

From Exclusion to Inclusion: Challenges for Refugee Children in Delhi Schools

*¹ Shujauddin and ²Dr. P Ramakrishna

¹ Research Scholar, Department of T.T. & N.F.E. (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India.

² Assistant Professor, Department of T.T. & N.F.E. (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India.

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Abstract

The population of forcibly displaced across the world is currently at its highest level. Education, a declared human right plays a crucial role in the life of a forcibly displaced person to overcome trauma and make them self-reliant. The 2023 UNHCR Refugee Education Report highlighted that over 50% of the global population of 14.8 million school-aged refugee children still lack access to formal education, therefore jeopardising their future well-being and depriving them of the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Inclusion, Equity, Accessibility and Quality are the major focus points of the global education. UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030 and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India envisions the inclusive and equitable education for all. This paper focusses on the issues and challenges faced by refugee migrant children enrolled in the government schools of Delhi. The qualitative research methods were used for the study, the primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews of refugee children. The findings of the study revealed that children experience various challenges right from admission to completion of their studies in school. The challenges include several aspects such as language, culture, setting, curriculum, textbooks, social contact, collaboration, and assistance from classmates and instructors. The Researcher also strived to examine the solutions the respondents provided to address the concerns and obstacles faced by refugee migrants at the school level.

*Corresponding Author

Shujauddin

Research Scholar, Department of T.T. & N.F.E. (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India.

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Introduction

Every year, millions of peoples around the globe escape from their native countries due to Conflict and War, Persecution and Human Rights Abuses, Economic Hardship, Natural Disasters etc. They migrate because the government of their country fails to safeguard them from human rights violation cases. The term 'Migrant' is a broad category that lacks a specific definition in international law. However, it generally refers to an individual who relocates from his or her usual place of residence, either inside a country or across an international border, either temporarily or permanently, due to a variety of causes. temporarily or permanently because of various reasons. It may be legal or illegal. It includes migrant workers, students, refugees and asylum seekers. This paper focuses on the international migrants who are persecuted and forcibly displaced in their home land and now they sought

asylum in India and living in the National Capital Delhi. We have tried to understand the challenges they face from enrollment to continuation of their studies in government-run schools.

Contextual Background

As per the UNHCR statistics (2023), 110 million people around the globe have been forcibly displaced. Out of which 48.5 million were displaced internationally. 43.3 million (40%) of them are children below the age of 18 years and less than 50% of these children have access to education. Whereas, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) talks about providing basic human needs and education is among them. Education is a basic need for every human being to have any status. Furthermore, the United Nations Refugee Convention 1951 has given mandate to the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to protect and defend the rights of refugees and asylum seekers including the right to education. Education is a declared human right of every individual as stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)-1948, which emphasizes universal access to education and technical education. Various international instruments and covenants are further recognized and reemphasized the right to education for every child whether having any identity or living in any part of the world whether it is his/her native place or not. Despite these provisions, migrants face many challenges to get admission to completion of their education. Since, having no specific refugee policy, India has a long-demonstrated tradition of welcoming and providing asylum to the person forcibly displaced from their homeland. Hence, India has a large number of refugees and asylum seekers from across the world. A total of one lakh ninety-one thousand two hundred seven (191207) refugees are registered with UNHCR, India. The population of refugees in India includes 46% of women and girls, and 36% of children. In addition to this, a significant number of applications are under the process of granting refugee status (UNHCR 2024). The majority of them are Afghans, Rohingyas (Myanmar), Somalis and other African, and Syrians. Although, thousands of Tibetans, Sri Lankan Tamilians and Pakistani Hindus are also living in India under the separate policy laid down by the government of India for the mentioned nationals. The majority of refugees and asylum-seekers in India reside in metropolitan areas alongside host communities such as Delhi attract a substantial number of refugees because of its affluence, ease of earning, and close proximity to the headquarter of UNHCR India.

The Legal and Policy Framework

India does not have a specific refugee law and policy and is neither a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention nor its Protocol 1967. Which are happens to be the primary international instruments to deal with refugee affairs. However, the government of India adopted an ad-hoc approach to deal with the affairs of refugees and asylum seekers under the provisions of the Passport Act of 1920, the Foreigners Act of 1946, the Indian constitution, and various judicial orders.

Since India has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 protocol, the Government of India does not have the authority to grant refugee status. Hence, all matters related to refugees within Indian territory are attributed to UNHCR responsibility. It is mandatory for all the countries in the world including those not ratified the convention to uphold refugee standard protection as a fundamental principle of international law. However, India has ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989, in 1992, which ensures the rights of a child including the right to education that facilitates them to reach their full potential with no discrimination.

Inclusion, Equity and Accessibility

Inclusion, equity, accessibility and quality are the major focus points of the global education and are also reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. The target of SDGs is focused on the promotion of inclusive and quality education among all. The concept of inclusion from 'the process of educating Children with Special Needs with general children is now become more comprehensive and ideal that covers 'all' irrespective of any physical, economic,

cultural and political differences. The concept of inclusion encompasses the participation of broader social identities such as caste, creed, gender, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disability. National Education Policy of India 2020 is also advocating the inclusive and equitable education for all SEDGs i.e. Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, which is an umbrella term covering gender, socio-economic and socio-cultural identities, geographical identities as well as disabilities. Refugee migrants may also be considered as a socially and economically disadvantaged community. They should be provided educational opportunities which may leads to improved life conditions, overcome the emotional and psychological trauma and distress they have experienced and contribute positively to the host country instead of becoming a burden.

Review of Related Literature

Migration due to fear of persecution in the modern world is a major issue. Millions of people have been forcibly displaced from their homeland and are compelled to live a life of being a migrant refugee, asylum seeker or stateless person within their country or outside in neighboring countries. The number is continuously increasing day by day, around half of them are children (UNHCR, 2023) ^[19]. They urgently need our attention not only to provide food and shelter but also to provide education, to make them skilled, to cope the situation they face, and to live life with dignity and independence. India and many other countries are not ratified the UN Refugee Convention 1951 and its 1967 protocol which had given birth to UNHCR the international organisation to deal with affairs of refugees and asylum seekers. Although India has a long-demonstrated tradition of welcoming refugees on humanitarian ground. The educational experience of refugee students in host countries is characterised by numerous of challenges. Including linguistic barriers, cultural differences, psychological distress, and socio-economic difficulties. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these obstacles and determining efficient methods to surmount them is essential for developing an inclusive and supportive educational atmosphere.

Refugee students face a multitude of challenges in their educational endeavours. They often experience feeling of disconnection, social and cultural isolation, and a cultural shock in their host country. They are also marginalised in attending the schools (Damaschke, & Wiseman, 2021) ^[5]. According to McBrien (2005) ^[13], the difficulties encompass linguistic obstacles, psychological distress, interrupted education, and socio-economic disadvantages. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) ^[18] highlight the challenges that refugee young people encounter when adapting to new educational environment, which can have a substantial effect on their academic achievements and social assimilation.

Dressler and Gereluk (2017) ^[6] emphasise the specific challenges experienced by Syrian refugee students, whereby a significant number have encountered disruptions in their education and need supplementary assistance to bridge the gap with their fellow students. In the realm of higher education, Harris and Marlowe (2011) ^[9] examine the distinct educational ambitions and challenges faced by African refugee university students in Australia. They emphasise the necessity of providing tailored support services to cater to their particular requirements.

Effective approaches to assist refugee students include the establishment of inclusive educational settings, provision of

language assistance, and resolution of socio-emotional concerns. A study by Block *et al.* (2014) [2] examines the need of providing instructors with professional development opportunities to enhance their abilities in effectively assisting refugee pupils. This entails comprehending the cultural heritages of pupils and using inclusive pedagogical methods. Krustiyati's (2017) proposes a refugee management model through interfaith and intercultural dialogue approach in addition to just drafting legal framework within ASEAN community. According to Stewart (2011), educators should consider implementing community resources and engaging in partnership with refugee families in order to establish a conducive learning environment. Fransen, S. *et al.* (2018) [8] suggests specific Schooling can be a better option for refugees as studied by they found the effect of specific schooling for refugees a better option than the normal schools of the host country.

A study conducted by Boda *et al.* (2023) reveals that the presence of ethnic diversity in schools can facilitate the social integration of refugee pupils, therefore diminishing their sense of isolation and enhancing their sense of belonging. This assertion is substantiated by Taylor and Sidhu (2012) [18], who contend that the implementation of inclusive education methods is crucial for the effective assimilation of refugee pupils.

The literature reveals that although refugee students have substantial educational challenges, there exist efficacious tactics and practices that can facilitate their overcoming of these barriers. Central themes include the significance of inclusive educational settings, customised instructional approaches, and assistance for social integration. Yet, there are still gaps in the study, namely in comprehending the enduring effects of these approaches and the distinctive requirements of refugee children in various educational settings and contexts. Extensive research is required to establish inclusive support systems that specifically tackle the distinct challenges encountered by refugee students and enhance their academic achievements and overall well-being.

The Problem Formulation

Owing to the lack of explicit policy, rules, and legal statutes in India, the socio-economic and educational rights of migrants and refugees in India are sometimes unclear and uncertain. India provides them with assistance based on humanitarian principles as outlined in the rules of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Refugee and asylum seeker children get education via NGOs supported by UNHCR and the local community in refugee camp locations. These youngsters are also eligible to enroll at adjacent government schools as per the provisions of the Right to Education Act 2009. They are granted leniency in providing the birth certificate and residency verification for admission. However, the absence of a well-defined policy and direction exposes them to several hurdles and obstacles while attempting to access regular school education. A significant number of individuals are compelled to pursue alternative education in Madarsas. This research aims to comprehend the problems and obstacles encountered by refugee migrant children who are enrolled in a government school in terms of access and inclusion.

Objective

To study the issues and challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers at school level.

Research Questions

1. What are the issues and challenges faced by refugee children during the admission process in a school?
2. What are the issues and challenges faced by refugee children in the classroom transactions?
3. What are the issues and challenges faced by refugee children in school in terms of inclusion?
4. What are the issues and challenges faced by refugee children with the teachers' behaviour?

Methodology

The population for the present study consisted of all young forcibly displaced migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from various countries residing in India. A sample of 20 refugee students from different locations of Delhi (consisting of 5 Pakistani Hindus from Majnu Tila camp, 5 Rohingyas from Shaheen Bagh camp, 5 Afghanis from Bhogal area, and 5 Somalis/Africans from Nawada area) studying in Delhi government schools was selected using purposive sampling technique. The study employed a mixed method approach to collect data consisting of observations and interviews conducted with students and discussion with their parents and camp leaders. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while the qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns. Additionally, secondary data from reputable journals and websites of other organisations is gathered to complement the main data.

Respondent's Profile Analysis

Age Group: The refugee migrants who were examined in this study are between the ages of 12 and 18 and are enrolled in grades VI to XII.

Gender Distribution: In the sample of 20 respondents, 15% (3) are female and 85% (17) are male. No respondents have identified as other gender.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are analysed and discussed according to the research questions framed, based on the objective. The researcher collected data with the help of an interview schedule, the themes of the interview were pertaining to admission, classroom transaction, school experiences in terms of inclusive practices and interaction with teachers and parents.

RQ 1. What are the Issues and Challenges Faced by Refugee Migrant Children during Admission at the School? Admission

Table 1: Issues and challenges in admission as reported by the students.

Challenges in Admission	Lack of Documents	Age criteria	Language Barriers
Responses	19/20 (95%)	9 (45%)	14/20 (70%)

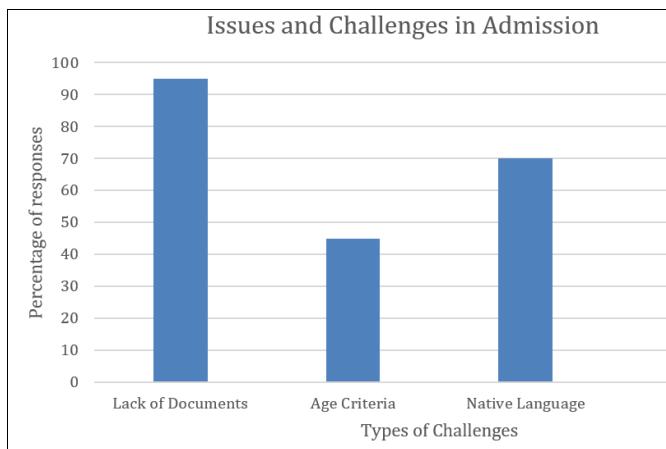


Fig 1: Issues and challenges in admission as reported by the students

Researcher asked students on the challenges that they experienced during the school admission process. The students unanimously disclosed that they encountered numerous obstacles during the admission process. Primarily, 95% of them encountered difficulties in getting admission because they lacked the necessary documentation confirming their identity and address. The students lacked the necessary documentation specified by the schools, like Adhaar Card and Bank Account details. Additionally, their UNHCR card was still being processed. Insufficient availability of necessary documents resulted in a prolonged waiting period for enrolment and led to a learning gap.

Approximately 45% of the respondents indicated that they faced difficulties as because of the age criteria mandated by the education system in India. According to their observations, children in the early years get admission easily into primary classes. However, when it comes to higher levels, particularly in 9th standard and higher, they have challenges owing to age requirements and the necessary basic knowledge. They are compelled to enroll in Notional Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), although they want to study in a regular school.

According to the survey, 70% of students reported that they are speaker of a different native language and struggle to comprehend the Hindi language, which is predominantly used in schools. Therefore, the school administration preferred to take admission of Hindi speaking children and the other non-Hindi speaking children were asked to come after few weeks for admission, after having some proficiency in both Hindi and English language.

RQ2. What are the Issues and Challenges Faced by Refugee Children in the Classroom Transactions? Classroom Transactions

Table 2: Classroom transactions

Challenges in classroom transactions	Language (Medium of Instruction)	Context and relevancy	Availability of learning material
Responses	20/20 (100%)	16 (80%)	20/20 (100%)

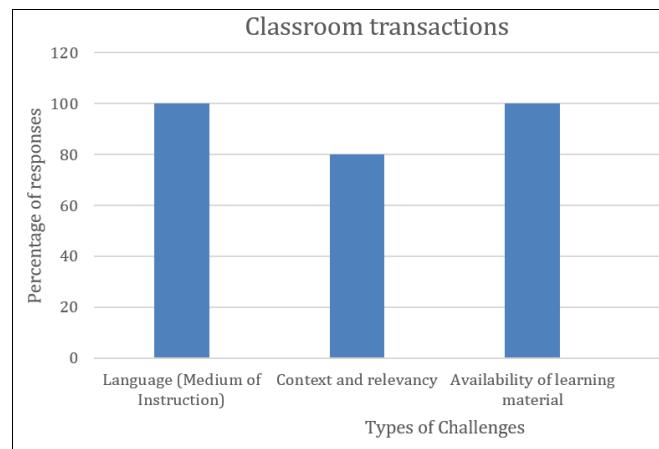


Fig 2: Classroom transactions

When it comes to challenges in the classroom transactions provided in the schools, Researcher found that all the students face difficulty in respect of understanding and relevancy, they found themselves as empty headed, unacquainted, without cultural interest and unversant. When the researcher tried to find the reasons, the medium of instruction, context of the knowledge imparted and learning material are the major challenges that they are facing. All the students reported that the medium instruction in the schools is Hindi or English and they are native speakers of different languages. They struggle to capture what is imparting in class but they fail. There is no one at the home who could support in learning the concept and completing the home work. 80% of children also reported that they are of different cultural geographical background and the context of content provided them in the school is irrelevant to them and they feel blank some times. All the students had also reported that there is no support material or learning material available in the school for addressing their needs.

RQ 3. What are the Issues and Challenges Faced by Refugee Children in the School in Terms of Inclusion? Social Experience (Inclusion)

Table 3: Social Experience (Inclusion)

Challenges in Social Experience (Inclusion)	Interaction	Acceptance (Sharing of resources)	Bullying	Participation
Responses	15/20 (75%)	13 (65%)	7/20 (35%)	12/20 (60%)

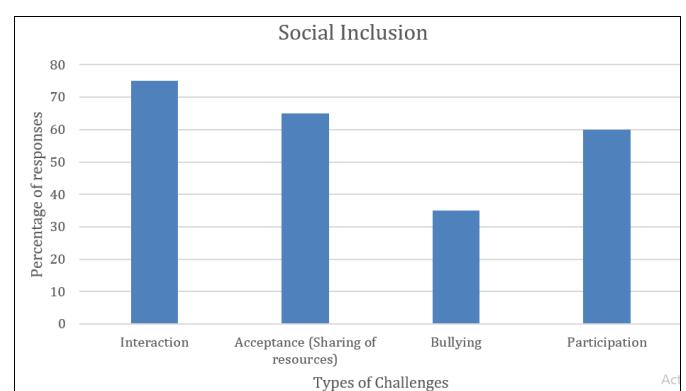


Fig 3: Social Experience (Inclusion)

Inclusion is an important prerequisite for the success of any education system. Refugees and asylum seekers reported many challenges that they have to face in the social inclusion process and make them feel isolated. The researcher classified them into four sub categories those are interactions with other classmates, acceptance and cooperation from peers, bullying and participation in various curricular and co-curricular activities. 75% of them reported that they do not talk much in the class and class mates, have very a smaller number of friends and the other children also do not talk much with them. They sometimes feel peregrine. 65% of them reported that as they have language problem, they need extra support but the native students of class do not provide or provide a very less support and sharing of resources. They need friendliness. 35% of them reported that they also faced bullying in school as the native students see them as stranger with different look and they call them with various names. Few times they also tried to fight with them. 40% of them reported that they want to participate in various curricular and cocurricular activities but teachers and pupils ignore them because of their language, culture, and separate identity.

RQ 4. What are the issues and challenges faced by refugee children with the teachers' behavior?

Teachers' Behaviour

Table 4: Teachers Behaviour

Challenges in Teacher Behaviour	Discrimination in giving opportunities	Individualized Attention	Lack of empathy
Responses	18/20 (90%)	17/20 (85%)	14/20 (70%)

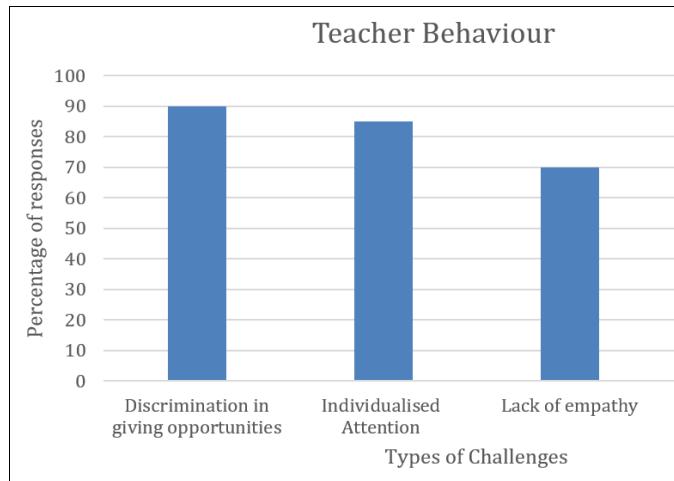


Fig 4: Teachers Behaviour

Students also revealed the challenges on the part of teachers. 90% of the students reported that they feel discrimination on the part of teachers when they assign different tasks and duties. They do not properly provide us the ample opportunities to participate. 85% of them reported that they are facing language and cultural barriers in their learning and need special individualized attention and remedial measures but it is not available to us. They also reported that teachers do not have empathy to them.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that refugee and asylum-seeking children face many difficulties and challenges since admission to continuation of their studies. A large number of these children dropped out in early due to these challenges.

India is not a signatory of UN Refugee convention but always support their cause on humanitarian ground. When these forcibly displaced children try to continue their studies in the country of asylum, they reported many difficulties specially lack of proper documents, age criteria and language of communication. Although some of the refugees succeed to get Aadhaar card and get admission in Delhi Government School with the help of social worker and NGOs working in the field. After taking admission they now face difficulties related to the content provided in the classroom which they found it irrelevant and out of their context because of language and cultural differences. The kind of environment they live in, the rate of crime is high and their chances of falling into the clutches of criminals are high. Many NGOs like BOSCO, National Organisation for Social Environment, Deepalaya Trust, Zakat Foundation and Humanitarian Aid International are providing them support in getting education and skill development. They feel isolated and discriminated from the side of the peers and teachers in the classroom and school due to their limitations for social inclusion. There is lack of knowledge, awareness and sensitisation among teachers, peers and other stakeholders about the education of refugee children. There is a need to provide support and remedial measures. These children feel stressful due to language, cultural, and social issues. They have lag in the basic literacy and understanding of concepts due to disturbance in their life. They feel inferior to local students and lack confidence to build social relations. Most of them described the behaviour of teachers and peers as cooperative. After the analysis and interview it can be suggested that some important steps to be taken to overcome problems of the refugee children includes the provision of special training and counselling to school administration and teachers, bridge courses to fill the gap in learning for learners, availability of language expert services, vocational education to become self-reliant and to support their families. There is a need to relax the admission rules for them and some adaptations to make them included in the main stream of education.

Conclusion

Refugees and asylum seekers face many difficulties and challenges while getting education in the host country. These challenges range from the process of getting admission to the completion of their studies. Education has been widely recognized as basic human right under many international conventions and treaties. Furthermore, its remarkable healing properties make it particularly significant for those who have been forcefully displaced from their homeland. It is helpful in adapting to new environment and to develop essential skills to become self-reliant. In this context, it is essential to implement a policy of inclusion in education for these children. This policy should include providing additional academic support in the form of learning materials, as well as ensuring the availability of supporting teachers and para teachers. Teachers should be trained and sensitized to understand and to address the need of these special learners in our classrooms. Proficiency in the language of the host country not only affects the capacity to learn and expertise, but also shapes the pace and the degree of social and cultural integration with the host community, which is crucial for adapting to a new setting. Hence, training and basic communication skills need to be developed among refugee children in order to cope up with classroom transactions. Native students must also be sensitized to empathize about refugee concerns.

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