

BALANCING WHOLE-SCHOOL AND SPECIALIST APPROACHES: “BEST PRACTICE” FOR REFUGEE LITERACY EDUCATION BETWEEN 2006 AND 2020

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Article info	Abstract
<p>Received: 11 September 2023 Accepted: 25 March 2024 Published: 29 April 2024</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Refugee education; literacy; best practice; whole-school approach; specialist approach; refugee education; pedagogies; educational chronology</p>	<p>Arguably the most important aspect of education for students from refugee backgrounds is literacy, so it is important for educators to be aware of best-practice approaches to literacy education for these students. By analyzing themes of best practice for refugee literacy education found in pre- and post-2011 academic literature, this study aims to detect shifts in what academics deem to be “best practice” in this field over time. The study finds evidence of a general shift towards holistic education as best practice for refugee literacy education; however, specialized intervention has grown in emphasis amongst academics focusing on non-classroom interventions such as mental health support and pre-mainstream literacy courses. This means schools and educators must maintain robust connections with external service providers and continuously improve their own professional practice in line with current best-practice pedagogies.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Refugees are individuals who cannot or will not return to their home country due to legitimate fears of persecution. Refugee students are young refugees who are being assimilated into host

education systems. However, being a refugee is “only one aspect of [a refugee student’s] subjectivity (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010, p.115). Refugee students vary significantly, though common issues like missed schooling and trauma are common among all refugees. Current refugees originate from diverse countries, and literacy rates differ widely within these contexts. While Ukrainian refugees typically exhibit proficiency in their native language, the same cannot be assumed for those from Sudan or Afghanistan. This is why studies such as Merga’s (2020) conclude that “there may be no one solution that meets the needs of all [refugee students]” (p.373).

Consequently, maintaining dynamism in the field of refugee literacy education is crucial. This study seeks to clarify and challenge the present trajectory of refugee literacy studies. It aims to provide insights into what constitutes "best practice" in refugee literacy education, considering the changing composition of refugee students. This study considers “best practice” to be any strategy designed to enhance the holistic educational experience of refugee students (Block et al., 2014, p.1352). It also follows Street’s (1993) ideological model to define literacy as both the traditional, technical study of language as well as political, historical, economic and socio-cultural linguistic empowerment.

This study follows from an earlier study examining change over time in scholarly perceptions of “best practice” for refugee education in Australia (Spratling, 2022).

Barriers to Refugee Literacy Education

Refugee students often have inadequate prior social capital, first-language literacy, and subject knowledge (Brown et al., 2006; Windle & Miller, 2012; Woods, 2009). Teachers often remain oblivious to these difficulties, as many teachers assume that students possess contextual and cultural knowledge such as how to use dictionaries (Miller 2009; Miller, Mitchell & Brown, 2005), or overuse discussion-led pedagogy which prevents students from practising literacy (Miller, 2009, p.581; Windle & Miller, 2012; Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011). Other teachers are simply unaware that they have refugee students in their class (Haig & Oliver, 2007), or are unaware that such students may be able to “decode words accurately without knowing what they mean” (Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013, p.88). Schools also present barriers to literacy by providing print-based materials and assessments which overlook the students’ lack of literacy (Merga, 2020; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Unrealistic expectations can also be counterproductive. Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) identify the tendency of some educators to garner positivity from refugees by focusing on heroism. This is damaging because “it may be impossible to summon up the requisite ‘gratefulness’” (p.13)

Scholarly literature has addressed the pressure faced by teachers of refugee students (Miller, 2011, in Windle & Miller, 2012, p.332), especially regarding the disjuncture between teacher readiness, student literacy, and the availability of age-appropriate resources (Cranitch, 2010; Woods, 2009; Morrice, et al., 2019). Miller (2009) combines issues of pedagogy and resources when explaining that for subjects with new and complex vocabulary, “the textbooks [are] too hard, and... content area teachers [do] not help them with the language” (p.572, citing Brown et al., 2006). When schools attempt to mend gaps in refugee student literacy, reading interventions which have little relevance to classroom content are often used, and success in these interventions is often negligible (Woods, 2009), especially since it can take students with limited English up to seven years to acquire the literacy needed to engage in a secondary classroom (Cranitch, 2010).

Many refugee students are pioneers in their families in learning English, thus lacking family support. This creates tensions as the roles of carer and child are reversed. Students may therefore forget much of what they have learnt by virtue of being in a community with a non-English speaking family (Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013; Morrice et al., 2019). Other refugee students may understand more than they appear to but lack the skills required to ‘be’ in school (Merga, 2020). Finally, poverty and unstable home life can cause malnutrition, and this affects literacy education (Windle & Miller, 2012; Kaplan, et al., 2015).

METHODS

Research Design

The current study, like the earlier Spratling (2022) study, employs a direct content analysis of qualitative data as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). In doing so, this study attempts to clarify notions of “best practice” regarding literacy education for refugee students. Qualitative themes of “best practice” therefore form categories which can be measured over time through a chronological-thematic review and limited critical analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Data Collection and Categorization

Academic research on literacy for students with refugee backgrounds was gathered from online databases and search engines using the following criteria:

- A piece of academic literature;
- Published between 2000 and 2023;
- Concerned with:
 - Refugee literacy education; and
 - Best practice

Articles were reviewed to identify themes, issues, and discussions related to refugee literacy. Relevant excerpts from these studies were extracted, coded and analyzed to derive best practice themes. These themes were then re-analyzed and refined into a final group of ten:

- Literacy Support Programs
- A Supportive School Environment
- Appropriate Texts and Assessment Tools
- Teacher Training and Pedagogy
- Peer Support
- More School Resources
- Student Voice
- Mental and Physical Health Support
- School-Community-Family Links
- Pre-Classroom and Transitional Literacy Programs

17 articles were reviewed and analyzed for themes of best practice before new articles failed to produce original themes. When new themes failed to appear, and original themes continued to be referenced, data collection ceased.

Analytical Process

Upon reading the initial dataset, some codes were determined immediately (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whilst others emerged during re-reading or colour-coding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This study used open theoretical coding (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), which produced a number of semantic themes after vigorous analysis of the dataset.

The importance of these semantic themes was gauged by their recurrence across multiple studies and the attention authors devoted to them. Themes were coded as either ‘major’ or ‘minor’ based on emphasis within each study.

Following thematic analysis, a 4-step chronological study was conducted. Data was chronologically organized into pre-2012 and post-2011 groups. Each study was then scored across the major themes identified across all data. Unmentioned themes received 0 points, whilst minor themes received 1 point and major themes received 2. Totals were converted into percentages to adjust for the larger pre-2012 dataset.

Reliability and Limitations

The recurring themes of best practice across both this study and the Spratling (2022) study, as well as its robust methodology, ensure its reliability. This research expands geographically beyond the initial 2022 study but focuses solely on refugee *literacy* education. The small size of the dataset reflects the niche area of refugee literacy in academic literature, but nevertheless limits the reliability of this study. This study relies on data collected from publicly available publications and therefore some potentially relevant data were not included (such as Miller, Ziaian & Esterman, 2018). This study may not be construed as having mapped the field of refugee literacy education. Indeed, multiple studies within the current dataset have expressed the need for further research in this area (Brown et al., 2006; Miller, 2009; Kaplan et al., 2015). Of course, as this paper is based on the findings of others, the limitations of the papers within the dataset also impact reliability.

FINDINGS

Table 1 provides chronological datasets in the left column, while themes are placed along the first row. Each article is then coded as having not mentioned the theme (0), mentioned the theme in passing (1, Minor Theme) or concentrated significantly on that theme (2, Major Theme). A total number of coded entries and percentage total to account for different dataset sizes is placed below each chronological dataset. The percentage change between the datasets is at the bottom of the table, with more positive changes coloured deeper green, and more negative changes coloured deeper red.

Table 1
Thematic Change in Emphasis of Pre- and Post-2011 Datasets

Key:	Major Theme:										
	Minor Theme:	Literacy Support Programs	A Supportive School Environment	Appropriate Texts and Assessment Tools	Teacher Training and Pedagogy	Peer Support	More School Resources	Student Voice	Mental and Physical Health Support	School-Community-Family Links	Pre-Classroom and Transitional Literacy Programs
Brown, J., Miller, J., & Mitchell, J. (2006).		1	2	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0
Matthews, J. (2008)		1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Woods, A. (2009).		2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Miller, J. (2009)		1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cranitch, M. (2010).		1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Ferfolja, T., & Vickers, M. (2010).		2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Rose, D. (2010).		1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
Ferfolja, T., & Naidoo, L. (2010).		2	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Dooley, K. T., & Thangaperumal, P. (2011).		1	1	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	1
Total (of maximum 18)		12	11	7	12	5	4	4	4	3	5
Total (Percentage)		66	61	38	66	27	22	22	22	16	27
Windle, J., & Miller, J. (2012).		0	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0
Naidoo, L. (2012a).		1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1
Naidoo, L. (2012b).		1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	1
Dwyer, E., & McCloskey, M. L. (2013).		1	2	0	1	0	0	2	2	1	1
I Kaplan, Y Stolk, M Valibhoy, A Tucker. (2015).		2	1	2	1	0	2	0	2	1	0
Gömleksiz, M. N. & Aslan, S. (2018).		1	1	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	1
Kaysılı, A., Soylu, A. & Sever, M. (2019).		0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Margaret K. Merga (2020).		0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Total (of maximum 16)		6	8	7	10	3	5	4	6	7	5
Total (Percentage)		50	66	58	83	25	41	33	50	58	41
Percentage Change		-16	+5	+20	+17	-2	+19	+11	+28	+42	+14

THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Training and Pedagogy (Change in Emphasis: +17%)

Teacher Training and Pedagogy remained the most popular suggestion of best practice, and a large part of implementing effective literacy pedagogy is teacher training. Naidoo's (2012b) study on pre-service community internships in a trial Refugee Action Support (RAS) program is seminal. Here, "it was established by the senior management that the [second] program succeeded because of the well-trained staff" (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010, p.20). However, numerous other studies have suggested that English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies may be shared by ESL staff with other teachers (Brown, 2004; Windle & Miller, 2012; Miller, 2009). It was suggested that this sharing should be done in a "systemic" and structured way (Miller, 2009, p.574; Windle & Miller, 2012, p.328). The benefits of practical teacher training showed that "students engaged in service-learning often demonstrate greater sensitivity towards different cultures questioning some of their previously-held beliefs, particularly those related to stereotypes" (Naidoo, 2012b, p.269). The benefits of pre-service teachers engaging with community learning programs are also supported by newer literature (Prentice, 2022; Young, 2022).

After teacher training, professional development should continue, even for non-teaching staff (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010; Prentice, 2022). Professional development should focus on how to explicitly scaffold writing (Windle & Miller, 2012), and specific pedagogical strategies for second-language learners (Miller, 2009; Naidoo, 2012b). Fortunately, many of these strategies are helpful for a wide range of students (Milton et al., 2007). However, there are some literacy issues which affect refugee students disproportionately, such as lacking first-language literacy. It is suggested that these issues should be covered directly in teacher training (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018).

Pedagogical strategies suggested that academic literature is moving away from intensive, specialist intervention and towards an inclusive, whole-school approach to education (Spratling, 2022). What this means for literacy education is that educators need more language-focused pedagogies in mainstream classrooms (Brown et al., 2006; Windle & Miller, 2012; Nation & Mcalister, 2020; Miller, 2009). Literature stressed the need for *explicit* teaching of language and literacy skills, and cultural norms, to avoid exclusionary practices (Leskinen, 2023). Such explicit modelling might be seen in "teacher modelling of dictionary use" (Miller, 2009, p.576; Miller, 2011; Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013). The idea that classroom teachers must explicitly unpack the wider context, genre and structure of a text was repeated (Windle & Miller, 2012; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010).

Some studies suggested focusing on existing student abilities, such as constructing texts through the use of “culturally acceptable methods such as storytelling” (Kaplan, et al. 2015, p.96; Windle & Miller, 2012; Midgette & González, 2023) and others encouraged “experiment[ation] with a variety of service delivery methods” (Naidoo, 2012b, p.268). On the other hand, traditional pedagogies such as “recitation, memorization and other traditional forms of direct instruction” were also suggested (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011, p.5). These pedagogies were particularly useful in teaching basic literacy skills (Windle & Miller, 2012). Others cited the psychological benefits of simple tasks whereby “students were observed to regain composure when required to perform apparently tedious tasks such as handwriting or copying text” (Cranitch, 2010, para. 12).

There existed some debate between studies which suggested traditional strategies do not allow enough time for students to practice (Windle & Miller, 2012, p.321), and those which suggest that modern, “open-ended” pedagogies require much scaffolding before refugee students can engage with them at all (Cranitch, 2010). This reflects the fact that many refugee students have either limited prior experience with schooling, or have only experienced traditional pedagogies. It follows that traditional methods of direct instruction need to be balanced with student practice, as Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) suggest with their “top-down” and “bottom-up” hybrid pedagogical approach (p.4). The use of traditional literacy glossaries of key terms paired with dual coding such as illustrations or colloquial definitions was repeatedly suggested (Windle & Miller, 2012; Miller 2009).

Another aspect of best practice concerns assessment. Immediate feedback and assessments informed by qualitative and quantitative data were suggested for gauging student progress, rather than through summative assessment and formal feedback (Kaplan et al., 2015; Matthews, 2008; Block et al., 2014; Taylor & Sidhu, 2011; Leskinen, 2023). Attaining qualitative and contextual data is especially important because academic understanding and literacy level are not co-dependent (Kaplan et al., 2015, p.90).

The cross-cultural communication required to effectively teach refugee students literacy has led some studies to suggest pedagogies and training which focus on exploring culture as a gateway to exploring language (Miller, 2009). This allows students to acculturate to the classroom as a socio-cultural space, which builds confidence (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010; Miller, 2009). When teachers understand their students’ backgrounds more, they are also better able to build trust, diagnose misunderstandings, and act as role models in the wider community (Woods, 2009; Rose, 2010).

Literacy Support Programs (Change in Emphasis: -16%)

Literacy support programs saw the most significant decrease in emphasis between the datasets. This indicates a shift in the academic literature on refugee education from targeted interventions to a school-wide strategy (Spratling, 2022). Nevertheless, multiple studies did suggest a variety of literacy support programs as best practices for literacy education (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Simsir & Dilmac, 2018; Meloche et al, 2018), and reported positive results from these programs (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010; Naidoo, 2012b).

However, it was not enough to simply give students extra language practice. Various studies cited the need for substantive, critical programs which taught literacy to students, not just language or vocabulary (Woods, 2009; Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011). This is because literacy support programs which teach critical (or metacognitive) literacy allow students to become more self-sufficient learners (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010; Bruinenberg et al., 2021). In Ferfolja and Vickers' (2010) study, the provision of literacy support which embraced metacognition allowed "marginalized students opportunities to identify areas where they felt they required targeted assistance" (p.115). Teaching refugee students to become independent learners is important because of a lack of differentiated literacy support in the classroom and at home (Miller, 2009, p.586).

Data suggested a wide variety of models for providing literacy support. Some focused on providing students with the basics of literacy whilst others focused on content, such as completing homework (cf.: Miller, 2009; Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010). Most studies agreed that support should be a student-led and collaborative experience (Naidoo, 2012a) and that the experience should be highly differentiated (Rose, 2010; Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010). More tuition time was also cited as a benefit of such programs (Cranitch, 2010; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010). This advantage is particularly important not only because it provides more opportunities to practice, but because it can prevent any loss of literacy during school breaks. A North American study over summer break recorded qualitative success with a camp focusing on literacy and fitness (Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013).

Overall, literacy programs succeeded due to their helpful and comfortable environments, the flexibility of the sessions, and the quality of support staff and coordinators (Naidoo, 2012a; Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010; Rose, 2010). It is difficult to generalize the successes of these programs which were often quite different in their contexts, age ranges and aims (cf.:

Rousseau et al. 2006; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010; Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010; Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013; Rose, 2010).

Student Voice (Change in Emphasis: +11%)

References to student voice as a method to promote literacy amongst refugee students gained marginally more attention after 2011. As Windle and Miller (2012) note, many academics prior to 2012 have referred to “connections to lived experience” as best practice in this field (p.322; Brown et al., 2006; Miller, 2009; Miller & Windle, 2010).

Student voice was considered best practice because developing self-expression through speech and writing is important for the development of all students (Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013; Ferreira et al., 2022; Young, 2022), particularly refugee students as they navigate their evolving identity in their host country (Rose, 2010). The sharing of skills, experiences, and culture are all important aspects of this development which can be guided in the classroom (Naidoo, 2012a). It was also deemed important in combatting narratives which pathologize refugees (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011, p.3). Furthermore, student’s voice enables critical analysis of texts and the use of metalanguage to promote self-sufficient and resilient learning (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011, p.14). What critical metalanguage looks like in the classroom was described by Bishop (2003):

... learners can not only use a variety of learning styles but also have the power to determine which learning styles they need to use. In other words, creating contexts where they can safely bring what they know and who they are into the learning relationship. (p.229, in Lynch, 2006, p.123).

Student voice can be used as a pedagogy for scaffolding and engaging student interest. This arises because students with relevant experiences linked to classroom content can utilize prior knowledge, compensating for gaps in socio-cultural or literacy skills. When students perceive a text or topic as personally significant, their ability to engage with it improves (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011, p.15). This pedagogy has been explored in the form of writings and discussions on moral and social issues loosely connected to studied texts (Windle & Miller, 2012), self-expression in the form of carefully scaffolded assignments where students create their own documentaries (Windle & Miller, 2012), and “shared enquiry” models in literacy support programs outside the classroom (Naidoo, 2012a).

School-Community-Family Links (Change in Emphasis: +42%)

The theme with the largest increase in emphasis between the datasets was the utilization of school partnerships with the wider community. The term 'wider community' primarily refers to universities, families, ethnic or religious communities, and social services. Interestingly, this theme in the Spratling (2022) study experienced a 9.4% *decrease* in attention in Australian literature after 2011. Data in the current set draws a strong link between school-community and -family links and “a whole-of-school focus involving students, families, communities, teachers, support staff, local agencies, and principals” (Kaplan et al., 2015, p.96).

Studies focusing on school-university links were those by Naidoo (2012a; 2012b), and Ferfolja and Naidoo (2010). These emphasized that collaboration between schools and universities can be mutually beneficial, as trainee teachers can learn effective pedagogies and refugee students can benefit from further tuition. University-school partnerships are dynamic, and imprint this dynamism onto school strategies and pedagogies (Naidoo, 2012b, esp. p.268). Such partnerships are particularly successful where school-university programs are co-created by all stakeholders (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010, p.5). These same findings are reported in more recent studies (Prentice, 2022).

The most commonly referenced link under this theme was the school-family link. Again, a main proponent of this was Naidoo (2012b), who suggests that extra-curricular literacy support programs provide “opportunities for social participation by parents” (p.268). Ferfolja and Naidoo (2010) add that parental involvement is vital for the continuation of such programs, which more recent studies have reinforced (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010; Merga, 2020, p.390), especially in religious schools which share a religion with the family (Kaysılı, Soylu & Sever, 2019, p.120).

Multiple studies mentioned community links alongside links between schools and counselling services (Rose, 2010; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Simsir & Dilmac, 2018). Rose (2010) explains how connections between “teachers, counsellors and ethnic communit[ies]” add to the participation of the “whole child” in education (p.123). The use of “culture brokers” (Kaplan, et al., 2015, p.96) or people like bilingual and bicultural “community liaison officers” was further suggested (Naidoo, 2012b, p.268).

Supportive School Environment (Change in Emphasis: +5%)

The need for a supportive school environment was popular and chronologically consistent. Generally, it was suggested that safe and supportive environments were important for refugee student attendance, motivation and optimism (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010, p.5; Rose, 2010; McIntyre & Abrams, 2020; McBrien, 2019; Kaukko et al., 2020; Midgett & González, 2023). Above all, studies emphasized the need to create a sense of positivity and celebration of achievements specific to individual students (Rose, 2010). It was argued that this would alleviate social marginalization, combat racism, and enhance academic outcomes by fostering student comfort and risk-taking. Student-teacher relations played a large role in how such environments were envisioned (Cranitch, 2010; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018).

Refugee students who “perceive... threats to cultural or linguistic status” are less likely to engage actively in literacy (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011, p.4). Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) discovered this where refugee students “spoke of being laughed at for their accent or for asking clarifying questions when teachers spoke too quickly, and of their anger at being unable to formulate responses quickly enough to respond to teacher questions” (p.13). To address these issues, teachers and students should transform the socio-cultural structures within the classroom (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Woods, 2009; Rose, 2010; Ferreira et al., 2022). This transformation might come from creating opportunities for social bonds between pupils (Rousseau et al. 2006), celebrating diversity (Block et al., 2014; Taylor & Sidhu, 2011), or establishing clear emotional support networks (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010). Recent studies from Turkey have suggested the use of religion to achieve these aims (Kaysılı, Soyulu & Sever, 2019).

Without discrimination, refugee students are better able to excel in literacy education without fear or distraction (Matthews, 2008; Woods, 2009). In this way, safe and supportive learning environments allow “students to feel in control and relieve the tension of managing uncertainty” (Cranitch, 2010, para. 12). A focus on language itself is not enough in the context of refugee literacy because of the psychological and socio-cultural barriers to learning faced by these students as opposed to other ESL students (Cranitch, 2010). Without a supportive and safe environment, pedagogies such as the co-construction of knowledge examined above may be ineffective (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Merga, 2020). Furthermore, these findings were relevant for external literacy support groups, as participants in Ferfolja and Naidoo’s (2010) study “indicated that the welcoming climate of the after-

school tuition centre facilitated attendance” (p.5). In some instances, students called their teachers by their first names and were invited for afternoon tea to foster this comfortable and informal atmosphere (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010). Teachers also felt less stress when refugee students felt safer and more supported (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010; Merga, 2020).

Small groupwork proved effective in classroom and extra-curricular settings (Rousseau et al. 2006; Rose, 2010). This strategy builds peer-support networks inside the learning environment, which allows refugee students time to think and participate. Groups of four or five people were suggested as optimal (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010, p.155). Other such pedagogies included games or social activities which combine learning with entertainment and socialization (Cranitch, 2010; Simsir & Dilmac, 2018; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018).

Appropriate Texts and Assessment Tools (Change in Emphasis: +20%)

With respect to assessment tools, it was suggested that assessment should be holistic and equitable wherever possible, “given the requirements of high stakes national testing” (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011, p.12). Studies strongly advocated against only using standardized tests when monitoring refugee students’ literacy progress (Naidoo, 2012a). This is because standardized tests “mask distinctive and multifaceted patterns of students’ reading abilities that require dramatically different instructional emphases” (Merga, 2020, p.373). Instead, comprehensive and dynamic testing which takes into account student language abilities, students’ own perceptions of their abilities, and observational data are far more useful in depicting student progress (Kaplan et al., 2015). Testing should be frequent to ensure post-settlement student placement is appropriate for their literacy and academic level (Kaplan et al., 2015).

The majority of data focused on teaching resources, especially textual and multi-modal resources. Strategies of best practice for providing accessible texts to refugee students included the co-construction of texts surrounding areas of student interests (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011). Where this is not possible, it was suggested that teachers and students modify existing texts (Windle & Miller, 2012), or modify the space within which a student learns so that they can take time and feel comfortable engaging with texts, especially where those texts are skill- but not age-appropriate and could cause embarrassment (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010; Olioumtsevits et al., 2022). Here, literacy support programs, support staff, and adapted pedagogies are vital. Extensive scaffolding of vocabulary, and the construction of personal dictionaries or glossaries can be used to solidify this learning (Miller, 2009). These glossaries, however, must be specifically designed to meet student needs. They should

“combine the literature on scaffolding and on vocabulary learning”, which often includes the use of both language and images to promote learning (Miller, 2009, p.583; Nation, 2022). This suggestion mirrors other studies advocating for “textual and non-textual supports” (Windle & Miller, 2012, p.322; Brown et al., 2006; Miller, 2009; Miller & Windle, 2010). Students learn more from hybrid visual-textual resources, and engage with them more readily (Cranitch, 2010; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). This is because students do not feel as intimidated by written pieces when they can use visual aids to help comprehension (Miller, 2009), and also simply because the resources are more eye-catching (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Aside from illustrated glossaries, other visual-textual hybrid strategies include making flash cards, games, and encouraging students to insert their own images alongside their notes (Miller, 2009).

The final suggestion of best practice in this dataset was at a more systemic, school- or even policy-level. It concerned the need for time, resources and funds to allow educators to create or acquire appropriate texts for refugee students (Windle & Miller, 2012; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Possession of a textbook to take home was helpful as students could take more time to understand vocabulary and content outside of the classroom (Brown et al., 2006).

More School Resources (Change in Emphasis: +19%)

A significant and increasing demand for resources, funding, and personnel was evident throughout the dataset. The plea for increased time, resources, funding, and qualified staff was present in 22% of articles before 2012 and 44% after 2011.

The need for more teachers was expressed in terms of needing smaller class sizes and more one-on-one time with students (Cranitch, 2010; Brown et al., 2006; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010), as well as having access to a wider skill-set for staff, especially language and cultural skills (Kaplan et al., 2015; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Others emphasizing the lack of time or resources either called for more support generally (Windle & Miller, 2012; Miller, 2011; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Merga, 2020), or specifically during transitional phases (Cranitch, 2010; Kaplan, et al., 2015). This concern extended to literacy support programs (Ferfolja & Naidoo, 2010).

Mental and Physical Health Support (Change in Emphasis: +28%)

Notably, the transition from specialized intervention to a comprehensive, whole-school approach in refugee education (Spratling, 2022) does not match the current study's emphasis on external health assistance. In contrast to the prior study's -16.2% shift in emphasis on mental health support in post-2011 studies, the present literacy-focused study notes a 28% increase during the same timeframe, advocating for schools to address both physical and psychological well-being.

In the current study, data referenced detention experiences, family dysfunction, and recognized psychiatric disorders such as PTSD as evidence for the need for counselling and mental health services alongside the traditional pastoral role of schools (Rose, 2010; Henley & Robinson, 2011; Kaplan, et al., 2015). Specialized support, especially from the refugees' own ethnic or religious community, was suggested (Cranitch, 2010; Rose, 2010). Despite this, it was also expressed that a positive and strength-focused outlook on refugee students which recognizes their "cultural survival strategies", but does not pathologize or "overdiagnos[e]", is equally important (Rose, 2010, p.126; Kaplan, et al., 2015, p.97). Schools and counsellors should be acutely aware of students' psychological and physical developmental history (Kaplan, et al., 2015) in order to accurately diagnose any disorders which may prevent holistic education.

In addition to mental health measures, social and physical support should be provided (Simsir & Dilmac, 2018; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Kaplan, et al., 2015), including support for malnutrition, injury and infection which can disproportionately affect refugees (Shah et al., 2014). Counselors and medical staff should remain involved beyond initial resettlement, as refugee students may face ongoing physical and psychological challenges.

Pre-Classroom and Transitional Literacy Programs (Change in Emphasis: +14%)

There remains some debate regarding the extent to which ESL pedagogies work for refugee students (Windle & Miller, 2012, p.319, Woods, 2009), and even whether ESL testing is appropriate for ascertaining refugee student proficiency before entering host-nation education systems at all (Kaplan et al., 2015). This is because "developing expertise in academic English takes many years" (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010, p.151), and short intensive programs may not be enough (Brown, et al., 2006; Woods, 2009). Schools are therefore

advised to utilize as much preparation as possible, and a mixture of the strategies mentioned above (Miller & Windle, 2010, Naidoo, 2012a).

In a further departure from the whole-school, decompartmentalized approach to refugee education, data recommended pre-classroom specialist literacy programs to prepare refugee students for mainstream schooling (Brown et al., 2006; Rose, 2010; Prentice, 2022). Ways of achieving this were by implementing intensive programs whilst students are still at primary school (Cranitch, 2010), or through specialist transition programs designed to prepare students linguistically, culturally and socially for the move into mainstream lessons (Kaysılı, Soyulu & Sever, 2019). Others suggested simple external language classes alongside the broader school transition (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Simsir & Dilmac, 2018; Brown et al., 2006; Woods, 2009).

Peer Support (Change in Emphasis: -2%)

Peer support remained a fairly constant theme of best practice across both chronological datasets, but was never a major theme in any of the papers studied.

Social interactions and support from peers are important for motivation, obtaining socio-cultural capital, and improving vocabulary for spoken literacy (Brown et al., 2006; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010; Matthews, 2008). Positive social relationships fostered through sport, and within and between diverse students, were praised as best practice in multiple studies for their emotional and academic benefits (Dwyer & McCloskey, 2013; Brown et al., 2006; Cranitch, 2010; Naidoo, 2012a; Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018; Gándara & Contreras, 2022; Midgette & González, 2023). Whilst some data recommended allowing students to join clubs or group-focused work in the classroom (Dooley & Thangaperuma, 2011), others suggested more structured approaches. Peer support groups, peer mentoring programs, and creating specific spaces where refugee students can generate their own social capital (Naidoo, 2012a) were all examples of this.

Implications for Stakeholders

For educators, this study shows that certain pedagogical strategies are better than others for teaching literacy to refugee background students; especially explicit, teacher-driven literacy instruction across all classrooms, guidance on dictionary use, and explanations of social and cultural norms essential for comprehending texts and genres. The study suggests utilizing

technical support to facilitate this, such as ESL staff and student data. This shift acknowledges the skill of mainstream teachers, the utility of specialists, and the fact that refugee students might not be accustomed to the student-led approaches prevalent in Western education.

More broadly, this study means school leaders and universities should invest in resources, time, teacher training and specialist support. The emphasis on increased school resources in literacy education has surged by 19% since 2011. Notably, the significance of fostering connections between schools and the broader community has witnessed the most considerable post-2011 growth (42%).

CONCLUSIONS

The previous Spratling (2022) study on Australian refugee education identified a decisive shift in academic literature's perception of best practices before and after 2012. However, the current study, incorporating global research while focusing on refugee literacy education, somewhat complicates this consensus. The study reveals instances where both whole-school and specialized education approaches are emerging. This could stem from differing academic opinions globally, or changing attitudes toward literacy education specifically for refugee students. The study raises these questions but doesn't resolve them.

When examining emphasis on best practice themes, certain themes are more recurrent than others both pre-2012 and post-2011. The most prominent theme in both periods was Teacher Training and Pedagogy, substantiating the findings from the previous study (Spratling, 2022, p.76) that specific pedagogies remain essential for refugee education and literacy. Notably, despite receiving considerable emphasis in both studies, Literacy Support Programs saw a significant drop in data emphasis after 2011, unlike other themes. Aligning with the earlier study's outcomes, fostering a Supportive School Environment garnered more emphasis than other best practice themes.

Surprisingly, School-Community-Family Links showed the most unexpected change in emphasis. In the current study, this theme received minimal emphasis before 2012 but surged by 42% from 2012 onwards, in contrast to the previous study's decline (Spratling, 2022, p.76). While some prior studies criticized pre-classroom literacy training, the current study notes a 14% increase in emphasis post-2011. Themes like pre-mainstream Literacy Support

and Access to Appropriate Texts gained prominence in this study, unlike the previous study, though these were present within broader themes in the earlier study (Spratling, 2022, pp.80-81).

Both studies highlighted in-school literacy support, which declined from 34.4% to 9.1% in the earlier study (Spratling, 2022, p.76) and from 66% to 50% in the current study. Conversely, Peer Support, though often mentioned, was never a major theme in the data, becoming the least emphasized theme in the post-2011 group. This underscores teachers' central role in driving learning. Similarly, student voice within the classroom had minimal emphasis after 2011.

Mental and Physical Health Support, along with More School Resources, gained prominence after 2011. Mental and Physical Health Support received equal emphasis to Literacy Support Programs after 2011. This shift may reflect mounting strains on mental health services and funding for refugee students This is unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic, as none of the data were written during or after the pandemic.

While holistic practices remain heavily emphasized as suggested best practice, there is a parallel surge in specific areas of expert intervention which have gained equal, or even more, emphasis in recent years. Post-2011 data saw a shift from specialized literacy support programs to mental and physical support and transitional literacy support programs.

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