

**EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES
AND FORCED (IM)MIGRANTS
ACROSS TIME AND CONTEXT**

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EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES AND FORCED (IM)MIGRANTS ACROSS TIME AND CONTEXT

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REFUGEE AND FORCED IM/MIGRANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES ACROSS TIME AND CONTEXT: THE INTERSECTION OF DETERMINISM, DURATION, AND MOBILITY

Alexander W. Wiseman and Lisa Damaschke-Deitrick

ABSTRACT

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the ways that refugee and forced im/migrant (RFI) youth move across time and context in their educational experiences. In particular, the contextual characteristics of determinism, duration, and mobility are explained, and the factors most often associated with RFI youth educational experiences (i.e., trauma, identity, and language) are discussed in reference to the ways that educational infrastructure, capacity, and sustainability are typically established and maintained in educational situations worldwide. This chapter also provides a brief overview of the volume's chapters and the ways that each chapter addresses one or more of these themes or topics.

Keywords: Refugee education; immigration; forced migration; determinism; mobility; trauma experiences; youth identity; language education

Political violence, civil unrest, economic crises, and natural disasters have occurred at a constant pace, leading to ongoing global emergencies characterized by forced immigration and migration (i.e., im/migration) worldwide. As a result, the infrastructures, capacities, and policies necessary to address the needs of refugee

youth, their families, and their communities are strained in communities wherever RFI youth are. But, the situations that RFI youth and the educational systems they move through or into vary throughout their journey (i.e., time) as well as by the communities, cultures, languages, and places (i.e., context) where education occurs. As a result, it becomes increasingly important for educators, researchers, and policymakers to identify, analyze, and implement education for RFIs across time and context.

Previous research on RFI youth and their education has focused heavily on the experiences of education in conflict situations (i.e., education in emergencies) as well as in the immediate post-conflict context (i.e., refugee camps) (e.g., [Shohel, 2022](#)). Unsurprisingly, this research has found multiple, significant challenges to educational access, equity, content, and delivery in these conflict and immediate post-conflict contexts ([Burde et al., 2019](#)), but it is also clear from this research that the experiences and impacts of education in conflict and immediate post-conflict are embedded more firmly in the static context than they are in the aftermath or long-term experience across days, weeks, months, years, or decades.

Other research on RFI youth, especially among those RFI youth who are near the end or have concluded their migration journey and resettled in stable, developed, or other long-term resettlement communities, shows that education is challenged by multiple factors encountered along the journey. These factors result in compounded trauma, crises of identity, and language confusion ([Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2022](#); [McBrien, 2005](#)). But, little research examines the role that time plays on the RFI youth experience and the ways that education may either mediate those factors across the migration journey. It is a complex intersectional analysis to collect data and analyze changes in how education either mediates, addresses or sometimes resolves the challenges of trauma, identity, and language across both time and context, yet it may be the only way to understand the RFI experience in the twenty-first century.

Education itself is often seen as nothing more than a socialization or socializing tool for RFI youth ([Swisher, 2023](#)). For example, in conflict situations (i.e., education in emergencies), the act of going to school – even if that school is a cleared, dusty patch of ground in a refugee camp – is itself a stabilizing experience. “Going to school” serves to bring some semblance of normalcy, order, comfort, or structure to the otherwise chaotic and traumatic lives that RFI youth lead ([Mosselson et al., 2017](#)). In post-conflict and resettlement situations, education is often recognized more for the role it plays in recognizing and addressing the trauma, identity, and language challenges that RFI youth have experienced, which is more of a deficit approach to education, than the potentialities and contributions that RFI youth can make both to their peers in school, but also to the communities where they resettle ([DeMartino, 2021](#)).

This volume reflects the challenges of these prior approaches to researching and understanding RFI youth education, while also suggesting ways that time and context of RFI youth educational experiences may be understood in connection to one another. The advantage of this approach is that it is possible then to develop a method for accounting for changes in RFI education that occur across the migration journey, while also accounting for the various differences that

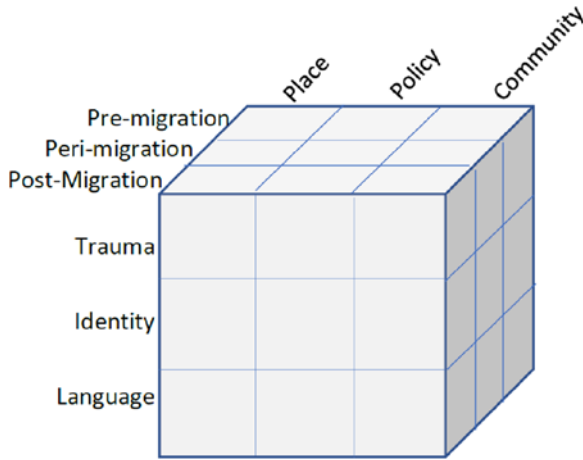


Fig. 1. The Intersectionality of TIDAL with Time and Place.

context contributes to those educational experiences at milestone moments in the journey itself. Although in many ways it is an oversimplification of the educational experiences of RFI youth across time and the contexts of their migration journeys, [Fig. 1](#) depicts the milestone periods in RFI youth educational journeys and the core factors that prior research suggests are the most relevant to understanding those journeys as a three-dimensional cube (a la [Bray & Thomas, 1995](#)).

As [Fig. 1](#) suggests, trauma, identity, and language (i.e., TIDAL) are experiences that are unique to each RFI youth and may range from no experience to daily and deep experiences. The TIDAL framework provides researchers, educators, and other stakeholders a basic form of “framework” for understanding and acting on the demonstrated needs of RFI students by way of a systematic accounting for intersection of and variation in trauma, identity, and language across time (pre-, peri-, and post-migration) and context (place, policy, and community). Although the cube as a visual explanation of intersectionality is limited ([Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013](#)), it does indicate that there is significant intersectionality and variation across both time and place, but also in terms of the degree or presence of trauma, identity, or language.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME

Time is most significantly understood in relation to the journey itself: pre-migration (i.e., before), peri-migration (i.e., during), and post-migration (i.e., after). The moment in time of the migration journey is significant because the migration experience is cumulative, meaning that each moment in the journey is highly influenced by the moments and experiences that preceded it. Pre-migration experiences that are positive or non-violent lead to different experiences of the same

phenomena in the peri-migration phase compared to those whose pre-migration experiences are negative or violent. To understand the role that time plays in RFI youths' educational journey throughout their migration experience, it is necessary to recognize that not all RFI youth started with the same educational experiences or backgrounds.

Research is quick to point out in many national and local contexts worldwide that there is often significant inequality in educational infrastructure, capacity (i.e., knowledge and skills), and even sustainability, which relies on infrastructure and capacity along with the involvement of key stakeholders in the ongoing implementation of appropriate quality education (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2007; Kayembe & Nel, 2019; Morrice et al., 2020). But, research is less likely to recognize the role that these different educational experiences pre-migration have on RFI youth once the key migration event occurs, whether it is political violence, climate, or economic crises. Instead, research on RFI youths' education examines the conditions and effects of their educational experiences "in situ," often without factoring in whether the education in emergency or conflict situations is significantly different in terms of access, equity, content, or delivery than it was pre-migration.

Likewise, RFIs whose peri-migration period was relatively short and stable (i.e., less overall mobility) will have different experiences in the same post-migration situations compared to those whose peri-migration period was relatively long and unstable (i.e., more overall mobility). And, of course, there is the highly likely possibility that the actual experiences of RFI youth at every stage of the migration journey will be significantly different between and across each of the stages of migration (i.e., pre-, peri-, and post-), although similar pre-migration contexts may yield similar educational experiences for RFI youth. For example, RFI youth at large refugee camps where they may live for extended periods of time mid-migration journey may have broadly similar educational experiences even though the specific context may be both physically and temporally distant from another RFI youth's experience.

RFI youths' educational opportunities and experiences before (pre-) and during (peri-) migration have been addressed considerably in previous research (Bellino, 2021), but there is comparatively little about the transition from peri- to post-migration education of refugee youth (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). This is especially true because of the cyclical and recurring refugee, asylee, and forced im/migrant situations occurring worldwide. The educational impact is great among young RFIs both moving into and being sustained and incorporated into educational systems worldwide, especially among Global North receiving countries, as well as among their families, their teachers, and the educational systems through which they resettle, participate, and become either formally recognized or de facto citizens.

But, even in Global North resettlement contexts, the educational opportunities often reflect the specific resettlement communities as much as the broader educational systems. For example, RFI youth may resettle in Europe or North America somewhere, but the specific communities where they resettle are often a reflection of their economic situation as well as their cultural affinities. Although

many resettlement communities that can do so have either legislated better conditions for RFI youth and their families or have purposefully placed them throughout a city or region to prevent the development of refugee “slums,” there is still the reality or at least the memory of places like, for example, Paris’s 19th arrondissement or the persistent location of RFI families in communities in Australia (Bhagat, 2021; Hirsch & Maylea, 2016), the Czech Republic (Burnett, 2015), and broadly across North America and Europe (Donato & Ferris, 2020) based on their economic situation rather than coordinated social planning.

The peri- and post-migration educational experiences of refugee youth are characterized by several related, but different components. Of course, in order to understand the peri- and post-migration experiences, the pre-to-peri migration experience matters significantly. In some cases, the migration is forced due to violence, war, or other explicitly traumatic experiences. Other times, the pre-to-post migration experience is characterized more by economic or socio-cultural forces rather than military or political ones. And, as a result, the pre-to-post migration experience may be one defined by tragedy and trauma or, at the other end of the spectrum, by resilience and purposeful movement. At its core, though, forced migration is not a voluntary migration. It is a consequence of some force or coercion that leads to relocation, often a “flight” from one community in particular (Oliver-Smith & Hansen, 2019).

The changes in these mitigating factors and contextualized experiences across the migration journey are often a reason why education is seen in peri- and post-migration schooling, in particular, as a socializing and stabilizing experience often more than a learning or preparation experience for higher education or the labor market. But, even the expectations for education shift across time for RFI youth. In pre- and peri-migration periods, especially in active conflict or immediately post-conflict, education often is provided by governments or international organizations for RFI youth as a humanitarian response more than as an economic or political development opportunity. Whereas, in some peri- and often in post-migration periods, RFI youth participate in established educational systems where the overall goal for the local student population is not to address trauma, identity, or language challenges resulting from forced migration.

Instead, the intended educational purpose and the resources and training dedicated to it in those resettlement communities are often part of a larger national or community-wide goal of developing the knowledge and skill capacities of the population’s youth so that they may become educated citizens and productive members of the labor market. RFI youth and their unique histories, backgrounds, and migration journey experiences are not the focus of education in those contexts. Quite the opposite, in fact. Those post-migration, resettlement communities’ educational systems are often actively engaged in performance monitoring, outcomes accountability, and preparation for transition of youth to higher education or the labor market. In other words, the providers of education have different purposes for education across the migration journey as much as the participants in education (i.e., RFI youth) have different experiences and purposes for participating in education across their journey, too. Therefore, time and context are both shifting across the migration journey.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Context is composed of community, culture, language, and place. The context of RFI migration journey is determined by the communities they either belong to or identify with contrasted with the communities that they are actually in. So, the context of RFI youths' migration journey from flight to resettlement is a product of identity alignment as well as of the quality of the migration experiences and purposes of education, broadly speaking. These contextual elements also have a personal effect related to individual experiences with trauma, identity, and language (i.e., TIDAL). The quality of RFI youths' experiences is a culmination of many factors, but evidence suggests that three, in particular, contribute to experiences during RFI youths' migration journey: determinism, duration, and mobility.

The characteristics that make RFIs' flight coerced or forced may or may not lead to a voluntary journey or choice-oriented destination. Those RFIs fleeing violence, especially those who are low income or who belong to racial and ethnic minorities often do not have a choice of when or where they go, especially during the initial stages of their flight. The key objective is to remove themselves from their immediate environment (or to be removed forcibly by a political or civic aggressor) (Oliver-Smith & Hansen, 2019). Therefore, one key characteristic of the pre-to-peri migration journey is **determinism**. In other words, who or what determines when the forced migration journey begins (pre-), where it leads to initially (peri-), and where it concludes in resettlement or more permanent residence (post-) and perhaps even citizenship. Determinism as a theoretical construct usually refers to external forces "determining" the events that occur beyond and outside of individual- or self-determination. And, this is certainly true in many RFI situations.

Determinism also denotes the purposes of educational provision or systems, and is often the product of large, external political, development, or humanitarian organizations operating in the pre-, peri-, and post-migration spaces. For example, schooling provided in the pre-migration context, especially during conflict or in its immediate build up, may serve the largely political or ideological purposes of the political, military, or economic regime in power. Historically, education has been used as a political tool for the development or indoctrination of political, cultural, and economic citizens (Wiseman et al., 2019), and therefore the entity responsible for providing education in the pre-migration period also can determine the purpose, content, delivery, and participants in education. The Taliban in Afghanistan are an extreme example of the ways that ideologically or politically-guided governments can dramatically determine the content and participation in schooling. This is shown in their increasing exclusion of girls and women from formal education each time they have been in power (Amiri & Jackson, 2021; Rauf, 2021).

But, the purposes of education are often also externally determined by entities providing formal schooling, which reflect the goals and ideologies of those organizations even when they are driven by more practical agendas. For example, UNICEF is a multilateral organization that often provides educational resources

and toolkits (see School-in-a-Box) for use in emergency situations. A stated goal of School-in-a-Box is to restore normalcy following an emergency (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009). This humanitarian response and purpose of education is determined by UNICEF and implemented in UNICEF-sponsored communities and camps in conflict or immediate post-conflict situations. But, as suggested above, the purpose of education determined by governments, states, or school boards in resettlement communities is never a “return to normalcy.” It is instead focused on developing high achievement outcomes that lead to further and higher educational attainment and the development of economically productive and politically aligned citizens (Hung et al., 2020). Therefore, determinism may reflect the decisions or determination about the migration journey as well as the content and purposes of education along that journey.

The length and character of the migration journey during the peri-migration period is also of primary importance. How long does it take? And, where does it take RFI youths? The migration journey itself can be as traumatic as if not even more traumatic in some situations than the pre-to-peri-migration period of forced flight (Youngmann et al., 2021). This is often the result of violence or other traumatic events experienced during the migration journey itself either in transit or at temporary settlements in refugee camps or in transitional communities where basic needs of shelter, food, and physical safety are often neither provided nor ensured. The longer the migration journey itself, the more opportunities for traumatic experiences during the journey (Cohodes et al., 2021). And, the more mobility during the journey, the more unstable the situation is, especially for youth who may be either unaccompanied or not able to make choices during the journey itself in relation to their own movement, safety, or basic needs. Therefore, **duration** and **mobility** are further key characteristics of the migration journey for RFI youth, which impact their ongoing or future educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes.

Some RFI youths’ migration journeys have lasted months and some have lasted many years. In particular, some RFIs may be “trapped” mid-migration due to a lack of resources, a resignation to their current fate, or because of policies or governments specifically preventing them from moving out of or onward in their migration journey (Chowdhury, 2021). For example, Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya has grown to be one of the largest refugee camps in the world, and many RFI youth and families are “stuck” there, and may never leave, due to economic challenges, legal restrictions or other reasons (Monaghan, 2021). Other RFIs have more quickly transitioned from the initial site of conflict to their final resettlement community in situations or countries that allow free mobility and opportunities for education and work (Belabbas et al., 2022). An example is the Syrian refugees who fled the Syrian Civil War and made their way rapidly into Germany. Although there were logistical difficulties for both German communities and the refugees themselves, many refugees were resettled throughout communities in Germany and have been able to live, go to school, and work in German communities in ways that would resemble their original freedoms in their home countries or may even be better, in some cases (Pritchard et al., 2019).

Finally, therefore, the **quality** of experiences during the migration journey is a cumulative key characteristic impacting RFI youth. Quality is a result of the intersection of many factors, but especially determinism, duration, and mobility. As a result, the quality of RFI experiences is as much an outcome of the migration journey as it is a key characteristic of it, but it still may be due to other combinations of factors related to trauma, identity, and language experiences, in particular. Traumatic experiences are often emblematic of the RFI migration journey due to the conditions that drive migration both in the pre- and peri-stages of the journey. Trauma can be individually experienced or a social experience among a community that shares similar socioeconomic, political, cultural, religious, gender, or racial and ethnic identities (Beauregard et al., 2017).

Identity is another key component to the reception of, participation in, and outcomes of education for RFIs. Both culture and language are key indicators of identity, which may be both developed and conflicted during migration journeys of RFI youth. Since school is often identified as a socializing agent (Handel, 2011), the role of formal education in the development of culture and an RFI youth's identity alignment with a particular cultural community is a key component of context and, therefore, the quality of the migration journey and the educational experience of RFI youth.

Quality is therefore a key component of context, which incorporates experiences of trauma and identity, across RFI youths' migration journey and their educational participation and experiences throughout that journey. Determinism, duration, mobility, and quality of the migration journey during the pre-, peri-, and post-migration phases are significant characteristics of RFI youth contexts, which both contribute to and in many ways determine the educational experiences of RFI youth in schools in their post-migration resettlement communities, in particular. These four characteristics are also influenced by time and context throughout the journey.

THEMATIC AREAS AND CHAPTER CONNECTIONS

Although the experiences of RFI youth cannot be explained or even described in one chapter or volume, there are several components of these experiences that recur and demonstrate both consistency and some patterning. As the global situation and the often tragic experiences that RFIs encounter become increasingly normalized through frequency and worldwide occurrences, the shared experiences of RFIs across time and space are investigated in the chapters of this volume. As such, chapters are organized by time and space, namely, pre-migration, peri-migration, and post-migration. During pre-migration, there is often conflict or other crises, which force im/migrants to embark on their migration journey. During peri-migration, the forced migration journey is underway, but may be characterized by varying degrees of crises and settlement or stops along the way in refugee camps or elsewhere. Post-migration is characterized by resettlement in a receiving community where the journey has ended or the reasons for forced migration have ceased or slowed so that further flight is either not necessary, optional, or not possible.