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Literacy 'Resettlement Stories' of South Sudanese Refugees in Australia

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Abstract

The early years of the twenty-first century were a distinctive period in the history of Australia's hospitality to refugees from Sudan and South Sudan. Significant numbers of South Sudanese refugees arrived in Australia in the decade 2000–2010. Although these numbers later decreased, commitments were made by the Australian government to provide refugee-sensitive initiatives to settle refugees successfully. This study explores the literacy resettlement experiences of South Sudanese refugees in Australia between 2000 and 2010, examining how diverse literacy practices shaped their resettlement experiences. Highlighting the challenges and opportunities these refugees faced in adapting to a new linguistic and cultural environment, this paper shows that these refugees engaged in a range of informal, non-formal and formal literacy practices—including in Adult Migrant English Program language classes—that were significant for their resettlement journeys. Understanding these refugees' literacy resettlement experiences can be both empowering and challenging experiences, can provide valuable insights into their integration process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy 'Resettlement Stories' of South Sudanese Refugees in Australia

With over 20,000 South Sudanese refugees having arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2007 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007), a focus was given to how Australia might better support and provide for the needs of these refugees. Attention was paid to the complicated and often challenging process that refugees experience once they have arrived in their new country. Variously termed 'settlement', 'resettlement' and 'integration', this process involves beginning to learn the new country's linguistic and cultural mores, as well as acquire or develop the necessary capital to be able to actively participate in and contribute to the new country's life. This paper investigates how the literacy practices undertaken by South Sudanese refugees—particularly the informal, non-formal and formal learning of English language knowledge and skills—have shaped the resettlement experiences of these refugees in Australia between 2000 and 2010. In this study, formal learning refers to education that occurs within an organised instructional program and results in a recognised qualification or certificate. Non-formal learning also takes place within a structured instructional setting, but it does not lead to a

formal qualification or credential. In contrast, informal learning is unplanned and not deliberately sought out by the learner; it lacks structure and is not provided by formal institutions (Clayton & Smith, 2009).

Whereas formal and non-formal learning predominantly occurred in Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) classes (Moore, 2022), informal learning of language and literacy occurred in refugees' everyday interactions with their families, communities and various service providers (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2016; see also Smith & Clayton, 2009).

To investigate these refugees' literacy practices and resettlement experiences, this study employed qualitative methods, primarily interviews with 18 South Sudanese refugees who possessed diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds. By exploring these refugees' informal, non-formal and formal literacy experiences during their resettlement process in Australia, the study aims to shed light on the factors that influenced their integration into the new linguistic and cultural landscape. Of particular interest is how South Sudanese refugees' resettlement experiences have been mediated by their engagement with informal, non-formal and formal literacy practices in both institutional and community spaces. After introducing the background and context to South Sudanese refugees' resettlement experiences in Australia in 2000–2010, the theoretical framework for the paper is outlined, along with the methods used in data collection and analysis. The findings are then outlined and discussed, including their implications and significance.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

For people who have escaped from their country of origin because of wars, well-founded fears of persecution or violence (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022), their resettlement in a country that will accept them as refugees is rarely straightforward or direct. Resettlement is a complicated and often challenging process that refugees experience once they have arrived in their new country. It involves learning the linguistic and cultural mores of the new country, along with acquiring or developing the necessary capital to be able to actively participate in and contribute to the new country's life. Importantly, resettlement or settlement is not a one-way transaction, where a new arrival 'fits into' or assimilates into the existing (and static) culture of the country they are settling in (Crisp, 2004; Valtonen, 2004). If a new arrival is to successfully make the transition from 'outsider' to citizen—someone who draws from and proactively contributes to an ever-changing cultural dynamic—then the host country (including its government, service providers, people and media) has to commit to understanding and proactively reaching out to meet the needs of that new arrival (Milner, Alio, & Gardi, 2022). In Australian studies, and most international literature, the resettlement phase is commonly defined as the first five years of permanent

residence in the new/asylum country (Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network [MYAN], 2022). However, there is a widespread recognition that it takes longer than that for most refugees to feel 'settled' in their new country.

Over 20,000 South Sudanese refugees arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2007 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007). Although the number of South Sudanese refugees arriving in Australia was significantly reduced after 2007—when the Australian government cut the percentage of African refugees accepted on a humanitarian basis from up to 70% to 30%—the Australian government remained committed to providing the necessary supports for these refugees' resettlement (Crisp, 2004). These supports encompassed healthcare, housing, education (including access to English language classes), employment opportunities, interpreting and translation services, financial advice and mental health services (Millbank, Phillips, & Bohm, 2006). Institutions and service providers supporting refugees were also accountable to governments and required to demonstrate that their services contained refugee-sensitive initiatives to settle refugees successfully (Harris, Lyons, & Marlowe, 2014).

South Sudanese refugees in 2000–2010 in Australia were a diverse community, differing significantly in their needs and characteristics. As this paper will show, although some South Sudanese refugees had professional backgrounds, many had survived in their country of origin in a subsistence economy—and that was before their fragile existence in refugee camps and the like en route to Australia. Oral culture was an important aspect of socialisation in those subsistence communities, and formal understandings of literacy and of learning a language—such as by sitting in classrooms—had not previously been experienced by some of the refugees (Burgoyne & Hull, 2007; Matthews, 2008; Sellars & Murphy, 2018). However, focus on South Sudanese refugees' language deficits fails to appreciate that the Sudan is culturally and linguistically diverse. There are over 400 languages and dialects in Sudan (Milner & Khawaja, 2010), and most South Sudanese refugees would have spoken two or three languages other than English, including Arabic, which was the official language in Sudan (Foundation House for Survivors of Torture, 2006).

Between 2000 and 2010, the teaching and learning time funded by the Australian government to newly arrived refugees for gaining English language skills was 510 hours per student, with learning undertaken at one of the centres offering AMEP. Originally introduced to help new migrants learn basic language skills—on the basis that functional English skills were crucial for social inclusivity and participation in Australian life (K. Milner & Khawaja, 2010)—the AMEP curriculum prioritised topics relevant to everyday life in Australia, such as education, employment and health (Department of Home Affairs, 2021). The curriculum also gave attention to how written texts are used in Australian social environments (Brown, Miller,

& Mitchell, 2006; Currie & Cray, 2004). Because refugees were obliged to attend AMEP classes as a requirement of their humanitarian visa (Hartley, Fleay, Baker, Burke, & Field, 2018), the present study is interested in refugees' experiences in learning English in AMEP centres—particularly whether the AMEP classes meet the needs of refugees with low written literacy skills (Gunn, 2003)—as well as the broader role of the AMEP classes in the development of English language literacies by refugees.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the diverse ways South Sudanese refugees engaged with language learning and literacy in their resettlement experience, this study draws strongly on sociolinguistic and literacy studies perspectives. In particular, the study frames literacies—and literacy practices—as situated social practices (see, e.g., Gee, 2004; Rowsell & Pahl, 2015; Street, 1995, 2003). This framing contests the traditional understanding of literacy learning as the acquisition of a set of generic set of literacy skills by an individual (Barton, 2001; Street, 1984). So understood, literacy practices are not simply the 'observable behaviours around literacy' but also 'the concepts and meanings that are brought to those events and that give meaning to them' (Street, 1999, p. 38). Importantly, by implication, there is a valuing of social experience. The study also references the concept of 'dominant literacy practices' (Hamilton, 2001) to understand how the participants encountered and navigated the dominance of English literacy practices in the Australian context (Department of Home Affairs, 2016), in contrast to their multilingual experiences and practices in Sudan.

Finally, the study draws on the recognition that literacies are developed through formal, non-formal and informal learning practices in diverse contexts. Whereas formal learning assumes intentional and structured teaching that takes place in institutions and, typically, leads to recognised qualifications (of various kinds), non-formal learning—although still referring to intentional learning in institutions—is more flexible in nature and less rigidly structured (UNESCO, 2016). Informal learning has been defined as 'a natural accompaniment to everyday life—learning that happens outside of the traditional educational settings—at work, in the family, in the community, during travelling' (UNESCO, 2016, p. 6). Given this diversity of learning contexts and practices, the study also employs the concepts of 'translanguaging' (Garcia & Wei, 2013; Jonsson, 2022) and 'code-switching' to understand and explain how the multilingual participants moved between different languages in their daily communication and literacy practices, and how such activities contributed to their development of English language literacies.

4. METHODS

Given its focus on participant experience, the study employed qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Specifically, the researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 18 South Sudanese refugees in Canberra, Australia, between 2015 and 2017. This research was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC). To recruit potential participants, an invitation was extended to Sudanese community members in Canberra, using a combination of community-based organisations (e.g., church groups) and the researcher's personal networks. Half of the interviewees were known by the researcher through community-based activities. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 48, with more males than females represented. They came from diverse ethnic backgrounds within South Sudan, including the Dinka, Nuer, Chollo and Bari tribes. Their educational backgrounds also varied from limited formal schooling in South Sudan to the possession of university degrees. All interviewees, irrespective of their formal educational experiences, were multilingual. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. Anglicised names were used if the participant wanted to be identified by an Anglicised name; otherwise, pseudonyms are a variation of the name's participants were born with. Table 1 outlines the demographic details for the interview participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	First Language	Sex	Family Status	Language Education	ofMEP evel	Arrival in Australia	Education Level in South Sudan	Employment Status in Australia
Achol	30	Endogo	F	Married	English/ Swahili		2008	High School	Employed
Akon	39	Dinka	M	Married	English/ Arabic		2007	Intermediate	Employed
Alex	40	Dinka	M	Married	Arabic/ English		2003	High School	Employed
Deng	33	Dinka	M	Married	English		2002	High School	Employed
James	43	Chollo	M	Married	English		2004	High School	Employed
John	42	Keliko	M	Married	Arabic		2002	High School	Unemployed
Josephine	37	Chollo	M	Married	Arabic		2006	High School	Employed
Katrina	38	Chollo	F	Married	English/ Arabic		2006	High School	Employed
Koang	33	Nuer	M	Married	English		2005	Intermediate	Unemployed
Lado	42	Bari	M	Married	English/ Arabic		2007	Intermediate	Employed
Maria	32	Bari	F	Married	Arabic		2009	High School	Unemployed
Monica	45	Chollo	M	Married	Arabic		2003	University	Employed

Nyakong	31	Nuer	F	Married	Arabic	2005	High School	Employed
Nyibol	31	Nuer	M	Married	Arabic	2008	University	Unemployed
Obaj	48	Chollo	M	Married	Arabic/ English	2007	University	Employed
Pal	34	Nuer	M	Married	English	2000	Intermediate	Employed
Peter	45	Chollo	M	Married	Arabic	2003	University	Employed
Susan	42	Chollo	F	Married	Arabic	2004	University	Employed

Interviews were semi-structured to facilitate conversation, allowing the researcher to continually prompt and respond to the interviewees (McLean, 2019; Mishler, 1991). A conversational approach was important because the literature shows that in interviewing some groups (including Sudanese), direct questioning can pose a challenge because a direct approach is considered rude (Madden, 2010). Thus, the researcher (who is South Sudanese) adopted a collaborative approach in co-generating the participants' literacy resettlement stories during the interviews (Mishler, 1991). This involved being patient, reassuring and rephrasing questions to make the participants feel comfortable and encouraged to share their experiences. Interviews were organised to suit participants' requirements (some had paid employment during the day, and some had other commitments, such as study and childcare) and were conducted by the researcher at the South Sudanese Community Centre in Canberra, Australia. Interviews lasted 50–60 minutes, used a combination of languages—Arabic, Sudanese Arabic, English and local languages—and were recorded to facilitate transcription and data analysis. Although the interview process was outlined in the Explanatory Statement (which was in English), it was often necessary to explain this orally to participants using other languages (e.g., Arabic or tribal languages) to ensure they understood the study aims and the interview procedure.

Raw interview data consisted of audio recordings and the interviewer's notes (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2000), both of which were used to construct transcripts of the interviews. The data from the interviews were analysed thematically, using Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach, and featured the following six steps: (i) becoming familiar with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes and (vi) producing the report. Working through this process—which involved moving back and forth between these steps—enabled both the identification of distinctive and sometimes unique participant experiences, but also the establishment of patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2021) across a range of participants in relation to

their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and everyday practices as new arrivals in an unfamiliar country. This process led to the identification that participants' stories clustered around three main factors or themes: (i) diversity and informal literacy practices, (ii) formal and non-formal English language learning and (iii) the effects of literacy practices on resettlement.

5. FINDINGS

Findings have been drawn from the voices of diverse South Sudanese refugees interviewed for this study, who told stories about how a range of literacy practices (Gee, 2004) shaped their resettlement experiences from the time they arrived in Australia between 2000 and 2010. Participants' 'literacy resettlement stories' included positive as well as disturbing experiences of learning and using language as they sought to make a new home for themselves and their families in Canberra, Australia, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As has been noted, findings clustered around three main factors or themes: (i) diversity and informal literacy practices, (ii) formal and non-formal English language learning and (iii) the effects of literacy practices on resettlement.

5.1.Diversity and Informal Literacy Practices

What informed this theme was that the South Sudanese refugees interviewed possessed diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, with some being highly multilingual—including exposure to the English language—and others having very limited formal schooling and little written literacy. Participants also spoke about using and developing their English language practices in a wide range of situations and practices to complete certain daily activities. These activities included: completing forms, reading signs to navigate around unfamiliar settings, shopping, community recreation activities, participating in church services or bible study groups and experimenting with online communications, such as email and Facebook. Finally, participants valued switching between languages for daily communication among their South Sudanese friends and community members. For instance, participants spoke of using home or tribal languages not just to learn English in formal settings, but also, importantly, to build new networks and to maintain connections to their tribal heritage. In the process of communicating with other members of the community, they explained how they switched among these languages in different circumstances, such as in church, at work and in language school. Achol provided one example of this:

> **Achol**: At work I used English but at church sometimes Dinka or English and Arabic depending on the situation... Sometimes when I'm at home with my children I use Dinka, sometimes in Arabic. With kids when things got complicated, we switched to English and with people who did not understand

our languages... In our community, we used both Arabic and some English.

Interviewer: To read the Bible?

Achol: I had Arabic Bible at home, but we went to church where English was used... (Interview, 11/10/2017)

Maria noted that, both in her early years in Australia and now, she often switches between languages during daily conversations with family and community members. At home, she used Arabic interspersed with some English when speaking with members of her family. She also used Arabic to read the bible and participate in a range of church-related activities. A different form of switching occurred among languages when she spoke with her fellow South Sudanese countrymen and women drawing on different vernaculars. The stories told by the South Sudanese participants of how they interspersed different languages and vernaculars in their home country further illustrated how they felt their identities were reflected through the language they used to engage in everyday community activities. Overall, participants found that the continued use of their first languages and vernaculars in some community activities helped affirm their cultural identity and provided comfort in their resettlement experience.

5.2.Formal and Non-formal English Language Learning

Participants made clear that attendance at AMEP English language classes was a central part of their resettlement experience, providing opportunities for both formal and non-formal learning. Formal learning activities included learning grammar and acquiring new vocabulary, and some participants said they found these activities to be helpful. Peter, for instance, spoke about gaining confidence as he learned English because his literacy education in his home country language had supported his learning of vocabulary and grammar, and this had encouraged him to experiment and participate in a range of literacy practices when he arrived in Australia. Participants also noted that their exposure to digital learning environments through the AMEP classes gave them the confidence to use computers and online dictionaries to look for the meanings of new words.

AMEP classes further utilised a variety of group discussions, role-plays and technology-based activities that participants found helpful for developing their English skills. Discussing these non-formal modes, several participants said they particularly enjoyed group activities and group discussion, saying that these activities helped them acquire valuable English skills necessary in the new world of Australia. Some AMEP language schools also allowed participants to use their first language in learning English as another language, encouraging students to move between languages and vernaculars when communicating in their classrooms. However, some participants faced challenges in AMEP classes that hindered

their learning experience, such as lack of translation support, cultural insensitivity and tensions with other students. Some participants also expressed resentment at learning yet another language, as well as fear of losing their cultural identity, and some were reluctant to participate in formal classroom learning.

5.3.Effects of Literacy Practices on Resettlement

Participants' literacy practices, informal, non-formal and formal, played a significant role in shaping their resettlement experiences and emerging identities in Australia. Many participants spoke positively about the value of the AMEP classes for their resettlement experience, implying that it powerfully contributed to their growing linguistic, educational and cultural capital. Maria, for instance, noted that the social dimensions of her learning in AMEP classes meant that she met new people as well as new ideas. Regardless of their prior literacy skills, many participants found digital learning crucial to their literacy resettlement in Australia. As several participants noted, engagement in digital practices helped participants to not only improve their capacity to comprehend and communicate in English and in other languages but build their cultural understanding. For example, Achol and Deng talked about how, after a few years of being in Australia, communication through email and Facebook offered them freedom of communication and access to new ideas and cultures. Achol indicated that Facebook, with its combination of English and international languages, was a useful tool to communicate with friends and learn new ideas through networking. He believed his time spent online helped in terms of staying connected to some of his past life and friends, while also helping him to settle in Australia through introducing him to new ideas and aspects of Australian life.

The dominance of English as the primary language of communication and literacy in Australia was a major adjustment for many participants, who had to navigate this new linguistic landscape. For example, Obaj indicated that, in his experience, language use was all about oral language in South Sudan, where he had been an active participant in local languages in *spoken* forms. He had not participated in written language practices in Sudan. In his Australian resettlement experience, it was challenging to have to learn not just a new language, English, but a language that was both spoken and written. As Susan explained this, 'Many people in the villages [in South Sudan] can just talk, they can't read or write. But here … Here in Australia, you need to read and write to go to appointments, write letters … It is important here to know read and writing to do your own things'. Obaj also felt uncomfortable with the dominance of English in Australia, saying that 'it is the only language' and that 'you don't have any other options. Susan, Obaj and Josephine also explained that oral language continued to be the most powerful way they could express themselves with their families and in community activities.

Overall, the key findings of this study highlight the diversity of South Sudanese refugees' backgrounds and literacy practices, the importance of informal, non-formal and formal language learning opportunities and the overall importance of literacy for the resettlement experiences and identities of these refugees in Australia.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the complexity of literacy practices and their effects among South Sudanese refugees. Participants' diverse linguistic backgrounds and varied educational experiences in Sudan significantly influenced their adaptation to Australian literacy practices. Although many found AMEP classes beneficial for their learning, some faced challenges stemming from cultural differences and social interactions. The study also reveals the importance of digital literacy in the resettlement process.

Notably, participants' previous education in Sudan influenced their literacy progress in Australia in various aspects. First, the South Sudanese refugees had varied educational experiences in Sudan, ranging from very limited formal schooling to university degrees, and many participants had experienced interruptions in their formal education in Sudan because of civil conflicts. These experiences affected their readiness and ability to engage with literacy practices in Australia, including creating challenges for some re adapting to structured learning environments in Australia. In addition, because some participants came from backgrounds where oral communication was predominant, and had limited experience in written language, they found it challenging to engage with written English in Australia.

Conversely, participants' multilingualism sometimes aided their English learning in Australia. More specifically, their linguistic flexibility allowed them to draw parallels and make connections between languages, and being multilingual gave some participants confidence in their ability to learn another language, making them more open to acquiring English. For instance, of the participants who had experienced Arabic as the dominant language of instruction in Sudan (Siddiek, 2010), some found that their knowledge of Arabic helped them in learning English. Other such participants—whose experiences in Sudan led them to associate Arabic with oppression—struggled with the transition. In addition, those who had some exposure to English in Sudan, even at a basic level, found it somewhat easier to adapt to English language learning in Australia. Some refugees used their multilingual abilities to find meanings of English words using Arabic–English dictionaries, aiding their vocabulary acquisition. Some AMEP programs also allowed students to use their first language to facilitate learning English, which was particularly helpful for those with a strong foundation in Arabic. Furthermore, participants often engaged in translanguaging, moving between different

languages to communicate effectively, as well as practised code-switching in their daily lives, which helped them navigate between their home languages and English in different contexts. These multilingual abilities allowed participants to maintain connections to their cultural identity while learning English, which was important for their overall resettlement experience. Nonetheless, although multilingualism was often beneficial—providing a strong foundation for learning English—some of the participants struggled with English being the dominant language in Australia, given that this differed from their experience in Sudan where they could freely use multiple languages.

Given the significance of participants' multilingualism for their adaptation to Australian literacy practices, the adaptations made by AMEP programs to accommodate the multilingual backgrounds of South Sudanese refugees were generally effective in helping them learn English, although the level of effectiveness varied. Where AMEP programs allowed students to use their first languages, this facilitated participants' English acquisition by helping them build on their existing linguistic knowledge. This was particularly effective for those with a strong foundation in Arabic. In other adaptations, varied instructional methods—such as handouts, presentations and discussions—catered to different learning styles and helped engage students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Many participants found group learning, discussions, and role-play useful for practicing English in supportive, realistic settings. Such practices-built participants' confidence in using English. The opportunities through discussion activities for peer-to-peer learning were also appreciated by participants, as they could learn from each other's diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Computer-based activities for pronunciation and listening practice were found helpful in improving specific English skills. However, some participants still struggled with the lack of translation support. Incorporating Australian culture and history into the language instruction was also viewed positively, as it helped students contextualise their language learning within the new environment. However, the effectiveness was not universal. Some participants reported challenges, such as the lack of translation services, the exclusive focus on English and Australian culture and difficulties in comprehending content because of language barriers.

Importantly, AMEP programs that demonstrated flexibility in their teaching approaches and were responsive to the specific needs and challenges of South Sudanese refugees were more effective in supporting participants' language learning. Thus, programs that acknowledged the diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds of the participants and tailored their instructional approaches were better able to build on participants' existing skills and knowledge. The programs that used translation services or encouraged the use of first languages (e.g., Arabic) and translanguaging in the classroom helped bridge language gaps and

facilitated better comprehension of the content for those with limited English proficiency. AMEP programs that created inclusive and supportive learning environments, where students felt comfortable to participate and draw on their multilingual abilities, were more effective in promoting language acquisition. Collaborative activities, such as group discussions and role-plays, were widely reported as highly effective in boosting confidence and enabling participants to practice English in meaningful, contextual ways. Programs that integrated discussions about cultural differences and Australian cultural contexts helped South Sudanese refugees better navigate their transition and apply their language skills in meaningful ways. Flexibility in accommodating gender-based challenges also enhanced the effectiveness of the AMEP programs for South Sudanese refugees. Overall, the more responsive and adaptable the AMEP programs were to the diverse needs, backgrounds and challenges of South Sudanese refugees, the more effective they were in supporting English language acquisition and learning outcomes, as well as participants' overall resettlement experience.

Despite the importance of these factors for participant language acquisition, some AMEP programs did not seem able to effectively implement the use of first languages and translanguaging. For example, AMEP programs that lacked explicit institutional support and policies encouraging the use of first languages and translanguaging would face difficulties in implementing these strategies effectively. Without institutional backing, teachers and students would be less empowered to use these approaches. In addition, if teachers lacked specialised training and competence in leveraging students' first languages and facilitating translanguaging, they would struggle to integrate these approaches into their instruction. A lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity towards the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of participants could also limit the use of first languages and translanguaging. Programs with limited access to appropriate resources—such as bilingual instructional materials, translation services and multilingual staff—would also be hindered in their ability to enable the use of first languages and translanguaging in the classroom. A rigid structure and curriculum that focused on a standardised English-only approach would also not allow for the flexibility to incorporate the use of first languages and translanguaging. In addition, programs serving a diverse student population with a wide range of first languages would struggle to effectively implement the use of first languages and translanguaging, given their need to cater to multiple linguistic needs simultaneously. Finally, a lack of funding and resources would a significant limit the ability of AMEP programs to overcome these challenges and effectively implement the use of first languages and translanguaging strategies.

Given the various points outlined in the findings and discussion sections, several recommendations can be made to policymakers and funders to enhance the capacity of AMEP

programs to better deliver literacy development through formal and non-formal learning and, thereby, facilitate refugee resettlement in Australia. Policymakers should provide clear policy directives and funding to AMEP programs to explicitly support the use of students' first languages and translanguaging in instruction. This should encompass the development of specialised teacher training programs (e.g., to support translanguaging), cultural awareness and sensitivity training and the provision of appropriate resources and materials (e.g., bilingual instructional materials, translation services and multilingual staff). Curriculum and instructional approaches should also cater to the diverse linguistic needs of student populations, rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all English-only approach. To continuously improve the design and implementation of AMEP programs, funders should support research and rigorous evaluation. Policymakers and funders should also encourage and facilitate stronger partnerships between AMEP programs and local community organisations representing refugee populations. This can help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps and further support informal language learning outcomes. Addressing these key areas through increased policy support, funding and a holistic, flexible approach, policymakers and funders can better enable AMEP programs to overcome the challenges and effectively implement first language and translanguaging strategies to support the learning outcomes and resettlement of South Sudanese refugee students.

6.1.Implications and Significance

This study has implications for governments and communities, especially regarding how they can better support the resettlement experiences of South Sudanese (and other) immigrants. The study also offers valuable case study evidence for current and future refugees to better understand their own resettlement experiences and the role of literacies in those experiences. In particular, the study highlights the diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds of participants, with some being highly multilingual and others having very limited formal schooling. This diversity in literacy practices and backgrounds shaped their resettlement experiences in Australia in important ways. The significance of this finding is that it underscores the need for AMEP programs and other resettlement services to be flexible and responsive to the heterogeneous needs of refugee populations (Department of Home Affairs, 2021), rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Understanding the diverse starting points of refugees and supporting translanguaging are crucial for designing effective language and literacy interventions. That is, the successful acquisition of a new language should not be at the cost of staying connected to one's first language for identity, culture and other purposes (Hatoss, 2013; Hatoss & Sheely, 2009).

In addition, although AMEP English language classes played a significant role in the resettlement experience for most participants—providing opportunities for both formal and non-formal language learning—some participants also faced challenges in AMEP classes. Such challenges included a lack of translation support, cultural insensitivity and tensions with other students. This suggests that the quality and cultural responsiveness of AMEP programs can significantly affect the learning outcomes and overall resettlement experiences of refugee students. This is particularly the case given that the dominance of English as the primary language of communication and literacy (both oral and written) was a major adjustment for many participants.

This paper has also made clear that participants' literacy practices—whether informal, non-formal or formal—played a significant role in shaping their resettlement experiences and emerging identities in Australia. This finding underscores the crucial role that language and literacy skills play in the social, cultural and economic integration of refugees. Addressing the literacy needs of refugee populations by facilitating diverse literacy practices (informal, formal and non-formal) is essential for facilitating the successful resettlement of such populations, empowering them to actively participate in their new communities.

7. CONCLUSION

South Sudanese refugees who settled in Australia between 2000 and 2010 had diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds that shaped their literacy practices and resettlement experiences. These refugees engaged in a range of informal, non-formal and formal language learning and literacy practices, including in AMEP English language classes (Moore, 2022), which they considered significant for their resettlement journeys. Understanding the refugees' literacy resettlement stories, including both positive and disturbing experiences, can provide valuable insights into the integration process.

Overall, this paper provides insight into the diversity of participants' backgrounds and literacy experiences, both in Sudan and Australia. The key findings that concern diversity and informal literacy practices, formal and non-formal language learning and the effects of literacy practices on resettlement draw particular attention to the role of first languages and translanguaging, the benefits and challenges found in AMEP classes and the effects of literacy practices on identity formation. Participants frequently mentioned using multimodal translanguaging literacy practices. These occurred at informal, communal settings (such as church-based and cultural groups) and supported the social learning of language, helping the refugees develop competence and confidence in their use of English. Building partnerships between AMEP programs and local community organisations representing refugee populations would further facilitate this process.

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Declarations

'**Clinical trial number:** not applicable.'

'**Human Ethics and Consent to Participate declarations**: not applicable'

Consent to Participate declaration

I have given my consent for the publication of identifiable details, which can include photographs (s), participants' pseudonyms names and ages, case history and/or details within the text to be published in the Journal of International Migration and Integration. This information could be used by other authors in potential research.

The Ethics Declaration Norm

Monash University Faculty of Education, observes the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (the National Statement).

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