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Title of Project
Language for an Unknowable Future: How Language Ideologies and Pedagogies Shape the Lives of Refugee Children

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Migrants and Refugees: Teaching and Assessing English

Final Report

Motivation for the Research

There are currently 65 million people living as refugees globally, half of whom are of school-going age, and these numbers are on the rise. Within this context, refugee education policy is increasingly focused on the inclusion of refugees in national school systems in host countries rather than their education in parallel, refugee-only schools, as was previously the trend. This shift in global policy aims to improve educational access and quality for refugees, but also means that refugee young people must increasingly navigate school in unfamiliar languages. Despite this pressing policy concern, there is little guidance about the linguistic inclusion of refugees in national schools, a gap my dissertation begins to address.

Research Questions

In the context of the ever-growing populations of children who are displaced into education systems that use unfamiliar languages of instruction, my dissertation examines the implications of this phenomenon for refugee children and their families, and for the educators, program leaders, and policymakers tasked with enabling their education. Focusing my study on the experiences of Sudanese and South Sudanese refugees in Kampala, Uganda, I begin to address this critical gap by answering the following questions:

- *Research Question 1:* How do language-in-education policies and practices shape refugee children's and families' relationships to school, self, and home?
- *Research Question 2:* How do government officials, NGO policymakers, and educators—those who create and enact language-in-education policies for refugees—understand the role of these policies for refugees' present opportunities and future aspirations?
- *Research Question 3:* How do these perspectives compare to those of refugee children and families themselves?

Research Methodology

This dissertation takes the form of a comparative case study (CCS), a multi-scalar research design that I implemented in Kampala, Uganda. Uganda is an appropriate site for my study given the country's long history hosting refugees, its inclusion of refugees into national schools, and its linguistic heterogeneity (OCHA, 2021; UNHCR, 2019a).

The comparative case study approach structures comparison across three axes: horizontal, vertical, and transversal (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). I conducted horizontal comparison by analyzing different approaches to language between schools and classrooms, as well as between individual families attending the same schools. Vertical comparison focuses on various levels or scales that may influence the phenomenon of interest. To understand not only the experiences of educators in schools or the children that attend them but also decision-making about schools and education programming, I conducted interviews with and observations of policymakers and program leaders working in refugee education in Uganda, examining their approaches to language and schooling for refugees, their aspired outcomes, and the constraints they faced. Finally, I undertook transversal comparison—or comparison over time—in two ways: first, through interview data that engages refugee families' migration trajectories, changing relationships to education and language depending on duration and path of migration, and relationships between language and future-building. The second is in ongoing interviews and document analysis related to language approaches in refugee education, which have been under development since 2018.

Given the scale of my interview data set (n=106), I followed Deterding & Waters' (2018) process for flexible coding in large-scale interview studies. Identifying *index codes* as my first step, I completed listening notes for all interviews, which are synthetic, analytic memos of the key themes that emerge in each individual interview and across the data (Seidman, 2019). After interview transcription, I also conducted *index coding* of transcripts in Atlas.ti, expanding on the themes identified in the listening notes. From there, I developed granular, *analytic codes,* applying grounded, emic codes that emerge from the interviews and listening notes and etic codes that draw on my review of the literature to understand patterns and divergences across the data (Charmaz, 2006; Deterding & Waters, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Weiss, 1994). These I analyzed through a series of analytic memos that allowed me to triangulate emerging findings, both documenting convergence across data types and examining places where they diverge.

Summary of Findings

I find that refugee families' aspirations are not fully represented in the language-in-education policies and practices that impact them directly. Instead, I find that assimilationist language policies and pedagogies only partially reflect the aspirations of refugee families as they strive to create futures that enable educational, relational, and economic opportunities in the present and future. But it is not just the aspirations of refugee families that are minimized in the face of English-only ideologies and pedagogies at school. Rather, for many education policymakers, program leaders, and educators, I argue, their own lived experiences and aspirations are also pushed to the side by narratives that conflate English with education and opportunity.

I present these findings across Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the dissertation. In Chapter 3, "'*Instruction is in English and they're not understanding anything': Programmatic priorities in refugee education and the funneling toward English,"* I analyze interviews with policymakers and program leaders engaged in refugee education in Uganda. I find that education leaders

engaged in refugee education aspire to develop transformative and innovative approaches to the education of refugees, particularly connected to language. But in the face of substantial challenges, including overriding narratives about the languages refugees use at home and seek at school, organizations shift away from these aspirational goals. Instead, demonstrating organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), they orient toward programmatic approaches that focus on developing English-language skills and facilitate refugees' access to national schools that privilege English.

In Chapter 4, *"'We insist that the children should speak English': Policy ambiguity and language ideology in the educational inclusion of refugee children,"* the lens shifts to examine the work of educators as they navigate refugee educational inclusion. I find that in the absence of guidance, educators struggle with how best to support their students. Although all educators are themselves multilingual, they are not supported through policy or training to draw on their lived experiences to navigate their classrooms. Instead, I find that school leaders draw on their own orientations to multilingualism to determine how to approach their schools' linguistic diversity, variously seeing multilingualism as a problem, right, and resource (Ruíz, 1984). These orientations intersect with global and national language ideologies (Flores & Schissel, 2014; Horberger, 2005), limiting spaces in which educators can move away from zero-sum approaches to language-in-education and toward those that build on students' existing linguistic repertoires.

Finally, Chapter 5, *"'When I go to meet my parents, which language am I going to speak with them?': Myths, mobile speech, and refugee children's search for opportunity in exile"* analyzes the experiences of refugee children who attend the focal schools discussed in the previous chapter, and the family members that care for them in Kampala. In this chapter, I reveal three overriding myths about language-in-education and refugees articulated by policymakers, program leaders, and educators in the previous chapters, and bring these into dialogue with the experiences that refugee children and caregivers describe. I reflect on the consequences of policies and programs that do not account for refugees' full linguistic repertoires and propose approaches to schooling that move away from a "monoglot ideology" (Blommaert, 2010).

Implications

This study offers one of the first systematic examinations of language-in-education for refugees in settings of first asylum. In intertwining horizontal, vertical, and transversal comparison, I expand our understanding of language in refugee education, taking into account constraints and opportunities at multiple levels. In doing so, this project reveals opportunities for additive rather than subtractive orientations to language policy and practice, with implications for policymakers, educators, and refugee families seeking and enacting education in exile.

This study makes two other key contributions to the study of refugee education: it is one of the first examinations of education in settings of first asylum where refugee and national children attend school together. In most settings globally, the inclusion of refugees into national schools means that refugee children have access to national curricula and often national teachers, but are physically separated from national students through school shifts or segregation in refugee camps (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). This is not the case in Kampala, and my study offers one of the first examinations of the challenges and possibilities of actual inclusion.

Additionally, while most refugees globally live in cities (UNHCR, 2016), research still focuses primarily on camp settings. This is also the case for the work of aid organizations, which have historically functioned primarily through camps and continue to do so despite the fact that refugees increasingly settle in cities (Koizumi & Hoffstaedter, 2015). In focusing on refugee

education in Kampala, I contribute new insights about the experiences of urban refugees, whose numbers are on the rise and who increasingly attend multilingual schools guided by monolingual policies and practices, but whose experiences remain underexamined in research.

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