Decolonising Knowledge Production in the Field of Refugee Education: Unsettling the Ontology and Epistemology of a Nascent Field

Brun – Saab – Shuayb, Cathrine, Cyrine, Maha
(Equal authorship, surnames in alphabetical order)

2024

CLS 40 years
IDRC · CRDI International Development Research Centre / Centre de recherches pour le développement international
Canada
LERRN
The British Academy
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Decolonising Knowledge Production in the Field of Refugee Education: Unsettling the Ontology and Epistemology of a Nascent Field

Brun – Saab – Shuayb, Cathrine, Cyrine, Maha
(Equal authorship, surnames in alphabetical order)

This project was funded by
IDRC, British Academy, FCDO, and LERRN

The authors would like to thank
Mohammad Hammoud, Marc Ghazali and Karim Mitri
for assistance with the report.

ISBN: 978-1-914521-04-1

www.lebanesestudies.com

Table of contents

List of tables

List of figures

Executive Summary

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the knowledge production landscape in the field of refugee education, critically exploring how it continues to be shaped by colonial legacies and dominated by global north (GN) perspectives. Analysing the English language and Arabic language academic literature on refugee education, the study investigates the power dynamics, economic interests, and ideological influences that sustain the divide between the global north and global south (GS) in this body of research. The findings reveal that the field of refugee education, despite its growth and diversification over the past two decades, remains profoundly unequal in terms of authorship, geographic focus, and the overall epistemological and ontological frameworks that underpin it.

Growth and Disparities in the Field

The field of refugee education has seen significant expansion, with a substantial increase in academic publications and a broader range of issues being addressed. This growth has been particularly evident in the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis, which has catalysed international interest and funding in refugee education. However, this burgeoning field has not overcome the deep-rooted inequalities that have historically characterised forced migration studies.

The report reveals that GN scholars and institutions overwhelmingly dominate the research landscape, often conducting studies in the GS without meaningful collaboration with local scholars. Of the 829 peer-reviewed articles analysed, 86% of single-authored English-language articles were produced by GN scholars, even when the research was conducted in GS contexts. This dominance has led to an extractive model of knowledge production, where the perspectives and priorities of GN scholars are privileged, while the voices, experiences, and expertise of GS scholars are marginalised.

Ontological and Epistemological Dominance

The research highlights how GN literature on refugee education is closely aligned with governmental policies in the GN, particularly those focused on integration and schooling. This alignment is reflected in the emphasis on technical and short-term solutions, such as language acquisition, classroom integration, and the overcoming of language barriers, often framed within a narrow understanding of education. The broader socio-political issues, such as racism, cultural diversity, and the long-term outcomes of education, are frequently overlooked. This approach has resulted in an ontology of refugee education that prioritises assimilation into host systems and overlooks the complex, multi-dimensional nature of refugee experiences.

Conversely, GN research on refugees in the GS tends to adopt a humanitarian approach that is strikingly apolitical and technical. The literature often focuses on immediate access to education, and basic literacy, with little consideration of long-term integration

or the broader socio-political dimensions of refugee education. The Arabic-language literature tends to focus on the psychological needs of refugee children, with an emphasis on trauma and mental health. While important, this approach overlooks broader systemic and cultural factors that shape their experiences. Moreover, it often reduces refugees to passive victims, in need of therapeutic intervention, aid and basic schooling, rather than as active agents with long-term educational aspirations and potential for social and political participation.

This ontological framework is further reinforced by the epistemic dominance of the GN, which is evident in the types of studies being conducted. The research is heavily focused on micro and meso-level analyses, often at the expense of theoretical and critical policy studies. The field is dominated by empirical, policy-driven research that is narrowly technical, with limited engagement in broader theoretical debates. This lack of theoretical depth has contributed to a disjointed and fragmented ontology, where education is reduced to a set of technical processes—such as literacy, classroom management, and exams—without consideration of the broader political, social, cultural, and global systems in which education takes place.

Geographic and Institutional Imbalances

The report sheds light on the significant geographic and institutional imbalances in refugee education research. Despite the fact that 75% of the world's refugees reside in low- and middle-income countries, nearly half of the studies analysed focus on the GN. This discrepancy is reflected in the authorship patterns, with the majority of research being conducted by scholars affiliated with GN institutions. Even in studies focused on the GS, GS scholars' voices are marginalised, reflecting an extractive approach to knowledge production that risks producing decontextualised, rather than meaningful, knowledge.

Arabic-language research, in contrast, is entirely focused on the GS but remains disconnected from global discourse, largely due to the absence of GN scholars' participation. This disconnection is partly due to language barriers, limited interest from GN audiences, and an underdeveloped tradition of refugee education research in Arabic-speaking countries.

The Role of Policy and Humanitarianism

The study also highlights the significant influence of Western humanitarianism in shaping the discourse of refugee education research. The GN literature primarily focuses on integration and school-centric approaches, particularly within GN contexts, while GS studies emphasise immediate access to education and psychological support. This reflects a broader trend where refugee education is approached through a lens of emergency and short-term interventions, especially in the GS. The dominant humanitarian discourse results in research that is overly technical and disconnected from the political, social, and cultural contexts that shape refugee experiences. This narrow focus limits the potential for these studies to inform sustainable and meaningful refugee education policies.

In contrast, the Arabic-language literature shows limited engagement with policy-informed vocabulary, such as access, integration, and humanitarianism. This suggests that the Arabic articles produce localised knowledge that is poorly connected to global policies and the wider international discourse on refugee education. The emphasis on psychological needs in the Arabic literature further reinforces the traditional victim-view of refugees, while the lack of engagement with macro-level analyses and policy discussions limits the scope and impact of this research.

Citation Trends and Epistemic Hegemony

The report's analysis of citation trends further underscores the epistemic dominance of the GN. All of the top 20 most-cited articles in the field are authored by scholars affiliated with GN institutions, and 91% of the articles citing these works also come from GN institutions. This concentration of scholarly recognition and influence within the GN reinforces existing power imbalances in knowledge production, privileging GN perspectives while undervaluing and underrepresenting the contributions of GS scholars. The geographic focus of these citations further amplifies this dominance, with 89% of the citing articles concentrating on refugee situations in GN countries, thereby marginalising the experiences and perspectives of refugees in the GS.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this report underscore the pervasive influence of colonial legacies and the structural imbalances that continue to shape the field of refugee education research, as of the forced migration field more widely. The dominance of GN scholars and institutions in directing research priorities has significant implications for the field, perpetuating academic imperialism and extractivism. This dynamic not only marginalises the voices of GS scholars but also risks producing knowledge that is disconnected from the realities of refugee experiences in those regions.

Addressing the deep-seated issues within refugee education research requires a significant shift towards a more inclusive and nuanced understanding that acknowledges the complex political realities affecting refugees. Localisation is often proposed as a solution but has largely failed to dismantle the entrenched power structures, resulting in the continued marginalisation of refugees. The academic community has a crucial role in challenging these power dynamics. We call upon scholars to not merely comply with existing frameworks, but to actively engage in reshaping the discourse and addressing the inequities that permeate the field.

In conflict settings, where research is inherently connected to political realities, it is essential that academics reflect on their roles. The question must be raised as to whether it is possible, or even ethical, to remain detached while humanitarian crises unfold. The political consequences of scholarly work must be acknowledged, prompting a rethinking of methodologies, ethics, and funding practices to ensure alignment with principles of justice and equity.

This endeavour is not only a scholarly responsibility but also a moral imperative. Efforts must be made to diversify the research community, dismantle the bureaucratic and institutional barriers that sustain epistemic hegemony, and foster a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to refugee education. By shifting the discourse and addressing power imbalances, it becomes possible to create a field that reflects and serves the needs and aspirations of refugee communities. This transformation is both necessary and urgent in fulfilling the ethical obligations of the academic community.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, refugee education has experienced substantial growth in policy, practical interventions and academic research. This heightened attention has been largely driven by growing concern for the importance of education for displaced populations resulting in increased international funding, which again brings with it a range of agendas, challenges, and considerations (Chankseliani, 2023). Refugee education, like the broader field of forced migration studies, is to a large extent close to policy as it often uncritically adopts policy-concepts – such as 'refugee' itself – and driven by national and global policies shaped by geopolitical interests (Chimni, 1998; Malkki, 1995). For example, according to UNHCR (2023), the global population of forcibly displaced individuals reached 108.4 million in 2022, with 35.3 million refugees. However, while 75% of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, forced migration-policy, practice and research are commonly viewed through a northern lens, perpetuating disparities that reflect broader global inequalities (Achiume, 2015). This reality is accompanied by the skewed power dynamics in the landscape of research collaborations where research shows that funding from the global north goes to research institutions also located in the global north, for research conducted in the global south (Barretta et al., 2011; Chankseliani, 2023; Chu et al., 2014; Sibai et al., 2019).

This report analyses the global body of academic literature on refugee education to understand the development of this field of knowledge, what knowledge is produced, by whom and where. Our research takes place amid concerns about power asymmetries, the promotion of an Anglo-American research agenda over locally generated one, limited impact on the research capacities of institutions in the global south and questions about the representation of global south scholars and those with lived experiences of displacement. The humanitarian sector has increasingly emphasised the constrained power dynamics in decision-making regarding humanitarian and development agendas, as underscored by initiatives like The Grand Bargain from the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Following from the Grand Bargain, the language has shifted towards 'localising' humanitarian practice, meaning more power and influence by local and national actors in humanitarian action. Localisation-efforts have had limited success (Brun & Horst, 2023; Dijkzeul, 2021), and there remains a notable absence of reflection on knowledge production within this domain. This oversight neglects to explore how existing inequalities in knowledge production can shape the ontology and epistemology of an emerging field, and as a result, influence policies and practices and vice versa. Recently, there have been efforts to examine these inequalities, particularly in forced migration. However, similar explorations are largely absent in refugee education. As the field evolves rapidly, an investigation into the knowledge produced and its influence on the ontology and epistemology of the emerging field of education for refugees is essential and timely.

We have conducted the research amid a strong call for decolonizing research generally and in forced migration- and education for refugees research specifically (Arat-Koc, 2021; Chimni, 1998; Osseiran & Nimer, 2024), implying the need to better understand what the power dynamics in the field are. The study was conducted while witnessing

the genocide in Palestine, following by deepening split in knowledge regimes, silencing and restricted academic freedom in many parts of the world. This reality is a testament to the need for further exploration into knowledge regimes and the prevailing ontological and epistemological hegemonies that dominate research on refugees, displacement and education. The study seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding refugee education research and examine the body of knowledge produced over the past twenty years, by analysing the types of knowledge being generated, the discourses being formed, and the scholars who are producing the knowledge. This entails unpacking the prevailing vocabulary prevalent in the literature, encompassing both established terms and emerging keywords. We interrogate the ontologies and epistemologies at play, exploring how they shape the understanding and study of refugee education, as well as the potential and limitations of current discourses, methodologies, and approaches. Additionally, we examine whose voices dominate the field and whose are absent. Specifically, the study aims to understand how refugee education has been represented in academic research over the past two decades and how this representation varies between English and Arabic publications. The research questions the study seeks to answer are:

1) How has the recent evolution of refugee education been represented in academic research publications over the last two decades?
    - What are the geographic and institutional patterns?
    - What discourses, including concepts and methodologies, shape the knowledge generated in refugee education research?
2) How does the focus and interest in refugee education research differ between publications in English and those in Arabic?

The report is structured into six chapters. The first chapter outlines the overarching aim of the study and provides a detailed overview of the current debates and issues in forced migration and refugee education. More specifically it presents the overall conceptual framework of the study. Chapter Two delves into the study's methodology, including a discussion of its limitations. Chapters Three, Four and Five present the study's findings: Chapter Three focuses on the emergence of the field of refugee education, Chapter Four addresses the ontology of the field of refugee education, while Chapter Five examines the epistemology of the field. Finally, Chapter Six synthesises the findings, offering discussions and conclusions drawn from the research.

Conceptual Framework of the Study: Understanding Refugee Education Research

Examining the body of knowledge produced in refugee education research means engaging with questions around participation, ontology and epistemology. Specifically, we are interested in who produces the knowledge in the field of refugee education research. Moreover, we consider how education for refugees is defined – its meaning

– in different contexts and the various prevailing discourses on education for refugees (ontology). Lastly, we explore the nature and scope of knowledge on education for refugees (epistemology) as well as how education for refugees is being approached in research (methodology). Included in this discussion are key questions regarding positionalities in knowledge production, and with a specific spatial lens to consider the differences between the global south and north in scholarship. In this section, we present the conceptual discussions we engaged with when developing the review of the literature and in our analysis. We focus specifically on the asymmetric participation in knowledge production; ontological question of the meaning of education; and representation of refugees.

Asymmetric Participation in Knowledge Production

It has been well-established in the refugee studies literature that while north-south collaborations, brought by international funding, present expanded opportunities, they also prompt critical considerations. For instance, questions arise regarding "... who produces knowledge, for whom is knowledge produced, and what constitutes knowledge..." (Mistry, 2014, p.6). According to Chankseliani (2023) north-south collaborations play a pivotal role in motivating research endeavours, fostering expertise development, and expanding opportunities for research dissemination. Rather than acting as an exercise in shifting power, international collaborations contribute to the inclusion of local researchers into existing global research communities, highlighting the relational nature of research production in contexts where national funding may be scarce (see also, Bradley, 2007; 2008; El-Refaei, 2020; Fransman et al., 2021; Landau, 2012; Nagar & Ali, 2003; Shuayb & Brun, 2021; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019). Thus, inclusion into global research environments through the influx of international funding to southern researchers is often accompanied by the dissemination of knowledge, which can inadvertently perpetuate power imbalances and unequal relationships in collaborators (Chankseliani, 2023). For instance, through international collaborations, northern knowledge and ideologies may be promoted over locally generated expertise, leading to the production of what could be seen as colonised knowledge, co-opted by specific geopolitical interests and perspectives. Landau (2012) echoes these concerns, noting that while north-south research networks aim to level the scholarship and relay southern perspectives to northern policymakers, they often fall short due to unequal resource endowments and incentive structures.

By taking a spatial lens and analysing the north-south distinction, the research speaks to the emergent body of literature highlighting significant north-south disparities and inequalities in knowledge production of forced migration research, including geographic representation and geographic focus (see, for example, Neang, McNally, & Rahim, 2022). We adopt this spatial analytical distinction with some unease. Our ongoing research shows that academic institutions in the global north and south co-exist in a globalised neoliberal knowledge complex, with shared goals, standards and paradigms, meaning there are powerful actors that operate across north-south and there are nuances and inequalities within the north and the south that must not be overlooked. There are also important alliances across north and south. However, the issue with GN and GS extends beyond merely geographic locations. It concerns whether

the knowledge being produced fosters diversity or establishes a form of hegemony that prioritises certain agendas, policies, and actors. This hegemony may benefit specific groups, such as donor agencies, or hosting governments while marginalising the needs of refugees or the local communities. Historically, GN has often been associated with colonial legacies that influence GS, and these hegemonies are prominently evident in the humanitarian sector. This is particularly apparent in how global refugee policies and funding are determined by entities outside the GS, even though the majority of the refugee population resides within these regions. The current dominance not only impacts the lives and futures of refugees but also influences how they are seen, represented, and researched in the realm of knowledge production. This process often overlooks and excludes refugees from meaningful participation and representation.

The Meaning and Purpose of Education – Ontological Questions

Our study aims to critically examine the underlying ways of knowing and understanding within refugee education, which can be interpreted as epistemologies, focusing on how knowledge is constructed, validated, and disseminated. Crucially, however, we also include the critical ontological question of what education is, its purpose and meaning.

The ontological question in research on education for refugees is often taken for granted, and education is generally understood to be an unmitigated good which has implications for how knowledge can be used and the kind of education interventions planned in refugee settings. For example, as we have shown elsewhere, in much of the research we engage with on education for refugees in the global south, education is approached as a humanitarian strategy (Brun & Shuayb, 2020; 2023). While humanitarian education interventions can address immediate relief and life-sustaining support, we have argued that, understanding education mainly as a life-saving strategy is too narrow, short-term and futureless, meaning it is insufficiently oriented towards the future: First, there is a contradiction between short-term humanitarianism, or the emergency-centred approach to education, and education in and of itself, which is inherently a long-term endeavour. Second, a humanitarian approach overlooks crucial contextual factors such as historical legacies, power dynamics, and political and cultural nuances, thereby constraining the depth and authenticity of the research dialogue. Exploring these tensions warrants further attention in the literature and research.

Understanding the ways in which education is conceptualised and defined in research in education for refugees and the spheres of education emphasised in different contexts is thus crucial for analysing the field of education for refugees. Ontological questions are closely linked with the conditions for education for refugees and the various interests that enter into this field. As mentioned above, research on education for refugees tends to be applied and driven by policy, which will determine the meaning and purpose of education in specific contexts. Thus, there is a pressing need for more critical research that delves into the underlying structural conditions and challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions prevalent in the field (Brun & Shuayb, 2020). To respond to this need, we examine the language, discourse, concepts and meanings, used within the field. This entails unpacking the prevailing vocabulary prevalent in the

literature, encompassing both established terms and emerging keywords.

Representation of Refugees - Unpacking the Epistemic Violence

Asymmetries in knowledge production extend beyond mere discourse and permeate the very fabric of epistemological and methodological practices. In much of the research on refugees, individuals are approached as passive victims in need of assistance and we – the researchers – tend to write *about* refugees rather than *with* refugees. Following from this, and in in the realm of refugee education more generally, the exclusionary manner is also demonstrated in the low participation of refugees in decision making concerning their education. Scholars have extensively expressed concerns in relation to the representation of refugees, and subsequently the kind of knowledge this produces.

For instance, Khan (2024) contends that refugee populations are frequently represented in research projects in a manner that accentuates their exclusion, with their voices marginalised during the conception, execution, and post-project reflection stages. This asymmetrical power dynamic is reflected not only in the choice of methodologies but also in the broader epistemological paradigms that underpin research agendas and findings.

These ideas have also been echoed by Neang, McNally, and Rahim (2022) who argue that the asymmetry of power in knowledge production is not limited to the north-south divide, but it also occurs between researchers and their research subjects, namely the refugees. This hegemonic scholarship affects all aspects of the research process, from the choice of methodology and research questions to the publication and dissemination of findings. Such epistemological choices often remove further those impacted by displacement and immobility, and those most affected by policy decisions from the knowledge produced about their very experiences. These ideas are echoed by Khan (2024) who put forward a holistic analysis of participation, taking into account the role of power, agency, and participation when determining standards of best practices for meaningful refugee participation (see also Aljadeeah 2022; Qasmiyeh 2021). Similarly, refugee-led knowledge production alongside ideas from development studies, feminist studies, and indigenous studies are emphasised to envision transformative change in this area.

With an emphasis on questions on representation in knowledge production, we show in this report that refugees are glaringly deprived of a voice in scholarship on refugee education. Thus, we frame the inequalities and asymmetries in knowledge production in forced migration studies and refugee education research presented here as 'epistemic violence'. Famously defined by Gaytri Spivak (1988), epistemic violence is the silencing of marginalised groups through discourse in which the other is created without an opportunity to speak back. Epistemic violence is often intertwined with other forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, colonialism, and classism. Epistemic violence refers to the harm that is done to individuals and groups in the process of silencing, marginalising and devaluing knowledges. In the research that we are about to present here, we consider this epistemic violence to take place both within global academic environment, but also by that academic environment towards refugees. With that in mind, in what follows, we analyse the academic literature on refugee education.

Chapter 2. Methodology

In this study, we analysed academic articles in both the English, and the Arabic language. Starting with the search for English academic publications, the analysis was two-fold. Firstly, we conducted a research review using UCL Explore - the library catalogue by University College London - where one of the authors is affiliated, to get an understanding of the academic contributions in this field and confirm our research questions. Based on our findings, we then conducted a systemised scoping review that is reproducible (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Munn, *et al.*, 2018; Levac et al., 2010). The systemised scoping review was similarly followed to conduct the search for academic Arabic literature. Our review comprised a critical examination of the delineated criteria of the articles published in the field of refugee education, namely the institutional and geographic patterns represented in the research, and the discourses, including concepts and methodologies shaping the knowledge produced.

To structure our work, we are informed by the framework of scoping reviews constructed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and its further development by Levac et al. (2010). To this end, we begin first by defining our search strategy. We then explain the inclusion and exclusion criteria that we developed to ensure the rigour of our search. Finally, we explain how the data is charted and analysed, with the help of research assistants, according to the aforementioned criteria. Although we follow this order to help organise the methods, these processes were designed iteratively rather than linearly whereby the different steps were revisited and refined throughout the research process.

Defining Search Strategy

To conduct our reviews, we leveraged a search engine to get an overview of the literature, UCL explore, and two bibliographic databases to conduct rigorous scoping reviews, Scopus and Shamaa. This section defines the search strategy. Appendix 1 summarises the syntax developed to run the search in each of the databases.

English Articles - UCL Explore and Scopus Bibliographic Database

Our search for articles that are published in the English language was two-fold. Initially, we used UCL explore library to survey the literature. The search was conducted within the time frame of 17th of January 2023 till the 1st of May 2023. We typed the following syntax into the search engine to find sources containing both ideas: (education) AND (refugee)

Based on our findings, we wanted to expand our search more systematically, by generating a reproducible review. To this end, we used the Scopus bibliographic database, an interdisciplinary database and the largest for peer-reviewed articles. The search was conducted within the time frame of 1st of July 2023 till the 1st of September 2023. Search terms on Scopus corresponded to two main categories: academic education and refugee students. During this stage, we collaborated with CLS researchers with

content expertise and other researchers and librarians with methodological expertise to develop our search terms. We also experimented with ERIC, a discipline focused bibliographic database with built-in thesaurus, to make sure our key terms were as comprehensive as possible. The final defined terms for each of the categories were separated by the Boolean operator OR and both categories were separated by the Boolean operator AND as follows:

> (School* OR learning OR education) AND (asylee* OR internal* displace* OR forc* displace* OR asylum seek* OR forced migra* OR refugee* OR conflict).

Arabic Articles - Shamaa Bibliographic Database

In the case of Arabic academic publications, the search was limited to the Shamaa database, the only open-access bibliographic database for publications in the Arabic-speaking world. The search was conducted within the time frame of 20th of March 2023 till the 24th of April 2023. Given that Shamaa is a bibliographic database that indexes educational articles in Arabic as of 2007, the syntax was developed in relation to one category only: refugees. However, noting that Shamaa database does not have controlled vocabulary, such as truncators and Boolean operators, and knowing that the Arabic language is gendered, we had to apply search terms for the category 'refugee' in an exhaustive manner. Therefore, as shown in Appendix 1, we had to search all the possible returns in Arabic language for:

> asylee* OR internal* displace* OR forc* displace* OR asylum seek* OR forced migra* OR refugee*

Applying Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This section explains the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to select the articles. Informed by the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009; 2015) and adaptation for scoping reviews by Peters (2016), we applied the criteria to include only peer-reviewed articles. On the UCL Explore and Scopus database, we filtered the search to include English publications, in the social sciences subject area, since 2000 (inclusive) in tandem with the expansion of the field of refugee education. The UCL Explore digital library generated 3,143 items, from which we selected the first 500 articles for screening, noting that the database sorts the records by relevance. Through screening the titles, 82 of these articles were removed. We ended up with 418 contributions from UCL Explore.

The Scopus database returned 854 articles. To further refine the results, we limited the search to these exact keywords: refugee, refugees, education, refugee education, refugee children, refugee youth, immigrants, immigrant, immigration, education in emergencies, displacement, forced displacement, refugee students, forced migration. We ended up with 507 records from Scopus. Exporting all the English records from UCL Explore and Scopus to a master list on excel, we identified 146 duplicates from both search databases which were removed. Therefore, 779 English articles remained to screen for eligibility.

In a similar manner, we applied the same criteria to include only peer-reviewed articles in the Shamaa database. We did not need to filter for language and year of publication because the Shamaa database only included articles in Arabic language as of 2007. The search returned 119 articles. However, 28 of these articles were not accessible (due to technical glitches such as invalid links, errors on page, etc..). Therefore, we screened 91 articles for eligibility.

We exported the English and Arabic articles to an excel sheet with all the basic information, including the title, abstract, keywords, funding, year of publication, and author. We then compared the titles and the abstracts of each of the articles against the inclusion and exclusion criteria as summarised in Table 1. We flagged 18 of the UCL explore records, 20 of the Scopus records and 3 of the Shamaa records as non-eligible. In coordination with the team members, these articles were excluded. The final number of articles remaining for charting and analysis was 829, of which 741 are in English language and 88 in Arabic language.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Arabic and English publications

Criteria	Database	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	UCL Explore & Scopus	English	
	Shamaa	None	
Year of Publication	UCL explore & Scopus	2000-2023 included	
	Shamaa	None - all articles on Shamaa database are published as of 2007	
Authors and Funding Bodies	UCL Explore, Scopus & Shamaa		Authors and Funding Bodies Affiliated to Israeli Institutions (in line with BDS movement that the CLS is committed to)
Field of Study	UCL Explore & Scopus	Social Sciences	
	Shamaa	None	
Type of Publication	UCL Explore, Scopus & Shamaa	Peer-Reviewed Articles	

Figure 2.1. summarizes the three steps for gathering the articles, including identification, screening and eligibility for inclusion.

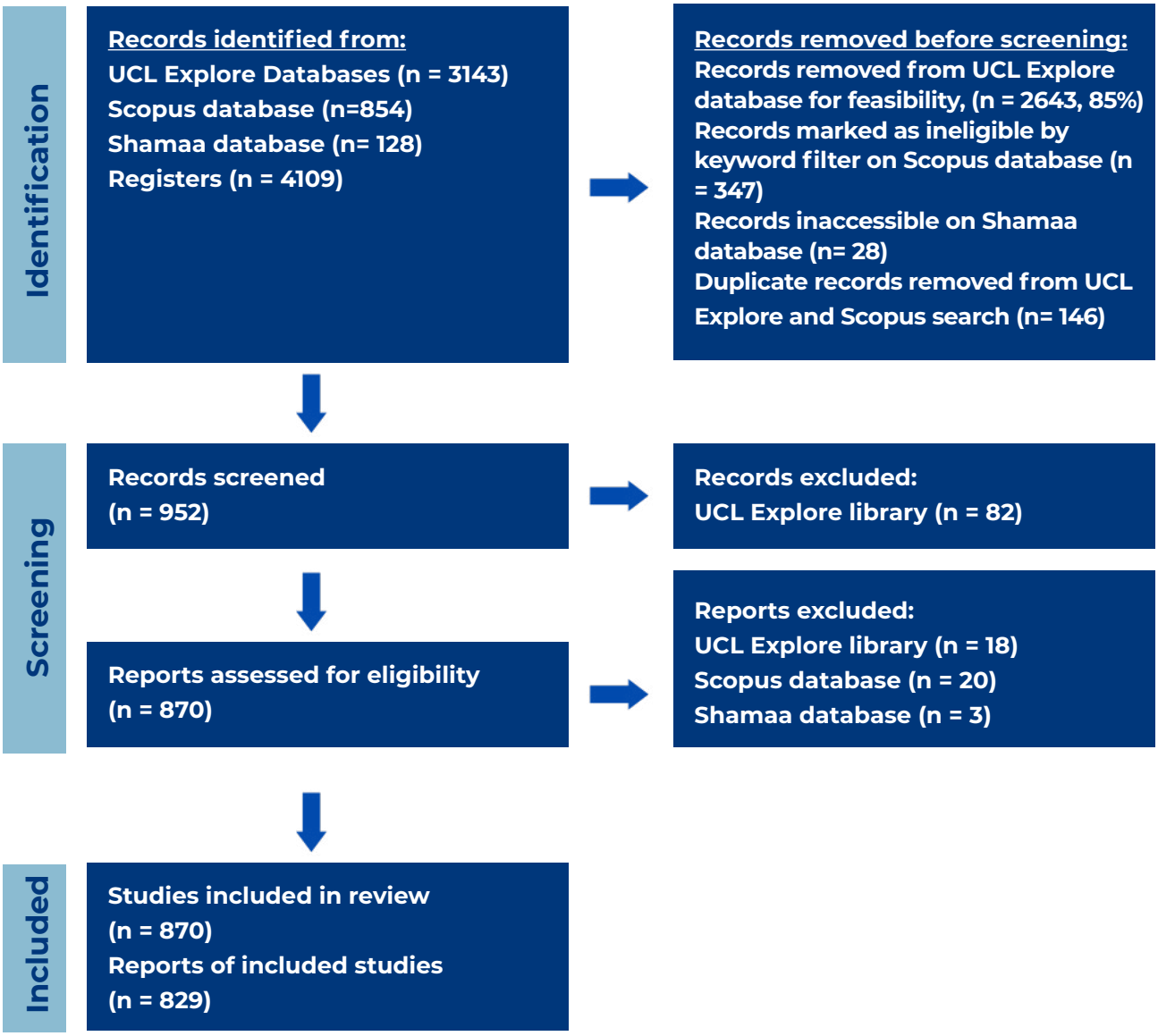

Figure 2.1. Identifying Articles in English and Arabic language

Analysing Geographical Disparities in Refugee Education Research

To delve deeper into the geographic inequalities and their manifestations in the field of refugee education this study will focus on the geographical location of where knowledge is being produced i.e..: north-south participation in authorship and geographic focus. By examining these patterns, the study sheds light on the existing disparities and contributes to the ongoing conversation on fostering more inclusive and equitable research practices through analysing publications on refugee education.

To formulate our criteria for analysis, we used the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) classification of countries which defines 'developed regions' as global north and 'developing regions' as global south. While acknowledging the limitations of this binary classification, we recognise its utility in reflecting prevailing power dynamics which significantly influence the political economy of knowledge production. This

classification served as a lens through which to explore patterns of authorship and geographic representation.

Our analysis focused on four key variables. Firstly, we examined authors' institutional affiliations, recognising their significance in understanding publication dynamics, especially regarding authors from the global south seeking publication in journals dominated by the global north. Secondly, we scrutinised the geographic focus of research, aiming to ascertain whether regional focus in the literature mirrored global refugee distribution. By juxtaposing geographic focus with authorship, we highlighted any discrepancies between where refugees are located and where research is conducted, revealing potential extractive research practices. Thirdly, we investigated the prevalence of comparative studies across regions, assessing the potential for cross-regional dialogue in refugee education. Finally, our examination of sample populations uncovered academic preferences towards specific refugee groups and regions, often influenced by donor agendas. These preferences, rooted in humanitarian approaches, can lead to research fatigue, duplication, and neglect of critical issues.

At a broader level, our analysis of regional representation in knowledge production shed light on structural imbalances and colonial legacies within refugee education. It provided insights into whose perspectives and worldviews are deemed legitimate, shaping governance and research funding implementation.

Data Charting and Analysis

Based on the review of the literature, three overarching categories were identified for data charting and analysis. The first was centred on the patterns of representation in the field of refugee education, focusing on the authors' institutional affiliation and geographic focus. The second was concerned with the ontology of refugee education research, including discourses and concepts. The final one focused on the epistemological approach of the field including methodologies voices and citation trends. These categories and the corresponding values coded are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding Framework

Purpose	Code	Possible Returns
To understand issues of representation across regions in refugee education research	Author(s) Institutional Affiliation	global north; global south; Both; N/A
	Geographic Focus	Yes; No
	Comparative Study	global north; global south; Both; N/A
	Sample Studied	global north; global south; Both; N/A

To understand the ontology of the field, the vocabulary and meanings	Author Keywords and Pre-defined Keywords	keywords; Yes; No
To explore the epistemological patterns shaping refugee education research	Type of Study	Theoretical; Empirical; Policy Review
	Research Design	Qualitative; Quantitative; Mixed-Methods; NA
	Nature of Study	Cross-Sectional; Longitudinal; N/A
	Sample Size	Value; N/A
	Intersectionality	Yes; No; N/A
	Level of Analysis	Micro; Meso; Macro
	Targeted population(s)	Students; Teachers; Policy makers; N/A
	Education stage	Early Childhood Education; Primary; Secondary; Higher Education; Vocational Education; Non-Formal Education; N/A

Limitations

It is important to highlight some of the limitations of our methodology. Firstly, we narrowed our focus to peer-reviewed articles in English and Arabic languages, excluding other languages. This decision was primarily influenced by the prevalence of articles in English as well as our expertise in the Arab world and proficiency in the Arabic language. Moreover, we acknowledge that our examination was limited to published material only on Shamaa website. There are a few other Arabic databases that required an institution subscription which we did not have. Thus our study of Arabic literature is limited and we cannot ascertain if other submitted articles available on other platforms would follow similar trends.

Furthermore, we recognise the discomfort in utilising the global north-global south distinction, understanding its inherent limitations. For instance, as mentioned above, it tends to oversimplify and homogenise the experiences of individuals within each hemisphere. Additionally, while classifying authors, we are mindful of the oversight regarding other demographic factors such as nationality, self-identification, or educational background. However, despite these limitations, we continue to employ

this distinction as a convenient shorthand due to the lack of alternative author information available. We also believe that this distinction aids in elucidating the power dynamics that shape the field, particularly in highlighting the necessity for scholars from global south institutions to collaborate with those from global north institutions to access publishing opportunities. Lastly, it is important to clarify that our analysis on representation and discourse is not intended as a critique of the scholars producing this knowledge, but rather to foster discussions on equitable and inclusive knowledge production.

Chapter 3.

The Emergence of a Field: Knowledge Production Patterns and Inequalities

Academic research on refugee education has proliferated over the past two decades gaining greater momentum with the Syrian refugee crisis from the 2011 onwards. The dramatic increasing interest in research on refugee education can be attributed to the emphasis of humanitarian agencies on including education as part of any humanitarian response in a crisis (Shuayb & Crul, 2020). In this Chapter, we show that our study confirms these findings. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 demonstrate the significant increase in the number of academic contributions over the past years in both English and Arabic languages.

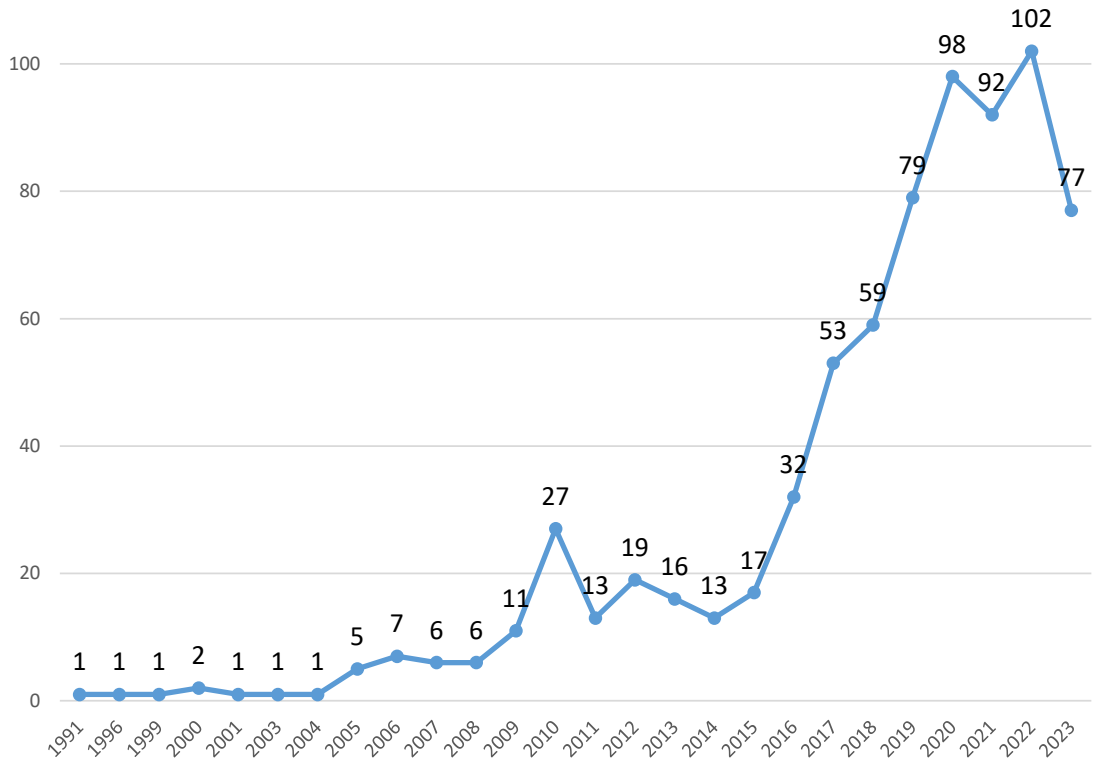

Figure 3.1. Number of articles published in English in the past three decades.

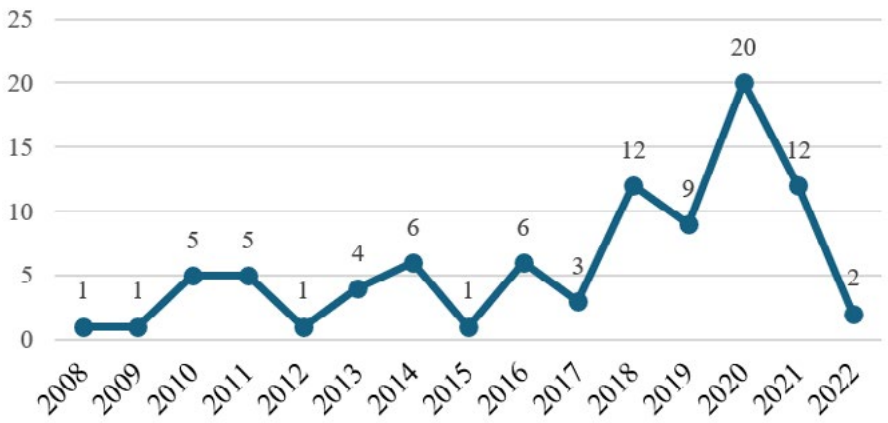

Figure 3.2. Number of articles published in Arabic language in the last fifteen years.

In an ongoing study on funding and forced migration research by Brun-Shuayb (forthcoming), the findings indicate that 98% of the funds for research on forced migration in the past twenty years come from organisations that are based in the global north region. Moreover, the study findings indicate that more than 50% of the funding is allocated to universities in the global north region. Arguably, such practices risk introducing biases and creating inequalities at various levels. Firstly, there is a risk in positioning Western knowledge as the most legitimate form of knowledge. Secondly, such practices suggest that there may be underlying interests behind certain ideas and epistemologies in the research, which influences the type of research conducted. To this end, we want to examine if and how these interests have materialised in knowledge production patterns. To address this, we explore the regional participation in refugee education research. We particularly examine the geographic focus of the studies and the institutional affiliation of the authors who are producing the knowledge.

Where do the Studies Take Place: Geographic Focus

Analysing the geographical distribution of research on refugee education in English language reveals a notable disparity, with nearly half of the studies conducted in the global north, as depicted in Figure 3.3.

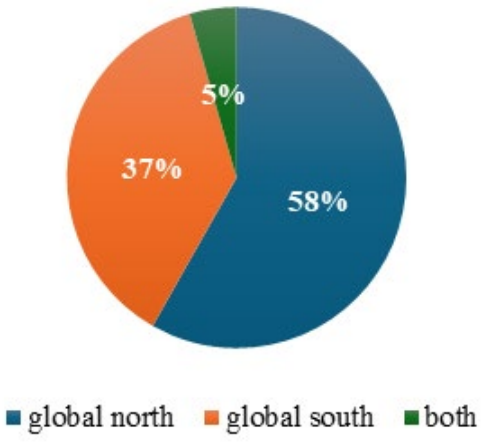

Figure 3.3. Regions Under Study - English articles

Among the top contributors to this literature are the United States and Australia, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. This dominance of northern countries, particularly these two, can be attributed to several factors such as the availability of funding, extensive networks, collaborative opportunities, and avenues for publication. Moreover, our study sheds light on a significant gap in sample sizes between studies conducted in the global north and those in the global south. On average, samples in the global north were found to be ten times larger than those in the global south. This discrepancy underscores the unequal distribution of research funding and the predominant focus on academic research in global north regions.

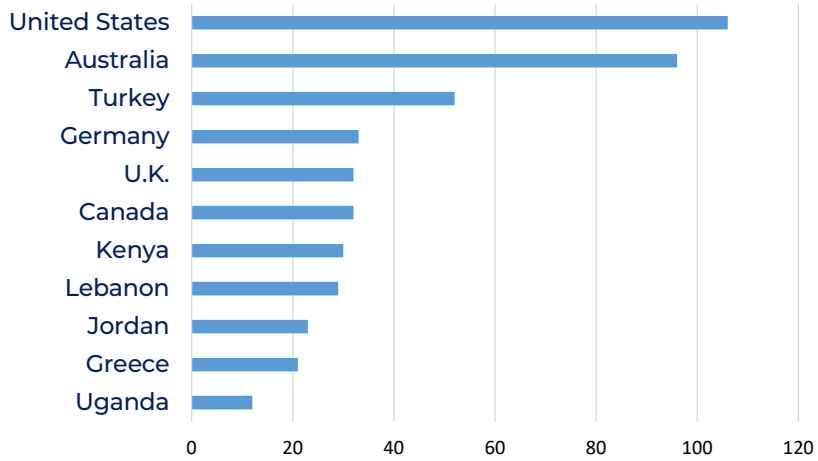

Figure 3.4. Countries Under Study - English articles

On the contrary, our analysis of refugee education research published in the Arabic language reveals a distinct pattern. Figure 3.5 demonstrates that all the studies in this corpus are focused on countries in the global south. This constrained approach may arise from various factors, including potential language barriers faced by scholars from the global north and a possible lack of interest in publishing research in Arabic. Additionally, a weak tradition of refugee studies in the Arabic language may contribute to this trend. These circumstances raise questions about the intended audience for such research and the underlying motivations behind its production.

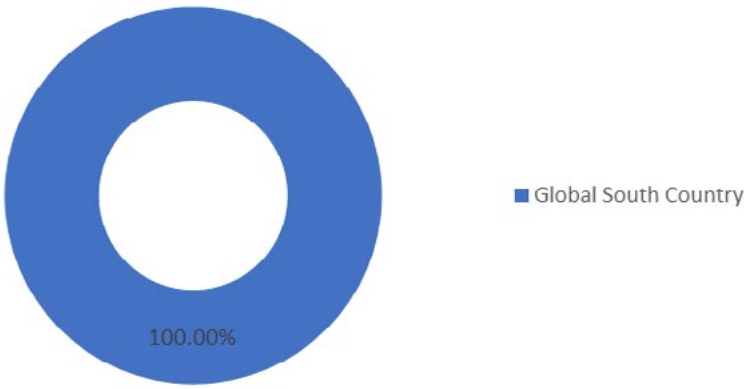

Figure 3.5. Regions Under Study - Arabic Articles

Addressing this imbalance is important for fostering equity and inclusivity in research funding allocation and academic collaborations within the field of refugee education. By ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources and actively engaging with diverse global perspectives, the field can advance towards a more comprehensive and representative understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing refugee communities worldwide.

Moreover, the findings of our study reveal a notable absence of comparative research within refugee education scholarship in the English language. Only 12% of the total articles examined in English were identified as multi-country studies, as illustrated in Figure 3.6.

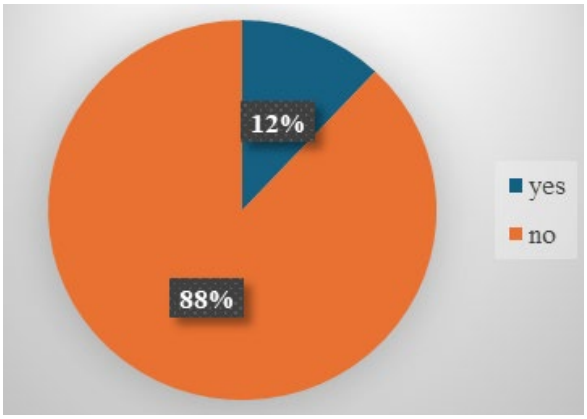

Figure 3.6. Multi-country studies - English language

Furthermore, Figure 3.7 depicts a limited presence of cross-regional research, indicating that the field is still in its nascent stages in this regard. Articles published in the Arabic language follow similar trends, with almost non-existing multi-country studies and cross-regional research.

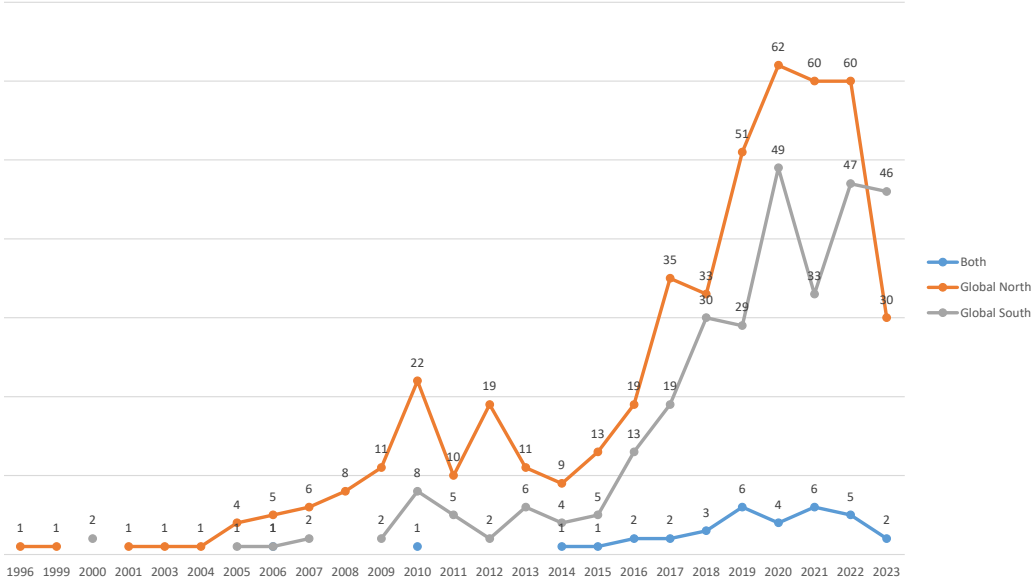

Figure 3.7. Cross-regional studies - English language

This lack of comparative and cross-regional studies suggests a dichotomy within refugee education scholarship, wherein two distinct streams of research seem to be emerging. Arguably, by developing theories and paradigms based on separate studies, there is a risk of overlooking the interconnectedness, and relationality of refugee experiences between the global north and south. Failing to recognise the relevance of refugee education research conducted in one region to the realities faced by refugees in another region hampers our comprehensive understanding of the critical issues impacting refugee education worldwide.

Who is Producing this Knowledge: Authorship Patterns

To explore who is producing knowledge in the field of refugee education research, we analysed various types of authorship, namely articles that are authored by a single scholar and those that are co-authored by multiple authors. Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of authors producing English articles are based in global north institutions. Figure 3.8 particularly highlights that 86% of the single-authored English articles are published by global north scholars.

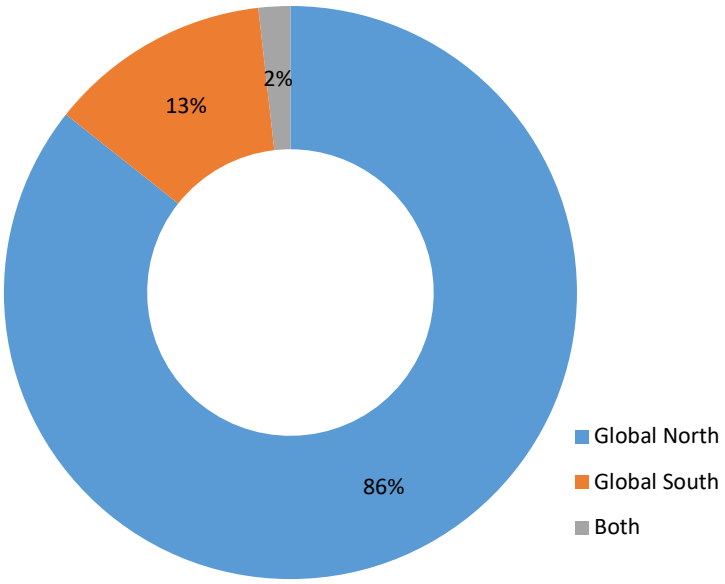

Figure 3.8. Author Affiliation of Single-Authored Articles in English, n=335

Similarly, figure 3.9 shows that around 85% of the first authors of co-authored articles in English are affiliated to global north institutions.

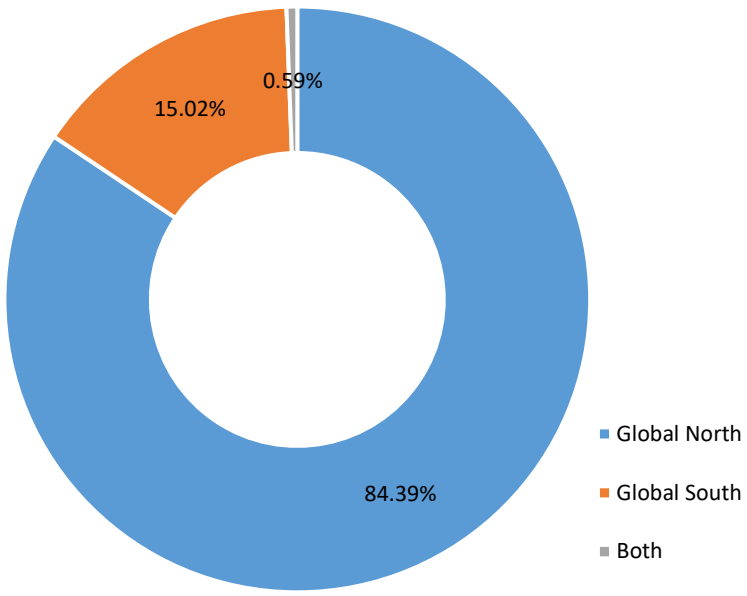

Figure 3.9. First-Author Affiliation of Co-Authored Articles in English, n=506

To further understand the authorship patterns, we broke down our analysis of the English articles by region. We did not apply the same analysis to the Arabic articles knowing that they were entirely focused on the global south countries. Our findings indicate similar authorship patterns. Figure 3.10 shows that more than 90% of the authors of single-authored articles in English studying refugee education in the global north countries are affiliated to global north institutions and more than 60% of those producing knowledge in global north countries are authors from the global north, too.

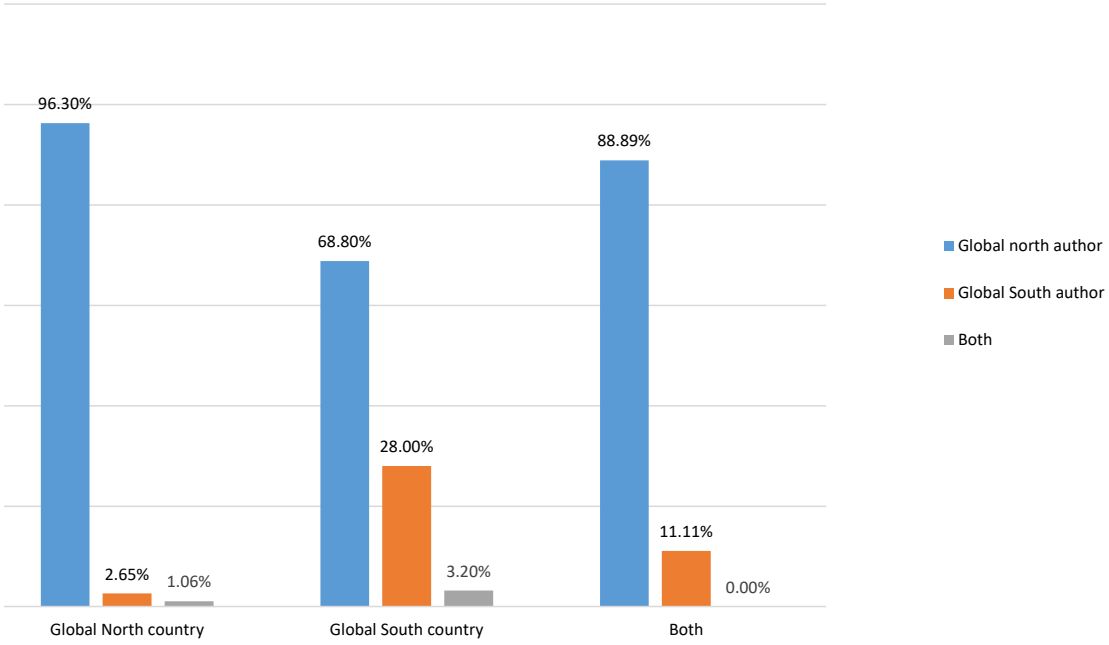

Figure 3.10. Author Affiliation of Single-Authored Articles in English by Region, n= 323

Similarly, Figure 3.11 shows that more than 99% of the first authors of English articles that are produced by more than one scholar and that focus on refugee education in global north countries are affiliated to global north institutions, and more than 60% of those focusing on refugee education in global south countries are affiliated to global north countries, too.

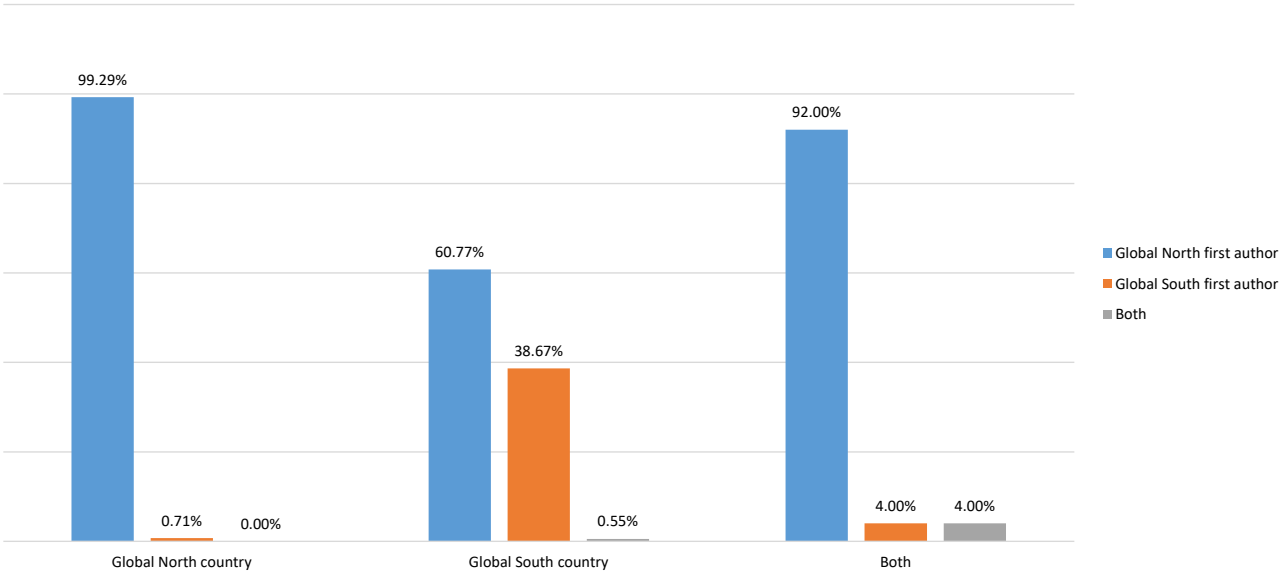

Figure 3.11. First-Author Affiliation of Co-authored Articles in English by Region, n=486

Overall, our analysis of the English articles shows that global south scholars play a secondary role in the co-construction of knowledge, even when the geographic focus of the articles is on global south countries. This demonstrates that the voices of the scholars who are closest to the phenomenon of forced displacement are rather marginalised, hence mirroring an extractive knowledge production process and a risk of producing decontextualised rather than meaningful knowledge.

Moreover, our analysis reveals that all Arabic publications are produced by scholars from the global south. This mirrors the argument that there may be little interest by the audience in refugee education research. Moreover, this discrepancy could be attributed to the underdeveloped tradition of refugee education research in Arabic-speaking countries, leading most authors to publish in English to reach a wider audience interested in the topic.

Summary

The analysis in this Chapter has highlighted the significant growth in refugee education research, particularly following the Syrian refugee crisis. However, this growth has been accompanied by notable geographic and institutional disparities that reflect broader global inequalities. The research is predominantly conducted and authored by scholars from the global north, despite the majority of refugees residing in the global south. This imbalance in authorship and geographic focus not only marginalises the voices of southern scholars but also risks producing knowledge that is disconnected from the

lived realities of refugees in the global south. The absence of comparative and cross-regional studies further exacerbates this divide, limiting the field's ability to develop interconnected and relational understandings of refugee experiences across different contexts. To address these disparities, it is crucial to foster more equitable and inclusive research practices that actively engage scholars from the global south and ensure that refugee education research reflects the diverse experiences and perspectives of refugee communities worldwide.

Chapter 4.

The Ontology of the Field: Focus, Vocabulary and Meanings

To further understand how the humanitarian agenda shapes refugee education research, this Chapter examines the ontological approaches that underpin the articles in this field. Interrogating the concepts and vocabulary on which the field of refugee education rests entails critically examining the foundational beliefs and assumptions that inform the field. This includes questioning the assumptions that are made about the nature of refugee education. For instance, what is considered to be the reality of refugees' experiences and the education provided to them? Are there multiple perspectives or realities within this field? How is knowledge about refugee education created, validated, and disseminated? Are certain types of knowledge or perspectives prioritised over others? How does the knowledge produced relate to policy agendas?

By interrogating these aspects, the study aims to uncover and challenge potentially unexamined biases, dominant narratives, and power structures that influence how refugee education is conceptualised, researched, and practiced. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the complexities of refugee education and possibly suggest new approaches that are more inclusive and reflective of diverse realities. By doing so, we can explore whose knowledge is deemed legitimate and how these frameworks influence the direction and focus of the research. Specifically, we aim to investigate if Western hegemony manifests in refugee education studies, dictating which perspectives are valued and which are marginalised. This analysis will help reveal the power dynamics at play, showing how certain worldviews and methodologies dominate the discourse, potentially sidelining alternative, non-Western forms of knowledge and ways of understanding refugee education.

To understand the emerging themes in the field of refugee education research, we first analysed the article keywords that are assigned by the authors. Next, to understand how policy influences refugee education research and vice versa, we analysed pre-defined keywords that we suspect are dominant in the research. The analysis is conducted for the English articles across both regions, the global north and the global south, as well as the Arabic articles.

Dominant Themes in Refugee Education Research

To understand the dominant themes in the field of refugee education research, we extracted the keywords that are assigned by the authors. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the author-assigned keywords in the English articles. It shows that terms like language, learning, social, policy, teachers, and many others are common in the

literature. This indicates a wide interest in the literature in various issues pertaining to refugee education, on the policy level, school level and individual level.

English literature focused on the global north	English literature focused on the global south	Arabic literature

Figure 4.1. Author-defined keywords in English Articles

To further interpret these findings, we broke down the analysis of the author-assigned keywords of the English articles by region, and we compared the findings against the Arabic articles. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the most frequent article keywords.

Table 3. The most recurring author-assigned keywords in the literature

Overall, the findings indicate a greater interest in the global north articles on policy as compared to the global south English articles which are focused on learning and schools. There is a significant focus in the Arabic articles on psychological wellbeing of students. To further unpack these findings, we have clustered the terms thematically and conducted a quantitative analysis. The findings are presented below and organised as English and Arabic articles.

English Articles: Integration and Long-Term Education

Upon breaking down and categorizing the author-assigned keywords in the English literature, 10 main themes emerged: language, university, humanitarian, exclusion/inclusion, conflict/peace, pedagogy, youth, identity/belonging, employment/labour/labor, and community. The frequency of these terms is depicted in figure 4.2, with the findings broken down by region. To further explain the findings, we conducted a qualitative analysis of these terms, wherein two overarching themes emerged: integration and long-term education for refugees.

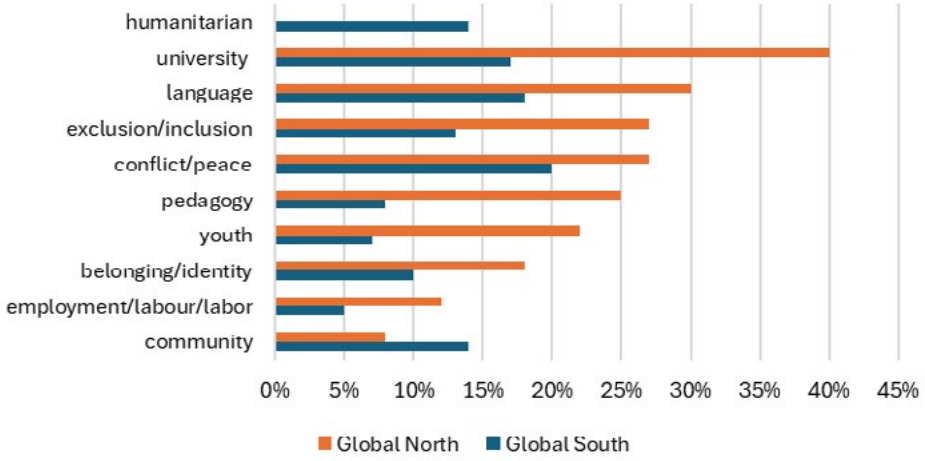

Figure 4.2. Frequency of Author-Assigned Keywords in English Articles across regions

Under the theme of integration, language surfaces as a pivotal concern, with 40% prevalence in the global south and 16% in the global north. This underscores the critical role of language proficiency in facilitating the assimilation of refugees into educational systems. Additionally, keywords highlighting inclusion and exclusion are prominent, noted in 27% of global south studies and 13% in the global north. This underscores a concerted effort towards fostering inclusive educational environments, ensuring equitable access and participation. Pedagogical considerations, evident in terms such as 'pedagogy', 'teacher training', 'teachers' and 'teaching', feature prominently in 27% of global south studies and 13% in the global north, reflecting a commitment to cultivating inclusive educational methodologies. Moreover, community-related keywords, present in 9% of global south studies and 14% of global north studies, signify a shift towards considering broader communal impacts of refugee education initiatives. Lastly, keywords related to belonging and identity resonate significantly, appearing in 19% of

global north studies and 10% of global south studies, underscoring the importance of fostering a sense of belonging among refugee populations.

Under the theme of long-term education for refugees, a discernible emphasis on higher education is noted, with 30% prevalence in the global south and 19% in the global north. This highlights a departure from traditional focuses on basic literacy and primary education towards facilitating access to tertiary educational opportunities. Furthermore, a noteworthy focus on youth emerges, with 21% of global south studies and 8% in the global north addressing this demographic cohort. Notably, keywords related to conflict and peace, prominent in 27% of global south studies but only 2% in the global north, underscore divergent scholarly discourses, wherein education is perceived as a means for reconciliation and conflict resolution in the Global South. Keywords related to work and employment also surface, appearing in 12% of global south studies and 7% in the global north, indicative of a growing recognition of the importance of socio-economic integration among refugee populations.

Overall, the English articles show a significant interest in integration and a burgeoning interest in long-term education. When compared to the word cloud analysis, there is also a notable emphasis on school-related aspects of refugee education, such as pedagogy and learning. While the term policy frequently appears, particularly in global north English articles, we suspect that many of these policies are focused on desk-review policies. These findings will be further analysed in the final section.

Arabic Articles: Psychological Needs and Pedagogy

Upon breaking down and categorising the author-assigned keywords in the Arabic articles, the most prominent terms that emerged, as shown in figure 4.3, are centred around psychological needs of students and pedagogical related matters. There is also a notable focus in the Arabic literature on the education for Palestinian refugees, demonstrated in the prevalence of the keyword UNRWA. This is an interesting discrepancy from the English articles that are mostly focused on the Syrian refugees. We contend that these findings further demonstrate how policy interest can shape the academic research.

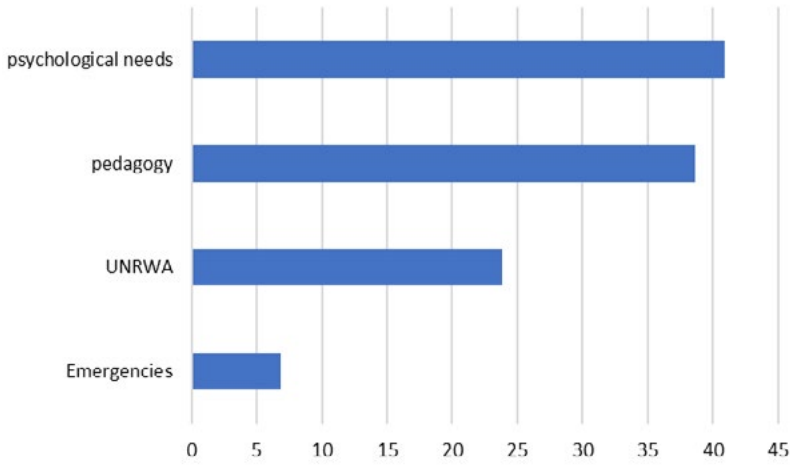

Figure 4.3. Frequency of Author-Assigned Keywords in Arabic articles

In the Arabic literature on refugee education, more than 40% of the author-assigned keywords revolve around psychological needs, with a notable emphasis on individual experiences such as post-traumatic street disorder, child trauma, counselling, therapy, aggressive behaviour, psychological resilience, psychological health, psychological alienation, obsessive-compulsive disorder, stress, happiness, depression, mental health and cognitive distortions. These themes primarily focus on understanding and addressing the psychological well-being of refugee children, often treating them as passive victims of trauma and adversities resulting from war and displacement.

The prevalence of these individual-focused themes reflects a positivist research tradition, wherein researchers adopt an objective and empirically driven approach to study phenomena. In this context, schools are often utilised merely as convenient sites for data collection, with refugee children being viewed as subjects of research. This narrow focus on individual psychological experiences and the instrumental use of schools as research sites neglect broader socio-cultural, educational, and systemic factors that shape refugee children's experiences and well-being.

Moreover, more than 35% of the author-assigned keywords in the Arabic articles are centred around pedagogy such as teaching, learning, teacher training, computer assisted teaching, students and teachers. The focus on pedagogical related terms in the Arabic literature is different from that in the English articles, which is focused on integration, language learning, communities, identities and belonging. These themes in the Arabic articles are rather primarily focused on adapting to the educational needs of the refugee students in schools to improve their access to education.

Overall, the Arabic articles show a significant interest in psychological needs and pedagogy. When compared to the word cloud analysis, there is also a notable emphasis on psychological and school-related aspects of refugee education. Notably, th findings indicate limited engagement with policies and macro-level analyses. This suggests a neglect of broader contextual factors and a reluctance to explore the complexities of refugee education beyond individual-level variables and immediate access to education.

Policies and Research in the Field of Refugee Education

To further understand the dominant discourse in the field of refugee education, the second stage of the ontological analysis explores the relation between refugee education policies and research. We first examine how policy discussions are shaping refugee education research. Conversely, we then analyse how refugee education research is attempting to bridge the gap by engaging in policy discussions.

To what extent are Policy agendas reflected in Refugee Education Research?

According to our hypothesis, we suspect a hegemony of western humanitarian policies

in the field of refugee education research. To capture the prevalence of this discourse, we defined the following keywords that are firmly rooted in the humanitarian realm: access, integration, humanitarianism, migration/immigration, long-term education and education in emergencies. We analysed the prevalence of these terms in both the English and the Arabic literature.

In Table 4.4, we present the prevalence of the predefined keywords in our study. Our findings indicate that keywords like access (22% of the global south studies in English) and integration (20% of the global north studies in English) continue to be prevalent in refugee education research, too. Conversely, we find limited occurrence of the terms like long-term (2% of the global north studies in English; 4% of the global south studies in English), indicating scarce engagement amongst scholars with long-term prospects of education, and particularly in the global south where we have identified a dominant humanitarian approach. These findings indicate a significant degree of influence of the policy agendas on refugee education research across both regions. We contend that the field of education in the humanitarian context is driven by grey literature instead of evidence-based studies.

Conversely, our predefined keywords rarely appear in the Arabic articles. The findings indicate that there is poor engagement with integration (1%), humanitarian (1%), access (1%), immigrants (1%) and long-term education (0%). We contend that the Arabic articles operate in a separate stream of research and is poorly connected with the global policies and the wider international discourse on refugee education demonstrated in the English articles. Moreover, based on our review of the author-assigned keywords, we found that most of these articles focus on the psychological needs of refugees, with schools being used as units for identifying children for the sample rather than being integrated within the research. We also discussed that there is some engagement with pedagogical issues particularly in adapting teaching methods for students' needs. We have also shown a certain engagement with UNRWA schools.

Taken altogether, we draw several conclusions. Firstly, the prominent focus on psychological needs confirms our argument that the Arabic articles continue to employ a traditional view, approaching refugees as passive victims of war traumas and other adversities. Moreover, based on the limited engagement with policy-informed vocabulary, such as access, integration and humanitarianism, it can be inferred that the Arabic articles produce localised knowledge and are poorly connected the global policies and discourse on refugee education. This discussion is further supplemented by the methodological review in the final section.

Table 4. Prevalence of predefined keywords

Predefined keywords	global north (English)	global south (English)	global south (Arabic)
Immigrants	32.61%	7.87%	1.14%
Integration	20.14%	14.23%	1.14%
Access	19.23%	21.72%	1.14%
Humanitarian	3.36%	13.48%	1.14%
EiE	1.68%	10.11%	3.41%
Long-Term	2.40%	3.75%	0%

To what extent is Refugee Education Research engaged in Policy Discussions?

Having explored how policy discussions influence refugee education research, we now turn to the converse: examining how refugee education research is engaged in policy discussions. In this subsection, we analyse two main aspects: first, the level of analysis within the studies, and second, the targeted population. These dimensions will help us understand how research in this field is contributing to and influencing policy dialogues.

Figure 4.4 indicates a significant dominance of micro-level studies in Arabic literature, with a particular focus on individual needs, especially psychological ones, rather than engaging with broader social issues and community-level discussions. In contrast, a notable focus on meso-level research is observed in English articles. This attention to meso-level studies in English literature marks a stark difference from traditional humanitarian approaches that often objectify refugees and reflects a broader attention to more inclusive and community-centred perspectives, moving beyond the victim discourse.

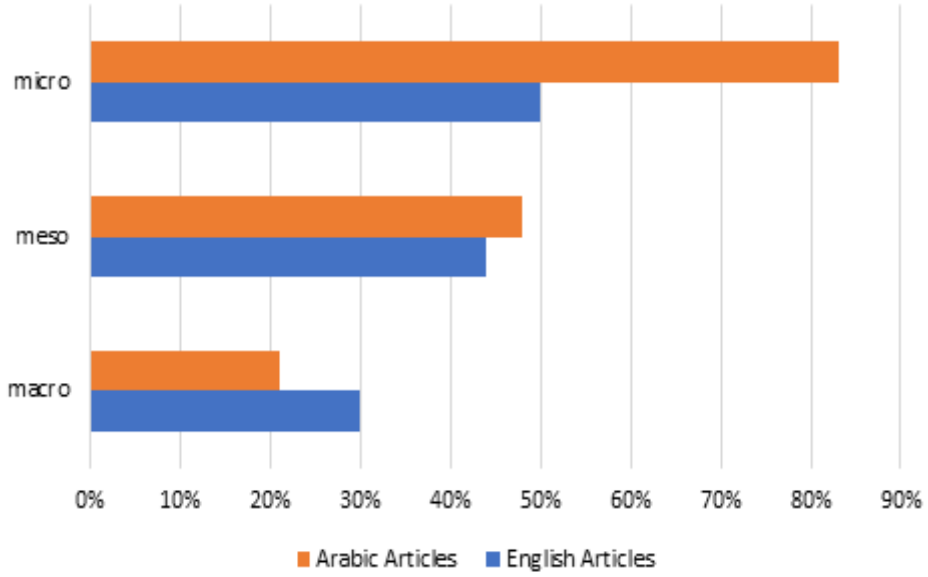

Figure 4.4. Level of Analysis for English and Arabic Articles

Moreover, figure 4.4 demonstrates that there is a moderate level of engagement by scholars with macro-level studies, with about 30% of the research in English and 21% of the research in Arabic falling into this category. However, Figure 4.5 highlights the limited interaction with policymakers, with less than 10% engagement in English articles and 0% engagement in Arabic articles. This suggests that, while there is some engagement in policy discussions, much of the analysis is still based on desk reviews rather than direct interaction with policymakers.

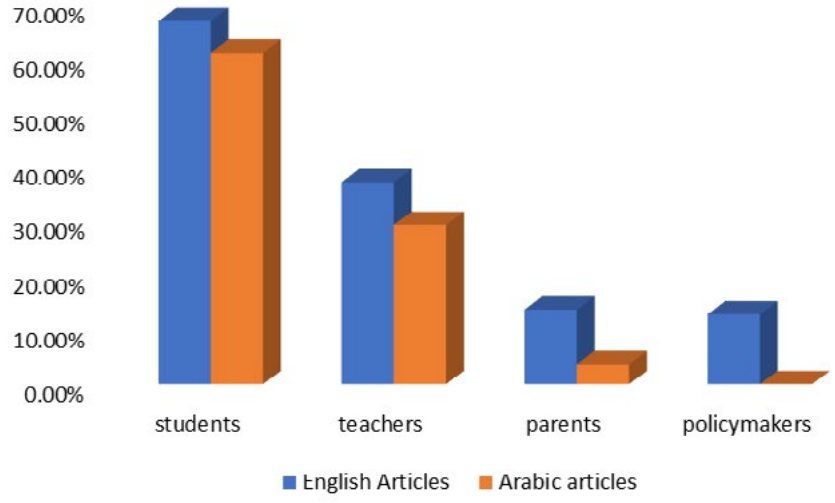

Figure 4.5 Population under study in English and Arabic articles

These gaps in engagement cast doubt on the potential for academic research to inform and shape refugee policies effectively. They prompt us to question how policy in the field of refugee education is actually made, and to what extent evidence-based research is informing policies and actively shaping them, rather than merely following

them. Taken altogether, these findings underscore the need for academic insights to inform policy formulation, ensuring that refugee policies are rooted in the contextual realities and experiences of refugee communities. In a forthcoming study by Brun-Shuayb (in progress), the authors conduct a policy ethnography where they hold interviews with policymakers to gain a more real-time understanding of the policy-making process in forced migration studies. This approach allows for a deeper analysis of the discourse and the relationships between researchers and policymakers, offering insights into how policy is shaped and enacted in relation to academic research. By bridging the divide between academia and policymaking, there is an opportunity to develop more informed, contextually relevant refugee policies that prioritize the needs and perspectives of those directly affected. This shift away from solely humanitarian-driven approaches towards evidence-based policymaking holds the potential to create more sustainable and impactful solutions for refugee populations.

Summary

In this analysis of aspects related to the ontology of refugee education research reveals critical insights into how the field has developed over the past two decades. Our analysis underscores the significant influence of humanitarian agendas and funding patterns, particularly those rooted in the global north, which have shaped the discourse and research priorities within the field. The disparities in authorship and geographic focus highlight the dominance of northern institutions in knowledge production, which has, in turn, marginalised southern perspectives and led to a skewed representation of refugee education issues.

The thematic analysis of both English and Arabic literature further illuminates the divergent focuses within the field, with English-language studies often centred on integration and long-term educational goals, while Arabic studies emphasise psychological needs and pedagogical concerns. This division reflects broader epistemological and ontological differences, where the global north's research agenda drives policy-focused, school-centric approaches, while the global south grapples with immediate and localised concerns.

The findings of this subsection indicate that, despite the growing body of research, there is a lack of cross-regional and comparative studies, which hampers a holistic understanding of refugee education. To advance the field, there is a pressing need for more inclusive research practices that bridge these divides, fostering collaborations that incorporate diverse perspectives and contexts. This approach will help to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of refugee education, one that is both theoretically robust and practically relevant to the varied experiences of refugee populations worldwide.

Chapter 5.

The Epistemology of the Field: Methodologies, Representation and Voices

To further understand how the Eurocentric agenda shapes refugee education research, this Chapter examines the epistemology that underpin the articles in this field. Interrogating the epistemic violence entails critically examining the methodologies, the representation of refugees in the research and the voices of the scholars across different regions. This includes questioning the type of studies, the nature of the data, the theoretical engagement, and the citation patterns.

Our analysis begins by exploring whether the studies are engaged in theoretical discussions or not, which allows us to assess the balance between evidence-based inquiries and conceptual explorations. This categorisation is crucial for determining whether the field of refugee education is genuinely contributing to the development of new theories and advancing as an academic discipline, or if it is predominantly focused on policy-driven research. By examining this balance, we aim to understand if the field is primarily reactive, merely responding to existing policies, or if it is proactively engaging in conceptual and theoretical work that can inform and shape future policies based on robust evidence. This distinction is essential for evaluating the field's potential to evolve beyond a policy-oriented focus and contribute meaningfully to broader academic discourse.

Next, we delve into the methods employed in empirical studies, which comprise more than 80% of the articles. By scrutinising these methodological choices, we can interpret how they impact the representation and voices of refugees and those directly affected by displacement. Specifically, we aim to identify whether these methods authentically capture the lived experiences and perspectives of refugees or if they instead perpetuate a top-down, policy-driven narrative that imposes imperial viewpoints on the refugee experience. This examination is crucial for understanding how certain voices are amplified or silenced within the field, and how this dynamic contributes to the broader patterns of epistemic violence, where dominant knowledge systems marginalise or erase alternative perspectives.

Lastly, we examine the citation patterns to explore the engagement of scholars from the global north and global south in citing one another. This analysis allows us to further understand the epistemic hegemony at play, highlighting the dynamics between scholars and the regions they are studying.

Theoretical Engagement in Refugee Education

Upon conducting a qualitative review of the Arabic articles, we found minimal engagement with theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Instead, these studies predominantly relied on psychometric tests and quantitative methodologies, focusing more on measurement than on developing or advancing theoretical insights.

To explore whether the English articles contribute to theoretical discussions, we utilised the AskYourPDF AI-assisted program. In particular, we identified whether the studies adopt a theoretical framework and whether they use the study findings to extend this framework. Figure 5.1 demonstrates that 83% of the articles adopt a theoretical framework, and Figure 5.2 shows that 68% of the articles contribute to the theoretical frameworks that they adopt.

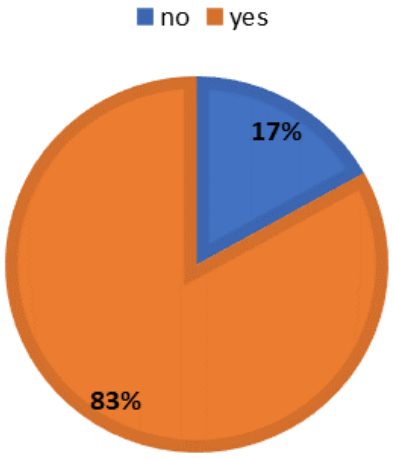

Figure 5.1. The frequency of English articles that adopt a theoretical framework

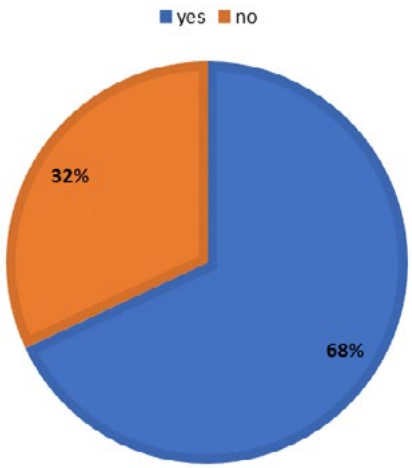

Figure 5.2. The frequency of English articles that contribute to the theoretical frameworks

However, upon conducting a qualitative review of the articles, we found that the majority of these articles tend to contribute to the literature in a more technical manner rather than engaging in conceptual or theoretical debates. These contributions often focus on practical aspects, such as factors influencing school enrolment, the implementation of specific educational practices, and other applied topics, rather than advancing broader theoretical frameworks. These findings can be attributed to the novelty of the field of refugee education and the need for further engagement in producing theories rather than extrapolating existing ones.

Methodologies in Refugee Education Research

Our analysis of the methodologies used in refugee education research demonstrates an increased attention to qualitative research across both global south and global north regions. Figure 5.3 shows that around 71% of global north studies, 59% of global south studies and 46% of cross-regional studies employ qualitative methods. This trend suggests an effort to amplify the voices of refugee communities and move away from traditional positivist research paradigms. While this shift is promising, there remains a critical need for further examination of how refugees are portrayed and involved throughout the research process. Our preliminary observations and existing studies (e.g. Aljadeeah, 2022; Khan, 2024; Neang, McNally & Rahim, 2022) indicate a concerning trend of refugees being excluded from various research stages, including design and dissemination.

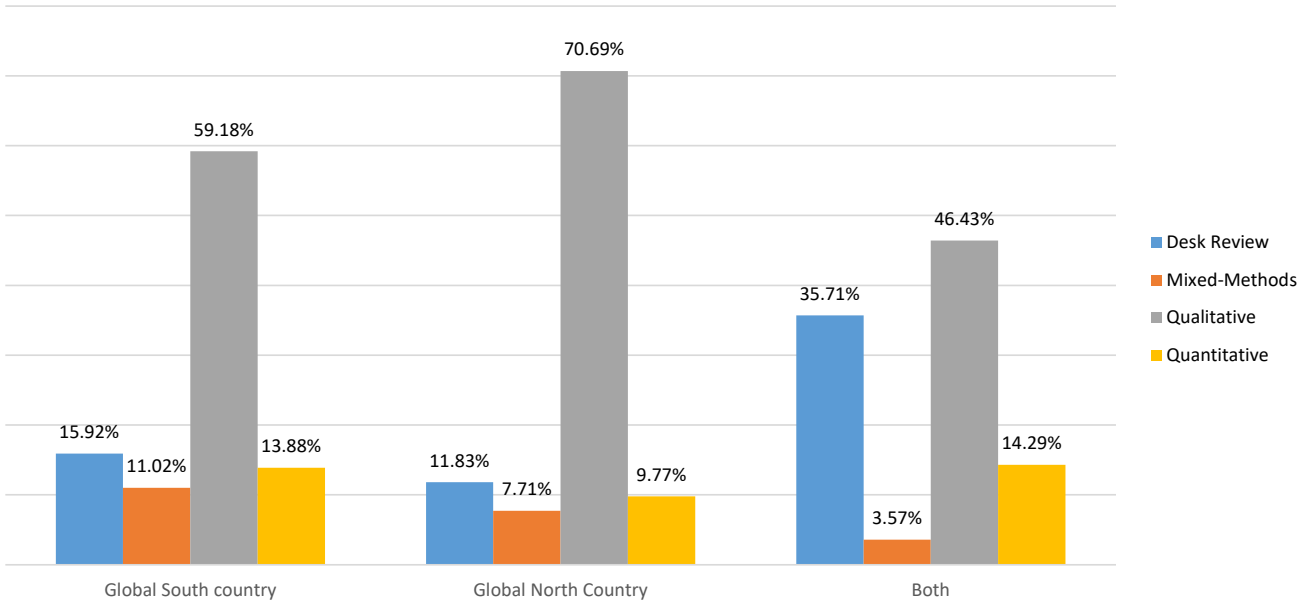

Figure 5.3. Methodology by country for English articles

Conversely, Figure 5.4 reveals that 91% of the studies in Arabic language employ a quantitative methodology. This finding substantiates our conclusion that Arabic literature tends to maintain a traditional approach, objectifying refugees. When combined with our earlier observation that this literature emphasises psychological needs, it becomes clear that refugees are often portrayed as passive victims, with minimal engagement in discussions that centre their own voices and experiences.

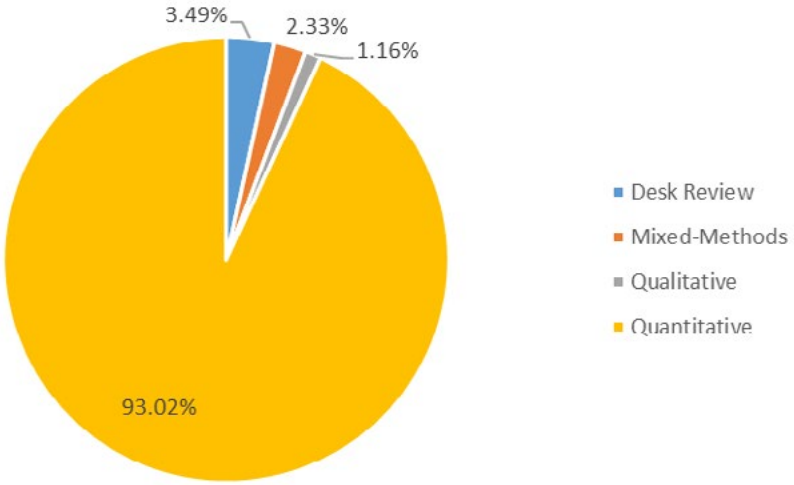

Figure 5.4. Methodology for Arabic Articles

Other findings from our analysis that concern the representation of refugees in the research include an exploration of intersectionality. Intersectionality refers to the interrelation of multiple forms of inequalities in the daily lives of individuals, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, which can create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Cho, Kimberlé & Leslie, 2013). Our analysis revealed that only 11% of the reviewed articles adopt an intersectional lens. This finding mirrors prevailing humanitarian practices, wherein the refugee experience is often depicted as monolithic, an essentialist approach that overlooks the diversity and complexity within refugee populations. This finding can be explained by the novelty of the field of refugee education. Nonetheless, by failing to adopt an intersectional approach, scholars and practitioners often overlook the nuanced ways in which factors such as neurodiversity, disability, sexuality, ethnicity, and past experiences intersect with the refugee experience. This oversight hinders our understanding of the unique challenges and needs faced by different subgroups within refugee communities as opposed to formulating more targeted and inclusive interventions and policies that better address the diverse needs of refugee populations.

Citation Trends: Epistemic dominance

The analysis so far attests to an epistemic violence, where only certain perspectives and voices are present. To further unpack the epistemic violence and silencing, we have also looked at the power dynamics manifested in citation trends in English articles only, given the lack of citation details on Arabic articles. This analysis helps us to understand whose knowledge is recognised in the field of refugee education and research and the

extent to which scholars across regions are engaged in relational scholarship. To do so we looked at the top 20 most-cited articles based on our latest search on Scopus.

First, we analysed the author affiliation of the top-cited articles. Figure 5.5 demonstrates that all the top cited articles are published by authors who are affiliated to global north institutions.

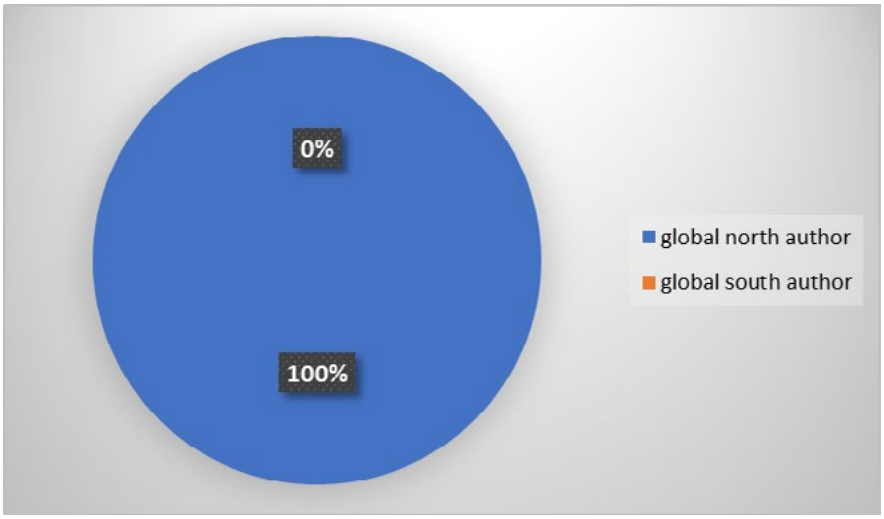

Figure 5.5. Author Affiliation of the top 20 most cited articles

Moreover, we analysed the author affiliation of the articles citing the top-cited articles (n=3732). Figure 5.6 shows that 91% of the authors of the citing articles are affiliated to global north institutions.

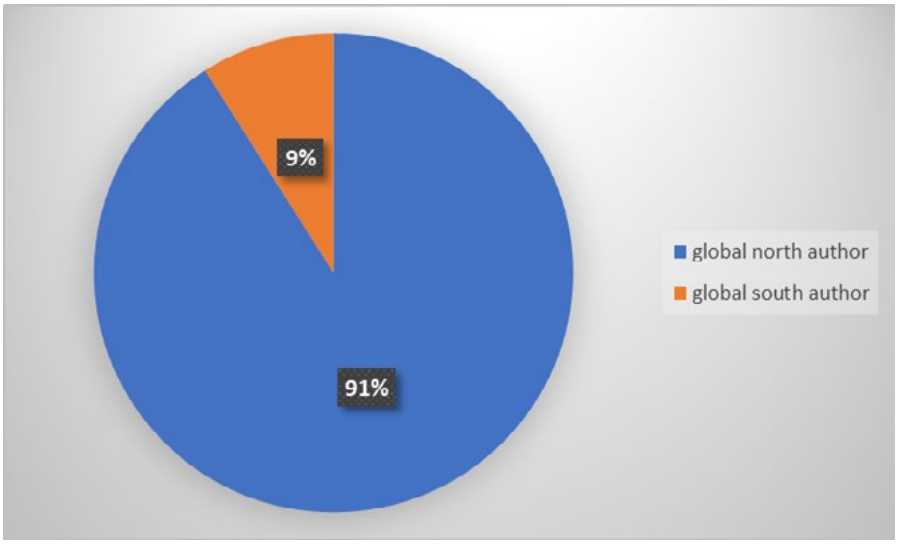

Figure 5.6 Author Affiliation of citing articles (n=3732)

Lastly, we looked at the geographic focus of the articles citing the top-cited articles (n=2532). Figure 5.7 shows that 89% of the citing articles focus on refugees based in global north countries.

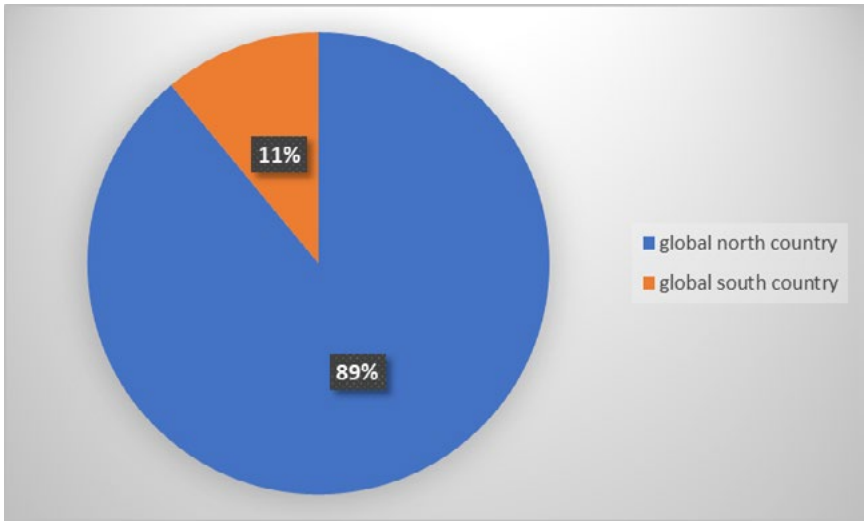

Figure 5.7. Geographic focus of citing articles (n=2532)

The analysis of citation trends reveals a pronounced epistemic dominance by scholars and institutions from the global north in the field of refugee education. This dominance is evident across multiple dimensions. Firstly, all the top 20 most-cited articles are authored by individuals affiliated with global north institutions, indicating that the most recognised and influential knowledge in the field is overwhelmingly produced by scholars from this region. Secondly, this trend extends to the broader citation patterns, where 91% of the articles citing these top-cited works are also authored by scholars from the global north. This highlights a self-reinforcing cycle of knowledge production and recognition within a relatively closed academic loop that primarily involves northern scholars.

Additionally, the geographic focus of the research further amplifies this dominance, with 89% of the citing articles concentrating on refugee situations in global north countries. This narrow focus not only marginalises the experiences and perspectives of refugees in the global south but also perpetuates a skewed understanding of refugee issues that aligns more closely with northern contexts and concerns.

In summary, the citation trends expose significant power imbalances in the production and dissemination of knowledge within refugee education research. These imbalances contribute to a form of epistemic violence, where the perspectives and contributions of scholars from the global south are systematically undervalued and underrepresented. To counteract this dominance, there is a critical need for more inclusive citation practices and greater recognition of diverse voices, particularly from scholars in the global south, to ensure that the field of refugee education research reflects a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of refugee experiences worldwide.

Summary

Our findings in this section indicate that there is extensive recognition and influence of knowledge generated by global north scholars within the academic community. Additionally, scholarly interaction and knowledge exchange are predominantly concentrated within the global north region, highlighting a significant imbalance. The limited collaboration across regions poses a barrier to producing inclusive and diverse knowledge, further reinforcing the dominance of global north perspectives in the field. These trends perpetuate the existing power imbalances in knowledge production, where global north perspectives are privileged, while the contributions of global south scholars remain underrepresented and undervalued. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the limited indexing of global south scholars by the SCOPUS bibliographic database, which poses a limitation to the analysis.

Taken together, this Chapter highlights the limited engagement of refugees in the co-construction of knowledge and the underrepresentation of global south scholars in the academic realm. While involving refugees in qualitative research within English-language articles helps reduce objectification—unlike the more positivist approaches common in Arabic studies—these studies still often lack meaningful engagement with participants in the research design. Additionally, global south scholars continue to face limited recognition of their knowledge, as demonstrated in citation patterns. These forms of marginalisation contribute to epistemic violence, where the voices closest to the phenomenon - both refugees themselves and to some extent global south researchers - are excluded. To foster more authentic and inclusive research, there is an urgent need for greater involvement of refugees, more representation of their voices in research, and increased recognition of global south scholars in knowledge production.

Chapter 6.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the field of refugee education research, by analysing the global body of academic literature on refugee education in English and Arabic over the past two decades to understand the development of this field of knowledge, what knowledge is produced, by whom and where. We were interested in understanding patterns of knowledge generation across the global north and south amid concerns about power asymmetries and colonial legacies. To this end, we conducted a research review of the refugee education research articles in English and Arabic. We developed a framework that examined how colonial legacies are translated into ontological, epistemological and methodological dimensions in the field. Our analysis began by exploring the representation of scholars and regions producing this knowledge, aiming to uncover patterns of academic production. We then examined ontological and epistemic hegemonies present in the content of the research.

Our review of the academic literature reveals that the field of refugee education has undergone significant development and diversification. This evolution is evident in the increasing volume of publications and the expanding range of issues addressed. However, the results show that the field remains heavily influenced by colonial legacies which continue to shape its ontological and epistemological stance. For example, the dominance of humanitarian logics and mechanisms partially fuelled the field's rise in global south contexts. Moreover, the field is predominantly shaped by global north funders and scholars, with GN humanitarian agencies playing a central role. This dominance is reflected in the research agenda, the conceptualisation of refugee education, and the broader discourse. The impact of GN-led knowledge hegemony extends beyond the unequal distribution of resources; it affects who sets the research agenda, who defines what is relevant knowledge and how to define education, how refugees are studied, and the implications of this research for refugees, who predominantly reside in the global south yet are largely absent from contributing to the field. Moreover, the absence of GS scholars in the literature highlights a troubling schism in the knowledge being produced.

GN literature concerned with refugees in the GN often aligns with governmental policies focused on refugee integration, emphasising language barriers and schooling as key challenges. However, it frequently neglects issues of racism, cultural diversity, and political representation and participation. In contrast, literature on refugees in the GS by both GN and GS authors, tends to adopt a humanitarian approach that is apolitical and technical. Literature on refugee education in the GS often depicts refugees as individuals in need of therapeutic intervention, focusing on access to schooling and immediate integration without addressing long-term integration or the broader socio-political dimensions. On the other hand, literature on GN situations seems to respond to and be synchronised well with policy debates at national and global levels, reflecting a potentially strong link between scholars and policy makers.

The emerging ontology from this body of knowledge can be characterised as one that promotes a functional and technical understanding of education where cultural, political and social dimensions are underdeveloped. It is an ontology imprinted by methodological nationalism where research gravitates towards education taking place in national education systems and where questions of membership and legal status tend to be overlooked. The review of literature shows that there is a dominant focus on micro and meso-level research, often at the expense of theoretical and critical policy studies. The lack of theoretical and conceptual framing – and an ambition to theorise – in much of the current research is deeply concerning and highlights a limited space for theoretical and critical debate. Following on from the narrow ontology where education is seen in largely technical terms, much research focuses primarily on classroom settings and textbooks. This approach neglects to explore how educational practices intersect with broader political, social, cultural, and global systems, rendering these crucial contexts largely irrelevant in the literature. While the literature analysed clearly shows education for refugees as an emerging field of study, the field still lacks a cohesive and well-developed understanding of education and its purpose.

Moving to epistemology, fragmentation is also clear from the epistemic dominance of GN actors and the marginalisation of GS perspectives and communities who are excluded from the knowledge production process. The epistemic dominance of the GN does not merely dictate what is researched and how; it also marginalises the crucial role that refugees and communities in the GS play in the knowledge creation process. Alarmingly, their voices are nearly absent – not only as active contributors and co-creators of knowledge but also in terms of their broader cultural, historical, and future relevance within humanitarian education agendas. This lack of representation indicates a power imbalance between the GN and GS that contribute to skewed content and methods of research including who gets to determine which research matters. GS scholars are strikingly absent from citation networks, while GN scholars reinforce and validate their own perspectives and those of their peers, sidelining vital contributions from the global south.

Our examination of the field's ontology and epistemology reveals a troubling picture of how neocolonial power dynamics continue to influence the understanding and research of refugee education and enables ongoing epistemic violence. This dominance affects not only the nature of the education provided but also its intended purposes and implementation. The narrow focus of the field where broader, long-term educational goals and aspirations of refugees are neglected, risks confining the vision and scope of refugee education to a narrow, conservative perspective.

To address these issues, we must shift towards a more inclusive, nuanced and holistic ontology and epistemology that acknowledges the complex political dimensions of refugee education. While localisation is touted as a potential solution, as mentioned in Chapter 1, our critique underscores that current efforts often fail to disrupt entrenched power structures, as key decision-makers and influencers remain unchanged, leaving refugees out of the equation (Shuayb, 2022).

The academic community has a vital role in challenging these entrenched power dynamics. Scholars must go beyond mere compliance with existing frameworks

and actively strive to reshape the discourse and power relations within the field. We must critically assess our role as academics, particularly in conflict settings where our research is inevitably entangled with political implications. Can we, as scholars, continue to operate from our ivory towers while genocide and humanitarian crises unfold before our eyes? More emphasis on how we collaborate, who we collaborate with and the ethical imperative in collaboration for equitable research is needed. To this end, a further focus on the timeliness and relevance of our research for those whose lives the research concerns: Our work must confront its political consequences and redefine our methodologies, ethics, and funding practices to better align with justice and equity (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

By diversifying our research community and confronting bureaucratic and institutional barriers that perpetuate epistemic hegemony, we can begin to develop a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of refugee education. This transformation is not just a scholarly obligation but a moral imperative. Only by shifting the discourse and power dynamics can we hope to create a field that genuinely reflects and serves the needs and aspirations of refugee communities.

References

Achiume, T. (2015). Syria, cost-sharing, and the responsibility to protect refugees. *Minnesota Law Review, 192*, 687-761.

Aljadeeah, S. (2022). Conducting Research 'with' Not Only 'about' Refugees, *LERRN,*

Arat-Koc, S. (2021). Decolonizing refugee studies, standing up for indigenous justice: Challenges and possibilities of a politics of place. *Migration and Indigenous Sovereignty in a Chronically Mobile World, 14*(2), 371-390 1

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1),19–32.

Barretta, A. Crossley, M., Dachi, H. (2011). International collaboration and research capacity Building: Learning from the EdQual experience, *Comparative Education 47*(1), 25-43.

Bradley, M. (2007). North-South research partnerships: Challenges, responses and trends. A literature review and annotated bibliography (IDRC Working Paper No. 1). International Development Research Centre.

Bradley, M. 2008). On the agenda: North-South research partnerships and agenda-setting processes. *Development in Practice*, 18(6), 673–685.

Brun, C. & Horst, C. (2023) Towards a Conceptualisation of Relational Humanitarianism. *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs, 5*(1), 62-72.

Brun, C., & Shuayb, M. (2020). Exceptional and futureless humanitarian education of syrian refugees in Lebanon: Prospects for shifting the lens. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees, 36*(2), 20-30.

Brun, C. & Shuayb, M. (2023). Twenty years of the inter-agency network for education in emergencies: Towards a new ontology and epistemology. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *22*(3), 420-432.

Brun-Shuayb C.M. (in progress) A policy ethnography of education policy making in Lebanon. Centre for Lebanese Studies and University of Cambridge.

Chankseliani, M. (2023). Who funds the production of globally visible research in the global south? *Scientometrics*, *128*(1). 783-801.

Chimni, B. S. (1998). The geopolitics of refugee studies: A view from the south. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 11*(4), 350-374.

Cho, S., Kimberlé W., & Leslie M. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs 38*(4), 785-810.

Chu, K., Jayaraman, S., Kyamanywa, P., Ntakiyiruta, G. (2014). Building research capacity in Africa: Equity and global health collaborations. *PLoS Medicine, 11*(3): e1001612.

Dijkzeul, D. (2021). Making localization work: The everyday practice of three NGOs in South Sudan and northern Uganda. *Frontiers in Political Science, 3,* 1-15.

El-Refaei, S. (2020). Global Research Partnerships: Beyond the North-South Divide? A Literature Review. Local Engagement Refugee Research Network Paper No. 4.

Fransman, J., Hall, B., Hayman, R., Narayanan, P., Newman, K., & Tandon, R. (2021). Beyond partnerships: Embracing complexity to understand and improve research collaboration for global development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne D'études du Développement*, *42*(3), 326-346.

Khan, B. (2024). Forging the path to meaningful refugee participation interdisciplinary analysis of power, agency, and participation, *LERRN,*

Landau, L. (2012). Communities of knowledge or tyrannies of partnership: Reflections on north-south research networks and the dual imperative. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 25*(4), 555-70.

Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. K. (2010). Scoping studies: advancing the methodology. *Implementation Science*, *5*(1), 1-9.

Malkki, L. H. (1995). Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*(1), 495–523.

Mistry, P. (2014). Co-Production of knowledge in forced migration studies an interdisciplinary analysis of challenges and the possibilities for the emergence of best practices. *LERRN.*

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D. G., & PRISMA Group*, T. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *Annals of internal medicine*, *151*(4), 264-269.

Moher, D., Shamseer, L., Clarke, M., Ghersi, D., Liberati, A., Petticrew, M., Shekelle P., Stewart LA., & Prisma-P Group. (2015). Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015 statement. *Systematic reviews*, *4*(1), 1-9.

Munn, Z., Peters, M., Stern, C. *et al.* (2018). Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping Review Approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 18*(143), 1-7.

Nagar, R. & Ali, F. (2003). Collaboration across borders: Moving beyond positionality. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 24*(3), 356-372.

Neang, L., McNally, R. & Rahim, N. (2022). Who Has Published in the Journal of Refugee Studies? Examining Author Affiliation and Geographic Representation in Articles and Book Reviews.

Osseiran, S. & Nimer, M. (2024). Knowledge production in refugee studies from the south: Theorisation of refugee labour in the literature on Turkey, *Migration Studies, 12*(3)

Peters, M., (2016). In no uncertain terms: The importance of a defined objective in scoping reviews. *JBI Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports, 14*(2). 1-4.

Qasmiyeh, E. (2021). Critical Approaches to Voice and Writing in Displacement.

Sibai, A., Rizk, A., Coutts, A., Monzer, G., Daoud, A., Sullivan, R. et al. (2019). North-South inequities in research collaboration in humanitarian and conflict contexts. *The Lancet, 394* (10209). p.1597-1600.

Shuayb, M. (2022). Localisation only pays lip service to fixing aid's colonial legacy, the New Humanitarian, Feb, 2022

Shuayb, M., & Brun, C. (2021). Carving out space for equitable collaborative research in protracted displacement, *Journal of Refugee Studies, 34*(3), 2539-53.

Shuayb, M., & Crul, M. (2020). Reflection on the education of refugee children: Beyond reification and emergency. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees 36*(2), 3-8.

Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?. In Nelson, C. & Grossberg, L. (Eds.), Marxism and Interpretations of Culture, 271-313. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

Sukarieh, M., & Tannock, S. (2019). Subcontracting Academia: Alienation, exploitation and disillusionment in the UK overseas Syrian refugee research industry. *Antipode. 51*(2). 664-680.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). Scoping studies: advancing the methodology. (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

UNHCR (2023). Refugee Statistics.

Appendix I: Search Syntax

English Search - UCL Explore Library:

Table 5. Possible Returns for English Syntax used on UCL Explore Library

Term	Possible Returns by the Database
Refugee	Refugee, refugees

English Search - Scopus Database:

Table 6. Possible Returns for English Syntax used on Scopus Database

Term	Possible Returns by the Database
school*	schooling, school, schools
Asylee*	Asylee, asylees
Internal* displace*	Internally displaced, internal displacement
Forc* displace*	Forced displacement, forcibly displaced
Asylum seek*	Asylum seekers, asylum seeking, asylum seeker
Forced migra*	Forced migration, forced migrant, forced migrants
Refugee*	Refugee, refugees

Arabic Search - Shamaa Database:

Table 7. Possible Returns for Arabic Syntax used

Term	Possible Returns by the Database
displace*	نزوح , نازح, نازحين, نازحون, نازحات
Asylum seek* / Refugee*	لجوء, لاجئ, لاجئين, لاجئون, لاجئات
migra*	هجرة, مهاجر, مهاجرين, مهاجرات