



STUDENT ENGAGED Participatory Action Research Center

Navigational barriers and assets for refugee education

A classroom-based and refugee- engaged participatory action research study

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Introduction

This research brief presents results from a collaborative project between Education Policy Studies students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and two refugee resettlement service providers, who themselves have refugee backgrounds. Over the course of an academic semester, these refugee professionals shared their displacement stories, educational journeys in the U.S., and roles at their work in aiding fellow refugees. Through these dialogues with the community partners for the study, we crafted research questions and an interview protocol, which we used to interview the community partners--thus the community partners with refugee background both designed, but also answered, the interview questions for the study.

Our findings spotlight the hurdles refugees encounter when seeking educational resources and the unique strategies they use to navigate these often unfamiliar systems. Building on the concept of *navigational capital* (Yosso, 2005), we emphasize the importance of informational and navigational barriers and assets as key considerations for refugee education research and policy. We conclude with suggestions on how refugee resettlement service providers can harness the strengths of the refugee community to help them overcome institutional barriers.

Background and Significance

Barriers to education for refugee newcomers

Studies on educational barriers for refugees often center on policy remedies (Streitwieser et al., 2019) and refining teaching methods (Bajaj et al., 2022). While there is ample research on the educational experiences, barriers, supports, and outcomes for refugee youth in the United States (McBrien, 2005), there is a noticeable gap concerning research on access to higher education for refugee adults (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Despite the fact that many adult refugees resettle with aspirations of continuing or pursuing education and careers (Yi & Kiyama, 2018), refugees confront numerous obstacles, including:

- Federal policies prioritize rapid employment over investing in education (Shaw et al., 2021; Wolfgram et al., 2018, Wolfgram and Vang, 2019).
- Refugees, especially adults, face discouragement from educators who hold deficit views (DeMartino, 2021; Larsen, 2022), overshadowing their resilience and navigational strategies (Shaw et al., 2021).
- Language barriers, especially academic English, are pervasive, with some female refugees facing added social barriers to participating in learning environments outside the home (Hirano, 2014).
- The financial challenges of U.S. tuition are as real for refugees as they are for other immigrants, as well as working-class and even middle-class citizens (Lindsey, 2014).
- Accessing higher education information is challenging (Bajwa et al., 2017), while some refugees are able to employ social media for guidance (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017).
- Discrimination, including Islamophobia, can be problematic on U.S. campuses (Campbell III, 2017; Harper, 2020).
- Securing official educational documents needed for college applications post-resettlement is a hurdle (Campbell, 2018; Wolfgram, 2020).

The ability to manage such challenges, negotiate access to resources, and navigate complex institutions involves a set of skills, dispositions, and strategies termed navigational capital (Yasso, 2005)--the ability to access information to navigate institutions that were not designed with you and your community in mind. For refugees, navigational capital is a well-cultivated set of skills, shaped experiences and interactions with complex global and national humanitarian and other bureaucracies which support refugees. The educational systems in the United States often

favor the navigational capital of privileged classes over that of immigrants and people of color (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). In an effort to provide information to enhance newcomers' ability to navigate local institutions, refugee resettlement organizations provide cultural orientation materials during the first 90-days of the resettlement in a new community.

Cultural competence and the cultural orientation of refugees

Cultural competence, which is the understanding and respecting diverse cultural values and beliefs (Georgetown University, 2023), plays a pivotal role in refugees' integration and overall well-being in new communities (Easterbrook, 2018). Providing cultural orientation materials has been shown to enhance refugee youth's integration into education (Muftee, 2014). To boost this competence among refugees in the United States, resettlement service providers offer cultural orientation on 15 varied topics, including health, time management, transportation, employment, and education (Kornfeld, 2012). Typically, local providers utilize materials from national resettlement organizations, and there is also a government-funded non-profit organization, the Cultural Orientation Research Exchange (CORE), offering curriculum and training content. In spite of the important role of cultural orientation in addressing educational and other barriers for refugees, there is little research on the process or outcomes, and there is a particular gap that the existing literature does not engage the refugees themselves in the process of inquiry (Lau & Rodgers, 2021).

The need for participatory research in refugee studies

Lau and Rodgers (2021) reviewed literature on cultural competence in refugee services and identified a glaring omission of refugee perspectives. They advocate for more refugee involvement to enhance the relevance of services and tackle the barriers refugees face. Participatory Action Research (PAR) offers a fitting approach to address this engagement gap. It emphasizes genuine community participation in research (Anderson, 2017) and positions community members as equal, leading contributors throughout the research process (Vang et al., 2023). This method challenges historical and current tendencies of research to sideline marginalized voices (Smith, 2012). PAR upholds that research is not solely for experts (Appadurai, 2006) and recognizes community members' unique insights into how to investigate problems that impact them directly (Herr and Anderson, 2014). In PAR, academic researchers act as guides and mentors, not authoritative leaders who claim power to direct the research (Littman et al., 2021). The focus is on real-world issues and actionable solutions (Fine, 2007; Freire, 2011). PARs application in diverse settings, from youth organizations to higher education (Ventura, 2017; Smolarek et al., 2021), has proven its effectiveness. Specifically, refugee-involved PAR projects yield more accurate service designs and enhance refugee empowerment, fostering confidence, skill development, and proactive agency (Areej Al-Hamad et al., 2018; García-Ramírez et al., 2011).

Research methods

The research problem and partnerships

This report highlights a pilot Participatory Action Research (PAR) study to investigate barriers to education for refugees, and the role of cultural orientation in aiding refugees' ability to navigate access to higher education in the United States. We investigate these topics employing a classroom-based and refugee-engaged research partnership, with the goal of engaging individuals with refugee backgrounds in the research process, to inform the research questions, procedures, and analysis, and to do research to impacts the community. The research collective comprises twelve students from a UW-Madison PAR course, their instructor Matthew Wolfgram who is an anthropologist at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER), and two individuals with refugee background who also serve as resettlement caseworkers at a refugee resettlement program in Madison, Wisconsin. Wolfgram's intention was to mentor students and individuals with refugee background in PAR and qualitative research methods and to do work to inform and enhance the services provided by the refugee resettlement program in Madison. The course's initial third acquainted students with PAR's history, theory, and successful examples (e.g., Dyrness & Sepúlveda 2020; Fine & Torre, 2006). The latter part transitioned into a hands-on PAR research practicum, partnering students, the instructor, and the refugee resettlement program's representatives to conduct collaborative research. Despite the setting of an academic university course, which imposes a hierarchy between the instructor and the students, through mutual agreement on power distribution and shared values such as confidentiality and cultural humility (Littman et al., 2021), the course aimed to create a research team in which all participants would contribute their insights in a respectful manner. These measures recognized the diverse backgrounds of team members, considering factors like citizenship status, displacement experiences, race, and education, ensuring a collaborative, respectful research approach.

Participatory design of the research questions and protocol

Participatory design of research question and protocol involved collective inquiry into a problem, drawing on community knowledge to investigate the problem and strategies action to transform the situation (McIntyre, 2000); and it also involves iterations of reflection-theory-action which education theorist and adult educator Pablo Freire (2018) has called “praxis”, which is defined as practice, as distinguished from theory. The participatory design of research questions and interview protocol took place in weekly team discussions following iterations of questioning, sharing, documenting, and theorizing experiences; which was then followed by

work to refine questions to probe for additional sharing, documenting, and theorizing. We also documented our research process through autoethnographic writing tasks (Vang et al., 2023) and conducted an asset mapping exercise to identify the resources and networks in the refugee communities to support social change (Lightfoot et al., 2014). The problem of barriers to school and college for refugee newcomers and the role of cultural orientation to support refugee education emerged through this iterative process because our community partners had themselves experienced challenges associated with education and careers, both as refugees, as the parents and mentors for refugee youth, and as caseworkers for the refugee community. Through this process we developed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the barriers, resources, and strategies that refugees experience and employ to access and succeed in education or support the success of refugee youth?

RQ2: What cultural orientation information is presented to refugee newcomers? Are there significant gaps in relevant knowledge in the material?

RQ3: How can participatory methods be used to improve the cultural appropriateness or usefulness of cultural orientation materials to support the educational success of refugees?

Through a process of questioning, sharing, documenting, and theorizing, we collaboratively refined our interview protocol to address our research inquiries. This method allowed our community partners' experiences and insights to shape the interview questions, influencing their focus, phrasing, and structure. A novel aspect of our approach involved presenting interviewees with cultural orientation materials, similar to those given to newcomers about education. We then probed their comprehension of the content, drawing parallels with the method of document analysis in the social science (Prior, 2003). The co-designed interview protocol can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Data collection and analysis

Our community partners both designed the interview protocol and were its respondents in an hour-long recorded session. This approach, which we term "autoethnographic reflexive interviewing," mirrors autoethnographic writing in PAR, where team members chronicle their experiences, contributing to the project's empirical record (Vang et al., 2023). This resulted in a preliminary record of two interviews and a collaboratively designed interview protocol. We employed open coding to discern themes, which the research team discussed, refined, and incorporated into analytical memos (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Findings: Navigational barriers and strategies to education for refugees

Navigational barriers to education for refugees and cultural orientation

Refugees, especially adults, face multiple barriers to access higher education in the United States. Barriers like language fluency, financial barriers, and others make learning to navigate the systems of education challenging (Bajwa et al., 2017; Yi & Kiyama, 2018), and additionally, discouragement from a lack of accessible information about college or a lack of college-oriented mentorship may lead refugees to self-select away from educational pursuits (Larson, 2022). Both participants faced difficulties upon resettlement due to limited English proficiency and inadequate translation support needed to access educational and other institutions. For instance, one participant struggled to effectively communicate with her child's teachers due to the language barriers, emphasizing the critical nature of such communication for educational success, stating:

Communication of parents to teachers, [and] parents to school is not straightforward because of the language. For me, it was okay because I was raised able to understand what they are talking about, but not the first day. The first day when people were talking to me I was like, 'Oh, hold up. Can you talk slowly and then I will be able to understand. Oh, can you write it down, give me a paper.' Because it wasn't easy to hear what they are talking about. So communication is not straightforward because there are some parents who are not able to speak English.

For refugees, the journey into higher education is not solely an academic endeavor but also a process of navigating and bridging cultural and linguistic divides. The reference to parents' difficulties in communicating with schools highlights a gap in the educational ecosystem, where the inability to speak English can hinder not just the student's academic progress but also the essential collaborative relationship between families and educational institutions.

Another example of educational barriers is the lack of recognition of educational credentials, which are often not accepted or miss-recognized, presenting another barrier that can be extremely frustrating for adult refugees with prior educational experiences (Wolfgram, 2020). Despite some possessing college credits, advanced degrees, and professional licenses or experience from their home countries, or from countries where they resided long-term as displaced refugees, these individuals often encounter systemic barriers that invalidate their qualifications and require them to start anew. This was the case for one of the participants we

interviewed, who had the equivalent to a bachelor's degree, and yet was unable to transfer their credentials, stating that:

“So for whatever paper [certificate, diploma, transcript, etc.] you come with here, mine wasn't a big paper, or PhD or degree or whatever, They will not consider yours. They have to leave every weight. And I don't know, but this is frustrating, for people to come here as a doctor, as a lawyer, or someone who was someone in their country, you have to start at zero. It's really frustrating for these people. Even for mine, I wasn't someone when I came here, but I had to repeat mathematics in high school. It's really frustrating. It should be okay to give me someone who can evaluate me in two days, or three days, or one week. See how it goes. But not say go back to school, mathematics school, or algebra or whatever. But like, some days over there, the more days you keep refreshing your mind, is like, 'oh I know this, oh I know the fraction, yeah I remember the...' and then it gives you something like 'oh why am I dividing by zero.' It's really stressful for those who came here with an education.”

Despite having education and skills from their home country, refugees often find themselves having to start over, sometimes from a basic level, which is not only demeaning but also overlooks the potential contributions they could make if their credentials were appropriately recognized and valued. This underscores the frustrating psychological impact of feeling undervalued and forced to start anew, despite possessing valuable skills and knowledge. One refugee commented on the stress of trying to navigate this, stating “Oh I can say I try my best but it gives you something of depression or trouble. I can say trauma... It gives you a kind of stress.”

Both participants described challenges obtaining accurate practical information about the American educational system, both for themselves and their children, but also for the other refugees who they support as caseworkers. Such informational barriers (Bajwa et al., 2017) amplified the already challenging financial, language, bureaucratic, and other barriers that they faced. For instance, with a lack of practical information, advising, or mentorship to support her college application process, one participant self-selected not to apply for financial aid, which further delayed her work to navigate the education system. There was a FAFSA training session offered by the community college, however, they described the experience as daunting and opaque: “I know one day I participated in an FAFSA training... But I left that class and didn't understand everything and thought that I can't apply to that because I didn't understand everything...” The other participant spoke about this in a different manner, stating that:

“I tried to apply for the master degree ... in urban design and landscape. But it is hard because we can't find like a scholarship and they don't even know ... they can't give to us. 'Okay so you are refugee, so I don't know if you are legally applicable to get this scholarship or not.' This is the problem.”

So therefore, educators and advisors may themselves be unsure if refugees can qualify for aid; and this confusion has caused some refugees to mistakenly be classified as international students who pay higher tuition (Streitwieser et al., 2019). While most refugees would qualify for some aid, other barriers may amplify the challenges, such as unfamiliarity with the internet and technology or lacking the required documents on hand.

Refugee resettlement agencies attempt to address these informational and navigational barriers to accessing education and other institutional resources through cultural orientation training, which is part of the Reception and Placement program to support refugee resettlement within the first 90 days upon arrival in the United States. Cultural orientation training topics include employment, housing, education, health, money management, travel, hygiene, and the role of the resettlement agency are topics covered in these programs (Kornfeld, 2012). These orientations play a pivotal role in guiding refugees as they learn to navigate bureaucratic institutions in the United States, which is why it is critical to assess the effectiveness of these materials in teaching newcomer refugees how to adjust effectively to unfamiliar culture and bureaucracy. The importance of such cultural orientation materials was expressed by one interviewee who stated,

“... it’s good and it helps people to understand how things go on here where they will be living forever... It provides helpful information. It provides some guidelines, yeah. You need to know what to do, like how transportation is in here in US, how to open the bank account, parenting. Yeah, there is much information inside.”

These statements show just how necessary the information in the cultural orientation materials are to refugee navigational capital. Even so, both participants mentioned that the current orientation efforts were not adequate, stating “Yeah, it’s helpful because there is some information there that they need to know. But you need to have other sessions to make it more detailed.” The amount and usefulness of the information, “It’s not helpful. No. It’s nothing actually. It’s nothing because we ... just like telling them about school and that’s it. Nothing about the system and how it’s going.” Refugees were presented with oversimplified success stories--the orientation materials have a slide depicting a joyous college commencement ceremony, for example--without concrete steps on how to start to pursue such a goal. Another problem we found during our interviews was that resettlement providers are often tasked with advising refugees on topics beyond their expertise. Interviewees expressed the need for specialist knowledge to address refugees' questions accurately, highlighting the importance of connecting refugees with resource brokers. This approach would not only support their educational aspirations but also empower them with actionable steps towards achieving their goals.

In this section, we have discussed the significant navigational and cultural barriers that refugees face in accessing education within the United States; and discussed how the primary program to address informational and navigational barriers (refugee cultural orientation

programing) does not provide adequate practical information for newcomers. The next section addresses the assets and strategies that refugees employ to navigate institutional systems.

Refugee navigational assets and strategies to access education in the United States

Refugees can adopt various strategies, such as intergenerational support, social networks, and self-advocacy, to navigate the U.S. educational system, resisting the deficit perspective imposed upon them. Navigational capital is defined as ones' skills and abilities to navigate "social institutions," including educational spaces (Yasso, 2005).

Intergenerational support was a pivotal strategy, with refugee parents playing a crucial role in guiding their children through environments that may not always recognize their potential. The resilience and adaptability of these families are highlighted by the experiences shared by our interviewees, who noted the initial struggles their children faced due to language barriers and cultural differences. Despite these challenges, one parent observed significant progress in their childrens' abilities to communicate and adapt within a few months, stating, "Well, they're doing well because when they came here, they struggled a little bit with the accent and with their culture. After some time, I can say after three to four months, they are doing well with speaking, with speaking and with writing because they have more support at the school."

This underscores the role of schools not only as educational institutions but as vital support systems that can either hinder or advance the integration process. Moreover, our interviewees, who were both mothers of elementary and middle school-aged children, showcased their dual roles as learners and educators within their families. They shared how the experience of watching their children overcome language barriers and cultural differences with relative ease provided them with a unique opportunity for reciprocal learning. One participant captured this sentiment, expressing her admiration and gratitude towards her childrens' adaptability and their role as her own teachers: "They are doing well. Those are my teachers for now. I can say, parents, we learn through our children and, and it comes down somehow." This statement not only reflects the strength and resilience within refugee families but also the profound intergenerational support that aids in their navigation and adaptation to new educational and cultural landscapes. Given that U.S. schooling often upholds white, middle-class norms (Heath, 1982), refugee parents challenge conventional ideas of parental involvement. They and their children adopt interchangeable roles, fostering collective growth and better access to educational resources. By learning from their children, parents improve their language skills, enabling them to better advocate within the educational system. For the children, assisting their parents reinforces their navigational skills and self-awareness.

Another key strategy is to foster a positive self-identity in their children to navigate institutional cultures. Both interviewees emphasized the importance of maintaining connections to their native cultures while adapting to their new environment. They strive to instill pride in their origins and resilience against external pressures to assimilate. One interviewee shared her encounters with microaggressions and xenophobia, emphasizing the importance of supporting her children through such experiences. She believes they must feel they belong, stating, “Because your kids need to know that they belong to this country, they need to grow in peace. That’s it...” This reflects the challenge refugee parents face in balancing their cultural values with those of their new country.

Another interviewee fosters resilience in her children, ensuring they embrace their identity. She noted, “So I help them to understand ... make sure they are able to manage any situation that comes out ... Try to understand and try to keep your identity; this is something our children sometimes want to hide the whole of who they are because of the situation that comes up.” Both participants encourage their children to reconcile their dual identities, thereby building their navigational capital and reinforcing their sense of belonging in the U.S. Sometimes this means urging their children to share their customs at school. One interviewee shared that she had her children explain Ramadan to their classmates, saying “I make my kids make a speech about Ramadan so they, they explain for their classmates and teacher like what is Ramadan.”

Both interviewees defied the notion that adult refugees should forgo education. They utilized navigational assets, creating social networks and practicing self-advocacy to access education. As an example of self-advocacy, one interviewee expressed her need for better English support, telling an advisor at Madison College, “this is not my language, I need more help in English.” Another challenge that refugees face is getting accurate and helpful information about higher education in the United States. To address this barrier, one interviewee connected with refugees across the U.S. via social media, gleaning insights on opportunities for education and career development. She noted the strategy is employed in refugee camps globally (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017), and shared that through social media platforms, she and her friends were able to combine their knowledge of available opportunities in their own cities and help each other learn what works in other areas. The other interviewee established connections with church volunteers, who provided support and transportation for schooling.

In their role as resettlement case workers, they both “Encourage them [refugees] to ask a question .. as much as they can. Asking questions means the more information they will get, from the like, the people around them. Don't expect that the people will start telling you information without asking them.” Another key advice was mutual cultural awareness, with the interviewee stressing, “Don't expect that ... [they] will understand you, no ... actually no one will understand you, you need to understand all these new cultures and all these new systems...” She emphasized the need for refugees to actively communicate their needs and culture rather than waiting to be understood.

In this section, we spoke and explored how refugees navigate and access education in the United States. Their navigational capital is formed through a combination of their own resilience, adaptation, intergenerational support, and their determination to self-advocate and use their social networks. The interviewees also spoke about the importance of cultural identity for refugees, in which refugee families must navigate the balancing act of preserving their heritage while integrating into their new environment. Finally, they focused on self-advocacy being a major navigational asset for refugees.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This project adopted a unique method to explore barriers to refugee education through a refugee-engaged, classroom-based participatory action research. Our findings indicate that many educational obstacles for refugees have a navigational component, intensifying existing social, cultural, financial, and institutional barriers. Educational resources are entwined in intricate educational bureaucracies. The expertise to navigate these bureaucracies—like handling applications and accessing specialized institutional knowledge—is grounded in social class-based insights unfamiliar to refugees.

To aid refugee education, research, policy, and advocacy should address the navigational challenges which amplify barriers to higher education for refugees. Refugees often demonstrate adeptness and resilience in navigating these challenges. Proper, culturally apt, and practical information in resettlement cultural orientations can also bolster refugees' navigational skills. While current materials offer a basic orientation to US education, there are evident gaps in practical details that could strengthen refugee navigational capital and ease their educational challenges.

The Major limitations of this research include the project's small sample size of two interviews conducted with community partners. Subsequent research will expand the sample, focusing on diverse refugee newcomers pursuing US education. More insights are also needed from refugee resettlement service providers and educators who support newcomers.

Recommendations to support education for refugees

Cultural orientation materials need further detail to help refugees effectively navigate U.S. systems, particularly educational institutions.

While current materials outline the general structure of K-12 and higher education, there is a lack of localized, practical information. Adding supplemental resources that guide newcomers on how to access and understand local educational policies and supports could significantly boost their access to educational opportunities. Many questions on how to practically navigate educational institutions in the United States remain unanswered by current cultural orientation materials. Providing supplemental, localized guides available online can fill these gaps, offering refugees a more comprehensive understanding of educational navigation in the U.S.

Given resource constraints, it is unrealistic to expect refugee service providers to also act as educational advocates and advisors. The knowledge required to navigate the complex educational bureaucracy is scattered across various roles and institutions. Education professionals can aid resettlement efforts by streamlining this information. The interview protocol used in this study could also serve as a valuable tool for both educators and service providers to engage newcomers in a process of improving and supplementing the cultural orientation process. This instrument aims to identify shortcomings in current cultural orientation materials and ways to enhance refugee navigational capital. It can be used to gather direct feedback from newcomers to improve the cultural relevance of these resources. The tool can also be adapted to cover other essential topics, like U.S. laws and healthcare, addressed during the Reception and Placement Period.

Resettlement agencies can provide follow-up, mentorship, and coordination with co-ethnic networks to support on-going cultural orientation.

The Reception and Placement (R&P) period is a hectic time for newcomers, requiring them to adapt to many new aspects of life. Cultural orientations provided during R&P aim to aid this transition. However, unlike other orientation goals such as learning public transport, education requires long-term planning. Therefore, follow-up support beyond the R&P period is beneficial. This can be offered by resettlement service providers or by employing volunteer mentorship programs to provide ongoing advice on education and career goals. Additionally, coordinating with local co-ethnic groups like religious or mutual-support associations can offer culturally relevant, asset-focused mentorship to newcomers.

Educators can formalize, promote, and resource educational pathways for refugees.

Programs and resources to support the educational and career goals of refugees sometimes exist, but their pathways may be informal and under-promoted, causing newcomers difficulty in finding and accessing them. Addressing this navigational barrier involves formalizing these pathways with clear and consistent points-of-entry and simplified application processes. Promoting these opportunities to both service providers and newcomers is essential. For institutions lacking such pathways, resources and leadership are needed to create, promote, and maintain them.

Recommendations for future research

Policy research and theory on barriers and access to college for refugees.

Research is needed to identify the institutions that support college education for refugees, document constraints and best practices, and explore how to scale the most effective supports. Special focus should be on policies that remove navigational barriers and enhance refugee navigational capital. This study advocates for a theoretical framework that addresses navigational mechanisms obstructing access, in order to design institutional supports that amplify refugees' navigational assets rather than disempowering them.

PAR and autoethnographic research on the navigation of barriers and pathways to higher education.

The existing research and this study call for more participatory approaches to amplify the voices and insights of newcomers in the processes of cultural orientation, resettlement, and education access. More work is needed on how to collaborate with community partners, like refugee newcomers, in designing participatory research methods. Autoethnography could be a useful tool, especially in studies focused on barriers to education for refugee youth. For example, a study could engage a group of high school refugee youth navigating their education and college applications to document their experiences. Such a study could offer nuanced insights into navigational barriers and assets, as well as potential supports to enhance refugee navigational capital.

Narrative asset-focused research on education for refugees.

One of the major challenges faced by refugees is deficit narratives about refugee education and experience. According to Bajaj et al. (2022), The use of humanizing pedagogies for refugee youth is a particularly effective counter to such deficit thinking. Adult refugees also often face explicit discouragement from pursuing education and career goals (Larson, 2022), and there is a lack of research to document the assets and strategies that refugees employ in their educational journeys (Shaw et al., 2021). Research is needed to document refugee counter-narratives that actively challenge the deficit framing associated with adult refugees (Solrzano & Yasso, 2002). Such asset-focused narrative research should be promoted to evaluate and amplify refugee voices, and to counter the institutional invisibility that obfuscates adult refugee experiences in higher education (Smolarek et al., 2021).

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Appendix A: Cultural Orientation Interview Protocol

Educational Background

1. Please tell the story of your educational background.
2. What are your current education and career goals?
3. How are you currently working toward those goals?
4. Have you faced any challenges or barriers to succeeding in your educational goals?
5. Were you able to overcome those challenges? If so, how?

Supporting Refugee Youth

6. Do you have children? (If no, skip to Cultural Orientation Section.)
7. How do you support their education?
8. What are your hopes, dreams and/or expectations for your children's education?
9. How challenges have you faced with the education systems in the US?
10. What advice would you give to someone (a parent) based on your experience with your children's education in the United States?

Cultural Orientation Section

Please review the cultural orientation material slide show provided to refugees who are resettled in Madison.

11. Do you feel this material is helpful for refugees to know? Why?
12. Is there any material that seems incorrect, inadequate, or unhelpful? Why? What information would be better?
 - a. Is any material confusing, strange or shocking? Why?
 - b. Are there parts that seem particularly challenging to understand? Do you think it may be challenging for other refugees to understand it?
13. Is there material you wish was incorporated that was not included?

Resources and Strategies

14. What resources, strategies, or people helped you pursue your educational goals?
 - a. How did you find these resources?
15. Has anyone provided you with useful information about education or careers in the US?
16. What would you tell a newcomer refugee to help them navigate their education in the U.S.?
17. Do you know anyone in your community who pursued or is pursuing higher education in the United States as an adult?



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