Educational Challenges and Opportunities among African Refugee Students in the Australian Education System: A Scoping Review

Mavis Boamah
School of Social Science, Media and Film and Education
Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne
mboamah@swin.edu.au

Education plays a critical role in the resettlement process of young refugees in Australia. This scoping review examines the Australian literature on the educational experiences of African students from refugee backgrounds. Specifically reviewing 10 articles published between 2001 and 2021 revealed that these students experienced educational challenges related to literacy and racism whilst maintaining high academic expectations. Guided by Putnam's social capital theory (2000), analysis of findings also indicates that: a) social networks that build social capital in rural communities may not offer the same opportunities to students in urban areas, and b) for students to successfully develop social capital, there is a need to reduce social inequalities such as racial discrimination. This paper suggests that attention be directed to reducing social inequalities in schools and communities and to promoting school-based mechanisms that enhance the active use of social capital by students from minority groups.

Keywords: refugee education; social capital; resettlement; social networks; Africa

The majority of young refugees from Africa have experienced inter-generational conflicts and interrupted schooling and arrive in Australia with no or a low level of formal education (Lee & Cheung, 2022). The fragmented experiences could mean young African refugees typically enter the Australian education system without the same level of academic and

institutional 'know-how' that might be expected among students in their age group. This possible educational challenge may stem from years of political instability in countries of origin and many years in transiting countries and refugee camps (Mupenzi, 2018).

Education is typically viewed as the main means through which refugees can fulfil their aspirations (Earnest et al., 2007). Education has the capacity to dispel ignorance about the historical precedents and contemporary politics of global and local inequality and injustice and it can work towards actively challenging disadvantage, discrimination, oppression, underdevelopment, conflict and violence (UNESCO 2003; cited in Matthews, 2008). Schools in Australia are regarded as key sites where young African refugees learn about Australian culture, acquire literacy skills, and make their dreams a reality (Earnest et al., 2015). Despite the important role schools play, scholars have argued that education policy frameworks at the national level do not address the unique needs and challenges of refugee background students (Harvey et al., 2016). Terry et al. (2016: 5) argue that the government's formal equity categories for higher education list students from refugee backgrounds within a broad category of Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) students, without considering either the unique obstacles refugee students face due to past experience of disrupted schooling or the strengths they possess.

Akin to the policy deficit, African students from refugee backgrounds are typically discussed in terms of the particular educational challenges they face, due to their experiences of war, life in transition, and disrupted schooling (Naidoo et al., 2015). Despite the challenges, these young people have educational aspirations (Naidoo et al., 2015). There is a growing body of research that focusses on how family and other social networks contribute to building the social capital and overall educational achievements of young people from refugee backgrounds. Studies to date show that the educational attainments of students can be linked to the forms of capital – social, economic, or cultural - that a person does or does not possess (Eng, 2009; Sullivan, 2001). The more access individuals have to these forms of capital the better the chances of positive educational outcome (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011). Researchers that establish links between educational attainments and social capital mostly employ the theoretical perspectives advanced by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000). Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital in which he categorises two models – bonding and bridging – is fundamental to understanding

students from refugee backgrounds and the social networks that contribute to their educational outcomes.

Providing a more detailed, evidence-based and nuanced account, this scoping review surveys the research on the educational experiences of African refugee students in Australia and elucidates their key challenges and opportunities by drawing on Putnam's (2000) social capital theory to further our understanding. The study reviewed ten peer reviewed journal articles published between June 2001 and June 2021, allowing the review to capture both older and contemporary studies. Only studies specifically focused on African students with refugee backgrounds were included because their years in refugee camps rendered them likely to encounter significant challenges in their new home. Based on this, the study does not analyse the dataset on any one specific African country, but draws data from multiple African countries at once, commonly Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Sierra Leone.

The review is organised in four parts. The first provides a brief account of Putnam's (2000) social capital theory. The second focuses on the review process and draws on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five stage framework for conducting scoping reviews. The third part analyses key findings from the review, documenting challenges such as literacy skills and opportunities such as social networks. The final part interrogates the relevance of social capital to educational outcomes.

Social capital: theoretical framework

Different theoretical lenses can be applied to study the integration and educational experiences of refugees. Theories of social capital are especially useful, and the approaches of both Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000) have been influential. The analysis below draws mainly on the work of the latter. Bourdieu views social capital as the various networks and connections that an individual possesses, contributing to power and class distinction, but Putnam emphasises that social capital fosters integration and promotes communal values and togetherness; it can be a glue that holds the collective norms and values of society together (Adkins 2005; Siisiainen 2003). Putnam's book, 'Bowling Alone', explained how Americans' changing behaviour led to social disconnection and a subsequent decline in community engagement and increased violence, crime and public health problems. He argued that active involvement in public organisations, including sports, was

the key to building social capital and arresting American's decline in social integration.

In Australia, social networks have been found to support refugees' resettlement in their new environment, amidst their fears and challenges (McDonald et al., 2008). This article goes further. It focusses on Putnam's ideas of "bonding" and "bridging" social capital to explore the varying social networks that young African students from refugee backgrounds draw on to build social capital and then to explain the relevance of social capital to their educational outcomes. Bonding social capital refers to the ties between already established relationships, for example families and ethnic groups, and bridging social capital to relationships between people of different background and ethnicity (Putnam, 2000; Walseth, 2008). Putnam placed more value on bridging capital and believed "bonding capital is good for 'getting by', but bridging capital is crucial for 'getting ahead'" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). The two models of social capital are both fundamental to explaining the integration of young refugees. According to Strang and Ager (2010), when young refugees develop bonding social capital, they gain confidence and self-worth, which facilitates the building of bridging capital. Bridging capital is fundamental to building the navigational capacity of young refugees (Murray, 2010). Social capital as a theory is indeed central to an explanation of the inclusion and empowerment of minority communities and its relevance to educational outcomes among young African students from refugee backgrounds is unpacked in the discussion section.

Review process

This paper draws on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five stage framework for conducting scoping reviews to examine the research conducted around African refugees and their educational experiences. The stages of the framework are: (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) selecting studies; (4) charting the data; (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results.

Identifying the research question

This review was guided by one main and two supporting research questions: 1) what does the literature typically focus on in relation to educational experiences of young African refugees in Australia? 2) What are the key challenges and opportunities identified in the literature? 3) What is

the relevance of social capital to young African refugees' educational outcomes? These questions aim at examining the state of the selected Australian literature on educational access, participation, barriers, opportunities, and outcomes for young African refugees living in Australia.

**Identifying relevant studies**

To identify relevant articles for this study, a thorough search through EBSCOhost was conducted. The search was limited to studies conducted within the Australian context from June 2001 to June 2021. There were six major databases in EBSCOhost that covered the research topic for this review: Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Urban Studies Abstract, Race Relations Abstract, SocINDEX, Education Research Complete and Academic Research Complete. There were six levels of search terms. First was the setting: school*/educate*/education*. The second level was the target group: refugee*/" political refugee*"/"religious refugee*". This was followed by an age category: youth*/" young people*"/teenage*/children*. The fourth level was the country of origin: Africa*/South Sudan*/Ethiopia*. The last but one level included search terms specific to the overall educational experiences: access*/ barriers*/ participation*/ challenges*/ resilience*/experiences*. Finally, the search was focussed on studies conducted in Australia*.

Study selection

The initial Boolean phrase search with the key terms from the six databases identified 83 publications, from which 10 articles were selected for review. The selection strategy followed recommendations offered in the PRISMA statement – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis (Moher et al., 2009). A summary of the selection process can be found below in Figure 1. Qualitative studies that explored experiences of refugee students in Australia was the central focus. Based on the research questions that guided this review, the search terms were kept broad to ensure all relevant publications were captured. All duplicates were removed. Abstracts of remaining articles were read, and inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed and applied. Inclusion criteria included: a) peer review or scholarly journal b) publication from June 2001 to June 2021 c) publications in English d) articles specifically about African students from refugee backgrounds e) studies conducted within the Australian context f) either qualitative or a mix of qualitative and quantitative studies.

Non-English publications, studies published earlier than June 2001 and later than June 2021 were removed. Conference papers, non-peer reviewed journals and studies outside the scope of Australian literature were also excluded, as, because of time constraints, were books. Purely quantitative studies were also excluded because they did not provide information on first-hand experience by study participants. After inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, ten articles were eligible for the review. The next stage was to read the full articles to encapsulate the full scope of the literature (Badger et al., 2000).

Figure 1. Study selection flow chart

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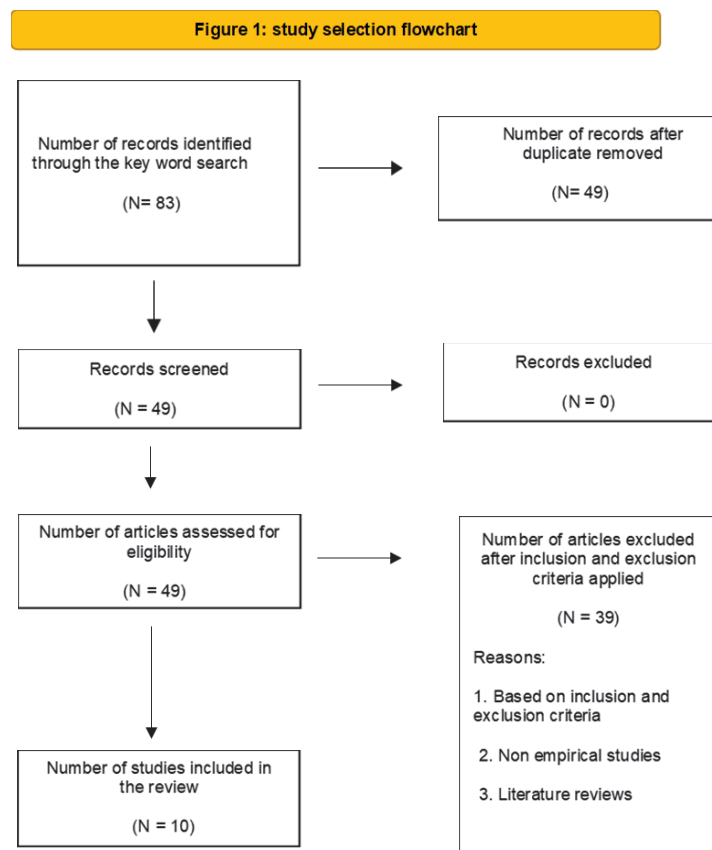
Charting the data

This stage recorded specific and general information about the study. Information on author, year, methods and whether educational experiences were discussed was recorded in a chart. All studies included in the review explored educational experiences of students, teachers, or community workers. More than half of the studies were purely qualitative, while three studies included a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative. The oldest study in this review was published in 2008. The review also included current studies in 2021. See Table 1 following.

Table 1 Summary of Data Charting

Author / year	Method	Country specified?	Experiences discussed	Sample	Age	Gender
De Anstiss et al 2019	Mixed	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Dooley et al 2011	Qualitative	Yes - more than one	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Earnest et al 2010	Qualitative	Yes - more than one	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Harris & Marlowe 2011	Qualitative	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Major et al 2013	Qualitative	Yes - One	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Matthews 2008	Mixed	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Molla 2020	Mixed	Yes - more than one	Yes	No	No	No
Molla 2021	Qualitative	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Naidoo 2009	Qualitative	No	Yes			
Oliver et al 2009	Qualitative	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

Collating, summarising, reporting the results

The final stage involved summarising and presenting findings from collated data, outlining the main elements related to the experiences of education. Before presenting the results of this review, it is important to note the variables used in the selected papers, including country of origin, age and gender. Studies were based on sample sizes ranging from eight to 117

participants. Multiple samples were employed: students, parents, community, and youth workers. Six of the ten papers reviewed did not report on the specific country of origin; three reported more than one; and only one study was conducted on one specific African country. Most of the literature in the review did not provide the age composition and gender of participants. General information such as teenagers, adolescent, young people, youth were used. See Table 1 above.

Analysis of key findings

The research consistently focused on persistent academic barriers faced by refugee students from Africa. Most studies discuss the impact of literacy skills on overall educational experience. A significant finding from the review indicates students experience racism and pressure from family members. Another critical theme to emerge from the studies is the dissatisfaction of students, parents, and teachers with the placement of students by age, without considering literacy skills and prior learning. Notwithstanding these challenges, the review also found African students from refugee backgrounds value education. The evidence in this review indicates that African refugee students see education as a beacon of hope and that building their social networks increases their chances of educational achievement.

Key challenges: literacy skills

Inadequate literacy skills were seen as the main impediment to educational access, participation, and achievement among African students from refugee backgrounds. It must be noted that the Australian government has humanitarian programs that support the settlement and educational needs of refugee students. For instance, refugees have access to Intensive English language programs for up to 12months (FaHCSIA, 2012). This service is, however, offered on arrival through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). de Anstiss et al. (2019) presented evidence that students spent up to 12 months in English language centres but were still unprepared to transition to mainstream schools. This can partly be attributed to the fact that there is no distinction made between the needs of refugees and migrants (de Anstiss et al., 2019). Earlier research had similarly shown that refugee and migrant students were being enrolled in English classes together, with limited consideration of the specific needs of refugee children, or the previous disruptions to education they may have experienced (Miller et al., 2005).

From this, it can be argued that refugee background students have all been subsumed within a bigger umbrella of Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) students.

Akin to this, as noted, more than half of the studies (n = 6) did not report on specific country of origin of participants. These studies were conducted on students from Africa as a homogenous sample without considering how individual experiences and needs impacted educational outcomes. A few studies (n =3) were however, based on more than one African country, with only one study that examined participants from one specific African country. Although other studies acknowledge homogenising this group could be based on defining obvious common characteristics such as skin colour, limited literacy, and interrupted schooling (Mupenzi, 2018), this can portray a misleading sense of cultural commonality. Some international studies have well criticised the tendency to homogenise refugees from Africa (Khapoya, 2015), yet some researchers homogenise this group without acknowledging important cultural differences (Rutter, 2006). The studies reviewed repeat same error.

This one size fits all approach to research on African students from refugee backgrounds, evident in the literature reviewed, prohibits a deeper dive into the challenging needs of specific individuals or of related groups. Findings from Molla's (2020) study in this review showed that Africans from refugee backgrounds have been identified to have more re-settlement challenges. In a policy context, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA, 2019) posits that if these cohorts of refugees are targeted using effective and tailored services, it will reduce the pressure on some social services, including Intensive English classes.

This argument is consistent with evidence from other studies that suggest that the educational needs of refugee students are rarely targeted using a specific policy at the national level (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007). Two studies from the review emphasised that refugee students from Africa exited intensive language schools with relatively low literacy skills (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Oliver et al., 2009). Olive et al. (2009) found that participants expressed the need to extend the time for intensive language schools to acquire skills and become familiar with the Australian education system before transitioning to mainstream schools. These scholars argue that young African refugees develop basic interpersonal communication skills faster than academic skills and it should not be assumed that their oral fluency is enough to access and fully participate in Australian schools. This suggests

that it takes more than twelve months of intensive English program to develop academic literacy skills, which is fundamental to educational achievement, and implies that African students from refugee background need extra literacy support beyond the twelve months Intensive English period.

Differences in accent was also recorded as a challenge among African students from refugee backgrounds. Two studies (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Earnest et al., 2010) found that students struggled to understand native English speakers because of how fast they communicated. Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) emphasised how participants in their study were laughed at because they could not speak and respond in the same way as their teacher. Although six studies (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Earnest et al., 2010; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Matthews, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009) presented evidence on literacy challenges and how African refugee students struggle academically, Earnest et al. (2010) added that literacy skills and students' struggle with accents impeded on their overall educational access and participation. Findings from Earnest et al. (2010) suggest that African students from refugee backgrounds were not expressive in class and chose to remain quiet for fear of being ridiculed due to their English proficiency skill or accent. This explains the finding from Oliver et al. (2009) where teachers revealed a belief that many African refugee students do not get support they require because they try to hide. This notwithstanding, Earnest et al. (2010) argues that some student participants were mostly not aware of support services and those that were aware, found it culturally inappropriate.

Pressure from family members

Pressure from family was one of the prevalent challenges recorded across the dataset. These pressures have been categorised into three themes: emotional and navigational; financial; and academic. Four articles (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Molla, 2020; Naidoo, 2009) found family pressure negatively impacted on student's overall academic performance. The study by de Anstiss et al. (2019), revealed how the family members of participants continue to struggle with trauma from war, including loss of loved ones and property. The authors argue that student participants in the study often had to provide emotional support at the expense of their own needs. In addition, students revealed how their support went beyond emotional to supporting family members navigate their new social context,

such as accessing social services, medical appointments or interpreting for them. This led to participants having less time to dedicate to their educational needs such as homework. Financial pressure also posed a significant challenge to many. Participants who lost parents to war expressed how they became a parental replacement to their younger siblings, forcing them to work more hours to financially support younger family members, including family overseas, which puts a strain on their education (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Harris & Marlowe, 2011). Similarly, in other studies King and Owens (2018) found that financial remittances to family members overseas by refugees from Africa was an obligation. Findings from this study revealed that a regular financial contribution overseas was highly enforced and failure to remit funds means family members will starve.

This review showed that academic pressure stemmed from family expectations for their children to excel. Harris and Marlowe's (2011) study found that male participants faced more academic pressure than their female counterparts. Harris and Marlowe's (2011) study suggests that males in African society are often considered breadwinners of the family and are expected to perform academically, land a good job and take care of the family. In the same study, these two authors argue that half of teacher participants indicated that pressure from family members adversely impacted on students' learning. In their study, a female student recounts how her home does not provide conducive environment for study. Although these findings do not represent the general case for all African students from refugee backgrounds, a review of the study by these two authors highlights some pressures from family that these students experience and how they contribute to their overall academic underachievement. While the studies reviewed did not suggest interventions on all categories of family pressure, Harris and Marlowe (2011) and Naidoo (2009) found that extra non-compulsory tutoring and after school homework support are fundamental to supporting these students who struggle due to some of these challenges.

Racism

In this review, four studies (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Matthews, 2008; Molla, 2021) found students from refugee backgrounds experienced varied forms of racism, discrimination, and vilification. One study, Matthews (2008), recorded how two young white girls taking a stroll stopped abruptly upon seeing two tall African boys in their loose clothes. This author described how the two girls slowly turned

back and went ahead at some distance. In other literature, scholars have asserted that young African refugees in Australia have come under racial attacks from the police, the media and in schools (Windle, 2008; Windle & Miller, 2013). While racism in Australia is prohibited under the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), some other scholars, including Markus (2016) and Halse (2017), argue that everyday racism is commonly experienced by young African students from refugee backgrounds and is widespread in Australian education settings (Halse, 2017).

Molla (2020) argues that racism puts stress on the young African refugee and hinders their social engagement and learning abilities. Racism in schools has been recorded as a challenge to academic success and social integration (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Halse, 2017; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Matthews, 2008; Molla, 2020; Stratton, 2006). Although the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 is enforced and scholars have documented how racism impedes academic achievement, it is hard to say the experience of racism by young African refugees will completely be eradicated from the Australian community and educational institutions. One adverse effect of racism is the academic stress African students from refugee backgrounds experience. Harris and Marlowe (2011) found that students are often under pressure to debunk the dominant stereotype about African refugees' academic failure and underachievement, to prove they are resilient and can succeed academically. This suggests there is the need to promote positive image and cultural awareness in schools for teachers, school leaders and students (de Anstiss et al., 2019).

Age placement of students

In Australia, students are placed in grades based on age eligibility. Two studies in this review (Naidoo, 2009; Oliver et al., 2009) found this to be a challenge for African students from refugee backgrounds. These studies contend that students were placed in grades based on their age, which was often higher than their academic competence. Teachers in the study highlighted how this challenge affected not only the student but teachers as they struggled to make students understand content which was beyond their abilities. Oliver et al. (2009) argues parents' disappointment in the Australian education system. Parents in their study noted that, unlike Africa, students in Australia are promoted based on age and this did not favour students from refugee backgrounds, who have experienced interrupted schooling or have no prior formal education.

Although these studies do not establish a relationship between limited literacy skills and the challenge teachers and students experience with age placement, I argue that the challenge with language acquisition by African students from refugee backgrounds shown in this review is exacerbated by age placement. According to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (2003), language competence is fundamental and considered a key indicator to successful resettlement. When students exit intensive English programs with low literacy skills, they are more likely to experience further academic challenge when placed in grades higher than their academic competence. From this review, it is critical to develop a holistic national policy framework that is specific to the placement of students from refugee backgrounds. At the institution level, Earnest et al. (2010) suggest under-prepared students need to have a more targeted induction to make them ready for any future academic challenges.

Opportunities: commitment to education

African students from refugee backgrounds come from countries that are characterised by war and protracted conflicts (Lischer, 2014). They arrive in Australia with hopes and aspirations. Four studies in this review (Matthews, 2008; Molla, 2021; Naidoo, 2009; Oliver et al., 2009) recorded how refugee students from Africa value education and their commitment to study to make their dreams materialise. These studies found that participants were ready to learn, gain a university degree, become professionals like doctors and serve the community. The enthusiasm to achieve future goals was evident in the study by Molla (2021) in which a participant recounts how their educational challenges from country of origin, through to transit country and in Australia, shaped their understanding and made them determined to achieve educational success. Similarly, Naidoo (2009) found that teachers reiterated the importance African refugee students place on education, which the teachers suggest makes it quicker for the students to adopt Australian school culture.

Social networks

Studies in this review suggest some factors that contribute to positive educational outcome. In one of the studies, Major et al. (2013) presented evidence of the relationship between participants' social capital and educational attainment. In their study, the authors found that family, friends and location and community were important factors that enabled participants

to build their social capital. The study showed that connection with family and friends increased participants' social networks and their chances of getting support. Close networks such as families provided emotional support, thereby building bonding social capital. On the other hand, friends from heterogenous groups such as school, church or sports enabled participants to access support outside their immediate family. Findings from Major et al.'s (2013) study suggested that bonding network helped participants to build their bridging social capital which allowed them to connect with the wider Australian community. Evidence from the findings further shows that regional location played a significant role in building participants' social capital. In smaller regional towns, participants could easily access and participate in activities, and build their confidence and self-worth which contributed to their overall educational attainment. Major et al. (2013) however, argues that these out-of-school networks in rural communities may not offer the same opportunities to students from refugee backgrounds in Africa in urban areas.

Few authors in this review shifted attention away from the challenges African students from refugee backgrounds experience and focussed on factors that support their educational achievement. There is a growing body of research about these cohorts of refugees that have documented academic and non-academic challenges, including Anselme & Hands (2010) and Earnest et al. (2007), and in this review Harris & Marlowe (2011) and Oliver et al. (2009). Although these challenges have been acknowledged and recorded, few studies in this review, such as (Major et al., 2013),take a strength-based approach to examine their educational resilience. From this, one can argue that African students from refugee backgrounds have challenges, but this does not mean they are less intelligent. They can receive higher returns on education when given the support, as evident in the findings of Major et al. (2013).

Discussion: social capital and educational outcomes
The review found that participants in the study by Major et al. (2013) were able to draw on out-of-school resources to build on their bonding and bridging capital. The study suggests family, friends and location supported participants to build their social capital.

Family was identified as a strong enabler for building bonding capital in this review. Major et al. (2013) found that participants received emotional and material support from their strong ties with close and extended families.

In addition, the study highlighted how family members supported newly arrived refugees to navigate and access services, including housing. The review also found that connections with friends significantly contributed to the building of both bonding and bridging capital of participants. The confidence and self-worth through bonding capital helped participants to bridge their social network with friends of different background (Major et al., 2013). Participants developed friendship network through the school, church, and sports. The study concluded that participants' association with people of dissimilar interests opened opportunities to access support which contributed to their overall success. This finding is consistent with Strang and Ager's (2010) study which suggests the importance of bonding capital goes beyond emotional support to providing useful information and resources that help in overall integration.

However, this does not suggest all African refugee students have access and strong ties with family and friends. This review found that participants provided emotional and navigational support to family members, instead of vice versa (de Anstiss et al., 2019). Findings from the review also show that participants found making friends with Australian students challenging because of limited literacy skills and the fear of being ridiculed (Earnest et al., 2010). This is not different from a study by Uptin et al. (2013 p.130) who adds that the obvious difference in African refugee students mark them as 'other' and makes it challenging to find friendship with Australian students, who often position them as 'unworthy of friendship'. Examples of instances recorded in these scholarships pose a challenge to students to build social capital. Although these social connections can create opportunities for African students from refugee backgrounds to build their social capital, some social factors as seen in the aforementioned studies do not allow these young students to fully explore the available resources to their advantage.

In other studies, Coburn (2000) contends that bridging social capital is not freely accessible to the minority group in an unequal society. According to Coburn (2000), inequalities in society reflect capitalism and vice versa and as reduce the level of social trust and cohesion. Akin to this, Uslaner (2000) argues that if there is a link between trust and inequality, people from minority groups in terms of power have less reason to trust and so the fight against inequality is a part of the solution to building successful social capital. Leonardi et al. (2001) in a study of Italian democracy emphasised that distrust and negative experiences of bridging capital in unequal societies forces people to turn to family, making bonding capital not

a luxury but a need. Evidence in these studies illuminates the findings from the review on the challenges some African students from refugee backgrounds experience in building their bridging capital in Australian schools. Putnam's work on bridging and bonding social capital has been criticised for disregarding how power relations and social structures affect the overall building of such capital. This suggests that, for African students from refugee backgrounds to successfully develop social capital, there is an urgent need to focus attention on reducing social inequalities in schools and communities.

Under the circumstances discussed above, one can argue that diverse social networks sometimes become a challenge to building social capital (Gelderblom, 2018). Social networks do not become the ultimate factor for developing social capital because, sometimes, they are unlikely to form (Gelderblom, 2018). Although Morrow (2004) demonstrates how social connections, particularly friendship, makes young people feel a sense of belonging in schools and communities and emphasises the significance of social capital for young people, there is a need for collective approach to enhancing school-based mechanisms that encourage the active use of social capital by African students from refugee backgrounds. Schools have the power to either facilitate or hinder the building of social capital by students from minority groups, including refugees (Ndhlovu, 2009). In a school with predominantly Anglo-Australian students, visibly black students require social network systems that can make them feel a sense of belonging (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012). This is more because positive educational outcome or vice- versa for African students from refugee backgrounds often depends on the social networks they can identify and the amount of social capital they are able to build both in and out of school (Langat et al., 2019). It is, therefore, important to note that social capital should not only be developed from bottom up but be supported from the top down (Newton, 1997). This suggests that the provision and availability of social networks such as family and friends at school, church or sports are not enough to build successful social capital. Location was one significant factor uncovered in this review that could bolster the development of social capital among participants.

A study by Beaudoin & Thorson (2004) suggests that rural communities tend to have increased level of social networks, social integration and attachment compared to urban communities. Similarly, Sampson's (1988) study found that urban centres had adverse associations

with local attachment and networks at both the community and individual levels. These studies suggest that location is crucial to how individuals develop social networks and build social capital. Burt (2004) further adds that individuals have advantage when they belong to more than one group in a particular location. Consistent with findings from this review, Major et al. (2013) found that regional location played an important role in building participants' social capital. This was mainly because participants were in relatively small regional towns where access and participation in school, church, sports, and the community was easier. Evidence from the review further adds that student participants had the freedom to visit and socialise with friends while staying close to home. Participants belonged to different social networks – church, school, sports, family - which contributed to their overall success. Overall, Putnam's concepts of bridging and bonding social capital are fundamental and provide a better understanding of the various social networks that students can draw on to access support. The clear distinction between bonding (family) and bridging (friends at school, church, community, sports) offers opportunities to students from minority groups to leverage support to reduce academic underachievement. However, this does not necessarily suggest that African students from refugee backgrounds can effectively explore these social networks to their benefit on their own.

Limitation of review

This review analysed what researchers have focussed on in terms of educational experiences of students from refugee backgrounds. This review was discussed from Putnam's social capital theoretical lens and did not consider the influence of power relations and social structures in building social capital. Findings from the review cannot be generalised because review was limited to studies published within the last two decades. Although the review looked at contemporary studies, the search was limited to only six databases and 10 journal articles due to time constraints. In addition, the review identified only peer reviewed journal and did not include books and non-scholarly articles such as grey literature as these were outside the scope of the paper. Also, majority of the literature reviewed were not specific to a particular African country, as a result the dataset was analysed in general without consideration the experiences from specific African country.

Conclusion

Much of the literature in this review focusses on educational challenges faced by refugees from African backgrounds when navigating Australian education, with literacy skills a prevalent challenge. Some of the literature also highlighted how refugee students from Africa value education. A growing body of studies are examining out-of-school resources that contribute to refugee students from Africa's educational outcome. The review found out-of-school resources and social networks help build social capital in rural communities but may not offer the same opportunities to students in urban areas. The findings in the review also suggest that although social connections create possible opportunities for African students from refugee backgrounds to build social capital, factors such as literacy skills, family pressure and social inequalities do not allow these young students to fully explore the available resources to their advantage. This means emphasis on a student's individual agency alone is not enough to build social capital. This calls for an urgent need for explicit attention to school-based mechanisms that enhance active use of social capital by students from minority groups.

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