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ENSURING EFFECTIVE EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE PUPILS: INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A STUDY IN ENGLAND

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Article Info

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Abstract

This study explores positive practices implemented by educators with refugee pupils in two schools in England. The research emphasizes the need for holistic models of education that prioritize the creation of welcoming environments and promote social-emotional well-being alongside language and academic skills. Asset-based approaches that focus on the strengths of refugee pupils are also discussed. The study provides examples of the positive practices used, including creating a welcoming environment, promoting social-emotional well-being, and supporting English language learning. The factors that shape these practices, including pedagogical knowledge, school-level knowledge and practices, and national education system characteristics, are also examined. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on good practice with refugee pupils and highlight the views of mainstream educators. The study provides insights that can be used to improve practices and promote supportive and effective education for refugee pupils.

INTRODUCTION

Forced migration has increased globally every year since 2011 (UNHCR, 2021) and has re- entered a prominent place in the news cycle following the Taliban's repossession of control in Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the end of 2020, there were 82.4 million forced migrants worldwide, including 26.4 million refugees and 4.1 million asylum seekers, with the vast majority of refugees (86%) hosted by neighbouring – and usually low- income – countries (UNHCR, 2021). The UK, however, does resettle and grant asylum to tens of thousands of refugees each year (UNHCR, 2020). Many of these newcomers are school- aged children who have a right under UK and international law to a high- quality education. Furthermore, school is often identified as an important factor in young refugees' process of settling into life in a new country, promoting the development of language and academic skills as well as social relationships and a sense of belonging (Allsopp & Chase, 2017; Candappa & Egharevba, 2000; de WalPastoor, 2015; Fazel & Stein, 2002; McIntyre & Abrams, 2021).

In England, studies show that schools have a wide variation in experience with refugee pupils and a corresponding variation in their relevant knowledge and practices with these pupils (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Ofsted, 2003;

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Prentice & Ott, 2021; Whiteman, 2005). Given the documented importance of school for refugee children and the continued reception of new arrivals into the country, it is imperative that schools and educators have the tools they need to enact good practice. To this end, this study asks: *What are educators' positive practices with refugee pupils and how are these practices shaped?* A better understanding of the factors that shape educators' practices can be used to improve these practices where needed, and thus contribute to the overarching goal of ensuring that refugee children across England, no matter where they arrive in the system, can access a supportive and effective education provision.

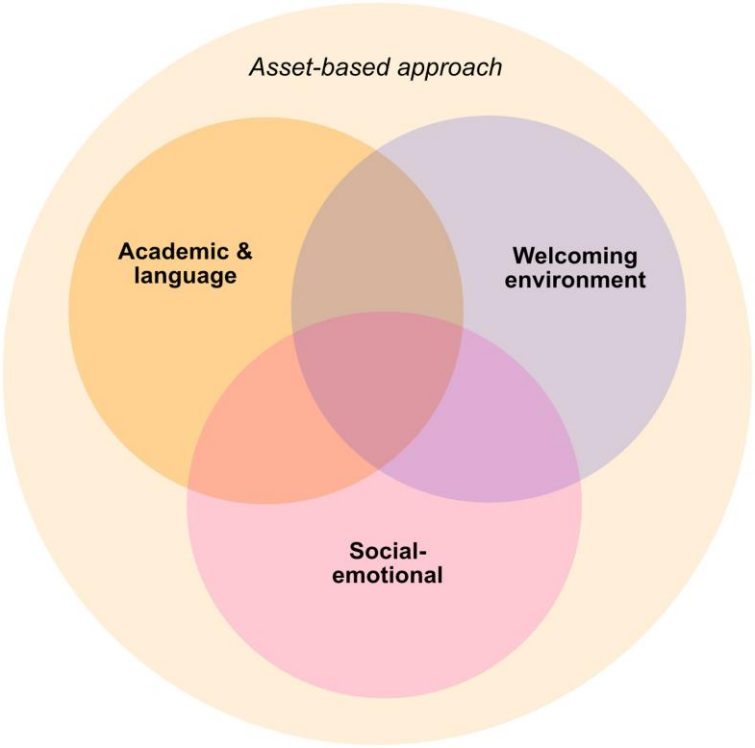
Previous studies of educators' practices with refugee pupils focus mainly on the unit of the school (Peterson, Meehan, Durrant, & Ali, 2017; Pugh et al., 2012; Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020) or local authority (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017; Vidal de Haymes et al., 2018) as case studies, or compare the policies and practices of different national education systems (Crul et al., 2019; Koehler & Schneider, 2019). When individual educators are the focus, they are often specialists, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers or school leaders (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021; McIntyre & Hall, 2018). These perspectives are important but given that most educators are not specialists, and that the English 'Teachers' Standards' require all teachers to 'adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils' (Department for Education, 2011, p. 11), understanding the perspectives of mainstream educators is essential. This study therefore contributes to the discussion in two principle ways: (1) it emphasises the perspectives of individual educators set within the contexts of their schools; and (2) the participant educators include 'regular' mainstream teachers and teaching assistants, alongside specialists like EAL teachers.

Conceptualising positive practices

In this study, 'positive practices' is conceptualised as a collection of practices that have been identified as positive for refugee children's learning and well- being. It aims to encompass two related areas in the literature – the concept of a holistic model of refugee education and the concept of an asset- based approach to refugee education. A holistic model of refugee education emphasises the importance of creating a welcoming environment and promoting social– emotional well- being in addition to supporting academic and language learning (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; de Wal Pastoor, 2016; Pinson & Arnot, 2010; Rutter, 2006). Currently, there are few studies that rigorously evaluate what type of provision is linked to the best outcomes for refugee pupils, for example by comparing the outcomes of a particular programme with those of a control group. There is, however, a range of literature drawing on the voices of academic experts, education and social work practitioners, young refugees and their families that calls for a holistic model as good practice (Block et al., 2014; McIntyre et al., 2018; Taylor & Kaur Sidhu, 2012). Pinson and Arnot (2010) argue that holistic approaches simultaneously appreciate cultural differences and promote social inclusion of refugee pupils, recognising the whole child rather than, for example, simply their language or mental health needs. de Wal Pastoor (2016) gives a broader definition, including within holistic practices larger structural factors such as education policy and curricula that support inclusive, learner-centred classroom practices. In this study, the focus was intended to be holistic practices at the classroom level; however, factors at the national system level were found to be influential, as described in subsequent sections below.

The term 'positive practices' was also selected to encompass the literature on strength or asset- based approaches to refugee education. Numerous studies note that in order to make it as far as they have, refugees and asylum seekers – and particularly unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) – must be highly resilient and resourceful individuals (Bronstein et al., 2013; Butler, 2005; Muecke, 1992). As Matthews (2008, p. 40) puts it: 'Indeed, it is because of their independence, not their dependence, that people become refugees in the first place.' Asset- based approaches recognise that refugee children – rather than lacking in skills and experiences – may simply bring different types of skills and experiences to the classroom. Roy and Roxas (2011) for example,

described how Somali Bantu refugee parents in Texas contributed to their children's education through oral storytelling, even when they themselves were illiterate. Moll et al. (1992) documented a plethora of knowledge and experience that migrant Mexican children in the US accumulated at home that could potentially be seen as a rich resource at school. Similarly, Miller et al. (2021) argue that refugee children in Australia have a wealth of social and cultural capital – such as languages, knowledge, relationships, and aspirations – that schools could recognise, value, and connect with, rather than focusing on perceived deficits within the dominant culture society. Overall, this study therefore conceptualises positive practices as holistic – that is, emphasising welcoming and well- being alongside academics and



FIGUR E 1 A holistic, asset- based model of positive practices with refugee pupils [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

host country language acquisition – and asset- based – that is, focusing upon and building on refugee pupils' strengths (Figure 1).

An ecological model of educators' practices

This study also employs an ecological model to better understand the factors that shape educators' practices with refugee pupils at the individual, group, and system levels. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model was originally created to conceptualise the contextual nature of human development and has been utilised extensively in research related to children and young people (see, for example, Aleghfeli & Hunt, 2022 and Miller et al. 2021 in the refugee education space). Bronfenbrenner's model consists of the individual situated within micro, meso, exo and macro- systems – with bidirectional influences running between the different levels. Recently, Bronfenbrenner's framework was adapted by Buchanan (2020) to conceptualise factors influencing the education of new teachers in the US – with, for example, a mesosystem composed of the teacher education programme, an exosystem composed of the school district and university and a macrosystem including national and state education policies and discourses. In the present study, a similar ecosystems model will be used to conceptualise the contexts in which educators' practices with refugee pupils develop (Figure 2).

Notes on terminology

In this article, I use the term 'educator' to encompass a range of school staff, including class teachers, teaching assistants, specialist teachers and school leaders. Similarly, the term

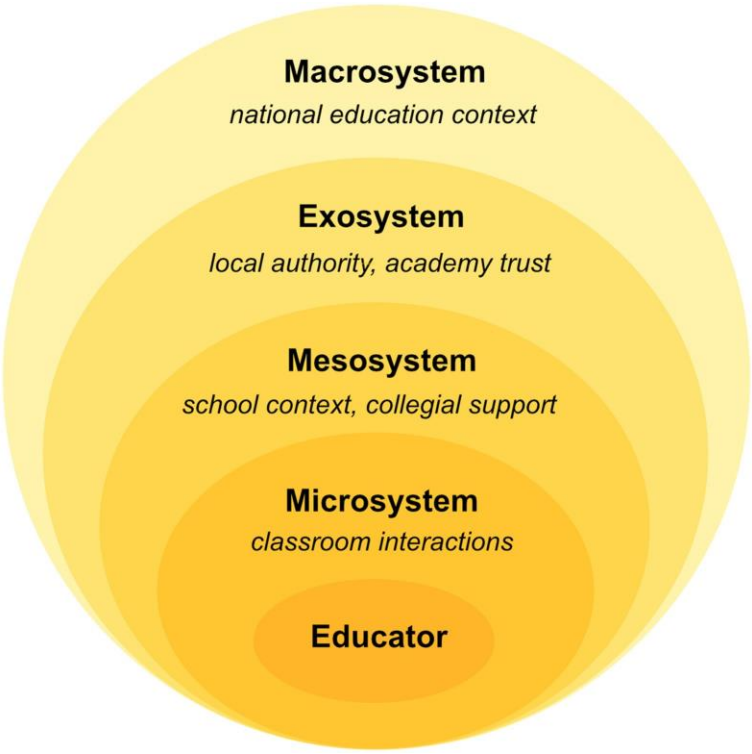


FIGURE 2 An ecological model of educator development [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

'refugee pupil' refers to recently arrived children with refugee status as well as those who are seeking asylum. Whilst the difference between these immigration statuses is clearly of importance in the lives of individual pupils, for educators, what is required in terms of practices is largely the same. The main exception to this is UASC, who arrive in the UK without their parents or usual caregivers and who therefore have an additional set of educator practices associated with the involvement of the children's social care system. In the following, I will use the term UASC when referring specifically to this group of young people.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on case studies of 17 educators at two schools with experience working with refugee pupils. Qualitative methods were selected to address the exploratory, process- focused nature of the research question. Data were collected by the author through participant observation and semi- structured interviews with educators. The research was approved by the Central University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (reference number ED- CIA- 18- 174).

School A and School B were located in the same city in England and were selected as case study sites owing to their serving a relatively high proportion of refugee pupils for the area. School A was a secondary school with a local reputation for being welcoming to refugee pupils and recent immigrants more generally. It had a special upper secondary 'sixth form' for beginner English learners that many UASC in the area attended. School B was a primary school with extensive experience of pupils with EAL and, more recently, with refugee pupils who had arrived through the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme. I selected a primary school as the second case study site in order to address questions around pupil age and provision that were raised at School A. Both schools had a higher than average proportion of pupils with EAL and pupils who received free school meals – the latter of which is a marker for socio- economic disadvantage in the English system. The schools were both

'academies' – that is, funded directly by the national Department for Education, much like a charter school in the US – but were not connected in other ways, such as School B being a 'feeder' school into School A or being part of the same 'academy chain'.

At each school, the case study educators were mainly selected by senior leaders, which meant that there was an element of selection bias inherent in the sample. Leaders gave me a timetable of classes to attend after asking class teachers to participate, then I approached additional staff such as teaching assistants after starting to attend the classes. Potential participants were given written and verbal information about the project and provided consent before observation and interviews, with the option to stop participation at any time. Throughout data collection, I aimed to follow the British Educational Research Association's ethical research guideline number 6, 'maximising the benefits and minimising the risks to participants' (BERA, 2018) by avoiding excessive time burdens on participant educators and offering my assistance in lessons. I spent 7– 8 weeks at each case study school; my time with each educator varied from full days for 2– 3 weeks (primary) to 1– 6 hours per week (secondary) (Tables 1– 3).

My participation in each class varied depending on the age of the children and the wishes of the class teacher. In younger classes and the separate EAL provision, this meant actively supporting pupils most of the time, while in older secondary classes I had less to offer and thus tended towards the 'observer' end of the participant- observer spectrum. I took abbreviated notes whenever possible throughout the school day, then typed and expanded the notes when I got home each evening. Each participant educator was interviewed once, using a list of core questions as a loose guide to the conversation. I transcribed the interview recordings – and notes, in two cases where participant educators preferred not to be recorded – as soon as possible following the interview. On several occasions, educators brought up themes from the interviews at a later date and these informal conversations were also a rich source of data. Transcriptions of the interviews and observation notes were compiled and analysed thematically in order to facilitate triangulation between data sources. Data were analysed in NVivo, employing a mix of inductive and deductive coding. Throughout, I followed the framework presented by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) as a general guide, asking: (1) what are the data telling me; (2) what is it I want to know; and (3) what is the dialectical relationship between the two?

Throughout both the observations and interviews, I was aware that social desirability bias likely played a role in educators' actions and statements. To counter this, I assured participants of their anonymity and aimed to establish as strong a rapport with them as possible, thereby increasing the chances that they would feel comfortable expressing their views and behaving in a relaxed manner. It is impossible, however, to completely

TA BLE 1 Case study school sites

School A	School B
Secondary (ages 11– 18)	Primary (ages 3– 11)
40.4% English as an Additional Language	45% English as an Additional Language
33.5% Free School Meals	20.8% Free School Meals
History of welcoming refugee pupils	Recent arrival of Syrian pupils through resettlement scheme
EAL Department – mix of separate and mainstream provision	Immediate mainstreaming of all newly arrived pupils

TA BLE 2 Case study educators at school A

Name	Role	Professional experience
Kasia	Class teacher	5 years teaching, 2 years as TA
Habibah	Teaching assistant	4 years as TA, 1 year as volunteer
Palesa	Class teacher	1 year teaching, 7 years as TA
Beatrice	Teaching assistant	3 years as TA, 19 years teaching
Samantha	Teaching assistant	3 years as TA
Safiya	Class teacher/EAL lead	27 years teaching
Aaron	Teaching assistant	2 years as TA
Ruth	School leader	15 years teaching

Abbreviations: TA, Teaching assistant.

TA BLE 3 Case study educators at school B

Name	Role	Professional experience
Catherine	Subject teacher	34 years teaching
Don	Subject teacher	9 years teaching
Eleanor	EAL and subject teacher	30+ years teaching
Fiona	EAL and subject teacher	10 years teaching
Michael	Subject teacher	19 years teaching
Margaret	Head of EAL	30 years teaching
Syed	Subject teacher	6 years teaching
Shauna	Subject teacher	4 years teaching
Simone	Subject teacher and senior leader	19 years teaching

erase the role of social desirability. An alternative approach is to consider my positionality when interpreting the study's findings (Attia & Edge, 2017). I am a white woman and an immigrant to the UK from the US – the latter of which is immediately apparent from my accent. I am also more highly educated than the average, as is apparent in that I am a doctoral student. These factors are markers for positive attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, and it is likely that participant educators noted the same factors and correctly assumed my attitudes. This could have affected how educators treated refugee pupils when I was present in their classrooms, and how they framed their thoughts and opinions in interviews. It is also worth noting that I worked at a primary school a few miles down the road from School A and School B for several years before – and part time, during – data collection. Thus, I was both an insider and an outsider, with the details shifting depending on who I was interacting

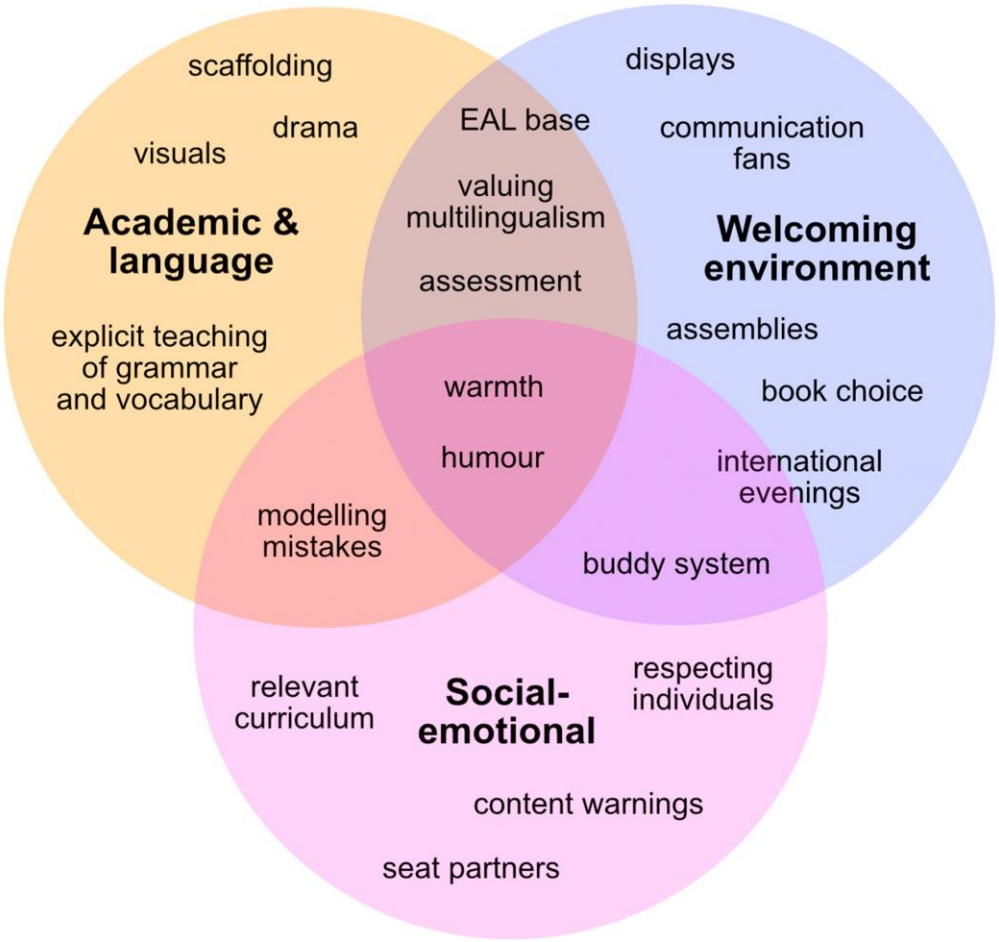
with. For example, I connected with educators who were also immigrants over some quirks of British culture, while non- immigrant educators noted my accent and other language differences. While I was a visitor to both schools, I was also aware of the local education scene, and had formerly taught several children at School A when they were primary pupils. My insider– outsider position was a factor that I regularly reflected upon while collecting and analysing data, in terms of how participants interacted with me and how they interacted with their pupils while I was present (Tables 1– 3).

RESULTS

This study found that educators at School A and School B enacted a range of practices with refugee pupils that fit within the literature's call for a holistic approach (Figure 3). These practices were shaped by educators' knowledge about teaching refugee pupils and the collective institutional knowledge of the case study schools. Furthermore, although this study set out to focus on individual educators and their school contexts, it was impossible to ignore the influence of the national education system, particularly with regards to the exam- based curriculum and associated pressures to perform.

Welcoming environment

Both School A and School B made an effort to provide a welcoming environment – to newcomers and to pupils more generally. At School A, the reception area was decorated with framed newspaper articles of pupils, school prospectuses and school newsletters, accompanied by photos reflecting the diverse ethnic make- up of the pupil population. Both the



FIGUR E 3 Examples of positive practices at school A and school B [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

physical environment and the behaviour I observed in school staff suggested that many educators were making an effort to be welcoming to pupils. In my fieldnotes, I wrote:

> What is School A like? … There's a give- one- take- one book exchange on the window ledges in one corridor… and adults and children often hold doors for each other … The attendance officers chew kids out when they arrive late, but they also spend a few minutes discussing a late boy's new coat and scarf, bright yellow both. An adult calls across the courtyard to a boy: Are you behaving yourself? Yes, Miss. All week long? Yes, Miss (sly grin). They both laugh. Subtext: she knows he doesn't always behave, probably hasn't managed all week, but she likes him anyways.

School A had an EAL 'base', which was a classroom located in a central, well- frequented part of the campus, making it easy for pupils to drop in and emphasising that EAL learning was a central part of the school's work. When newly arrived pupils first started at School A, the EAL educators – three teachers and one teaching assistant – assessed their language and academic skills and created personalised timetables for each. Possible provisions included anything from full- time mainstream classes – usually for younger pupils – to nearly full separation in the EAL sixth form, a programme for pupils who arrived in the older grades with very little English language. In my fieldnotes, I wrote that no matter if they were in full- time mainstream classes, at the end of each day, several refugee pupils would 'congregate in/outside base, picking up siblings, meeting, checking in'. When I shared this observation with Margaret, the head of EAL, she said it had taken a concerted effort to create this welcoming, drop- in culture:

> Well when I first started here, our asylum seeker students sort of assumed that we had a direct line to the Home Office, and that anything they said to us we would report directly to the authorities. And we had to work really hard to break that down, and say actually we're not working for the government, we're here for you. And I think building up trust with young people has been a really big part of what we do. So that means we now have constant students on the door [laughs].

At School B, the primary case study, the front entrance hosted a large display of the previous year's school play, and another of an 'International Evening' – illustrating a packed school hall and tables full of food from around the world. In some classrooms, displayed vocabulary words had been translated into Arabic at some point in the past; now the cards were looking worn around the edges. At School B, all newly arrived refugee pupils were immediately placed in mainstream classes. At times, the school created small groups for support with beginner EAL, when the need was seen as high and there was a teaching assistant available to facilitate. Ruth, the school leader who coordinated this support, said that the decision to immediately mainstream was ideological – to be inclusive – but was also partially 'down to cost'. She added that so far they had found that 'most children cope with being fully immersed'. School B provided newly arrived EAL learners with a communication fan that had symbols for basics like 'happy', 'sad', 'hungry' and 'toilet', and arranged peer buddies for all newcomers, regardless of whether or not they spoke English. In addition to these set practices, I observed educators make efforts to be overtly welcoming to pupils from other countries. On one occasion, the head teacher reframed the Red Nose Day assembly – normally a jovial, celebratory fundraising event – to include a sombre discussion of the Christchurch, New Zealand mosque massacre, which had taken place that morning, stating explicitly that the school respected and valued its Muslim families. This was followed by a video showing Afghani refugees living in Serbia and a discussion of why people sometimes have to leave their homes. In my fieldnotes, I noted: 'The film came from the Red Nose Day website. There were several to choose from, but she chose refugees'.

On a more day- to- day basis, I frequently observed class teacher Safiya chatting with parents in Arabic at pick-up time and translating various documents that they brought to her, often unrelated to school matters. This gave the area outside her classroom a welcoming, sociable air and, in my observations, parents lingered longer there than in other pick- up areas. Safiya also made a point of regularly valuing multilingualism. I observed her asking

pupils how to pronounce sounds and say phrases in their home languages, and explicitly stating how wonderful she thought it was to speak multiple languages. In an interview, she related how one new arrival had been changed by these practices:

S: Sometimes, actually, children who come from different countries, it depends on the school environment, they are embarrassed to say anything about their country. Or even say a word in their own language. And they tell you, I'm from England. I don't know if you had noted this? H— was the same until he saw us all talking in different languages, encouraging it. Before he used to go – Mum has no idea, not a single word in English [and he would not speak his home language with her at school].

C: And he wouldn't speak?

S: Wouldn't. But now he translated all about the trip to St Paul cathedral! So it's just the confidence, do you know what I mean? Here we do respect that they come from a different country, we value their differences as well.

Another class teacher at School B, Kasia, told me how she selected a class reading book, *The Unforgotten Coat*, because it dealt with how newly arrived immigrants can feel more or less welcomed in their schools. Finally, teaching assistant Habibah described how she aimed to tailor her welcome to individual children's personalities. She provided home- communication books in Arabic to newly arrived refugee pupils whose families spoke Arabic, but related to me how one pupil preferred more independence, so she stopped: 'It depends on the character of the child'.

EAL strategies

Educators also enacted positive practices with refugee pupils through their use of EAL teaching strategies. The main types of EAL strategies that educators employed were visuals and dramatisation to support understanding. At School A, for example, class teacher Simone made frequent use of historical photos and film clips, while in the EAL sixth form, the educators – and pupils – used an impressive mix of mime and internet image searches to enable discussions about everything from school rules to gun control to global inequality.

At School B, Safiya and Kasia scanned illustrations from class texts to display as talking points and visually modelled all tasks (WAGOLL – What A Good One Looks Like) for pupils before sending them to work independently. Safiya explained that 'visual, loads of visual' was the main message of an EAL training course she had taken years previously: 'WAGOLL was part of the training … It's to show them, because if you tell them they have to do this and they have to do that, the children don't understand but you have to show them modelling'.

Educators at both schools explicitly taught English vocabulary and grammar. In the EAL sixth form, Fiona often had pupils sing or chant new words to help remember them. I recorded in my fieldnotes:

What happens when things change state? Ms puts 'evaporation' and 'condensation' to the tune of the Hallelujah chorus, gets us to annunciate each syllable in this way. (J— and N— continue to sing it throughout the lesson and in lessons following, when encountering the words.)

Similarly, I observed Kasia direct her class to repeat new vocabulary words in 'opera singer voice', 'baby voice', whispers, shouts, etc., which was met with enthusiastic participation. She noted to me afterwards that she aimed to teach the whole class as though they have EAL, since she found many of the strategies to be engaging and effective for everyone. I also observed educators focus specifically on vocabulary and grammar points with refugee pupils and other pupils with EAL. In a Year 10 class, Catherine habitually checked in on a newly arrived pupil, suggesting sentence starters and defining words. In Year 2, Safiya paused a phonics lesson to explain to speakers of other languages that in many accents of British English, the 'ir' sound – as in 'bird' – is not as pronounced as one might expect if one is accustomed to rolling or otherwise emphasising the letter r.

Finally, educators used educator and peer scaffolding to support English language acquisition. In a Year 8 class at School A, for example, class teacher Syed recognised that a new arrival from Syria had good maths skills

although she understood little English. He sat her next to another pupil from Syria who had better English but was behind in maths, so that they could support each other. In interview, he said that the teaching assistant was often not available, so he used this seating arrangement to support both pupils:

I know A— 's English is a lot better than N— , so it makes sense to pair them up and A— will explain a lot of things to N— . And N— is very good at, if you slow your speech down she will try and understand things, so again everything is done on a day- to- day basis of what I have available. If I've got a TA, obviously the TA will sit with them. If not, I take it as it comes, you know, come check on them more regularly.

At School B, Palesa scaffolded the speech of a newly arrived refugee pupil so that he could share news when passing the 'listening teddy' at circle time. As I recorded in my fieldnotes: 'Ms gives B— his words one by one. He repeats, grinning, smothering teddy in an embrace (I – played – with – my – brothers).'

Social– emotional well- being

Finally, case study educators enacted positive practices through their promotion of refugee pupils' social– emotional well- being. Educators took action to foster positive peer relationships for refugee pupils, for example through alterations of seating assignments or learning groups. In younger classes, such as Reception at School B, I observed educators encouraging children to invite a newly arrived refugee pupil to join their play. In Year 5, Kasia said she tried to select topics of learning that would 'celebrate' the countries and cultures of newly arrived pupils so that refugee pupils and their classmates did not see them only 'through the optics of the conflict':

So this year we have H— and E— from Syria. So our first topic was 'Golden Age of Islam', we are talking about Bagdad and you can see our Islamic tiles, going to the museum. And that was done specifically so Syria doesn't equate with war, civil war … you know that sort of thing.

At School A, Michael commented to me between lessons on how a refugee pupil was getting along with his table group, and Simone said she was considering changing a refugee pupil's seat so that he was better supported academically. In my fieldnotes, I wrote:

After class, Ms says she seats refugee student with limited English near a boy who is 'bright' and has 'been through a similar experience' in terms of settling into new school, country, learning English. But she's thinking of moving him near someone with better study skills so as not to hold him back.

Educators also looked out for refugee pupils' well- being through making learning relevant to their experiences and interests. In Year 10, for example, Simone facilitated tangential discussions on the Berlin Wall, the US–Mexico border wall and the ethics of national borders in general, sparked by interest from refugee pupils. In the EAL base, Margaret noted that they were able to tailor their curricular content directly to pupils' interests:

Young people are open- minded and curious and they want to know about the world. And so we found this thing called the 'Unit Award Scheme' which allows us to teach small units of work on almost any topic. And if we don't like what's online we can actually write our own units.

In practice, I observed lessons in the EAL sixth form on topics as wide- ranging as 'The Solar System' and 'The Royal Family', with spontaneous digressions on topics such as the value of different national currencies.

Finally, educators promoted refugee pupils' social– emotional well- being through the respectful addressing of individual needs. Several mainstream secondary educators were observed to quietly 'check in' with refugee pupils throughout lessons. In the EAL sixth form, one pupil spoke aloud to himself, seemingly due to nerves, and was permitted to do so as long as it was not disruptively loud. At School B, I observed Palesa allow a newly arrived refugee pupil to sit right next to her feet and keep a hand on her leg while she addressed the whole class. When I asked her about this in an interview, she explained that she had found the pupil was calmer when he was allowed to touch her:

He is a very tactile child … and that gives him a sense of comfort … so with him, I go with that. Obviously there are boundaries but I do allow him to sit at the front with his hand on my knee or hold his hand, to walk

holding his hand, just to always – he almost needs that to be ok, and he's so – he looks at your face, he goes off how your emotions are now, and he responds to that and he wants you to laugh at him … that's where he gets his assurance, so I give him that as much as I can.

Knowledge shaping practices: micro, meso, and exosystem factors

One of the main factors that educators said shaped their positive practices with refugee pupils was their relevant pedagogical knowledge. Within this theme, they referenced microsystem and mesosystem factors – that is, they spoke about how their knowledge shaped their practices within their individual classrooms, but also about how the input of more knowledgeable colleagues and school support structures was essential. Case study educators' knowledge about teaching EAL offers an illustrative example of this dynamic. Knowledge about EAL varied between educators, depending on professional and personal experience. The EAL leaders and specialists had decades of collective experience working with refugee pupils and other pupils with EAL and a range of formal qualifications including master's degrees, TESOL certificates, counselling courses and experience working abroad. In contrast, some mainstream educators had only recently started teaching, or had started teaching at the case study schools, and said that they relied on support from these in- house 'experts' to know what to do with newly arrived refugee pupils. As mainstream secondary educator Shauna noted, without the support of EAL specialists, 'we'd be lost. It would be a real shame for those students because I think they'd struggle to meet their potential. The EAL department are golden'. EAL specialists at School A provided in- house training sessions, regular 'learning walks' in mainstream classrooms, and perhaps most prized by their colleagues, near constantly available ad- hoc support. Similarly, at School B, Safiya undertook 'learning walks' and created a folder of electronic resources for EAL teaching but was also known to provide assistance as and when required, or 'embedded' in the system as she put it. Thus, knowledge held within the school- level mesosystem supported educators' knowledge and practices within the microsystems of their classrooms. Beyond the micro- and mesosystems, exosystem factors such as the Local Education Authority (LEA) were also mentioned as supporting educators' knowledge and practices, although this was a much less prominent theme across interviews. Safiya, for example, noted that she had received extensive training from the LEA – the local government body overseeing schools in each county – before LEAs were abolished in 2010, and Margaret and Eleanor both mentioned previous training through the local authority.

In terms of knowledge content, educators also said that they had knowledge about trauma and social– emotional well- being that informed their practices with refugee pupils – although in interviews this was much less emphasised than EAL knowledge and mainly took the form of awareness around lesson content and the potential to upset pupils. English teacher Shauna, for example said that she spoke with refugee pupils prior to watching a film clip of bombs exploding, as part of the class's unit on War Poetry. History teacher Simone noted that she could not avoid violence in the curriculum, but that she tried to be sensitive to how pupils were reacting:

I kind of watch what's going on. I talk to them if it's going to be difficult – I talk to the class if it's going to be a difficult topic, and then I'll touch base and say, are you ok? Just sort of touch base. And if I notice anything I will give space. I can't not do it because they've got to know it.

At School B, Beatrice and Safiya both noted that they intended to avoid upsetting refugee pupils through curricular content, but that they were still learning what types of content might be upsetting – they related experiences using images with fire and a volcano that had unintentionally upset a child who was reminded of bombings.

Outside of curricular content, educators did not tend to mention knowledge related to social– emotional well-being, trauma or mental health – with the exception of Margaret, who had been on a counselling course and said she would like to provide an in- house training session on 'what trauma does to your brain and to your behaviour'. Yet, while other educators did not much mention knowledge related to well- being, in my observations they frequently enacted well- being related practices, as detailed above under 'holistic practices'. This suggests that

they either found the topic unimportant to speak about in interviews, for example when compared with EAL strategies, or that it was a tacit type of knowledge that shaped their practices unconsciously.

The national education context: macrosystem influences

Initially, this project set out to focus on case studies of individual educators within the environments of their schools. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, however, it became clear that the role of the national education context – or macrosystem – could not be ignored. Educators frequently mentioned that their practices with refugee pupils were influenced by factors such as exams and the related curricula – particularly at the stage of secondary school. In England, pupils take national exams in both primary and secondary school, with the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exam around age 16 having particularly high stakes both for schools and individual pupils. At School A, educators repeatedly pointed out the difficulty of helping refugee pupils to be successful in a system with a narrow – and timebound – definition of success. Pressure for pupils and schools to perform on GCSEs was cited as the reason that many refugee pupils could not be placed in regular mainstream provision, although educators knew that theoretically this would be preferable. Fiona noted that one of the main factors the EAL team took into account when placing pupils in an appropriate provision was their 'chance of acquiring a full range of GCSEs'. Margaret noted that refugee pupils – and particularly UASC, who often arrive around GCSE age – faced challenges such as immigration stressors and needing to learn English very quickly. She added that the government's two- year results exclusion window for pupils new to English was rarely enough time to get them 'up to speed':

> Even with more settled students, it's a battle to get them to achieve their full potential in exams in time … We've got a student who is approaching GCSEs this summer, who arrived at the beginning of Year 10, who is very bright, able, incredibly hard- working. In the future, given enough time, that student will be a high flyer. But the GCSE grades she's going to get won't reflect that. We might, if we really work hard at it, just get her into the pass range. But really, give her another two years and she will be flying. So that's an issue. I would hesitate to call that a disadvantage because why would an able student be a disadvantage? But we are somewhat trapped by the exam system and the league tables.

Similarly, Catherine noted that pupils who were older when they arrived were sometimes placed in situations where the curriculum moved too quickly:

> Sometimes, particularly with older students, if you're doing GCSE stuff, what's expected of them is totally unrealistic. And we have to sort of find a middle way. So, for example, T— who's in Year 10 arrived some time last year, and almost within less than six months he's having to deal with GCSE English Literature texts. That's totally unrealistic as far as I'm concerned … everybody else is going like this [gestures gentle slope], he kind of needs to go like that [gestures steep, near vertical slope].

At School A, exam pressures also affected the provision for refugee pupils indirectly, through the practice of 'setting' classes. While some departments, such as History, had policies of 'mixed ability' classes, most were split into upper, middle and bottom sets based on pupils' prior attainment. (School B, a primary, did not set.) Several educators at School A noted that refugee pupils were often placed in bottom sets, owing to language issues or having missed education, and that this was unfortunate since bottom sets were already demanding in terms of the support for learning required. In interviews, Syed noted that, 'with the types of classes that they're put in, every student is kind of high need in some way or form' and Shauna said 'it's tough when you get a bottom set because it's behaviour, SEN, EAL, refugee, all together … one teacher, sometimes support, sometimes not'. After a few particularly challenging lesson periods, Shauna commented to me that 'it's just too many [pupils] for a bottom set'. My observations concurred; in bottom sets educators had to devote much of their attention to 'loud' needs while quieter refugee pupils were left without support.

At School B, national system factors were less emphasised in interviews. One exception was Kasia, who told me that although she was aware it 'sounds so awful', she felt time and resource stresses related to the arrival of refugee pupils – although she attributed this stress to the education system rather than the pupils themselves:

> On an individual level you really love them and appreciate them and see them. But they make teaching life so much harder you know, you look at the children and you think these are my refugees, these are my white working class, these are my boys, these are my this, these are my that … I think all of the things are literally a product of my – of teachers in England being overworked. Because the things being asked of us are just too diverse, you know too – we just spread ourselves so thinly.

Educators at School B also made informal comments about Year 2 and Year 6 SATs – namely, needing to prepare pupils – but they rarely related SATs pressure to their practices specifically with refugee pupils as was the case with GCSEs at School A. This difference between School A and School B suggests that the primary curriculum could be less of a constraint on educators' positive practices with refugee pupils – or at least that it was perceived this way by educators at School B, in contrast with those at School A.

DISCUSSION

This study found that educators at two schools in England enacted a range of holistic, positive practices with refugee pupils. Two factors were identified that educators particularly emphasised as shaping their practices: pedagogical knowledge and the national education system. The following situates these findings within the existing literature and discusses implications for policy and practice.

Positive practices: Situating the findings

The present study adds to a body of literature documenting examples of holistic, asset- based practice with refugee pupils, with educators and schools supporting language learning and academics alongside creating a welcoming environment and caring for refugee pupils' socio- emotional well- being. Similar findings have been reported in Australia, where Wilkinson and Kaukko (2020) described how a primary school enacted a 'pedagogy of love' with refugee pupils and Pugh et al. (2012) described how a newly arrived pupil base was located centrally within the school building, in an effort to be spatially and socially inclusive of newcomers. In the UK, McIntyre and Abrams (2021) found that case study schools promoted refugee pupils' feelings of 'safety', 'belonging' and 'success' and Peterson et al. (2017) found that educators aimed to create a 'welcoming, safe, and hospitable environment' (p. 26) for UASC pupils, in contrast to sometimes hostile public attitudes.

Other literature, however, has found schools and educators to be lacking. Baak (2019) reported that while some practices at Glasgow schools were welcoming, the responses of different schools were 'ad hoc and piecemeal' (p. 277) with both educators and parents identifying major difficulties in terms of communication and inclusion. In Canada, Guo et al. (2019) described how educators failed to respond to incidents of bullying and racism experienced by refugee pupils. The discrepancy between these findings and those in the present study probably lies in the differences between studies' goals and associated methodologies. The studies described in the preceding paragraphs focus on schools that were selected in order to document good practice. In contrast, the studies that are critical of educators' practices tend to include several schools across a geographic area and aim to make a judgement as to whether they are enacting good or bad practice. The present project rests more in the former camp than the latter. School A was selected for its positive reputation working with refugee pupils. School B did not have the same reputation but its educators had years of experience with new arrivals who were not refugees. My goal, therefore, was to observe practices at schools with relevant experience rather than assess practices across many schools in the area. While I did not enter fieldwork with the goal of looking only for examples of positive practices – but rather with a more open, exploratory lens – positive practices were mainly what I encountered, an outcome made more likely by the selection of School A and School B as research sites.

Implications: tempering the national context

Macrosystemic aspects of the national education context – such as exams, the associated rigidity of the curriculum and 'setting' – were identified by educators as constraints on their positive practices with refugee pupils, particularly at the secondary level at School A. This finding concurs with previous studies. In the US, Hanna (2013) found that educators at one school separated out newly arrived pupils to study for a high- stakes English language exam despite knowing that this type of provision was detrimental in the longer term, a case of 'rational agency in conflict with policy incentives' (p. 146). At schools in England, McIntyre and Hall (2018) found that 'the realities of school life' (p. 14) often got in the way of best practice with refugee pupils; a 'policy paradox' required schools to look out for pupil well- being, on the one hand, while performing on pressurised examinations, on the other. The implications of such findings should be a recommendation to change the English education system: to promote well- being alongside academic achievement and to employ more flexible, inclusive assessment processes. Some authors have argued that such changes would be good for many children (Mælan et al., 2020; Parker & Levinson, 2018), not just refugees. It is unlikely, however, that such systemic changes will be made with any expediency. In the meantime, the cases of School A and School B join a body of literature offering examples of how the national context can be tempered on a local scale (see, most recently, McIntyre & Abrams, 2021; Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020) – or in other words, how factors at the micro- and mesosystem levels can act in tension with factors at the macrosystem level.

At School A, the EAL sixth form offered an 'inclusive- ish' option to recent arrivals in the older grades. Although most of these pupils did not have time to catch up with the GCSE or A- Level curricula, the EAL sixth form did offer the possibility of attending a mainstream comprehensive secondary school, full time, with opportunities to interact with mainstream pupils. Within the mainstream at School A, the history department did not 'set' classes, which, while not a national policy, is certainly normalised practice in English secondary schools. Schools 'set' classes with the goal of improving exam scores, although the research consensus is that it tends to exacerbate inequalities (Connolly et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2020; Mazenod et al., 2019) and has been noted to be specifically detrimental to refugee pupils' outcomes (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). Practices such as these could be enacted by other secondary schools, or departments, to make their schools more welcoming and supportive – particularly for pupils age 16+, who frequently have difficulties obtaining a school place (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021; Reed & Fazel, 2012; Wade et al., 2012).

At School B, there were fewer national constraints to be tempered, given that curriculum pressures and related norms at primary schools are different from those at secondaries. Primary pupils are normally placed in classes set only by age, learn new languages more easily than older children and already have a focus on learning social–emotional skills alongside academic ones. Thus, primary educators are more expected to enact holistic practices in general. Beyond the sphere of the education system, however, I would argue that educators at School B tempered the UK's hostile immigration context. Similar results were found by Arnot et al. (2009), who describe educators' attempts to 'maintain moral integrity' while working within a policy environment of hostility towards immigrants. As described in preceding sections, educators at School B set a tone of positivity around migration, multilingualism and multiculturalism – through, for example, translation, assembly topics and the head teacher publicly announcing her respect for Muslim families. While not all schools are gifted with multilingual staff, any educator could make multilingual signs using a translation app, organise an 'International Evening' type of event or explicitly state their respect for different cultures, and thus create a more welcoming environment.

Limitations and future directions

The use of case studies allowed for a detailed, contextualised exploration of educators' positive practices; however, this study also has significant limitations. As discussed above, the study reports educators' perceptions of how their practices are shaped, augmented by my observations of associations between their knowledge and

practices. In the future, studies using quasi- experimental designs would be helpful to more robustly examine causality between these concepts. Longitudinal studies would also be useful to explore in more detail educators' perceptions of how their practices are shaped, for example, in their first year or two of teaching refugee pupils. Additionally, School A and School B were selected because of their experience teaching refugee pupils. The question remains as to how educators and schools with little or no experience – and perhaps little knowledge or negative attitudes – would interact with refugee pupils, and how best to support them to develop positive practices. These questions are imperative, particularly given the UK's policy of 'dispersal' of asylum seekers to areas without a history of welcoming such populations. The quality of education that a newly arrived refugee child experiences should not depend on whether they are placed in one part of the country or city over another; rather, all schools and educators should be supported to enact positive practices with refugees.

In conclusion

This study offers a look at how educators at two schools enacted positive practices with refugee pupils. It considers the factors shaping these practices through an ecological lens, highlighting the roles of educators' pedagogical knowledge and the national education system. Young refugees and asylum seekers will continue to arrive in the UK in years to come and school is a critical aspect of their settling in process. Educators and schools should be supported to enact positive practices, promoting the best possible educational experience and life outcomes for all refugee pupils.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author reports no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data not available due to ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical approval was approved by the Central University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (reference number ED- CIA- 18- 174).

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