

Karen Refugee-Background Students’ Exploration of Linguistic and Cultural Identities Through Multimodal Creative Artwork

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Abstract

When refugee-background students begin formal schooling in the U.S. system, they are expected to adapt and learn, often losing touch with their home language and culture. This qualitative case study examined how Karen refugee-background students in an elementary immersion classroom explored their linguistic and cultural identities through multimodal creative artwork. The participants were two second-grade Karen refugee-background students at a Korean immersion school: Minnie and Nari. Data were collected and analyzed through students’ artwork, classroom observations, and interviews. Findings illustrate that while Minnie displayed strong linguistic and cultural affiliation and identities as a Karen speaker learning English and Korean, Nari, influenced by positive school experiences, found her linguistic and cultural identities as an English speaker who was learning Karen and Korean languages and cultures. This study gives insight into Karen refugee-background students’ experience in

an elementary immersion classroom and the importance of identity exploration.

Keywords: Karen students, refugee-background students, linguistic and cultural identities, multimodality, student artwork

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, a number of refugees have left their home countries and migrated into the U.S., and Burma has been one of the primary countries from which resettled refugees originate. Being persecuted in their home country, Karen people and families had to withstand “systematic human rights violations including torture, extrajudicial killing, burning of villages, forced labor, and rape” (Shannon et al., 2015, p. 578). This persecution forced them to flee and eventually resettle as refugees in the U.S., where they live safely and have educational opportunities for their children.

After resettlement, Karen parents are likely to typically send their children to U.S. public schools and have high hopes for their children’s educational experience, such as target language learning (i.e., English) and the possibility of access to what Karen parents consider to be the “good jobs” through formal schooling (Cun, 2020, p. 269). However, due to the effects of disrupted education and low print literacy even in their first language, Karen refugee-background students often struggle with adapting to (and learning in) the U.S. public school system. While the literature has found that the knowledge and experience students bring from home are associated with positive learning experiences (Gee, 2002; Harste, 2010), students’ language, culture, and prior learning experiences are often disregarded and considered unwelcome

(Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011). Teachers prioritize teaching their refugee-background students behavioural and socializing practices appropriate for the U.S. school setting (Cho et al., 2019) without taking into account their prior education and experiences. As a result, this leads to having adverse impacts on the academic achievement (Magro, 2007) and schooling experiences of students from a refugee background.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how two female Karen refugee-background elementary students explore their linguistic and cultural identities through multimodal creative artwork. According to Cummins (2004), understanding student-created identity texts provides schools and teachers with a potential for rethinking and re-structuring educational practices in the learning environment. In this sense, it is important for students, especially those with refugee backgrounds, to have a chance to explore their identities given their high dropout rate from school (Tandon, 2016) and greater likelihood of living below the poverty line (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011).

Literature Review

This section provides a brief review of education literature on (1) Karen refugee-background students and their U.S. schooling, based on the scarcity of research on elementary

school students with a refugee-background and Karen ethnicity; and (2) Linguistic and cultural identities through multimodal artwork, identifying a research gap that needs to be addressed in this present study.

Karen Refugee-Background Students and Their U.S. Schooling

Education research has various terms used interchangeably to refer to Karen people with a refugee background, such as “Refugees from Burma” (Roof & McVee, 2021), “Burmese” (Tandon, 2016), “Karen of Burma” (Gilhooly & Lee, 2017), and “Karenni” (Dudley, 2010). For this study, I used the term, “Karen refugee-background students,” to refer to students speaking Sgaw Karen and from Burma, and whose families were forced to leave their home country due to violent conflict between military armed forces and many ethnic minorities. While Myanmar became the official name of the country, I here refer to the nation of the Karen people as Burma, which had been historically so called. I use that name throughout this study in deference to Karen students’ and parents’ preference (Gilhooly & Lee, 2017; Harriden, 2002).

For refugee-background students, schooling experience in a resettled country plays a pivotal role in their transition to the new learning environments (Oikonomidou, 2010; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). However, schools tend to

become places where refugee students encounter discriminatory practices and experience rejection and isolation from peers, teachers, and even subject-matter content (McBrien, 2005; Rutter, 2006; Tandon, 2016; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). In addition, research on school policy and practices for refugee students reveal that refugee students' academic success or failure are attributed to individual capability, rather than viewed from a systemic or structural perspective (Gitlin et al., 2003). Tandon (2016), for example, examines the obstacles and experiences of adolescent refugee-background students with Karen or Burmese ethnic backgrounds after their resettlement in the U.S. The author asserts that the U.S. education system and resettlement agencies led refugee youth or refugee students to learn only English, "sending a message that it was the only subject they were capable or worthy of learning or that it was the only one needed to learn to create their place in the labor force" (p. 15). This study not only presents the participants' U.S. schooling experience and classroom learning, as well as challenges and difficulties, but it also provides multiple marginalizing factors (i.e., birth order, gender, inability to take care of their illness) that are very complicated and make substantial impacts on their education and health.

Compared with refugees of various ethnicities, Karen refugee-background students are expected to adjust well due to their culture's traditional respect for authority (Gilhooly,

2015). However, many of them are likely to struggle to become part of their school community because of rejection by peers, similar to the experience of other refugee students, (French & Conrad, 2001; Kennedy et al., 2019) and lacking support from schools and teachers (Gilhooly et al., 2019; Gilhooly & Lee, 2014; Gilhooly & Lee, 2017; Hiorth & Molyneux, 2018). Kennedy et al. (2019), for instance, delve into the ways in which two Chin refugee-background students in an elementary ESL classroom explore and express their identities in terms of creating the third space through a series of multimodal writing activities. Like the Karen, Chin refugees are representative of ethnic minorities in Burma who were persecuted and forced to flee to refugee camps or foreign countries due to the military ascendancy in Burma in 1962 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006). Grace, one of the participants, identified herself as getting access to an American identity by engaging in educational activities and learning U.S. history, American culture, and U.S. cultural practices, as well as the English language. Unlike Grace, Sui, the other participant, had a great deal of complexities in terms of her identity expression. For example, while she stereotyped Americans as white, blue eyes, and blonde hair, she viewed culture as “hereditary with the potential for cultural pluralism depending on one’s family heritage” (p. 65). The findings of this study illustrate that the participants’ writing products “provided striking nuances and

variations across the [participants'] identity expressions" (p. 66) through the codes of nationalism, phenotypology, and monolingualism.

Hiorth and Molyneux (2018) investigate how Karen refugee-background students shape and perceive their academic, social, and institutional experience in their resettled country, Australia, when they transition from an English learning school to formal mainstream high schools. The authors found that many areas of transition (e.g., academic, social) were "a particularly complex, multifaceted, long-term and non-linear process" (p. 139), especially for refugee-background students. For example, most participants who had high hopes for making new friends with diverse backgrounds at their high schools found it difficult to build solid and sustainable friendships with English-speaking peers as a result of being isolated from other larger student groups. Additionally, a great discrepancy existed between the participants and their teachers in terms of classroom learning and what it meant to be "a good student." For instance, the participants expected learning to be "structured around copying notes from the board, filling in workbooks and memorizing lists for tests" (p. 137), whereas teachers imagined good students to be actively participating in classroom dialogue. Throughout the research, it was apparent that while schools were likely to identify and address the early challenges

that Karen students were expected to come across, such as basic classroom routines and school information (e.g., building access), they often ignored “the more protracted and somewhat hidden challenges related to socialization and student behavior” (p. 140).

Due to the lack of support and appropriate attention from academically and professionally ill-equipped teachers and schools, many refugee-background students, including those with the Karen ethnicity, tend to discontinue their formal schooling, dropping out (McBrien, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Tandon, 2016) to enter the workforce and become factory workers alongside their parents (Harper, 2017). To solve the problem, several studies suggest that schools take concrete actions, including parental involvement (Blakely, 1983; Kivora, 2012), to cater to refugee students and help them transition successfully and feel a sense of belonging to their school community, which could lead to a decrease in the drop-out rate.

Linguistic and Cultural Identities and Multimodal Artwork

When refugee-background students enter the U.S. school system, they begin to engage in learning the new language and culture. During this process, they encounter and negotiate their linguistic and cultural identities that they brought from home

and gained through many experiences inside and outside of school. In K-12 classroom settings, there has been research on identity exploration and positioning of refugee-background students, especially those in elementary grades. For example, Karam et al. (2020) examine how a sixth-grade Iraqi refugee-background student (Fawzi) perceived himself and was positioned by his teacher and his peers in a culturally and linguistically diverse U.S. classroom. While the teacher academically recognized Fawzi's excellent math knowledge and skills, she defined Fawzi as "a typical Iraqi man" (p. 214) who is usually disorganized and whose handwriting is hard to read and understand. Additionally, she described Fawzi as isolated in the class and attributed his isolation partly to his arrogance and superiority to other students in math. Although Fawzi's overall connectedness to his peers was more improved by the end of the year, based on the researchers' observations and interpretations of Fawzi's self-positioning, he seemed to rarely engage in informal and non-academic related conversations with his peers. This study reveals not only a discrepancy between how his math teacher positioned Fawzi in class through the use of indexical processes (e.g., assigning labels, presuppositions, and stances), and how Fawzi positioned himself through his description of himself and his social network in the same class" (p. 218). It also demonstrates the ways in which he navigated his self-positioning from a marginal

position with limited socialization to a more central position with an improved social network in his class. With these, it is worth noting that stereotypical perceptions and perspectives towards refugee-background students, along with “static characteristics that may be “presupposed” based on their ethnic, national, religious, or other labels” (Karam et al., 2020, p. 219), may reinforce marginalization and isolation of refugee-background students. Given that the difference between self-positioning and being positioned by teachers and others has an impact on identity formation of young refugee students, it is important for refugee-background students to have a chance to explore their identities, to define and express who they are, and gain a sense of belonging to a host society.

Based on multiliteracies and multimodal literacy perspectives, various scholars have paid attention to help immigrant or refugee-background students explore and even discover their identities, such as digital storytelling (Kim et al., 2021) and interactive social network services (Bigelow et al., 2017). Kim et al. (2021), for example, investigate how two English learners in middle school engaged in digital storytelling to display their interests, experiences, and identities by *remixing* multimodal semiotic resources. Two participants used emojis and emoticons, along with photos and narration, to create digital videos to demonstrate their ways of learning and reflections on their learning, which reveals the complexities of

their identity navigated through experiences as immigrant and English learners. This study illustrates that multimodal semiotic resources via digital storytelling enabled the English-learning participants with diverse backgrounds to explore their identities and “reflect and express their voices” (p. 8). Multimodality and multiliteracies were introduced with the advent of the New London Group’s (1996) approach to literacy pedagogy, which dramatically changed the landscape of literacy education and research by recognizing that diverse social and cultural practices shape the meaning generated by people engaged in the meaning-making process (Heydon & O’Neil, 2016; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Serafini, 2014). Since 2000, in particular, extensive research has examined the relationship between multimodal texts or semiotic forms and students’ learning, including ways in which a variety of genres of the visual engage in and create meaning making (Stein, 2008). Stein (2008) investigates how multimodality is linked to teaching and learning through the lens of a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning. Viewing the agency of people as core to “sign-making” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 10), social semiotic theory involves “how human beings make meaning in the world through using and making different signs, always in interaction with someone” (Stein, 2008, p. 875).

In current educational settings, students are likely to come across and navigate multimodal texts in which more than

a single mode is associated with others to generate new meaning and interpretation in their everyday lives, rather than dealing with print-based traditional texts (Heydon & O’Neil, 2016; Serafini, 2014). Research has found that multimodal texts can be used to develop and improve students’ meaning-making process and literacy skills, as well as their identity exploration, with the arts often employed as an alternative to texts (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011; Flewitt, 2008; Narey, 2009). Binder and Kotsopoulos (2011), for example, researched the practical ways in which linguistically and culturally diverse kindergarteners develop multimodal narratives through the arts (i.e., quilt squares) to represent the importance of their own being in the world. Multimodal literacy practices can take many forms, such as poem writing (Meyer, 2008) and play performance (Darvin, 2015). Among efforts to support refugee-background students in the U.S., the arts are found to be particularly useful to their adjustment to school, as they provide constructive approaches to addressing diverse problems that refugee-background students encounter (Brunick, 1999; Rowe et al., 2017; Ugurlu et al., 2016; Wellman & Bey, 2015). Ugurlu et al. (2016), for instance, used the creative arts as therapeutic tools with Syrian refugee children and found that refugee children expressed their emotions and thoughts while “increas[ing] their self-esteem and improv[ing] their problem-solving skills” (p. 98).

Particularly relevant to this study is literature on the exploration of linguistic and cultural identities by immigrant- or refugee-background students in elementary school (Dressler, 2014). While the research site (i.e., Canada) and population (mainstream multilingual students) are slightly different, Dressler (2014), for example, investigates the linguistic identity of elementary school students in a German bilingual program with German and English as primary instructional and school languages. Participating students demonstrated and discussed their linguistic identity through a “language portrait” enabling them to express “all aspects of their linguistic identity [...] and bring[ing] into the classroom languages that may not otherwise have been discussed” (Dressler, 2014, p. 49). The present study used multimodal creative artwork to examine the ways in which Karen refugee-background students explore their linguistic and cultural identities. Research working with Karen refugee-background students in educational settings thus far delves into their resettlement processes (Gilhooly, 2015; Gilhooly & Lee, 2017) and their literacy practices and academic content learning (Gilhooly et al., 2019; Harper, 2017), including difficulties and challenges at school (Barrett, 2018; McBrien, 2005; Oikonomidou, 2010). However, there has been scant research on the ways in which Karen refugee-background students engage in multimodal creative artwork to explore their

linguistic and cultural identities, especially in elementary immersion contexts. To bridge the research gap, the research question at the heart of this study is: How does multimodal creative artwork reflect Karen refugee-background students' linguistic and cultural identities?

Theoretical Framework

I drew upon the “funds of knowledge” approach (González, 2005; Moll et al., 1992) to prioritize Karen refugee-background students' prior knowledge and experiences and their ways of interpreting various experiences. This is closely related to their meaning-making process and empowers the participants to be actively involved in the ways in which they explore their linguistic and cultural identities with agency. The funds of knowledge approach is a matrix of experiences, thoughts, knowledge, and skills that people have acquired through everyday life and are influenced by diverse environments (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Moll et al., 1992). Moll et al. (1992) refer to the idea of funds of knowledge as the “historically accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p.133). The researchers stressed the importance of the household knowledge that students inherit from their parents or family, and that teachers should leverage to build a more inclusive classroom environment,

especially for immigrant or refugee students (Chang & Rosiek, 2003; Upadhyay, 2009).

In addition to funds of knowledge, this study adopted a social semiotic theory to analyze the participating Karen students' artwork and examine how the participants engaged in meaning-making out of their multimodal artwork. Research grounded in social semiotic theory zeroes in on "what and how multiple modes/ semiotic resources are used to create meanings in texts" (Yi et al., 2019, p. 165) as a multimodal ensemble. With this perspective, meaning-making of socially situated persons and multimodal communication cannot be made in a vacuum, nor interpreted as monomodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

In this study, funds of knowledge in collaboration with social semiotic theory based on multimodal perspectives served as important roles in understanding Karen refugee-background students and their linguistic and cultural identity exploration. Influenced by a variety of factors, including "social relationships, significant others, particular activities and practices, political ideologies, religious beliefs, or any other artifact" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 36), Karen refugee-background students engaged in artwork activities that naturally demonstrated their understanding of the languages they spoke and the cultures they saw as part of them. I

particularly delved into the ways in which the participants viewed and interpreted themselves and something around them and attended to meaning-making through the artwork they created.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative case study method to focus on Karen refugee-background students' lived experiences and their language and cultural representations in an elementary immersion school. I drew on Merriam's (1998) perspectives, which place much emphasis on "making sense out of data" (p. 178) by integrating what the researcher has observed and what people have said through rich descriptions. The participants of this study took part in student-centered/driven creative artwork and produced art texts (e.g., self-portraits) that were culturally relevant and meaningful to them. After the classroom teacher's introduction and explanation of each artwork activity, the participating students worked on and completed the four art activities pertaining to their identities which were embedded as part of lessons. The four artwork activities were: 1) making a self-portrait, 2) creating an identity grid, 3) decorating a profile silhouette, and 4) generating an identity banner. In addition to students' artwork products, I did classroom observations for three days a week for two weeks and conducted informal open-ended interviews with a

group of students. Data collection started and ended in February 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Four activities of identity artwork were carefully planned and collaboratively organized by the classroom teacher and me as a researcher. The artwork activities were introduced and integrated into part of the lessons in the Geography strand that expected students to demonstrate their understanding of diverse cultures and identities from different perspectives. Out of the four artwork activities, I focused on analyzing the profile silhouette activity (“What is in my brain?”), as 1) many students reported that they found it the most interesting and engaging and 2) this led to participants talking about what they created which included their linguistic and cultural identities in interviews.

For this artwork, students adopted a variety of materials to decorate profile silhouettes with something representative of themselves or important to them. In addition to basic art supplies (e.g., crayons, markers), students were allowed to use Karen fabrics with traditional and indigenous patterns (see Figure 1), as well as Korean and English magazines. Since most Karen students in the second-grade classroom demonstrated their intimacy with the fabrics, they were willing to come to the front of the classroom and take several pieces for their silhouette decoration. When they

completed the decoration of their profile silhouettes, I interviewed the participants with their profile silhouette, asking them to introduce what they had created, and interpreting and understanding their artwork from their words and perspectives.

Context and Participants

Hangul School (pseudonym, pronounced as ‘Haan-gul’) opened in 2014 as a local public charter K-6 Korean immersion school in a midwest city of the U.S., and it has now expanded to include grades preK-12. Hangul provides students with Korean immersion education in addition to pull-out English language services (i.e., ESL class), especially for EL students. Most teachers in Hangul have academic and/or professional backgrounds in Korea, speaking Korean and English fluently. Since a majority of the enrolled students at Hangul have Korean cultural, family, and language backgrounds, the participants of this study were Korean students whose families had varying degrees of English language proficiency and schooling experience, such as limited or no formal schooling. Based not only on my time as a volunteer teacher but also on my rapport with students and teachers there, I contacted a couple of teachers of different grades for recruitment. After discussions with interested teachers, one second-grade teacher had great interest in participating in this study, and her class was finally

chosen as a participant grade. With approval from the school director and the IRB, 20 students in the second-grade classroom obtained consent from their parents for the research participation, and were able to participate in this study.

Karen parents send their children to Hangul for various purposes and reasons, such as the parents expecting their children to receive appropriate attention from dedicated teachers and have extensive learning opportunities for reduced rates or free of charge. In addition, there were some Karen students who initially went to a local public school and ended up switching to Hangul after having experiences of being severely bullied and rejected by their peers without continuous support from teachers and schools (Gilhooly & Lee, 2017; Prior & Niesz, 2013). In contrast, Karen students in Hangul received great attention from teachers who were professionally well-trained and academically well-equipped and tried to respect students' home language and culture while providing them with opportunities to experience diverse learning activities.

The second-grade classroom has 20 students: 16 Karen refugee-background students from Burma speaking Sgaw Karen and 2 Korean-American students and 1 Korean student, and 1 white American student. Among these students, two female students, who had both completed all four artwork

activities and the interview sessions with me, were invited and selected as final participants in this study upon their parents' additional approval for the interview participation.

Minnie

Minnie, with a Karen refugee-background and speaking Karen, English, and Korean, was born in Burma and resided in a refugee camp in Thailand before immigrating to the United States with her family when she was very young. Based on what she said, she naturally “switches” languages from English and Korean to Karen when she is at home, as all family members speak the home language to communicate. She speaks the three languages, Karen, English, and Korean, and is studying all three, with varying degrees of literacy and proficiency in each. As one of the most outgoing and active students in the classroom, she is eager to learn both Korean and English as well as other academic subjects while helping her Karen peers, especially newcomer students, by translating what the teacher says into Karen. In this study, she participated in all four artwork activities and completed informal open-ended interviews.

Nari

Nari, with a Karen refugee-background and speaking English and Korean, is from Karen, and her family immigrated to the U.S. before she was born. She usually speaks English both at

school and home, rarely using her home language, Karen. It is only her father who speaks the Karen language to communicate with his children and Karen friends and neighbors. She reported that she has a limited understanding of Karen without knowing how to read and write in it, having a couple of basic Karen words to communicate with her father. Although she is one of the students who speak as little as possible in class and prefers individual work, she has a great interest in learning many different academic and non-academic subjects, including language and *Taekwondo* (a Korean martial art). In this study, she engaged in all four artwork activities as well as informal open-ended interviews.

Positionality of the Researcher

Based on my work as a volunteer teacher at Hangul for several years, and as a former assistant teacher in a Kindergarten classroom, my position throughout the course of data collection was one involved in participants' meaning-making out of their artwork as an active listener by asking questions and displaying my reactions. This was possible because not only were most Karen students in the Grade 2 classroom my students when they were in kindergarten, but also my firm rapport with students and the classroom teacher served as a gateway to collecting primary and supplementary data for this study. However, my intimacy with the second-grade classroom

also came with tension, such as the extent to which I engaged in students' interpretation and meaning-making out of their artwork. In addition, it might be possible that the classroom teacher's instruction was influenced by my presence in the classroom. Being aware of the fact that my relationship with students could affect the study findings, I often stepped back at different times during the data collection in order to reflect on my role as a researcher and to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the research.

I self-identify as an Asian Korean-English bilingual female graduate student researcher with several years of international teaching experiences. This might influence what I did in the classroom. While I helped Karen students better learn the Korean language and grade-level content in Korean, for example, it was challenging for me to fully understand what it means to learn Korean as a third or an immersion language to Karen students in the second grade. Additionally, my lack of knowledge in Karen language and culture could have led to my being seen as an outsider, having an impact on my interpretation and understanding of Karen refugee-background students' learning and speaking three languages at school and home.

Data Collection Tools

Student Artwork

Students had 30 minutes for each artwork activity. Once every artwork session was completed, students were allowed to display what they created in their classroom and/or the hallway of the school building for three days. During the school visits for observations, I took pictures of every artwork product and then students took their masterpiece home. While I took 98 photos of their final art products and students engaging in artwork activities, images of final art products were only used and analyzed, with permission having been granted by students and the classroom teacher.

Informal Open-Ended Interview

I had four informal open-ended interviews with the participants, and each interview session lasted for 15 to 20 minutes and took place during class recess or transition times where conversations naturally occur. Interviews that focused on the ways of the participants' interpretations and meaning-making out of their art products were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. While I did not "come to the interview with a set of structured questions" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127), I began the interview by asking the first question as "미니가 한 것에 대해서 말해줄래요? (Can you tell me about your

work?)” and asked follow-up and clarification questions depending on participants’ responses and our discussions. Before starting each interview, I asked participants to choose what language they liked to use and depending on their selection, the primary language varied and switched one language to another. For example, Minnie wanted to use Korean at first and then switched back and forth between English, Karen, and Korean, especially when she did not come up with any appropriate words in a language. When she used Karen to describe something, I drew on mechanical translation tools (e.g., Google Translate) to make sense of what she was talking about. When interviewing Nari, she wanted to use English throughout, along with a few Korean words, such as 한국(Korea), 학교 (school).

Classroom Observation

Classroom observations were conducted in 5 periods of 25-30 minutes each for two weeks to become familiar with pedagogical routines and see if there was any chance for Karen students to leverage their linguistic and cultural practices in interactions and their language and content learning. I typed up observation field notes during or right after every class observation (over 10 pages in MSWord) as “the written account of what [one] hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in

the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 107).

Analysis Process

For analysis of collected data, I paid initial attention to the overall picture and then moved into details such as the use of color, materials, and shapes, trying to figure out what images meant and stood for. I wrote down short memos on my initial impressions and interpretations of each piece of artwork and compared them to students' actual interpretations of their work by asking them questions in the interviews that also served as a member check of the participation. I remained open and flexible to each modality of students' individual art product in order to learn more about the ways in which students searched for their linguistic and cultural identities, as well as how they drew on the direct/indirect experiences that impacted their identities.

I engaged in finding initial coding for analysis and generated both initial descriptive codes and emergent themes based on repetitive themes and patterns and important information from the data collected. After the initial coding process, I implemented constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1968), during which new themes emerged which I compared to the existing categories to determine whether the new ones would be able to stand as an isolated category or

belong to an extant category. In addition, although the participants had some things in common (e.g., Karen, a refugee background), I focused on different experiences and perceptions that the participants obtained and retained.

Findings

Many Karen students' silhouettes showed a certain degree of commonality in terms of using three national flags of Korea, United States, and Karen to the extent to which they cut in the middle of each flag and combined one to two or all three half-flags to make one big national flag. While there were some who did not put any national flag into their silhouette, many of them were eager to employ flag pictures as a way to express their current sense of originality or their fluid ethnic identity.



Figure 1. Students using Karen fabrics

In this section, two profile silhouettes from two Karen participating students (Minnie and Nari) were selected and examined as the participants not only engaged enthusiastically in the research project and interviews, but they also created their artwork in ways that demonstrated different ways of perceiving and positioning various experiences and entities around them. For example, while Minnie's artwork clearly indicated her sense of belonging to her family, school, and local ethnic communities, Nari's focused on something influenced by her learning and school experiences and her professional aspirations in the future.

Minnie

Using a girl's silhouette, Minnie layered pieces of colored paper, a picture of the Karen national flag, and a picture of a traditional Korean drum (Figure 2) to express intangible information that cannot be represented in and conveyed through her silhouette. In the colorful collage, she made a religious symbol (i.e., the orange cross in the rectangular-shaped black paper) and created various shapes (i.e., hearts, squares) by using small pieces of pink-, red-, and green-colored paper to convey her mood (i.e., hearts for joy and delight) and her favorite things (i.e., an apple on top of the Karen flag, a palette for her liking for drawing and painting). In addition, pieces of Karen textiles and pictures of the Karen flags and the

Korean drum were placed in the artwork to reflect her affinity for her ethnic community and preference for music.



Figure 2. A photo from Minnie's silhouette

Because I am Karen

The details of Minnie's silhouette informed an overall interpretation of the work: there were three strips of the same red-colored Karen fabric in the middle and at the bottom that can delineate her sense of belonging, Karen culture and being Karen. Her being Karen was manifest in this picture, in which she put the Karen national flag at the top. She explained:

Because I am Karen... And (*pointing at the fabric*) that's our [fabric]. My mom and dad.. uh.. We wear it, um like, in

New Year. In Thailand. Last time when I was two, I didn't remember but my mom told me, like, we celebrated it and there's almost, there's, there's like, a lot of people and there is a river and like, like, (*smiling*) I, I fell in the river. (*laughing*) And, I wear it on my birthday and sometimes on Christmas, and, and also the New Year, and Easter, and my siblings' birthday, and my mom and dad's birthday, and my uncle and aunties, and grandma and grandpa's birthdays. I like it.

Minnie presented her firm linguistic and ethnic identities as being Karen by using the whole Karen national flag and including a traditional musical instrument. In the interview, she reported that she spoke “a lot of” Karen at home and rarely speaks English, presenting her confidence and comfort in speaking her home language compared to the two other languages (English and Korean) that she was expected to learn and speak at school. Despite her limited understanding of reading and writing skills in her home language, she seemed to have opportunities to interact with Karen peers in school, which plays a significant role in her home language

maintenance. Additionally, according to Minnie, she intentionally excluded American and Korean flags from her silhouette, and unlike the other students, was the only one to exclusively use the whole Karen flag without modification:

I can understand Karen but I can't read it. [...] In recess, when my friends say Karen and, and I said back to them [in] Karen. (Researcher: I'm so glad you are speaking Karen at school.) Because I am Karen, I speak Karen ... sometimes English, and I speak Korean in school. But I speak a lot of Karen [at] home. And I speak it [Karen] every time. Sometimes I speak English in school, but I think I don't know much about English. Some words I don't know how to say it [English].

Among all Karen students in the classroom who had talked about their home language practices, it was Minnie who revealed the great confidence and pride in herself as a Karen speaker, having extensive exposure to her home language and culture at home. Additionally, her homeroom teacher implemented a flexible language policy allowing students to use

their home language for their learning. All these motivated her to hone her home language skills and engage in Karen cultural events and activities hosted by the local Karen community. During the class observations, the homeroom teacher for the second grade, Ms. Jin (pseudonym), welcomed and encouraged Karen students to scaffold and support each other's learning through their home language use and even bring their cultures to the classroom (i.e., putting a light paint on their face on a daily or weekly basis), which may influence Minnie's having strong linguistic and ethnic identities.

She put a picture of a Jang-gu, a Korean traditional drum, at the bottom and a Red Delicious apple, one of the most popular varieties in the U.S., at the top of her silhouette. Her placement of different cultural items into an artifact indicated that she engaged with and navigated all three languages and cultures (Korean, American, Karen). When reading the ways in which Minnie drew on cultural artifacts (i.e., Jang-gu, Red Delicious) to express her fluid cultural affiliation, I found it interesting and worth noting that she did not layer or blend the cultural items in ways that they were used without any modification. This illustrated that although she was in the process of exploring and navigating all three languages and cultures, her ethnic and linguistic identities as a Karen speaker with the Karen ethnicity were rather firmly established.

I Go to Church

As indicated on the left side of her artwork, Minnie made the Cross from orange-colored paper with a black-rectangular background. When I asked what the black background stands for, she identified it as the Bible that she brought to her local Karen church every Sunday. Both the Cross and the Bible represent her religious identity as a Christian, which was distinct from other religious symbols that other students created and included in their silhouettes. While Karen students who drew on religious symbols were likely to incorporate diverse religious texts (i.e., the Qur'an) mingled with well-known figures (e.g., Buddha) in their artwork, Minnie included the specific religious scriptures (i.e., the Bible) and symbols (i.e., the Cross) that presented her Christianity, and she confirmed:

I go to church every Sunday. I learn Karen there, and pray, and sing songs with my friends. (Researcher: Can you tell me how important this is for you?) Um.. because my mom and dad and my sisters go to church and learn about the Bible and Jesus? And, and, I have fun in my church and learn

about Jesus and ... and I can meet my friends there.

While it was not discussed in interviews whether Minnie self-perceived herself as a Christian having a religious faith and belief, it was apparent that she prioritized and positioned Christianity as part of family religious practices:

Researcher: What is the most precious, or important thing for you in your work here?

Minnie: (*smiling*) the Bible. Because I go to church.. My mom and dad and my sister and brothers and my aunts and grandma go to church together.

Gilhooly (2015) found that “Karen conversion to Christianity introduced not only religion but provided Karen access to Western education, medicine, and protection from their historical adversaries, the Burmans” (p. 3). Given that Minnie attended a local Karen church, however, she did seem to relate her Christianity to better social access and services. Rather, her religious identity was likely to give her access to her learning of the home language and culture and a chance to get connected to those having the same ethnic background.

Based on her silhouette, it was evident that Minnie placed the textile-made heart next to the Cross and the Bible on the left side so that it was connected via a green strip up to the other pink heart which was located next to the Karen national flag. When I asked her if there was any implicit meaning she wanted to convey through connection between the religious items and the Karen flag, she responded, “I think my friends and family and my neighbors are all Karen and go to the Karen church so they are, um, like the same.” This suggested that her residence and neighborhood were based on Karen communities supporting her building and developing a friendship with her Karen-speaking friends, which naturally led to her linking Christianity to the Karen ethnicity.

Nari



Figure 3. A photo from Nari's silhouette

Using a girl's silhouette, Nari used pictures of national Korean, U.S., and (half-cut) Karen flags and included small pieces of Karen traditional textiles and colored paper, along with her drawing, for this artwork (Figure 3). Compared to Minnie's, Nari's silhouette contained a lot more drawing and writing to express abstract information that cannot be understood through her silhouette. In addition to colored-paper, textile pieces, and national flags, she used a white crayon to draw and write something that presented her personal liking or someone with whom she had affinity (i.e., Ms. Kim). For example, she created a round-shaped palette by drawing a white circle with small pieces of red-, yellow-, and blue-colored paper in it, and this represented her preference for drawing and painting.

I Just Don't Want to Speak

In Figure 3, she pasted the American and Korean flags onto the silhouette nearly complete and undamaged, whereas she had cut the Karen national flag in half. While one might assume this was because it was the biggest and she may have not wanted it to take up the whole space, she explicitly stated in interviews that she intentionally cut the Karen flag in half to display that she identified her originality of being American based on her birthplace (i.e., the U.S.) and the language she speaks (i.e., English), which was closely related to her linguistic and cultural affiliation and identities:

Researcher (R): (*pointing at her silhouette*)

Oh, I see the three national flags but one of them seems half cut.

Nari (N): Yeah. Um.. Because I think I'm [an] American because, um, I was born in America and... and I speak English. And sometimes I think I become Karen and I'm like a Korean because I can speak a little bit [of] Karen and Korean... but I speak English more, like, in classrooms and school.

R: Wow. You speak three languages! Awesome!

N: (*smiling*) Yes. I can speak Karen and Korean. But I just... I speak English more and I like learning [English] with Mrs. Lee (pseudonym).

Her way of using the national flags illustrated her affinity for a particular nationality (i.e., U.S.) and linguistic identity as an English speaker. However, she perceived herself as a Karen or a Korean at times because of her language proficiency in both languages. It is worth noting that her positive attitudes towards learning experiences and perceptions of schooling, including teachers' appropriate attention paid to

Karen students, may play a pivotal role in having her leave the Korean flag undamaged. When she was asked to explain why she wrote “Ms. Kim” at the bottom of the silhouette, she responded, “I like Ms. Kim. She is very nice and smart and kind and beautiful.” Although it was not discussed what made Nari have personal affinity with Ms. Kim, it was likely that her great care for students and professional knowledge and teaching may facilitate her attachment to her teacher, Ms. Kim, and further Korean language and culture.

She particularly demonstrated the varying degree with which she is able to speak the three languages through the adverse use of words such as “more” and “a little bit,” which appeared to be associated with the extent to which she spoke a language with confidence. For example, during the classroom observation, I often found that she had more confidence and comfort when speaking English than using Karen or Korean by using gestures and a slightly high tone of voice with smiles to interact and work with her peers and teachers, as well as have interviews with me in English.

Following my complimentary response (i.e., “Awesome!”), she recounted that she spoke English more than the other two languages and enjoyed English learning with Mrs. Lee (pseudonym) who was her EL teacher in the school. As many Karen students did, she had been learning English

three to four times a week with Mrs. Lee in an EL classroom, and they all reported that they enjoyed EL classes with the teacher a lot. Her positive perception of the learning experience with Mrs. Lee through engaging activities likely kept her interested in and motivated to learn more about English. When I discussed with her homeroom teacher about Nari's English learning, she explained that Nari was an academically-driven student with a great interest in learning and practicing English, including American history and culture.

Moreover, it seemed likely that her home language practices stimulated her to estrange her home language. She explained:

I speak English as [a] first [language],
Karen very little. Well, um, well, I
speak Karen to my dad only because
he speak[s] Karen and I speak
English, like, to my siblings. I learn
many thing[s] [in] English and... I...
I like it.

She emphasized that the primary language through which she was able to learn and communicate with others was English and that she used English at home to interact with her siblings. Her limited understanding of her home language appeared to impact

the conversations with her father and between her father and her siblings. It was revealed through an informal conversation with her homeroom teacher that she was allowed to speak English at home based on her father's belief that English is necessary for his children to be part of the mainstream society in the U.S. In addition, when she was asked about her home language practices, it was clear that she mostly used English with very little use of broken Karen for communication with her father as she did not fully understand Karen and her father had limited proficiency in English:

I just don't want to speak. I mean, Karen. I [am] kind of shy when I speak Karen. I can understand [Karen] a little bit. My dad [is] trying to speak English but he didn't [use correct English] so I use some Karen and English words [to] tell him but I think he don't understand. So I use English a lot and little Karen to my dad. But he don't understand.

Her home language practices indicated that they appeared to impede communication between Nari and her father, who mostly spoke Karen at home, by having her

speak a mixed form of Karen and English to help him understand what she wanted to say, but ended with her father's incomprehension and conversation breakdown. Her language practices at home were likely to reinforce Nari's emotional detachment from her ethnicity and home language and culture, which may lead to her using the Karen flag half-cut in her silhouette and writing the names of her Karen friends in Korean. However, the great difficulties in interacting with her father and her limited proficiency in Karen did not seem to galvanize Nari to practice her home language, instead saying "[she] use[d] English a lot." Consequently, the way she positioned and perceived the languages around her was influenced by her self-identification as an American in collaboration with home language practices, which depicted her linguistic identity as an English speaker who used Karen at home and learned Korean in school.

If I Don't Go to School, I Cannot Learn

Among many Karen students who presented their love for the school in their silhouettes, it was Nari who was particularly noticeable for her expression of her affection for schools, teachers, and friends through the silhouette artwork: for example, she put the names of her best friends on the top left side and the name of her favorite

teacher, Ms. Kim from kindergarten, at the bottom, along with a picture of a school and words (i.e., “school”, “eye-doc”) in the pony-tailed part of the paper. When asked about her school experiences, she equated the word “school” with friends, art and PE classes, and some other activities and experiences that she could have at school, which led to her believing that learning occurs in school,:

N: I like my school. And if I don't go to school, I cannot learn.

R: Can I ask why? I think you can still learn at home or anywhere else.

N: Because I can learn from the teacher and, um, there's clubs. I like specials. I can learn many [things] in school. I like special classes... PE... and art... I can learn at school.

Not only academic and content-related learning and studying, but also non-academic experiences and activities she was willing to enjoy and attend to, and this enabled her to have a strong sense of belonging to her school community and (inter)cultural experiences. For instance, since her school provided Korean immersion education, they often hosted many cultural events for both students and their families in which students could

participate and celebrate together, such as Korean traditional holidays (e.g., Seollal, Korean Thanksgiving). Nari actively attended and enjoyed every cultural event provided by the school, and through this she was naturally exposed to and motivated to learn Korean language and culture.

In addition to a variety of activities in school, her home language practices were one of the factors that had her cherish and prefer learning at school. In the interview, Nari stated that her father was able to speak Karen at home and rarely used English for work because many of his colleagues shared a Karen language background. She explained:

I use English at home. I speak English to my brother and sister. When I say something to dad, my older sister can change language [English] to Karen so he can understand... I understand Karen but very little. (*pause*) He doesn't speak English well. No. He only speak[s] Karen.

Since Nari's father was the only one who spoke the Karen language at home, his children were expected to learn and speak the home language to interact with their

father. Due to his children's limited home language proficiency, it often appeared to be one of the older siblings' responsibility to bridge the language gap between her father and younger children by translating English to Karen or vice-versa. His lack of proficiency in the English language was likely to have an adverse impact on communication with his children, which could lead to potential generational discrepancy and conflict (Gilhooly, 2015). Affected by the home language practices, Nari placed more value on all types of learning and experiences at school, including her professional aspiration of being an eye doctor and friendships that she believed she was able to have and develop only by attending school.

Different Ascriptions of Meaning to Color

In the silhouette artwork, the two participants demonstrated their different preferences for color and distinct ways to give meanings to specific colors. For example, Minnie often used pink- and green-colored paper for her profile silhouette partly because she had the pink-colored garment, including the traditional pink vest for children (Figure 4), which led to her having a familiarity with the color and considering it as a family color. She explained:

I... I used pink [in the silhouette]
because, I don't know, I feel like it's

more like family color? [...] I have this color[ed clothes] at home. My mom made pink clothes and there was no ... (*pointing at sleeves*) I don't know. (Researcher: You mean, (*pointing at arms*) sleeves? You mean, a vest without sleeves?) Oh, yes. Yes. And I used green to show [that] ... this is a Christmas tree because I love Christmas. I like green too.

Given that Karen children usually have a traditional Karen vest with tassels for special occasions or any cultural or family events, it seemed natural for her to have affinity with the specific color and grant meanings to the color in ways that it represented part of herself and her childhood experience and her family.



Figure 4. Traditional vest for Karen children

Moreover, Minnie used green-colored paper to make a Christmas tree. She reported that Christmas was very special for her as her close relatives who resided in different states gathered on this holiday for a family reunion to celebrate the day together. She explained that she had an extended family where all family members, including grandmother and aunts, lived in the same household, and this seemed normal through the lens of Karen culture and Minnie's family culture.

M: I am living with my mom and dad
and my brothers
and sister and grandma and aunts.

S: Wow! You have many people in
your house.

M: Yes. Oh-No. It is not too much[many]. We have 11 people in my house.

In Nari's silhouette, it was evident that she used pieces of a pink-colored tassel and of Karen fabrics with traditional patterns. Unlike Minnie, however, she did not provide any cultural meaning or interpretation in adding specific items. Rather, she selected the cultural artifacts for her artwork because of their aesthetic beauty, not because of her cultural affiliation. She described:

I don't know... I think they [were] beautiful and pretty and I put those here. I saw my friends wear it, the clothes ... But I... I don't do that. [...] I have one at home but I don't wear it.

Using a couple of colors (i.e., white, blue), Nari expressed her professional aspirations for being an eye doctor in the future and her personal liking for drawing, such as a palette using small pieces of red-, yellow-, and blue-colored paper, including school-related experiences. When asked about the use of white and blue colors, she explicitly stated that she deliberately drew on the colors to delineate her preference for

painting and both academic and non-academic experiences she gained at school. While the reason for her personal liking for white and blue colors was not discussed during the interviews, it seemed possible that many factors and environments impacted her penchant for the particular colors. For example, both the Korean immersion school mascot, a white tiger, and the Korean national flag with white and blue colors included, along with her positive perceptions of various experiences in school, influenced her inclination for the white and blue colors. Additionally, it seemed possible that since she distanced herself from her home language and culture, her affiliation and intimacy with the U.S. and the English language motivated her to include both white and blue colors for her silhouette artwork.

Discussion and Implications

This study investigated how Karen refugee-background students explored their linguistic and cultural identities through multimodal creative artwork in an elementary Korean immersion classroom. Since this artwork project was conducted in a Korean immersion school setting, this study reflected students' diverse experiences and perspectives in a specific learning community, and findings of this study cannot be generalized to all refugee-background students in U.S. elementary classroom contexts, or even to all students with Karen ethnicity. However, analysis of the participants' artwork

and the transcribed interviews disclosed “striking nuances and variations across the [participants’] identity expression” (Kennedy et al., 2019, p. 66).

Minnie demonstrated her strong linguistic identity and cultural affiliation, such as being a Karen speaker who learns English and Korean and appreciates the Karen culture. Her self-identification as a Karen person naturally led her to an interest in learning and maintaining her home language and culture. Minnie’s spoken skills and her confidence in Karen pushed against what Gilhooly (2015) found: “[Karen] children, namely 1.5 and 1.25 generationers (those who resettled at earlier ages), have limited speaking ability in Karen. [...] It is not uncommon for younger Karen children to have very limited Karen vocabularies, compromising parent-child communication” (p. 11). While it seemed that Minnie’s linguistic and cultural identities were mostly influenced by her home language practices, it was likely that the student’s experiences in school and church impacted her identity exploration and expression in many ways that navigated and learned three languages (English, Karen, and Korean) and cultures. My observational data indicated that she was actively involved in the teacher’s instruction and educational activities while helping other students understand the classroom lessons and complete assignments using her home language in the classroom. This was made possible by the second-grade

teacher's language policy that allowed refugee-background students, especially those who recently resettled in the U.S., to draw on their home language to make sense of the instruction and better understand grade-level content. The fluid classroom language policy in collaboration with her home language practices enabled Minnie and other Karen students to help them not only engage in their identity exploration and expression, but also position and perceive themselves as central and part of the community, rather than peripheral and marginalized students. In addition to the schooling experience and classroom language policy, her affiliation with a local Karen church provided her with opportunities to maintain the Karen language and participate in Karen cultural events. As shown in her silhouette that included spiritual items, such as the Bible and the Cross, her involvement in many activities in church strengthened her strong attachment to the Karen language and culture, which affected her identity exploration.

While Minnie's exclusive use of the Karen flag on the artwork denoted her attachment to her home language and culture, Nari included three national flags of Korean, the USA, and half-cut Karen, which pointed to her perceived linguistic and cultural affiliation. Nari's silhouette included food culture and practices (i.e., tacos and *Tteokbokki* (Korean spicy rice cakes) for school lunch), friendship information (i.e., writing names of Karen friends), and the professional job she desired

to have for her future, greatly affected by experiences in school. This may be combined with her belief that learning could only occur in school. Moreover, her linguistic perceptions of Karen, English, and Korean in exploration of linguistic and cultural identities indicated that her home language practices had little impact on her home language learning and development. As discussed in interviews, she stated, “When I say something to dad, my older sister can change language [English] to Karen so he can understand... I understand Karen but very little.” This revealed that her father’s limited understanding of English and reliance on English-Karen bilingual older children to translate Karen to English or vice versa obstructed the communication with his children using the home language, and this triggered her to be alienated from the Karen language and culture and adhere to English while highlighting overall activities and learning in school without leaning toward specific events, feelings, or any particular moments.

Minnie and Nari’s distinct preferences for color and different ways to provide meanings for particular colors were affected by the Karen cultural influence or school-related experiences. Although research that examines individuals’ selection of color affected by personality found that those having outgoing personality are likely to use “warm, invigorating colors, like red and orange, whereas introverts are

drawn to cooler, calming colors, like blue” (Birren, 1980, as cited in Withrow, 2004, p. 35), it was obvious that the ways in which Minnie and Nari preferred and used specific colors for their identity artwork were intertwined with complicated factors affected by family and school dynamics they experienced.

The findings of the present study provided useful and meaningful pedagogical implications for elementary classrooms and schools, especially teachers serving refugee-background students and/or multilingual/-cultural students. First, it is necessary for teachers to incorporate identity exploration via multimodal texts into curricula so that young students with refugee and bi-/multilingual backgrounds could have a chance to navigate their identities and integrate them into part of their language and content learning. In the case of Karen refugee-background students in a language immersion classroom, for example, students are encouraged to make multimodal texts or artifacts based on their prior experiences by using and mixing an immersion language, English, and even their home language, such as Language Experience Approach (Hall, 1970). Student-created multimodal texts and artifacts can be used as textbooks for their immersion language classroom lessons, which may play a significant role in not only their immersion and English language development (Nessel & Dixon, 2008), but also their home language maintenance. In

addition, given that today's young learners are exposed to multimedia and digital technology, students with diverse backgrounds can benefit from multimodal composition (i.e., drawing journals) and digital storytelling with use of technology in navigating and exploring their identities (Kim et al., 2021) and enhancing their understanding of literacy and subject-matter content (Hur & Suh, 2012). Hur and Suh (2012), for instance, found that digital storytelling contributed to English learners having agency in learning and researching the content and materials used for their own stories, as well as improving their spoken and written skills in English. The research suggests that students with refugee backgrounds may “author themselves, their voices, and their unique identities” (Kennedy et al., 2019, p. 67) when provided with an appropriate means to navigate and express their identities. As such, teachers can explore and adopt technological tools to “create authentic learning environments and motivate [refugee-background] children to develop language and literacy” (Cun, 2021, p. 33).

Second, teachers should leverage the multimodal literacy practices to their pedagogical routines and instruction in ways that view students as socially situated humans and prioritize their meaning-making through a variety of social semiotic resources. Multimodal literacy practices engage with a social justice concern in that they enfranchise young refugee-

background students whose culture and knowledge are better represented with multiple modalities of learning and presenting themselves other than written and spoken language (Narey, 2017). The last implication echoed Crandall's (2018) part of the implications for educators serving Somali-born refugee-background students. Crandall (2018) emphasized the significance of "history as part of the context for how each [student] viewed who [they are] in the United States" (p. 46). With Crandall (2018), teachers with younger refugee-background students should generate and practice an "asset-oriented discourse" that recognizes "the resources and strategies that refugee-background students employ toward their goals both inside and outside of educational settings" (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017, p. 81). The discourse is very important in that the contributions and endeavors that refugee-background students like Minnie and Nari make to their families and school diversity, are often obscured and even ignored by deficit perspectives. One way to do this is having students publish their own self-newsletter that highlights their family and personal histories and their voice on certain topics or issues. This way enables students to foster agency and critically see their learning and even position themselves "in a larger context of social [and systemic] inequality" (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017, p. 90).

Conclusion

Exploration of linguistic and cultural identities is especially significant for younger students with an underrepresented and refugee-background, given their high chance of leaving school in early to late adolescence (Tandon, 2016). This applies to Karen refugee children, in particular, as they were initially unlikely to experience identity crisis upon resettlement, but likely to re-experience struggles with identity issues later, “hav[ing] difficulty foreseeing the content of possible selves in the new cultural context” (Ertorer, 2014, p. 281). Through this study, it is hoped that new instructional practices and strategies emerge that better serve marginalized refugee-background students in equitable and socially just ways, allowing students to have the opportunity to explore their linguistic and cultural identities. This will contribute to their better learning and socialization in the long run, having students feel their home language and culture are acknowledged and valued to learn best and truly feel like they “belong” in the new culture and school system.

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