as a primary site for integration (Ghosh et al., 2022; Wilkinson, 2002). Many researchers in the field of integration have pointed out that it is a two-way process which not only involves the efforts and adaptation of newcomers but also the "structure and openness" of the welcoming society (Klarenbeek, 2019). Indeed, new developments in adult education call for 're-imagining adult education and its empowerment role at both individual and societal levels" (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichlova, 2021, pp.3), wherein, for example, newcomers and host society members collaborate. However, if those not of the dominant group do not see their experiences, histories or perspectives included at school, how can they feel part of the whole? Syrian YAR experiences have bearing on their integration path into the future. Our findings also imply, in terms of a critical/radical theoretical perspective of adult education, the need for systemic change; for inclusive pedagogy which moves away from traditional education practices towards fostering equity and equality for the marginalized (Elias & Merriam, 2005), such as refugees. Although challenged to contribute to social change concerning fairness and justice (Tuckett 2015), AE must go beyond a neo-liberal perspective of economic investment and acknowledge the essential and active role education must play (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichlova, 2021).

Thus, the responsibility and adjustments in daily life rely not only on refugee students to learn the official language, gain the diploma, and accord with the cultural norms of Quebec society but also education institutions and the people who work within and develop policy for them. There is a need to acknowledge and appreciate the linguistic, educational, behavioural, and sociocultural differences of new learners and be ready to adapt and support them. While such differences are appreciated by the AE practitioners we spoke with, more is needed to be done on the part of policy makers to fully enable the integration of Syrian YAR into AE centres and Quebec society more broadly.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn attention to Syrian YAR in AE and the challenges they face progressing through the education system in Quebec. The findings are drawn from the practitioners' perspective regarding students who have experienced disrupted education due to forced migration and who enter AE ill-equipped in terms of academic content and language skills. These YAR grapple with their responsibilities at school and at home, trying to maintain motivation through their challenges. Within the restrictions of the current AE system and despite significant funding restraints, the practitioners actively try to accommodate the needs of the students. However, the reality is that such efforts made by practitioners do not address the systemic issues. Greater funding for the AE sector to address the requirements of YAR is needed to better enable their progression. Further, the dynamics and needs of AE centres in cities such as Montreal and Laval have changed with the recent influx of YAR to their classrooms. Practitioners insist that the current approach to AE does not work for students with this profile. Adapting to this change is paramount for the success of AE centres and their students.

Ensuring that refugee youth obtain an education while in countries of first asylum is as highly pertinent in countries of resettlement such as Canada. Integrating these displaced youth

into schools is essential in Quebec. Education is the key to obtain the necessary skills for employment, to connect with the local community and to develop social connections, all which shape youth perception of belonging and self-esteem. Given that racial discrimination compromises the ability to feel safe, a sense of inclusion becomes an encouraging factor for any immigrant or refugee newcomer to resettle in Canada. As it stands, this population appears to have slipped between the cracks at a policy level.

The two policy recommendations that are the most important are the need for the Ministry of Education (1) to ensure effective training in French for YAR to enable their easy transition into academic curriculum, and (2) increase in the funding for the AE sector and student bursaries. It is imperative that students who are the main bread-earners have sufficient funds so that they can attend to their studies full time and complete their high school diploma. These two factors will save the government (and society) money that is spent on repeated inability to complete the program.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

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Chapter 7

The findings in manuscript one described the continual educational disruption faced by these refugee students while in Syria, asylum countries, and Quebec, as the portrait of Aaron attests to in the introduction. This manuscript which deals with students' perspectives, leads to a perception of YAR as resilient and highly motivated students despite the challenges they faced including a foreign pedagogical system at AE and the seemingly unfair evaluations of their knowledge for class placements. Manuscript one corroborates with the thesis conclusion that YAR ultimately adjusted to their challenging new reality, as illustrated by Aaron who shifted his aspirations from medicine to construction. The findings in manuscript two which deals with practitioners' perspectives, focused on the interviews with AE practitioners who gave their opinions about working with YAR students. The data shows that AE practitioners require more government support to face difficulties working with refugee student populations. The practitioners shared their cultural perspectives on the influence of YAR parents and the pressures the parents cause on students. The practitioners recognized that YAR had to manage with language barriers and an unfamiliar pedagogy as AE students.

Chapter 7 provides a broad overview of the results which goes beyond the findings found in the two manuscripts, affording greater clarity with more detail and citations. Although some of the findings, which have already been noted in the two manuscripts, are echoed in the results below including language and pedagogical challenges, this chapter further elaborates on these issues including more concentration on the role of the administration. Moreover, this section provides a greater understanding of the YAR students' sense of exclusion drawn from their lived experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Having now a general understanding of the thesis subject as presented by the two manuscripts above, the broad literature review, and the research question, this chapter will present a comprehensive look at the findings based on the perspectives of all the study participants, as well as some recommendations for policymakers, a discussion of the findings, and the limitations of this study.

Results

Findings

The ensuing chapter outlines the research findings based on the 41 participant interviews while referencing the literature and conceptual framework. The results are provided below in a broad thematic manner. Although the conclusions focus on the main grievances expressed by the 29 Syrian YAR attending AE in Montreal, what they reveal is the agency of this sub-group; that these refugee students were resolute. The study data outcomes also include the perspectives of the 12 AE practitioners interviewed. These institutional agents gave feedback on the supports lacking in the AE sector, which were needed to enable the academic success of YAR. These educators also noted their own need for support as professionals working with refugee students. Like other ethnic and linguistic minority groups, Syrian YAR faced barriers, especially in learning new languages and local culture, and subsequently in obtaining educational qualifications in the AE sector in Québec. Furthermore, the distinct pedagogical features and institutional formation of AE impacted these students' ability to develop their aspirations into capabilities and connections.

The issues YAR students confronted varied from language, culture, and economic hardship to multi-layered traumatic experiences. The following factors are among the structural challenges which negatively impacted the Syrian YAR participants' progress in the AE system: (A) local language learning (B) unfamiliar teaching methods, (C) ministerial issues including funding and its consequences such as scheduling issues, an inability for YAR to network and (D) perceived discrimination. The cultural obstacles include (A) adjustment to school culture and (B) parental perspectives. The last section of the findings focuses on YAR resilience. Furthermore, the data indicates the critical need to emphasize not only refugee pre-resettlement conditions but also the contexts in which these learners were accommodated, including the socio-economic impact their environment had on their educational progress and fundamental ambitions.

The challenges can be categorized into two broad sub-themes: challenges due to structural hurdles and challenges due to cultural barriers. The third theme concentrates on Syrian YAR motivation. Many of the struggles that displaced refugee youth face are a result of the structural blockades and systemic segregations found in national education systems in host locations (Morrice, 2021). Educational policy and methods of teaching need to be sensitive to these obstructions which prohibit the reconstruction of YAR future.

> I went through a lot of hardships. I explained to you a story of 4 years in less than 15 minutes, but I suffered a lot… I am very… serious… I want to work, I want to study, I want to graduate, and I am not coming to play in Canada.
>
> I am here to study. (Abeer).

The frustration is palpable in the quote above. Abeer explained her journey and experience navigating AE in Montreal. Overcome by the challenges she faced, finally allowing herself to express her feelings, she tearfully articulated her thoughts through this study. Abeer, like all of the YAR participants we interviewed, made it clear that she aspired to fully establish herself in her new home in Québec and, through her education, reclaim her life. However, what she and all the Syrian YAR participants in our study found was that those barriers and *défi*, coupled with insufficient academic support in the AE system, served to continue the disruption in her life and hindered reaching her desired aspirations and limited her life chances.

1. Structural barriers

a) Learning Local Languages

The findings revealed that the primary concern raised by all 41 interviewees was related to language. Based only on the study sample, it was indicative that there was a problem with language learning because many students complained about the difficulties they faced. “The language was the biggest challenge. I think the only challenge.” (Issa). The students and practitioners agreed that YAR entering AE were insufficiently prepared for academic learning. “They are slowed, particularly by the French language [subject] because in math and science they are very performing.” (Practitioner 7). The Francization program offered free of charge by the government to all immigrants to help them integrate into Québec society was reported to be a slow and inappropriate process to enter academic programs. The level of French in francization programs is not appropriate for the education track. Initially, many students were hopeful and appreciated the value of learning French because of the access it offered to enter into Québec life. “With [French] we can have a better life, even better than back home!” (Aaron).

Not enough attention is paid to the transition from francization to the academic classroom, complained all the practitioners. The AE educators agreed that this weak link resulted in YAR, and allophone immigrant AE students, feeling disappointed and frustrated because students often had to relearn the language before being allowed to study academic subjects in French AE schools. The path to acquiring scholastic French was not linear. "The school is designed for those who speak French. And if you do not speak French, you may not understand everything." (Ali). Since all subjects are taught in French it is imperative to know the medium of instruction well.

> If the teacher explained everything in French and you didn't get it and you're too shy to ask the teacher, so no one really follows up with you…teachers do not help, even if someone is taking one subject, like math, they would not get support if the student's French were not good. (Farrah).

The Syrian YAR participants' knowledge of English and French on arrival varied. Newcomers must attend French schooling, but adult education is exempt from this law. However, there was no information provided to these refugees regarding their right, as AE students, to attend English AE centers as they assumed that in Québec they had to go to Frenchspeaking schools. Most student participants did not know French despite both languages having been taught in the Syrian education system. At the time of the interviews, most students spoke with some proficiency in English and varying levels of French. English was appealing to those YAR who had more familiarity and/or experience with the language.

> English is much better for us…we have more vocabularies and ability to study in English than French so… why to wait and waste another year …learning the French language while studying… like, I do not want to risk my future … so I said, …let's do English.
>
> (Tareq).

Of the 29 refugee student participants, 12 chose to study at French AE and 17, more than half, chose to attend AE in the English system. The students did not all start in the French AE sector. They found out from friends and their community that it was possible to attend AE schools in English. At the time of the interviews, 21 students were in the English AE system. Three students

had decided to transfer from French language AE schools despite having tried several French language AE schools before deciding to leave. These three students lamented not having gone directly into the English sector, which they perceived could have allowed them to precipitate finishing AE and achieving their aspiration of entering college. “I stay [in French AE] for three months, but I think I didn’t progress anything; I did not achieve anything.” (Abdul).

> Because I can say that I wasted two years of my life in Canada. Like two years, and I am trying to learn English and French...I could say that if I chose English from the beginning it would be better for me. At least, I would be in the university right now. (Ibrahim).

> If I was in French maybe I wouldn’t have finished in three or four years... This is because of the anxiety and the fear and that I would not succeed and that I would not go to college fast. And that is why I chose the English path. (Laila).

The complexities of learning a new language, in French or English, were not as relevant as the difficulties faced due to the insufficient level of scholastic language entering AE and the lack of academic support. Language learning, and learning in a language, are not the same things. The issue was with the process and the lack of support, not necessarily the language. Research suggests that given many minority immigrants speak more than one language, learning another language would therefore not be the sole cause of academic difficulties (dela Cruz, 2023; Lightbown & Spada, 2020; Steinbach, 2010). Content-based academic language acquisition (Crettnand & Reusse, 2019; Lightbown & Spada, 2020) or a plurilingual approach for refugee learners in the classroom (Reddick, 2023) would be most appropriate. Many YAR searched for alternatives like changing schools, and languages, and even just simply dropping out. Considering that all the refugee participants felt that they were already behind their peers, the delays caused by the language issue were a major hindrance.

> Participants admitted that learning in a foreign language, whether French or English, was challenging for them. Practitioners agreed: “Starting from zero is a big blow: no school, no language, no cultural knowledge.” (Practitioner 1).

> [Having to learn the official language is] difficult because you do not speak their language. You do not speak English and French. You should like study from zero. It's short time and long stuff; like, math, English, and French in three months. It is a lot!
>
> (Nour).

Without an academic level of English or French, progress through the AE system presented a problem. For these refugee students, challenges were faced learning in English or French because they needed academic support; however, teachers were unable to consistently provide individualized attention, obligated to move through the curriculum depending on the language abilities of the broader class. Supplemental teaching assistants, or tutors, were not available in the classroom.

> Like [for the] exam [in] physical science you need to have academic English. It was very difficult for me to translate the question; I know the idea if I understand the question I can answer. But sometimes, I had hard time to answer. I always was asking the teacher to translate the question to me. (Hadi).

Given the relationship between culture and language, participants' sense of belonging to their new society was threatened (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Language and cultural capabilities are markers of a sense of inclusion and yet obtaining these indicators was challenged by the government assimilation programs that unintentionally hindered YAR progress. Researchers have suggested academic francization as a possible solution, but this has yet to materialize (Potvin et al., 2014). There is a misalignment which stems from the reality that the transition from government language programs to the education system is not made for the majority but for newcomers, like YAR. This route is only for non-Franco-Québécois. Yet, not enough thought and attention have been directed to the experiences of these students. For allophone newcomers to Canada, language acquisition is a challenge, whether in French or English, therefore innovative approaches to language learning may improve the process (dela Cruz, 2023; Galante et al., 2020).

b) <u>Pedagogical Approach</u>

The AE pedagogy was envisioned to empower students returning to their studies later in life, affording them the respect and possibility to take their time achieving their goals with no pressure, equitable in theory. Designed with liberalism in mind, from a meritocratic standpoint, if students fail, it is their fault and responsibility, rather than a consequence of the pedagogical and institutional context (Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Luu &Blanco, 2021; Versmesse et al., 2017). Adult education was not intended for those who became AE students due to circumstances, such as forced migrants with missed years of schooling, nor those who are still in their developmental stages of life. Historically, the pedagogical process at AE centers focused on individualized learning wherein the onus for all aspects of student life rested on the pupil. If students required academic help, they were encouraged to seek assistance. The independent learning approach and culture assume that the AE student population is an autonomous homogenous group (DEAAC 2009). As an alternative option offered to mature individuals to complete a High School diploma, AE is understood by society to be a choice (Lukes, 2011; O'Toole & Essex, 2012), and adult students therefore are expected to be self-motivated. "Nobody is forcing you to be there, and [it] is actually one of the biggest problems." (Ahmad).

The YAR participants chose to go TO school over work, strongly motivated to move through AE rapidly, get a high-school diploma and head to higher education. The freedom to learn independently seemed ideal as YAR anticipated this meant moving faster through the system, convinced they would catch up with their peers in the diaspora who were ahead of them scholastically. The student-centred approach applied in AE centres, whether in English or French, disregarded the fact that Syrian young refugees came from educational systems that are teacher-centred (Al Hesan et al., 2016); and that these YAR learners did not have the basic skills to be independent learners. In this education system, refugees' past learning experiences were not recognized whereas pre-resettlement knowledge could shape and synergize refugee experience in a new context (Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Kyriakides et al. 2018; Paul et al., 2023). With much less educational support than in the youth sector, many students felt set up for potential failure and resented their experience. These refugee students suggested that a more structured approach would have allowed them to advance in more favourable conditions and within their time frame.

Students would have benefited from scholastic support at least in learning how to become independent learners. When pedagogical expectations exclude students, this is a form of discrimination (Pierre & Bosset, 2021). All practitioners concurred that independent learning was a painful adjustment for YAR who had been used to rote learning; that navigating AE was a struggle for YAR. “It's a real leap for them to learn on their own…” (Practitioner 2). For AE teachers, the independent approach is challenging as well. According to Voyer (2021), AE practitioners reported feeling more competent having appropriate supplementary training merging disciplinary knowledge and the individualized education module. The findings concur with other research which highlights the need for more support around independent learning and the need to offer different learning approaches for immigrant students (Potvin et al. 2014).

> This module requires a lot of autonomy, maturity, and strategy. Evidently, many students can find themselves wasting their time because they lack those strategies. On the other hand, it is convenient for students who want to move forward faster. (Practitioner 7).

Even if they needed assistance, the number of student requests made it difficult to get individualized attention to advance. “It's very difficult to move forward on your own...” (Caleb). Lack of tutors or teacher assistance resulted in the students waiting futilely in their seats for the essential academic support needed. There was a notable absence of scaffolding support. Students regretted the lack of guidance as they worked through the school system. There was a sense that being responsible for their advancement in AE equated to being left alone without adequate assistance, ultimately extending their time at AE and the possibility of failure. Unfortunately, several students did fail classes.

> … the individualized [program] you are on your own, but I have a lot of questions because it’s a new language for me. So, if you want to go see the teacher, you should write your name [on the board]. So maybe if you have chance, you will see him twice a day, so that’s difficult, because there are many students who write their name and ask questions. (Abdul).

I have several friends [who] were living in Syria…they left school for five years… [due to the war] and then …coming here and went to school for a week but then … left. I believe that

[they] needed help because there are a lot of intelligent students, but the problem is it is very hard to get back to school. (Maher).

Although intended to support adult individual situations, the AE approach failed to address the age-related struggles of Syrian refugee students who were still young in many ways; barely leaving adolescence, on the cusp of adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Hirani et al., 2016; Lukes, 2011). Moreover, the practitioners all agreed that "the face of AE ha[d] changed" (Practitioner 12); and that the population of AE students was much younger and diverse. Some YAR found this to be true as well." [AE] is full of teenagers now more than adults I would say" (Fadi).

The YAR students expressed difficulty in motivating themselves. "You have to be your own teacher." (Ikhlas). "They are not going to follow you*."* (Tareq). Previously in Syria, these students were used to teacher support and guidance in the classroom. "In the beginning, it was a bit hard to understand ... [in the Middle East] the teacher does everything, and the student just sits there, taking the information." (Issa). Instead, the YAR students felt unsupported. "After the second time, the third time I said "uh sir, still like I don't understand" he says "You know what? I don't have time for this, let's move on." (Aaron).

> The system there [in AE] is different from high school… we know in high school, they kind of, they do advise you, they do tell you what to do, you can't miss classes … so the system in adult [education] is sort of different. (Ahmad).

> [My] teacher just gives us a book, and some questions and you have to answer them. Ah when you finish, come show me I will tell you if it's right or it's not. But how I'm gonna do it? You didn't explain for us. You know? (Mariyah)

Some students felt that the *laissez-faire* learning method did not suit them. They maintained that they preferred the familiarity of a more rigorous regime. Many YAR considered that tardiness, sleeping in class (local AE students usually work full time and are tired), disrupting lessons or absences should not be tolerated in school. "I believe that it [AE] should be

stricter on this." (Hana). For YAR such behaviours were indicative of a lack of motivation or encouragement from the school; students were left to fail repeatedly, connecting to the fact that AE is not mandatory (Lukes, 2011). This demotivating environment was not acceptable to YAR interviewees who interpreted teacher indifference to student disengagement in classroom learning as highly discouraging.

> If you are going to come to our school, you are going to be frustrated because of the students. You will enter the classes; you will be frustrated. Everyone is sleeping. The students, like, everyone. (Emir)

What was both surprising and discouraging to YAR was that many 'Canadian' AE students of the dominant culture, without any language barrier, had been in the AE system for several years and had still not completed the program, yet according to Villatte and Marcotte (2013) such traditional students appreciated the AE system. Some practitioners noted that other foreign students, such as Asians, seemed to manage well with a self-governing pedagogical system. "It is true that autonomy and discipline are values of adult education. They [YAR] feel very challenged by this..." (Practitioner 8). Being behind in a foreign curriculum, facing new languages and unused to asking for support in educational contexts, the YAR students felt abandoned and at times confused, constantly needing to seek advice or risk failure.

In recognition of the problems that Syrian YAR face in their transition from the *classe d'accueil* or *francisation* to AE, one school trialed a pilot project to address YAR-specific needs. The *Cadre* program centered on Syrian refugee students, aged between 16-18 years old, in one class with one teacher. The project proposed a hybrid method of teaching French: independent learning (AE) and lecture/group-based learning (high school). "The idea behind this project is to avoid the brutal change from a lecture that has a teacher speaking to individualized courses." (Practitioner 6). The practitioner from this school indicated that this approach to learning created a sense of solidarity and support, which students found encouraging as it decreased isolation; that grouping students by age is more motivating and brings stability, consistency, and a sense of inclusion to the classroom. Although these are desired outcomes, from interviews with the Syrian refugee students in AE, teachers' positive

perceptions of the *Cadre* system did not reflect the experiences of the students themselves. Hence, there is a need for greater engagement with the student body to understand their needs, desires and experiences in systems that are designed for their explicit support, as the literature shows (Sorensen, 2023).

The challenges YAR faced with the AE pedagogy were not contingent on the length of disrupted education in pre-resettlement times but rather depended on the level of academic difficulty faced post-resettlement without teacher guidance. Although certain English language AE schools offered some traditional instructional approaches to learning, follow-up and guidance were lacking in these schools as well. For example, one YAR participant had experienced only minimal levels of disrupted education, was highly motivated, aspiring to study medicine, and arrived with relatively advanced levels of English. Yet, he failed to complete one level of advanced maths in the assigned time because he worked alone without guidance from a teacher while attending other difficult science courses. Ultimately, it took him three semesters to finally complete one level. Even in schools where there may be some teacher-directed lessons, students had to repeatedly ask the teacher to slow down to enable them to understand.

The concept of pace was a confusing micro-macro level issue for the student participants. On one hand, completing academic material was time-sensitive due to curriculum deadlines. The quick pace of teaching is dictated by teachers' need to cover the curriculum. The unavailable academic support made it difficult for YAR to keep up with the pace.

> [The teacher] always likes to give us activity and subject and said finish it fast-fast fast … Like I need time to understand it I cannot finish it without understanding. I told him that, he said he cannot because the school board gave me specific time and program I have to finish. And that for me it is difficult. (Issa).

On the other hand, AE students were generally encouraged to determine their progress to complete the education program at the speed they chose. The AE mantra of going at your own pace was an idea that did not resonate with YAR who already felt left behind.

> …every time that you go and ask a person …they will advise you what to do but they will always say like "take your time," "no need for rush," just "do everything as slow as you can, as well as getting good marks. (Amina).

Whether in the English or French sector, for students who are used to repetition learning, not used to learning in new languages, or who have experienced disrupted education and perhaps trauma, the independent learning approach is not ideal. Teaching strategies are based on the goals of education, while learning styles are specific to individuals and cultures, most evident among refugee learners (Paul et al., 2023). Indeed, when learning and teaching styles are incongruent, student efficiency is reduced (Ghosh, 2004). The assumption that all students will benefit from an individualized approach to learning is misguided and serves to marginalize minority student populations.

> Yes, well they have to either find a solution or find more teachers better suited to support people who come here at a later stage in life, who have already lost a few years of schooling, who already have difficulties speaking the language …In fact, it's very difficult. So, they need to pay more attention, they need to encourage us more, they need to have better informed attitudes, and be better educated as to how to work with us, how to teach us. (Roula).

As the study findings and the literature suggest, AE authorities must acknowledge that refugee students have a variety of learning styles, multiple intelligences, and language abilities to build on (Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; Matthews, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Wilkinson, et al., 2017). Refugee students need reassurance and a sense of grounding found in an approach to learning which feels more connected rather than dangerously promoting their exclusion; an approach to teaching which is more collectivist (De Capua & Marshall, 2011). All 29 students suggested that the AE pedagogical approach did not serve to inspire them but rather strongly discouraged them. As one student questioned: "Don't they know they are actually playing with someone's future?" (Roula). Having lost time, while moving from Syria to an asylum country,

having lost time to learn new languages in Québec, and having lost time wading through a foreign education system, only served to motivate YAR to move through AE as soon as possible.

c) <u>Administration</u>

The study findings are aligned with the literature regarding refugee resettlement in host countries: global policies do not reflect refugee displacement reality (Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Morrice, 2020; Ratković et al., 2017). The Syrian students shared they felt forgotten as no established policies or practices for their educational path were set out, a refugee reality postmigration, as the literature outlines (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Van Heelsum, 2017). For example, YAR were not informed of the educational paths available to them, such as Adult Education. Students felt left out because they were not included in the registration of refugees into schools upon arrival, which was the case for their younger siblings. "I was supposed … to attend that school because it was the high school there, near where we lived. But I didn't, my brother only got the mail." (Reem). This student explained that because he was over 16 years he was not considered for traditional high school and yet uninformed of any other option. It was predominantly YAR self-motivation that propelled them to identify how they could continue their education.

Research literature confirms that lacking the right information impedes refugee advancement (Lloyd, et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) because informational barriers place refugees at a disadvantage (Bajwa et al., 2017). The study findings suggest that YAR should be acknowledged as a specific subgroup of refugees arriving in Canada at a vulnerable age, 16-24, and who exist between government classifications of children and adults. Although not obligated to go to school, not enough attention was paid to these YAR by the government, unless they had started their education in the youth section. Upon arrival to their resettlement host society in Montreal, the subsequent delays for YAR to enter school were a source of great frustration, according to the student interviewees because they lost time as they searched for information, reaching out to family and friends, and rarely approaching formal services. Many newcomers are understandably unaware of how societal systems work when unfamiliar with mainstream

institutions. Therefore, YAR who were invited to Canada should have been informed of their educational options by the municipal administration. However, they were forgotten due to their age, and omitted from successful participation and mobility in their resettlement country.

When YAR were already in the youth sector of the education system, the findings show that there was insufficient communication regarding their transition to AE schools when they became too old (16 years) to stay in the youth section. The students complained that there was neither guidance nor preparation provided by authorities before the change. There was a lack of information provided to the students and their parents regarding the way the Québec education system functions. “I expected to go to a regular class… [not] adult school…[for] failing students. My parents thought I had bad grades and they started scolding me…it was a lot of pressure and very stressful.” (Samar). The lack of information from authorities and seeming lack of care, which YAR students associated with transitioning into AE, was a troublesome truth. These experiences exemplify the structural barriers, which endorse exclusion, compounded with YAR struggle to learn the host norms and language. “I would say that the [transition] to Adult Education is made in a brutal way, those students are already fragile for different reasons and problems, and they are lost.” (Practitioner 6).

Francization Disjuncture

Practitioners complained that the curriculum and assessment approach of the francization integration class provided by both the Ministry of Immigration and the Ministry of Education were found to be dissimilar because of the inconsistencies and differences in each Ministry’s pedagogical methods. The practitioners and YAR students also expressed frustration because there is a disconnect between the French learned in this program and the academic content needed for the AE French sector. “Each ministry works in isolation (Ministry of Education, Immigration) while there should be more communication between them regarding this target population…” (Practitioner 4). The limitations of practitioners' inability to solve these structural problems were evident in discussions. This is a crucial point because what is being underlined is the disjunction between two policy imperatives. From the practitioners’ view, there is a generous budget provided for francization, so why are students facing challenges in learning French? If the

money is not the problem, then the problem is that the needs are not targeted. As much as AE centers' budgets change depending on the student numbers, the concern, according to the practitioners, is how the money is spent by regional directors. In theory, centre directors inform the regional directors of the AE center's needs, for example, specific resources for the refugee student population.

Marginalization of Adult Education

Adult Education is not considered a priority for the government (Walker, 2022), as this practitioner expressed:

> The needs of adult education are always placed at the end of the list. The budget will always go firstly to primary and/or secondary schools… Political decisions are much bigger than me. It is difficult. Adult education cannot be the poor kid of the school board. (Practitioner 10)

Students felt the absence of resources and personnel in the limited courses offered and, in the infrastructure. They noted the demotivating environment and lack of school materials.

> …even the lighting of the school it affects the student's mood. I will say mood because I went to my old schools; they were dark a little bit when you go there you feel like you are going to some horror movie or something. You do not have the mood to study or stuff like this. You know, small stuff like this they affects a lot, at least for me. (Mohamad).

> And they need stuff, like computers and internet. If I don't have internet, I cannot study there. The teacher sometimes gives us activity to do it in the phone, so someone if [students] cannot afford the internet on his phone, they cannot open like us. And if the computer, if you open it there, it's really slow. We will finish and the Google still rolling. (Aaron)

Practitioners felt the financial strain of the lack of remedial teachers, psychologists, and school support, among other school services. “If the government is going to allow refugees to come to school, it must have support mechanisms for them…” (Practitioner 3). All 41 interviewees concurred that as an educational institution, AE is marginalized, and not important to the Québec Ministry of Education. Some teachers spoke about their limits as educators in terms of supporting their students, many of whom faced challenges at school without sufficient academic support and mental health services. The education staff lamented the lack of support services and resources to assess students who probably had learning disabilities, and as non-specialized educators, were unable to decipher how to assist these students.

> When students first arrive at the adult school, there should be services provided such as psychological diagnosis or to check for learning difficulties. But they are never diagnosed due to a [lack of] resources whereas more specialized guidance [is needed]. (Practitioner 4).

Furthermore, one educator added that “…school boards need to decide what those services are, for example, trained teachers for students with special needs, a psychologist, etc. by prioritizing their budget.” (Practitioner 8). The lack of awareness of the needs of refugee students and their educators by the authorities was evident in the study findings. As shared by the practitioners: “There’s not enough staff, a need for personnel and resources so we can reduce the administrative work on teachers, counsellors etc., to be more efficient.” (Practitioner 10). Many practitioners were overworked and seemingly tired, morally, and physically, during the interviews, yet their professional and personal dedication was obvious. Some practitioners worried about the financial struggles their students and their student’s families underwent as refugees. The practitioners felt ineffective about the difficulties some of their students faced, having to work and study. As one educator shared:

> Especially young teachers who are trying to help say …"they can't buy bread this weekend." I tell them: "Listen, we help them, there are resources, but we can't place all the problems in the class on your back, it's not right". (Practitioner 9).

The educators acknowledged the challenges their refugee students faced with triggering memories of trauma and their inaccessibility to concentrate on class work, confirming the literature on the refugee integration process; that the pre- and post-migration experiences of refugees impact their mental health and learning capabilities (Boyden, 1994; Kos & Zemljak, 2007). "Teachers don't have the training to help students with anxiety, PTSD, triggers, insomnia etc., so they send them to the counsellors." (Practitioner 2). Yet, many YAR reported rarely seeking out support from counsellors.

The teachers were troubled by their inability to address the needs of students coming out of a war zone. "The terror that young adult Syrian refugees have witnessed needs to be dealt with and a psychologist at school can help but the money in the budget does not allow for this." (Practitioner 1). One teacher explained that his job teaching refugee students was twofold: to pay close attention to the psychological well-being of the students and to teach the class: "But to do that double job, psychological support, and language improvement – at the same time? Ufff. It is not easy." (Practitioner 6).

The lack of trauma-informed training was evident in some practitioners' narratives, sharing that they did not know how to comfort their students triggered by sounds (like rain which sounded like bullets) during class or by news of continual fighting in their homeland.

> Students in class used Facebook and found out that their neighbours, their cousins were dead. Then the students cry, the teacher cries…we don't know what to do.
> We are not trained for that therefore we just do our best. (Practitioner 3).

Additionally, practitioners complained there was a lack of supplies needed for students, and a lack of funding for additional, though essential services or extracurricular activities to foster a sense of community at the school. "Our budget is too limited, for example, even to

buy a cake! There isn't enough staff …and resources so that we can reduce the administrative work of teachers, counsellors, etc., to be more efficient." (Practitioner 5). "The AE sector is not understood from the ministerial level…there is a total disconnect." (Practitioner 12). The insufficient support for staff was evident in the necessity for trauma-informed training, professional development focused on refugee education, and the need to reduce practitioner workload by hiring more staff. "I think teachers need more training and we need more time to spend with students individually." (Practitioner 4). Indeed, the difficulty many YAR reported had to do with insufficient support for students in AE classrooms.

Lack of Funding

To ensure that the AE diverse student body achieves success, the Québec government must address the funding issues in the AE system. The practitioner interviewees noted that while there is funding for vocational schools, which support students who go straight into the economic market, there is no funding or bursaries for those who pursue their formal education. One practitioner shared her dismay that once the government passes a young adult student onto AE, the Ministry expects AE to be responsible for all the needs of the student.

> Pass the buck/problem…after mandatory age of education, 'you're on your own'- they [the government] feel like they have done their job to mandate education…like: 'I'm not responsible for you now that you're an adult. (Practitioner 12).

Feedback from practitioners paints a somber picture of the structural issues found in the AE sector which do not provide the support essential for refugee student academic achievement. "The needs of AE students depend on the school body, so services in AE should be mandatory based on need." (Practitioner 11). Systems, processes, and practices should be designed according to the school population, insisted the educators, therefore, requesting that the Ministry of Education provide support services across the board in the AE sector is not the answer. To know where there is a need, an awareness of the clientele at AE centers is essential. This is possible through strong, informed leadership and governance, of regional directors and local center directors who should all understand the need for mandatory services. Engagement with

the student body should be strengthened to know what each AE schools need and allocate the resources appropriately. “Service provisions to this group have not been made a priority in the school board budget.” (Practitioner 12).

Scheduling Issues: Another Major Consequence of a Limited Budget

The lack of AE teachers prevents offering more mandatory courses in any one center. Given that in most AE schools there are only three subject blocks scheduled per day for three months, scheduling issues caused a lot of obstruction and delays to YAR academic plans. These courses were often programmed at the same time, leaving YAR no choice but to take one required course per term. The inability to take all the subjects needed in one semester meant students had no choice but to wait for the next semester. As the quotes below attest, this was deeply frustrating for students.

> They put it in the schedule in the same period so I cannot take it. So, I should switch it, like I lose 3 months, I think. .... And the same problem in the next semester, and this semester also… Like if I want to study English, math, and French; they need to open more courses. Three multiple courses in the same schedule. Now, because of that I will lose three months. (Omar)

When asked how the timetable issue impacted his progress in obtaining his High School diploma, Hasan, retorted “You just opened my cuts,” due to the delay in his graduation caused by the system. The foreignness already encountered in terms of AE pedagogy and language learning was amplified by scheduling issues. Students were motivated to change the system, which worked against them by addressing school directors, but more courses offered meant more teachers and staff needed, which meant more funding. “I just told him about the schedule, and they said we cannot we don’t have enough money to open classes...” (Abdul). To deal with their inability to change the system, many students decided to find alternative options such as additional classes at AE centers elsewhere and/or night classes to quicken their process out of AE. “If I did not get to go to other schools and looked and searched which one gives this course and which one can give me that course; I would probably still be there in

adult." (Ibrahim). With the intention not to waste time, the choice to attend several AE centers in one day, from early morning to late at night, subsequently caused some students a lot of stress and fatigue.

Another consequence of the limited budget was to form networks. In AE, unlike in traditional schools, it was difficult for these refugee students to get to know others. Seeking their high school credentials as soon as possible YAR spent time in many AE institutions due to scheduling issues and were busy working as well. Therefore, the opportunity for YAR to focus on academic connections and to interact was limited. As the literature and the study findings confirm, feeling part of the community and developing a network is related to how well refugees and immigrants integrate and overcome feelings of isolation (Jacquet & Masinda, 2014; OECD, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

Networking

School is a microcosm of society. In the youth sector, there is more support in place to ensure that children can learn, make friends and progress smoothly on their path. Since students attend different AE classes based on their level, and not on their age, they are often grouped with different people each session and therefore AE does not provide a stable environment favourable to building solid ties. In secondary school, friendships can be fostered over years with ageappropriate peers and a community can be established. For YAR at AE schools, this opportunity to connect and network is not mirrored because AE institutions are structured for the individual, rather than the group. Therefore, making friends and building connections is not a principal component of the AE experience whereas the literature posits its importance for refugee students (Lamba & Krahn, 2003; Wilkinson & Lloyd-Zantiotis, 2017). While the AE mandate is to improve all adult student's life chances and qualifications, refugees have diverse needs which the AE structure does not accommodate. "Adult education is just about study? There are few opportunities to develop community outside of class." (Chantelle).

The student participants struggled to connect because they were not part of a cohort. The YAR expressed frustration, isolation, and doubt about school, rather than seeing school as a place to

build social relations. The opportunity to socialize was limited for YAR who yearned for connections. Even learning French in the francization program was isolating in that YAR had limited opportunities to communicate outside the classroom with Francophones. These language classes not only create social segregation between newcomers and native speakers, but they fail to use one of the best ways to learn a language through socializing (Lightbown & Spada, 2020; Steinbach, 2010). Occasions to meet those of the dominant culture in AE remained difficult, as YAR participants reported, although such contacts would facilitate networking in the local language, learning societal norms and enabling integration of minorities into Québécois society. Yet, when possible, YAR were delighted to create friendships with other AE minorities "I love to be between everyone... it was fun for me to learn about new cultures like Indian people, Pakistani people rather than the Middle Eastern people, you know." (Ikhlas).

Learning on one's own, problems with learning the language, in addition to difficulties understanding cultural differences, did not nurture an environment conducive to networking and connection building. Students learned that studying at AE schools was a lonely quest and so had to focus on their individual tracks to accomplish their aspirations. "I was close to them during my classes and during school period but after school, no. I went straight home and did my own thing." (Lina). Some interviewees unambiguously reported switching AE schools to find a younger school environment where they could make friends. "I was young, you know 18...and everyone was very old with me in the course, so I was not comfortable at all.... I went to another school where I found people a little bit from my age, and that was way better." (Ibrahim).

d) <u>Perceived Discrimination</u>

Student participants believed that after completion of the yearlong francization course, they would be placed in high levels of academic French. The frustration of not having learned French sufficiently for AE in francization, and the overall grade placement tests which assessed YAR on subjects other than language, surprised and disappointed YAR to discover that they were placed in low academic levels. A consequence of not being a native Francophone or Anglophone speaker is that students were evaluated based on their knowledge of the language and not on their competence in terms of the subject content. Their perceived inability to express themselves

fluently in the language of instruction resulted in lower-grade placements. For example, despite being proficient in math in Syria, Ikhlas was placed in two grade levels below. “I had to repeat everything just to understand in English.” (Ikhlas). Although he found the content uncomplicated, Hasan was placed three levels below. “I was very frustrated ... because they don’t let me switch classes.” (Hassan). This felt unfair to YAR who claimed that their knowledge of the subject area was higher than their ability to express themselves in a foreign language to prove this. “Yes, I am very upset, and I do not want to talk about this subject because it gets on my nerves.” (Lina). If YAR students objected to their low placement, they were reassured they should take their time and not worry.

Some YAR claimed they were discriminated against due to practitioner prejudice. The students believed that their entrance exams were not graded correctly; and that they were placed in lower levels simply based on who they are and where they come from: refugees from Syria. The perceived discrimination expressed by the YAR corroborates with the literature (Pierre & Bosset, 2021; Ferede, 2010; Morrice et al., 2020; Yau, 1995). Not all students responded in the same way to their low placement. Some students acknowledged that without sufficient language abilities, they required placement at low levels. “Despite I’m really good at math and everything. But my English wasn’t that good at that time. So, they put me in secondary one.” (Hadi). Others protested, like Hassan “What I did was that I changed school because I wanted to do another placement test in another school…. So, I did my placement test and they put me sec 4 [a higher level].” Still others, like Naima, not knowing the system, patiently waited to discover that they should have complained from the start of the perceived discrimination. “Now no one is going to help me, because the time that I had to take action I didn’t because I didn’t know what to do.” Naima ended up dropping out of AE for a year, frustrated and disillusioned.

Another feeling of discrimination surfaced, according to some students, when teachers assumed that YAR students were dropouts. The refugee students felt that the teachers should have known their pre-resettlement story; that they were forced to abandon their schooling due to war in their homeland. “The teacher thought I was a dropout. She didn’t know I had to stop school. Why not? Why didn’t she know?” (Amina). “The teacher said you chose to be here [AE], it’s your problem but I didn’t choose to be here, it wasn’t my fault.” (Jameela). The

importance of knowing your students is evident in these narratives (Potvin et al., 2022; UNHCR, 2022).

The refugee students felt betrayed by hidden costs which discriminated against their seeking an education; costs which were considered unfair. The students noted that studying at AE required more financial support than they expected. They only became aware of these expenses after enrollment. During the interviews, YAR participants felt the need to share their surprise and disappointment regarding the cost of school materials required to purchase every term, which for some was an obstacle, like Farrah: "… for the books… I paid for French only book 60$ for one semester and imagine… I [also] have English and mathematics…". If a student came to class without the course material (whether forgotten or not bought due to cost), entrance into class was forbidden, according to the YAR interviewees. The students considered this policy to be unfair and could not fathom that practitioners were willing to fail students with financial problems or who neglected to bring their book to class. Excluding YAR from class, rather than understanding these students' circumstances, was perceived as discrimination.

> If you have a book, you study, and if not, the teacher kicks you out without knowing your situation; like, maybe I cannot afford a book. I saw that many times in the French class. If you do not have a book, out. We do not need you. He does not ask you why you do not have a book. (Ahmed).

Newcomers who attended francization were offered a small financial incentive to allow them to focus on learning French and Québécois culture. However, in adult high school the costs of school materials and life costs are not sufficiently covered by government support. "Even me I work, I cannot study in the weekend, also after the school it's too hard ...Like I don't study, I don't practice... so if I fail, I deserve that ...because I do not study." (Yusuf). Consequently, to pay for their personal and student needs, YAR have to make money working, while studying. "The past year was very crazy year to me. I will finish in this May, this semester, and then I will stop studying for one whole year because I am broke! I cannot afford my education." (Caleb). If financially possible, all YAR would have preferred to study full time, to concentrate on building

their academic dream rather than to have to work to support themselves and often their families as well. Of the YAR interviewees, 28 of the 29 held employment and attended school.

2. Cultural Barriers

a) Adjustment to School Culture

Accessing services for something as fundamental as academic support appeared as a barrier due to cultural practices. This was especially the case when students first arrived, unfamiliar with the school, the system, and the people. “Yes, Syrians will not ask for help.” (Yusuf). Although some students sought assistance from tutors and teachers, needing to continually ask for assistance was problematic. The combined challenge of not being taught and a lack of reassurance and guidance from teachers was difficult. “You will not feel that anyone is encouraging you.” (Mohamad).

The sense of desertion was very real in many students’ narratives, sharing their perception that students risk failing over and over until practitioners step in to consider why. “If you stayed 20 years doing nothing (in AE) no one will tell you anything... Whatever you do, you do it.” (Farrah). Adjustment to independent learning, as mentioned previously, was extremely difficult for these refugee students who felt institutional agents did not understand their desire to speed up their time in AE; for YAR moving on with their educational lives was critical. Students hesitated to seek support because practitioners repeatedly encouraged them to take their time and not rush.

Although some support services were available within the school, the majority of YAR shared they were not accustomed to cultural norms such as reaching out for support. The student participants rarely used these facilities, other than the occasional basic-level contact with tutoring or career advice services. “I am not that type of people who goes like to somebody and talk. I always keep inside of me. I manage my stuff alone, but that affected my school.” (Mariyah). According to some students, practitioners were unable to understand their perspective and therefore YAR preferred not to hear the same rhetoric which differed culturally from the Québécois perspective. The refugee student’s reluctance to ask for help was based largely on previous experiences which resulted in answers considered unhelpful. “I do not go to

an advisor anymore because I know what they will tell me. They will say, okay we are in Canada; here no one asks you about your age, about your studies." (Hadi).

Traditional AE students understand the mechanisms and processes of accessing services; however, many YAR sought support in less conventional ways. For example, for mental health issues, some YAR found comfortable casual conversations with practitioners to be helpful. For some students, teachers were the first line of support, not only from an academic perspective but also as a source of encouragement and fun. 'They gave me hope to not lose my hope' (Amina).

> I couldn't imagine the support she gave me ...She was like "it's okay, I will give you some extra time. You don't need to be worried about other people. Everybody has some problems in their lives, so it's okay". (Roula).

Some YAR students viewed their teachers as extremely accessible individuals who would go out of their way to support students during lunch breaks, and even after school. One student, however, found that practitioners offered support and encouragement only when he asked.

If you pay attention, there are really good teachers there…there are really people who actually want you to succeed but if you don't give them your 100% why they should give you a 100% when you are not there, and if you are not even showing up? (Fadi).

Some students also sought out career advisors, and tutors and approached the administration to discuss pertinent issues. Culturally speaking, it is significant to recognize that the interactions of the students with these support services were approached informally. Some YAR shared that they sought support from career advisors to discuss their feelings, not for career advice.

> [The career advisor] gives you advices … like let's say when you are confused, and you want to know what you want to study. She gives you advices on that, you know. So, I was really close to her. Once, two every two weeks I would go and see her. (Lina).

Rather than addressing a mental health worker directly some students tried to manage their stress, sense of anxiety and cultural expectations, for example, with kind practitioners. One student felt even more connection to a practitioner of a similar minority background.

> Sometimes I would go to [the advisor]'s office to talk to her about these problems, too. So not just about career stuffs, but some psychological stuff, too. But I felt like, she was very close to me, and whatever questions I had I would go and answer her, and she will answer me. (Hana).

Some YAR enjoyed the fact that they could rely on people other than their friends to assist them in studying, which helped to boost their confidence. "I sat with her, and she talked… it's just about having a good teacher to talk to me in French … And when my exam came it truly helped." (Reem). However, for some students, the teaching and the tutoring service did not provide enough help and so labeled the quality of the teaching as deficient. "They [teachers] should be trained." (Naima). Hadi just needed support: "It's a little thing [encouragement] but it makes a big difference." Practitioners were generally appreciated especially when they seemed implicated and interested in helping students as this made a substantial difference, according to the YAR interviewees; however, when students did not feel supported, they held a negative perception of practitioners. Given the precarity of teaching positions in AE due to the irregularity of student populations, some practitioners noted that AE teachers are sometimes not as invested as teachers in the youth sections of the education system.

The Syrian refugee students lived in a collectivist culture which is family oriented. They highly value family and feel a sense of responsibility to provide for them. This may be accounted for by the reverence and respect for family and parents, which are culturally linked (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Steinbach, 2010, Paul et al., 2023). As the findings revealed, YAR were more used to a communal culture rather than an individualistic culture. Almost all young adult participants lived with their families and worked to support them while studying full time. This contrasted with the culture found in Québec, which for some AE practitioners, was necessary to

successfully navigate the AE system. “The Syrian refugees don’t have Québécois values.” (Practitioner 9).

For some practitioners YAR were not independent enough, considering that “…as of 16 and above a student should be responsible for their education and the consequences of their life choices. In this society, at 18, an individual is a legal adult and is expected to function as such.” (Practitioner 2). “The Québec reality is that there are norms, like you can’t be late, or lunch doesn’t have to be hot…it can be a cold sandwich.” (Practitioner 7). “Young adult refugees frequent adult education with a different background from the traditional clientele…” (Practitioner 1). Refugee students are different from other students: they may have trauma, face a new country, society, and language in which they must study. Although YAR attend AE with a different past than customary students, they are nonetheless expected to be autonomous when what they really want is the support required to navigate the foreignness of their new home.

b) <u>Perspectives on the Role of Parents</u>

Perspectives on the role of parents differed among participants. Practitioners criticized the newcomers because their parents were too involved in their lives and vice versa; YAR students cared too much about their parents and families. Practitioners pointed out the cultural difference between YAR and the dominant culture in terms of parental involvement in adult life. Some students shared the difficulty that their culturally dictated reality played on their ability to finish school because the adult responsibilities of financial strain and supporting their parents were heavy on them. Some YAR voiced that their parents were dependent on them for translation, driving, childcare and income to support the family. Often parents were less aware and less involved than their children in societal interactions, needing their children to accompany them. Refugee parents are often left behind because their children are faster to integrate into resettlement settings (Mangrio et al., 2020). “They become the parents of the parents. They learn French faster than their parents, so they end up taking ‘care’ as translators, etc.” (Practitioner 9).

Practitioners spoke of parents as a major source of pressure for students, both academically and concerning family expectations because Syrian refugee parents may require financial support from their children. “When I talk to [the students] about them studying and

working, they tell me that they have a lot of pressure from their families to help at home. It is normal for them, it is cultural." (Practitioner 5). Teachers found parents too anxious about their children's progress. Students felt pressured. The combined demands of AE, their self-imposed expectations, and intergenerational pressures often exacerbated and exhausted YAR, as Aaron expressed: "Oh, what do you want me to do? You want me to go to the moon and study as well?" Practitioners thought that parental anticipation for YAR to excel academically at the top universities to study the top professions, moving quickly to the next stage of education was misguided.

Most strongly expressed by practitioners was that parents had grand aspirations for their children without having a full understanding of how the system works, ignorant of the obstacles in the AE system impeding these students' academic advancement. "Parents aspire higher than what is realistic, and they compare with their friends' children" (Practitioner 6). Practitioners shared that YAR parents should be informed, from the start, about how the AE system functions and what this education sector has to offer to help adjust YAR parent expectations for their adult children. The unrealistic educational expectations of refugee parents for their children were surprising for practitioners who lacked an understanding of Syrian culture. "It is incredible how much influence they [parents] can have, in contrast to our values here in Quebec." (Practitioner 8).

The refugee students voiced that their feelings towards their parents were at times mixed due to the parental stress regarding their studies and yet as a source of encouragement and advice. As one student shared: "…thank God my parents they were there for me, and they were supporting me… But I also live with them. They were supportive, the education always is the first for them, so they supported me, I can say." (Omar). Practitioners indicated that parental pressure impacted how students engaged at school and what they aspired towards. "You need to finish; your peers are already in University." (Roula). The hesitancy of some students to speak about this issue could be culturally related (Morgan & Idriss 2012; Taylor & Krahn, 2013). Nonetheless, the most significant YAR narratives focused on gratitude for parental support and for their parents' choice to give up their lives for the betterment of their children. Their drive to advance as fast as possible was to show appreciation for their parents' sacrifice in bringing

them to Canada, sensitive to the challenges their parents faced not being able to gain work in their previous professions and in learning a new language. This theme never left YAR minds as these young adults recognized what their parents, families and friends gave up for sanctuary and hope of a better future.

> …our parents were a huge part of motivation. And the reason why I wanted to finish quickly, not to take my time, to finish as fast as possible to get to college, is for them. Is to prove to them that they did not waste [their] time and they did not sacrifice all the things that they did, like for nothing. So, I wanted to give them back this, at least, by finishing as soon as possible. They were really there for me for motivation, for even for advice. (Hassan).

3. Syrian YAR Motivation

The findings show that the Syrian refugee students were highly motivated to continue their life in Canada, yet they were extremely frustrated not being able to move fast enough through the AE system. The YAR interviewees were future-oriented; highly motivated and driven by cultural expectations of where one should be at a certain age. Extreme motivation for higher education or better employment options was expressed as an imperative. “Giving up is not an option.” (Chantelle). Their linear academic path was disrupted by the entire process of seeking sanctuary. Relocation due to war set YAR back but it did not set back their aspirations. Resettlement in Montreal offered the hope of fulfilling YAR life chances, yet the refugee students expressed sadness not to have succeeded with the expectations with which they came to Canada.

> I cried a lot because it is not fair that all of my friends in Toronto, they are already going to university, and they are not behind. For me, I am little bit behind…
>
> I still need to do a lot of work. (Lina).

Comparing themselves to peers in Syria and elsewhere, participants echoed regret of feeling academically less competent than their friends and colleagues. Studies show that aspirations are often thought of in relation to other people’s achievements (Boccagni, 2017).

The feeling of failure and disappointment was clear.

My goal is to finish as fast as possible. I do not want to lose any time because my friends back home already graduated three months ago. So, looking at it I just want to be with them. (Tareq).

Despite facing many challenges, Syrian refugee students found ways to overcome difficulties both as newcomers to Canada as well as YAR in AE. Family and friends helped them to stay motivated in times of hardship and despair. Although hardworking, they still needed support as one student put it: "We are all humans, you know." (Mohamad). Participants were relentless in their ambitious aspirations. Hardworking at both intersections as AE refugeebackground students and as employees, as most worked and studied full time, Syrian YAR were driven. Indeed, as one participant explained, the motivation: "… is inside yourself." (Omar). Findings revealed the inherent impetus of Syrian YAR not only to persevere and meet their goals but to live to their highest potential.

The YAR strove to gather the required information to complete secondary-level schooling: entered AE centres, attended multiple schools concurrently to obtain the obligatory number of courses within a given period, and demanded a healthier environment and more efficient systems from AE school authorities. "I went to four adult centres to finish it [high school diploma] as fast as possible." (Samar). However, these challenges did not dissipate YAR determination, resilience, commitment, and motivation to move forward. They strategized working and studying from early mornings to late nights, and weekends. "I checked many schools … when I found out that my second school was not that good, I went …to so many schools, French schools, to see if they are better. [I] looked for so many." (Hadi). To explain just how dedicated he was to finish school, another participant explained his journey to take summer school: "…it was an hour and a half from my home … so we had to wake up at six a.m. We had to wake up really early, and take the metro and then two buses, and change." (Tareq).

> Their objectives were clear and set: to finish the AE program and obtain his High School diploma as soon as possible to enable the development of capabilities for higher studies or training programs. Some YAR sought to go to university while others considered employment to secure a better financial position in the interim. “I only had one goal in my mind just to finish high school and go to college.” (Lina). “I don't want to waste time. I want my diploma.” (Abeer). As the study findings show, Syrian refugee students struggled within an unfamiliar education environment where they were confused about how to learn. “There needs to be a clearer path for people like us…we can’t figure out everything alone” (Roula). Overall, through their shared stories the image of a resolute YAR appeared. Considered as a whole, the Syrian YAR student was their own motivator. “No one helped me and told me to go and do this and that; I did by myself.” (Abdul).

The challenges students faced in AE negatively impacted Syrian YAR sense of self especially when they compared themselves to other Syrian refugee students and in terms of their own perspectives on their aspirations. Independently learning in a new language, without guidance, most YAR students remained focused on the idea that AE schools would strengthen their competencies, improve their language skills, build networks by cultivating connections and, most importantly, help them progress to reach their goals. Although their expectations were not met, they were adjusted, never losing sight of a better life, holding on to their ambitions and the prospect of greater opportunities in their new home. One student, although grieving his loss of future plans to be a doctor accepted the idea to be a mechanic, realigning his aspirations as a resettled refugee and nonetheless grateful for sanctuary: *“…but I am safer”* (Hadi).

Recommendations for Policymakers

The findings of this study generate questions which lead to recommendations, not only useful for policymakers in Canada and all its provincial education systems but also globally for all governmental authorities welcoming refugee learners to resettle in their nation.

1. Support Refugee Students at AE to Learn Independently

The findings reveal that the AE independent approach to learning for student success must be supported. Refugee students must be taught how to learn independently. Support could be offered by the orientation counsellor following the registration of students into AE schools. Group classes to explain the pedagogical approach at AE and follow-up sessions would be beneficial to new learners. A hybrid approach including both independent and instructional learning could provide the necessary scaffolding support for students, with teacher assistants available in the classroom. Volunteer teaching assistance could be employed by engaging students who are preservice potential teachers to assist YAR during classroom hours and outside scheduled courses as tutors on AE grounds. These future teachers would benefit from the teaching experience and the refugee student would get support to learn skills on how to work independently. This would not require funding from the government but rather coordination between the universities' Faculty of Education and the AE institutions. The management of such a service would be by someone in a representative/liaison role.

2. Greater Collaboration Between Ministries (Education, Immigration, Employment)

For long-term integration of YAR, more collaboration is necessary between the ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Immigration, Francisation and Integration and the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity) concerning funding, the francization program, and support navigating YAR into and out of the education system. Proper governance would determine the schools with refugee populations in need of such support. An awareness of the clientele at AE centers is essential and is possible through strong, informed leadership from provincial governments, the regional directors and local center directors. Collaboration between the three Ministries (a tri-ministerial government working group) could be through an appointed working group, with representatives from each ministry, who would focus on how to engage, encourage and navigate refugee populations through various programs available for newcomers to Québec. Moreover, this governmental collaboration would consider/guide each YAR as one file (immigration, education, and employment) toward their future path as established citizens in Québec.

More collaboration between the education systems is recommended to link the youth sector and adult sectors to establish and ensure a smoother transition for refugee students and thus

minimize further disruption. This could be established and solidified through Immigration and Education ministerial collaboration by transferring YAR, who arrive at 16 years old, directly into AE classrooms dedicated to that sub-group. The refugee students could then learn French in a more focused environment with other students in their age group while being exposed to academic content in a youth section of AE schools.

The tri-ministerial governmental working group could support both YAR and their parents in understanding the local employment and education systems which would benefit these forced migrants by minimizing stress and managing expectations. Given that funds are available through the Ministry of Employment for vocational schools, funds should be available for refugee students pursuing an education as an incentive for these young people and an investment for Québec. The tri-ministerial government working group could provide funding for YAR, such as bursaries, to help them continue their education as opposed to entering the workforce right away. This work group could also focus on linking AE with local community employers for networking opportunities and building liaisons through *meet and greet* and workshops for YAR set up at AE centers through ministerial associations.

3. Sufficient Funding to Support the Social Justice Mandate of AE

As research confirms, the need for dedicated programs to support learners with trauma, with gaps in their education, and provide academic assistance, requires significant resources. More classes, support services and more teaching support would require hiring more educators and therefore would require a commitment to a larger AE budget. Mental health resources are necessary including psychologists, remedial teachers, intercultural agents, and stronger links with the mental health community to identify issues and maintain follow-up. However, as much as these problems can be mitigated with financial support, other needs are not costly but simply require coordination. Extra academic support could be recruited from volunteers in the community and pre-service teachers willing to volunteer a few hours a week at AE centers to help YAR with their studies. The management of such a service would be by someone in a representative/liaison role.

4. Improve the Teaching of French to YAR and Immigrants

a) Addressing the issue of curricula and assessment differences in the francization programming of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Immigration would require there be one program applied at both ministerial levels for all newcomers given there is one similar objective: learning Québécois language and culture.

b) Learning academic French would benefit YAR and similar allophone young adult immigrants, as in the example in Switzerland. Refugee YAR students in Geneva are provided with the academic skills and strategies specifically needed for their studies. Such a program is highly recommended and could be offered, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Immigration and the Ministry of Education, at AE schools structured specifically for this age group of 16–24-year-old students.

c) The government could trial a francization class based on the plurilingual inclusive approach to language learning to test the results.

d) An informal approach to general language improvement would involve community volunteers and/or pre-service teacher volunteers to tutor students at AE centers. The coordination of such a service would be by someone in a representative/liaison role.

5. Support Teacher Education for Refugee Learners

Teachers need to be supported through pedagogical training for refugee education, which integrates trauma-informed instruction and specific preparation and preparedness for the new demographic of refugee students with strategies incorporating YAR needs. Teacher education programs for pre-service teachers and access to a professional development fund targeting inservice teachers are essential for upgrading teacher preparedness. There should be more work on understanding diversity in the classroom and asset-based pedagogies through regular professional development for teachers. YAR participants avoided talking about mental health issues, or seeking support, as it is a culturally stigmatized subject. AE services must reach out to students as YAR shared they were hesitant to go to these services directly. One recommendation, for example, would be that mental health support staff be encouraged to enter classrooms regularly to familiarize themselves with students.

6. Involve Parents in the Education of YAR

The Ministries of Immigration and Education should inform YAR and their parents upon arrival about the education options available. Refugee families should be contacted and informed about the local school board. The local school board should also be made aware of all YAR students in a household to help place them in appropriate education sectors. Parents must be informed of the need to transfer their children from the youth sector to the adult sector.

Parents of refugee learners should be invited to AE centers to join in community activities, and to participate in discussions with educators, to promote connections to link them to their children's reality, such as in examples from Turkey where collaboration among stakeholders was successful. Community volunteers could be involved in creating such a program for refugee parents of YAR to meet at AE centers familiarize themselves with the local culture and language and feel included. The Western individualistic approach found in Québec versus the cultural approach found in Syrian refugee families is an important dichotomy which friendship building in the dominant community can dilute. Furthermore, YAR and their parents need to be informed of the pathway and resources that AE offers so they both can understand the education system that is foreign to them thus reducing the stress of navigating it and familiarizing the refugees with an understanding of the cultural and school expectations. Through initial *meet-and-greet* gatherings or assemblies, both parents and their young adult children can be introduced to AE and feel a sense of belonging within this community.

7. Provide a Space for Refugee Students to be Heard

Being heard is necessary to find out how YAR experience school for adults and what challenges they face. The needs of YAR must be recognized at AE centers as they differ from those of the dominant culture AE students. One recommendation would be to set up a peer support committee headed by a student body representative for YAR students at AE. This group could meet weekly, organized by an AE practitioner, such as a psychoeducator or guidance counsellor, to provide feedback to the administration and continue a dialogue between practitioners and YAR.

Engagement with the student body should be strengthened for practitioners and the government to know how to support refugee-background student needs and allocate the resources appropriately.

8. Provide Networking Opportunities: Strengthening a Sense of Belonging

A representative is recommended as a liaison for YAR to support making connections with school peers and creating bonds through social activities, such as outings, reinforcing the idea that AE is a place where YAR feel welcomed. The representative could be responsible for linking the community and refugees, managing weekly activities to connect students with outside opportunities. The example in Scotland connects refugee students with the Edinburgh University community for mentorship and tutoring support, a program that could benefit YAR at AE in Montreal. Another example of connecting would involve the representative finding Francophone volunteers in the community (like retired teachers) and managing a schedule based on the student's timetable. This way these community volunteers can have one-on-one conversations with students to practice their French and discuss life in Québec, which will serve to reinforce their language skills, cultural understanding, and associations outside the AE classroom.

Discussion

Focusing on essential elements in education, such as aspirations and life chances, this study examined the AE sector as a path to lifelong achievement for at-risk youth, such as YAR. The data reflect the subjectivity of the Syrian refugee learners; their sense-making echoes what they feel, and therefore experience. Although YAR felt targeted or picked on, it is a result of a system which unintentionally excludes (Haffejee, 2015; O'Higgins, 2012; Pierre & Bosset, 2021). The objective of the Québec Ministry of Education's programs is to promote equitable and inclusive outcomes for newcomers of diverse backgrounds, but its structures do not facilitate this aim. All interviewees, students and educators, unanimously voiced frustration regarding, for example, the lack of resources: all grievances directed at governmental disregard for AE schools. The need to hire more (specialized) teachers, psychologists, tutors and school material was noted as well as, the lack of services to support practitioners and to support students. Indeed, what this

study has extracted is that refugee students are omitted in societies like Québec, where social and economic structures reflect a system ignorant of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic subjugation of marginal groups (De Haas, 2011; Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018). These refugee students hoped to *thrive and not just survive* but the study findings reveal that the structural challenges YAR confronted in the AE system, despite their agency, created frustration and discouragement which sheer motivation alone could not overcome.

The conceptual framework of CRT and the Capabilities Approach employed in this study revealed the marginalization YAR encountered in the Québec educational structures which limited the development of their capabilities and ultimately, their life chances. The paradox revealed through the data analysis is that students were given the opportunity to further their education but at the same time experienced exclusion in the AE system; that the governmental organizations designed for inclusion and fairness are not working. For example, the AE system offers YAR a chance to get back on track and within the normative Québeccentric expectations and linear progress in life, based on the dominant cultural belief that equal and just chances exist for all (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Ianinska et al., 2013; Maitra & Guo, 2019). Similarly, the francization program was designed for the inclusion of newcomers to Québec society. However, equal treatment in an unequal world produces inequity and unjust and unfair results. As YAR narratives revealed, these refugee students' experiences were not aligned with this 'linearity' or with the ideals of equity and inclusion for all in education (Ainscow, 2020; Pendakur, 2020; OECD, 2012).

The findings illustrate that life for YAR prior to arriving in Montreal influenced their availability for schooling in AE. Severed educational histories, exposure to war along the journey, and learning styles in Syria, as the literature confirms, were a reality which made it difficult for study participants to readjust to school at a comparatively advanced age. These life experiences created mental health challenges which contributed to YAR disenchantment, as well as individual and cultural expectations about their age, and at what stage they should be in life (Lamb et al., 2019; Watkins & Zyck, 2014). The Syrian refugee students realized they had to adapt, despite the structural and cultural barriers, to have a chance at a good life in Québec society (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Cabrera, 2018; Razack, 2018).

The education system within which refugee students are placed is highly important (Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Paul, 2023; Pierre & Bosset, 2021). Teaching methods for diverse populations like refugees must be understood alongside their lived experiences, their community, and their distressing background (Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; Slade & Dickson, 2020). Yet YAR were placed in the AE sector, which was difficult to penetrate; an education system unsuitable for refugee student needs as allophones, ignorant of the learning methods, culturally unused to asking for help, and in need of teacher direction. The AE system is structured in a way which excludes minorities, such as refugees, yet the YAR interviewees made earnest efforts. Therefore, considerable attention was needed from AE educators to appreciate how refugee students learn and how to facilitate their scholastic success, while building on the knowledge refugee students already have and cultivating connections (Baak, 2018; Correa-Velez et al., 2017; Gateley, 2013; Haffejee, 2015; Kaukko & Wilkinson, 2018; O'Higgins, 2012; Sorensen, 2023).

Unfortunately, such attention was lacking for the Syrian YAR at AE schools in Québec. The students shared that they would have preferred a school atmosphere like at secondary schools: a fun and motivating environment with connections, community, and networking, which the literature supports as vital for successful schooling (Cortez et al., 2023; Jacquet & Masinda, 2014; OECD, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). However, the research findings show that there was no community support to link with YAR family/parents, and no networking opportunities although the desire was there. The program for Syrian refugee youth in Edinburgh, Scotland (Syrian Futures, 2022), for example, supports promoting mentorship and community connections for refugees. Research supports connections among students, between educators and parents, and students in the community as valuable in refugee learners' growth; that such relationships are the cornerstone to awareness, understanding classroom clientele, and minimizing othering (Atkinson, 2018; Calaf, 2017; Cortez, et al., 2023; Prins et al., 2018).

The Syrian YAR were very motivated to continue their life in Canada, initially aiming for higher education, with a focus on high status professions, as well as learning French to adapt to Quebec culture. Research confirms the importance of learning the host language for refugees in

Canada to participate in society, yet it remains a major barrier (dela Cruz, 2022; Galante et al., 2023; Nourpanah, 2014; Stewart, 2017; Wilkinson et al, 2017) and added to YAR feeling excluded and marginalized (Ducass, 2019). Another reason YAR felt excluded stemmed from their perceived discrimination of being misjudged as dropouts because they attended AE, a place stigmatized for dropouts (Walker, 2022). The students experienced what they felt was an injustice when their actual level of education was not recognized due to low school placement (Ferede, 2010; Morrice et al., 2020; Shakya et al., 2010). The YAR interviewees felt discriminated against; and that their experiences were not validated (Haffejee, 2015; O'Higgins, 2012; Pierre & Bosset, 2021). The literature agrees with the research findings, that refugees feel unacknowledged when they end up in lesser grade levels, which delays their progress ((Ferede, 2010; Kaprielian-Churchill, 1996; Morrice et al., 2020; Shakya et al., 2010 Wilkinson, 2002; Yau, 1995).

While the AE mandate is to improve all adult students' life chances and qualifications, refugees have different requirements that the AE structure does not accommodate. The refugee students felt misunderstood by practitioners who saw them as needy refugees whose parents were too involved in their lives; and that they should be more like the dominant culture and face responsibilities like all adults at 18 years old. More frustration was voiced through YAR narratives as they felt that practitioners did not seem to comprehend their need to get through AE as soon as possible, confirming the literature that understanding refugee personal and professional ambition is essential (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Spencer & Charsley, 2016; Van Heelsum, 2017). Nonetheless, practitioners believed that their collaborative approach and availability to the students provided support; repeatedly encouraging YAR to take their time to complete their studies. Yet the findings show, as does the literature, that these refugee students did not agree, feeling instead misjudged; that the system did not recognize or consider their educational struggles nor their perspectives (de Lambert, 2018; Sharifian, et al., 2021, Renner et al., 2021).

Through their narratives, all 12 practitioners admitted to their need for trauma-informed strategies for their refugee students who experienced triggering war-related recall in the classroom (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Kaplan et al. 2016; Lamb et al., 2019; Zilberstein,

2014) because these educators were unprepared and unaware of how to help their refugee students (Sidhu et al., 2011; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019; UNESCO, 2016). Many student participants shared that they were unwilling to seek formal support for mental health help, an issue culturally stigmatized (Murphey, 2016; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). However, some students sought informal support through casual conversations with practitioners. As the literature suggests many refugees, like those in this study, struggle with anxiety and emotional grief while dealing with financial and linguistic challenges, culture shock, and difficulties with legal and administrative issues (de Lambert, 2018; Sharifian, et al., 2021, Renner et al., 2021). Both the academic literature and the AE educational agents in this study agreed that educational systems require significant support systems to address and resolve refugee learner requirements (Haffejee, 2015; Maraj et al., 2022; Ratković et al., 2017; Sharifian, et al., 2021).

While AE centres offer learning opportunities and potential advancement, many YAR perceived themselves as excluded, behind their peers, halted by a system difficult to navigate. Despite Québécois values for equity and social advancement, the dissertation data demonstrate that inclusion in the AE sector of education in Québec is only considered for the majority, while minority groups encounter injustice and exclusion as manifested in YAR participants' struggle, frustration, isolation, and uncertainty. Being a refugee, as the study findings and literature agree, does not mean being weak, vulnerable, or incapable (Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Luu & Blanco, 2021; Versmesse et al., 2017). Although the Syrian refugee students were challenged at numerous intersections, they struggled to adopt the culture, lifestyle, and school norms in Québec, determined to attain their objective of finishing high school. Finding solutions to address the challenges to refugee academic integration is of paramount interest to all stakeholders. Indeed, the lack of connection between the Ministries of Immigration, Education and Employment to focus on the needs of young Syrian refugees as a specific subsection, due to their age, and pre-resettlement circumstances of YAR, reflects grave ignorance on the part of the government and a lack of governance.

Limitations

This research is based on a sample of 29 Syrian YAR students between the ages of 18-24 years old enrolled in the AE sector of the Québec education system, in Montreal. This study did not include those YAR under 18 due to ethical restrictions for research on individuals categorized as children. No other refugee group was considered for this Manuscript Ph.D. as it is based on a 2018-funded study commissioned by the Quebec Ministry of Education focused on Syrian YAR due to the high influx of Syrian refugees to Quebec since 2015. The student participants were not Syrian YAR who gave up their studies, or who dropped out of school, but rather this research focused only on the refugee students who pushed through AE despite obstacles which speaks to their perseverance. Interviews with asylum seekers or immigrant young adults seeking schooling in Montreal were not accepted because the focus was on the recently arrived Syrian sub-group of young adults without secondary education credentials. It was difficult to find Syrian YAR at AE schools who were willing to participate in this study. Many of these refugee youth had little time to spare due to family commitments, working and trying to study. There were also problems of research fatigue for Syrian refugees as they were a targeted study sample.

The gender division was uneven with 15 male and 14 female. This study did not collect data based on the intersections of gender, religion, and socioeconomic status purposefully to limit the understanding of the issues of being a refugee youth seeking academic integration in a resettlement context. Despite the specific focus on Syrians, the obstacles faced in academic integration as blocked by the cultural and structural systems, as voiced by these refugee learners, are generalizable to the understanding of other allophone refugee and immigrant groups resettling in Québec. The sample of practitioner participants was limited to 12, from three French school boards only. The number of participants for this study, whether refugee students or practitioners, was impacted by the pandemic because subsequent participation was limited due to COVID-19, therefore, it was not possible to gather a larger sample.

Chapter 8
Conclusions

Understandings Gained from This Study

This study allows the reader to witness a story of human tragedy and hope shared through the voices of Syrian forced migrant youth who found refuge in Canada. Due to circumstances beyond their control these young adults, barely out of adolescence and facing arrested development because of the conflict raging on their front step, resonated resilience to rebuild their lives despite the cultural and structural barriers they encountered, as the literature and the study findings confirm regarding refugee educational aspirations (Boccagni, 2017; Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020; Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Dei & Rummens, 2010; Shakya et al., 2010; Stermac, et al., 2010; Van Heelsum, 2017). Many YAR had mixed feelings about relocating to host societies as some felt they had no choice following their family to safety. It is important to understand refugee context and culture; to value the intersectionality in the complexities of their lived experiences pre-, and post-migration.

Sometimes the challenges met in the unfamiliarity of schooling were perceived as prejudice and discrimination (Pierre & Bosset, 2021; Khanlou, et al., 2014; Potvin et al., 2022), having already lived profound uncertainty and injustice. Therefore, it is important to understand the context within which refugees arrive in welcoming societies (Borselli &Van Meijl, 2020; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Paul et al., 2023; Spencer & Charsley, 2016; Van Heelsum, 2017). Teachers were significant contacts with the refugee students, yet these AE practitioners did not have an awareness of the whole picture; of what the Syrian YAR and family had lived or were living. The literature concurs that teachers interacting with war-affected youth in their classrooms must know their refugee students and be sensitive to their differences (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; UNHCR, 2015; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019).

The focus must be on strength-based paradigms and not on deficit-based models. The study findings reveal that there is a need to succour AE practitioners who were overworked and insufficiently supported (Maynard, 2020; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Morrice et al. 2020; Potvin et al., 2014; Walker, 2022). To appropriately enable refugee students' pursuit of education, policy imperatives are called upon. An equitable and inclusive approach adapted to refugee-background learners would place these students at the center of the education system (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019), rather than within an existing policy infrastructure; it would support

practitioners in accompanying this untraditional AE student body. Education is a valued choice for Syrian YAR, reflecting their aspirations and those of their parents for their adult children. Canada, like many host countries in the Global North, was placed on a mantelpiece; a fallacy of a panacea that failed to live up to the ideals force migrants have of a resettlement home. Through refugee students' narratives, there is a call for more direction, a need to be accompanied along the foreign path that represents their future, their goals and life chances.

The reality is that the policies and practices of societal structures do not consider, or are unaware of, the academic needs of refugee students as this study and the research literature confirm (Bonet, 2018; Dryden-Peterson, 2022; Morrice, et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2023; Ratković et al., 2017). The small body of literature focused on YAR in AE (Jowett 2020; Kanu 2008) also agrees with this study's findings regarding refugees' determination to get through AE despite the complications that they encounter, despite the fractures in the system. Practitioners agreed that YAR were unlike the homogeneous AE population (Ainscow, 2020), yet these refugee students were nonetheless placed within the existing educational system. The AE sector plays a significant role in education and society (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichlova, 2021; Walker, 2022) but what YAR experienced were challenges which threatened their life chances (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Feuerherm & Ramanathan, 2015; Jowett, 2020; Kanu, 2008).

This research has highlighted commonalities among all research participants, students and practitioners, regarding the challenges that exist for refugee students to successfully progress through the AE education system and points to clear avenues for change. The interviews with the students were often very moving. As a researcher bearing witness to the narratives of these Syrian YAR, it is clear that the journey of these forced migrants was indeed morally and spiritually destabilizing as much as it was functionally. Through the descriptions of the practitioners, the fatigue and exasperation of these professionals were evident, wanting to do more but unable and blocked at an institutional and political level. More must be done by Canadian educational policymakers to ensure the inclusive sanctuary that YAR need to rebuild their future in their resettlement home and ensure the support their educators require to successfully accompany their refugee students into their new lives. With increasing numbers of forced migrants throughout the world, the onus is on governments to support YAR to

successfully claim their safe space in the context of relocation; that their productive membership and contribution to their social and economic progress is safeguarded, as well as that of their hosts. The participants clearly voiced that change is imperative. This research hopes that their voices are heard.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are many avenues for further research which have not been examined. The following are some suggestions for research studies.

1. Participants Perspectives Post COVID-19

It would be constructive to revisit this research by interviewing the AE Syrian refugee students from this study to understand how COVID-19 affected their schooling including additional challenges and needs produced as a result of the restrictions. Did the pandemic have an impact on the aspirations and life chances of refugee students? Similarly, revisiting the practitioners would help gain an understanding of the role the pandemic played regarding the challenges of AE institutional shutdown and interacting with refugee students. Did the pandemic have an impact on the ability of practitioners to provide support to refugee students?

2. Transition between the Youth and Adult Education Sectors for Refugees

How can the transition of YAR from the youth sector into the adult sector be improved or changed? Perhaps a study can investigate how many YAR placed in the youth section at, or just under, 16 years old graduate from high school or if they are transferred to AE to finish their secondary studies. Would these students prefer to go directly into AE in a class designed for them?

3. The Dysfunction of the Francization Program for Refugees.

Despite great investments by the Québec government into teaching French to new immigrants, why do students still struggle in the French program? Would other approaches be more suitable such as plurilingual or content-based language acquisition for refugees? Further investigation is needed to understand why more Syrian refugee students chose the English sector over the French sector. What could encourage allophone YAR to remain in the French AE sector?

3. Teacher Education for Refugees

More focused research on the experiences and needs of AE practitioners would explain their working conditions and how this impacts their ability to serve students. More interviews with practitioners would be beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of how their struggles and biases impact service to YAR students. Also, such a study could focus on practitioner needs for support to enable refugee students' academic achievement.

4. Accommodation to Encourage School Retention for Refugees

Potential students in the AE sector were unable to pursue their education after arriving in Québec because of their household or financial responsibilities. Marginalized upon arrival into low-paying jobs, this lost opportunity is significant for YAR at the individual level as well as for Québec society. What accommodations can be made to encourage or support such students to complete their High School diploma? Why does the government support refugees going straight into the job market with financial incentives, but not into education?

5. Parental Academic Expectations for their YAR children

The YAR ambivalence concerning what is considered support and what is considered pressure felt from their parents is an area worth examining. Moreover, useful research could focus on refugee parents' expectations for their young adult children's educational outcomes in resettlement sites and the view of institutional agents regarding parents' involvement. How can there be more cohesion between refugee families and educational systems regarding cultural and structural expectations based on what is available in the host country?

6. Examining Intersectional Levels of Refugee Reality

Focus on the YAR gender dimension concerning their perspective on their aspirations and life chances in Quebec. Other research could focus on differences in terms of religious adherence, for example, Muslims and Christians, in terms of YAR academic expectations and challenges.

Final Reflections

Despite a national willingness to offer sanctuary to asylum seekers, the Syrian refugee students in this study afforded an awareness not found in the literature to date. Forgotten by education policymakers due to age (disregarded by the government), risking life chances, perhaps dropping out of school altogether, or into anti-social behaviour, the findings in this study are significant because they reveal that without proper cognizance of YAR student experiences as youth who do not fit within the mandatory school-age bracket and aged-out of traditional schooling without a high school diploma, they risk dropping out of society. Moreover, this research has brought attention to issues within the AE system that pertain not only to resettled YAR, but other vulnerable young adults who lack knowledge of the dominant culture, local language, and social networks, placed into unfamiliar education systems without consideration of their assets and life experiences, and with little guidance.

This research revealed that YAR faced both opportunity (offered by schooling and language courses) and exclusion (structural and cultural barriers) in attaining academic integration. While there is an effort for equity by the state, there are systemic problems for which the current strategies and practices are insufficient to efficiently enable AE refugee students to flourish. Within the existing framework, there is no awareness at a policy level of the unique needs of YAR, including distinct services and supports, in contrast to the AE traditional matureaged student. The challenges faced by this minority group, and similar at-risk students, require the development of appropriate educational strategies to support their transition through the AE system. Yet YAR showed intrinsic motivation to overcome the challenges and obstacles they faced at AE; to pursue their aspirations, even if they had to be modified, proving their resilience and determination to accomplish their education goals.

Structures designed to include, in practice exclude, as the study findings reveal. For refugees, and vulnerable immigrants, to live to their highest potential, embracing their aspirations and life chances, Canada and local provincial governments cannot remain unaware. To be able to contribute to peaceful coexistence and civil society, hosting countries like Canada must foster the opportunity for refugee learners to use their education towards sustainable futures. Canada, as a nation, leads with a common fundamental commitment to fairness and inclusion for all learners. Through an examination of the challenges, including the extent of distress faced by these Syrian forced migrant students and the support they require in the AE system, this study asks policymakers to examine the incongruence in the paradox of inclusion and exclusion of Québec policies and practices for YAR in AE schools. The findings in this study are particularly important as they bring to surface questions and reflections difficult to face yet necessary. How do the findings align with a host country which places humanity, care, and justice at its doorstep? This dissertation will contribute to the limited knowledge worldwide of this subgroup. By increasing awareness of YAR educational experiences in the Québec education system, such research can improve school success, retention, and overall long-term incorporation of this important assembly of refugees into their place of sanctuary.

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