

The University of the Arts
Division of Continuing Studies
Professional and Adult Programs

IDENTIFYING EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES
OF KAREN REFUGEE STUDENTS

By

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A Capstone Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education; Educational Program Design

April 20, 2018

Abstract

In response to a growing need of research in the field of education for refugee populations, this study was designed to explore the needs of Karen refugee students who have been resettled in the United States as a result of having to flee their homes in Myanmar (Burma). The introduction justifies the need for this research, along with a snapshot of Karen youth in the United States and the city of Philadelphia. The second section, a literature review, explores current research related to the Karen youth population in the United States including general immigrant and refugee research in the school setting. It also examines the relationship between the needs of Karen youth and the needs of students of low socioeconomic status. The methodology of the study is discussed in detail and introduces information about the study participants. Results of the study are categorized by trends identified within the gathered data of the study. Recommendations for next steps are laid out for both teachers and researchers. Areas of additional research are recommended and suggestions for school based support modifications are addressed.

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Chapter One

As twenty-first century educators, teachers need to be well informed about how to meet the needs of the children of our country who often hail from vastly differing backgrounds. This introduction is tasked with providing background information on the role of foreign refugees in American schools from the viewpoint of educators. These students represent an often misunderstood core group of the public school population across all regions of the country. The Southeast Asian country of Myanmar (Burma) has produced refugees since 1948. Shockingly, refugees continue to flee the country to this day and many of the children end up in our classrooms around the United States. The Karen ethnic group has produced the largest number of refugees from Myanmar (Burma) and they will be the focus of this study.

This project is the summation of personal experience educating refugee youth outside the traditional classroom setting. Through my work volunteering with Karen youth, I have come to recognize and appreciate their gentle and giving personalities, especially knowing the trauma they have experienced. After accepting into my house a Karen student who was struggling in school, I experienced first hand the challenges he dealt with daily as a result of his life experiences. With all that struggle, though, I have seen him persevere and overcome the unthinkable. He has graduated high school and has been accepted into his first college of choice. He is the success story that has inspired me to conduct this study to help other Karen youth who are struggling, both academically and emotionally, in American schools.

Through the course of the study, students, families, and educators will be either surveyed or interviewed to determine what they believe are the challenges Karen refugee students face in urban public schools. The survey and interview questions used in this study are intended to identify current education needs of Karen youth while also presenting potential suggestions to meet the identified needs.

Background

The United States is home to children of varying backgrounds and needs. Meeting the needs of all students is a challenge for teachers in the 21st century as the demographics of students in America continues to change (NCES, 2013.) This project will focus on identifying the unique needs of the Karen refugee population in a classroom setting. The Karen ethnic group makes up one of the largest refugee populations in the United States (Igielnik & Krogstad, 2017). Refugee Health Profiles (2014) identifies that refugees have spread across the US with significant populations in 34 states (see figure 1). With a focus on preparing classrooms for students learning in our schools today, this population of refugees has been underrepresented and needs to be addressed. For the past few years, up to 110,000 refugees have entered the country each year, although that number is shrinking due to current political views (Connor, 2017). Of those, up to 3,000 may resettle in the state of Pennsylvania, with a majority being placed in the city of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program, 2018). Many of those are children who are now in our schools. To truly be prepared as a 21st century educator, knowledge of educating this population is needed. This research study will identify the needs of this unique 21st century population, which will lead to programming design that can be specialized to meet their needs in a modern day classroom.

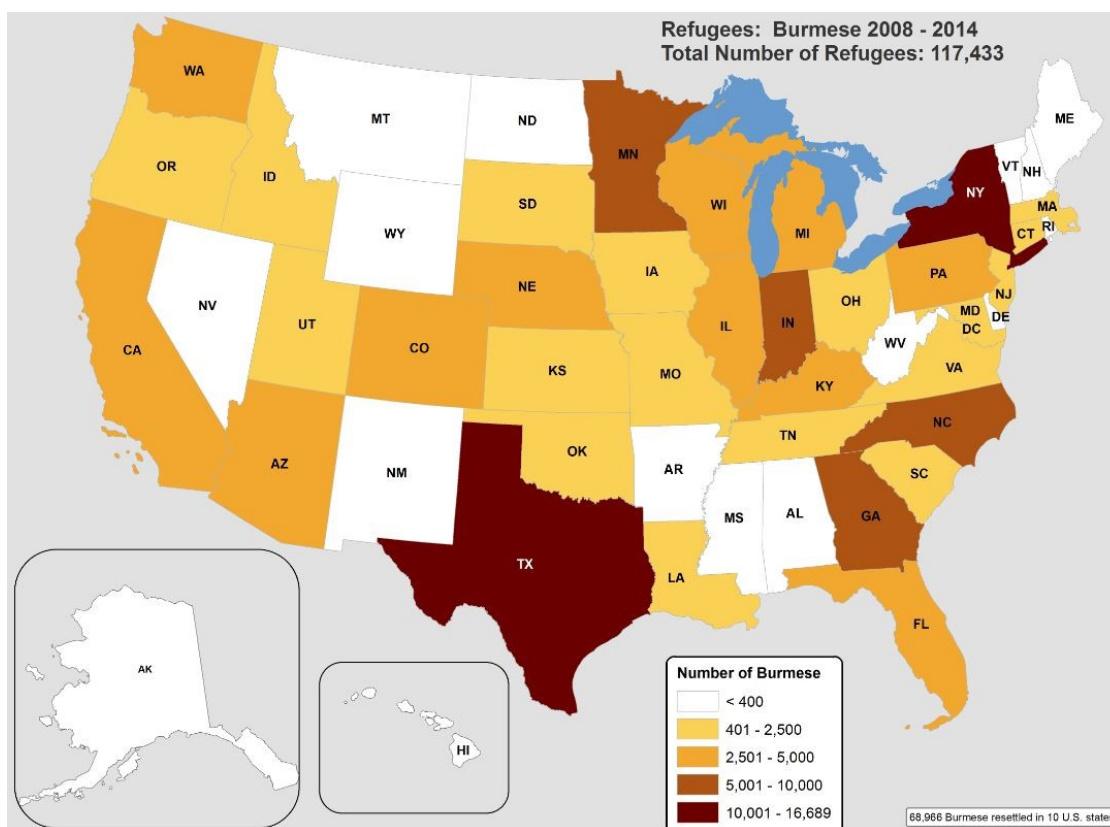


Figure 1: Map showing the distribution of refugees from Myanmar(Burma) upon resettlement in the United States (Refugee Health Profiles, 2014)

Many Karen, after going through the resettlement process, have found themselves in dramatically different situations when compared to their lives in Southeast Asia. Going from the jungles of Thailand, they now often find themselves in rough neighborhoods of major cities, such as Philadelphia. A population of about 200 Karen have settled in a small pocket of South Philadelphia (Karen Community of Philadelphia, 2016). Their community is tight knit, however the city adds several additional challenges to the already challenging lives they lead. The children from these families are a permanent part of our country; once they arrive, they are able

to receive a permanent resident green card and even are able to apply for full citizenship after five years of residency (U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, 2017). As educators, we need to ensure their needs are being met.

Throughout this study, a single question will be answered to identify the barriers of Karen refugee students in urban public schools. This single question will be extrapolated as a pathway towards it's answer. Several other questions will be touched upon throughout the study in order to better understand the barriers from all points of view. Together the information gathered will provide a starting place for teachers of Karen youth when first interacting with the new culture. This will aide in creating a meaningful connection between the students, their families, and the school.

Statement of the Problem

After a thorough investigation of current research on refugee students in American public schools, a clear need for additional studies was discovered. This study seeks to inform researchers of areas of needed exploration to better understand how to educate Karen refugee youth in American public schools. Additionally, this study seeks to inform educators of Karen refugee youth of needs in order to better connect with their students in the classroom setting. A narrowed review of literature allowed for a progression from general studies in the refugee school experience in America (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011) all the way down to Karen refugee needs in an early childhood classroom (Prior & Niesz, 2013). These studies, among many others, identified the need to approach the educational experience differently when working with refugee students. One study even stated the importance of having supports in place for helping these students deal with post traumatic stress disorder (Tran & Hodgson, 2015). Studies on

refugees are quite sparse, though, and only one of the studies found focused specifically on refugee students from the Karen ethnic group and that study focused solely on students prior to their k-12 learning experience (Harper, S. G., 2016). Specific research needs to be conducted in order to narrow down general refugee needs to identify the specific needs of the Karen refugee students, which have had a relatively large influx into the Philadelphia public schools.

Findings will be shared with the education community in Philadelphia through the Karen bilingual counselor. He works closely with this population and, in addition to counseling and translating, often acts as an advocate for the students. He will be able to understand the results and share them with the appropriate people in the School District of Philadelphia who work with Karen refugee students daily.

Purpose of the Study

Research on immigrant students in American has been conducted in abundance. This previous research, however, often lumps refugee students in with typical immigrant students. By definition, though, refugee students have drastically dissimilar experiences when compared to the typical immigrant. Refugee students are in the United States as a result of violence and are often not here by choice. This background changes the motivation of these students as well as their needs. To lump refugee student research with typical immigrants does a disservice to educators as they try to learn from these studies. Ideally, research needs to be conducted on specific refugee situations. A refugee from Myanmar (Burma) will have a tremendously different history than a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo. For these reasons, this study is being used to dive deeply into the history, culture, and needs of refugees from the Karen ethnic group who have fled their home country of Myanmar (Burma) after years of oppression

and war in the longest running civil war on Earth in order to better meet their needs in the classroom.

Being a small minority of under seven million worldwide, the Karen people are rarely a topic of professional study. The frequency becomes even less as the topic is narrowed to educational challenges. The ultimate goal of this project is to identify specific educational needs of Karen school-aged children. By identifying these needs, practitioners will then be able to attempt interventions that can be applied either inside or outside of school. In order for any interventions to be attempted within this subgroup, first an analysis must be formed to identify the specific and unique educational needs of these students. That formal analysis is what makes this project significant.

These students frequently seem lost, stuck between cultures with reminders of their traumatic past at home with what is left of their families, all while trying to navigate the cultural norms of being a student in a Philadelphia public school. I have observed these struggles and acknowledged their need for emotional and academic supports in order to improve their educational experience. This project will further the research within this vibrant community and allow educators to pinpoint the needs of these students making for an all around more productive and meaningful learning experience.

Research Questions

Current research on refugee youth in public schools is generalized and non-specific. Through specific surveys and interviews, the questions below will be answered allowing for more specific educational programming for the Karen youth in Philadelphia. Targeted accommodations for needs indicated by answering these questions will allow for more adequate

and student-centered teaching in the classroom. While a single question will be answered during this study, a tiered level of questions will gather data from all stakeholders in these children's education.

1. What barriers do Karen refugee children face in public schools?
 - a. What are the most commonly reported barriers to learning reported by Karen refugee children in public schools?
 - b. What are the most commonly reported barriers to learning reported by Karen refugee parents of children in public schools?
 - c. What are the most commonly reported barriers to learning reported by teachers of Karen refugee children in public schools?

Research Design

This study is designed to collect qualitative data in order to identify themes of barriers for Karen refugee youth in Philadelphia public schools. Surveys and Interviews will be conducted in order to gather this data. Refugee students and families will be surveyed in person and recorded for later review. A translator will be present who is fluent in both English and Karen to aide in the understanding of the response to each survey question. A total of ten students from various grade levels will be interviewed in order to identify themes among the broader population of Karen refugee students attending Philadelphia public schools.

The parents of the refugee students will be asked a smaller set of questions which will focus on their views of American education and their child's place within the system. These interviews will be translated between Karen and English and therefore will be recorded in order to ensure all data is correctly gathered.

The final segment of candidates will be questioned through surveys. Several teachers of refugee students from public schools in Philadelphia will be surveyed with online surveys in order to gather data from them. Due to school schedules, this is the most logical way to gather data from these participants.

Definition of Terms

In order to fully understand the nuances of this study, it is critical to have a consistent understanding of all terminology. The following definitions are intended to clarify any misconceptions that may arise from these terms throughout the study.

1. Burma is a small country in Southeast Asia (see figure 2). Burma borders India and China to the north, Thailand to the east and south, and Bangladesh to the west. The country is made up of 135 different ethnic groups, which has been the fuel for war in this country for over fifty years. Burma was renamed Myanmar in 1989 by the Burmese Army. The country is still widely referred to as Burma by the Karen ethnic group, as well as the United States government.

Figure 2: Map of Myanmar (Burma) in Southeast Asia (Google, 2018). The area highlighted in red is known as Kawthoolei, or Karen State. It is the home to the Karen ethnic group.



2. Immigrants, in the context of this study, refer to people who voluntarily relocated to a new country in order to provide a better life for themselves or their family. Immigrants, in terms of this study, are different from refugees who were involuntarily relocated due to unrest in their home country.
3. The Karen ethnic group is one of the largest ethnic groups in Burma. They mostly live in the Karen State in southeastern Myanmar(Burma). There are seven million ethnic Karen worldwide. Many have fled their home country to refugee camps in Thailand where they lived for decades. Over time many have been relocated to other countries around the world.
4. Myanmar is the name the Burmese Army gave Burma in 1989. When the name of the country is written as Myanmar, it is often followed immediately with the previous name, Burma, in parentheses. Since Myanmar was a name issued by the military junta, it is not widely used by the ethnic Karen or even the United States government.
5. Refugees in this study refer to displaced ethnic Karen. The term refugee is assigned to the ethnic Karen because they have been persecuted for more their fifty years because of their ethnicity. Many Karen fled to Thailand, where refugee camps are located near the Burmese border. A typical stay in these camps lasts upwards of 10 years. Families would go on to resettle in other countries once they were chosen. Refugees are specifically not relocating by choice, which can affect their mental state once relocated. This study focuses solely on refugees and takes all of this information into account.

Conclusion

This study is intended to fill several gaps in research within the immigrant and refugee public school student population. As the United States continues to take a large number of refugees, particularly from Myanmar (Burma), it is increasingly important that teachers of these students understand their specific educational needs given their refugee background. The following chapter is a review of the literature which informs this study and the need for such precise research in this area.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study of literature is tiered through five areas of research, ultimately narrowing down the field to problem of practice I will be investigating in my study. This review starts with a brief history of Karen people, then transitions into issues involving refugee children in schools, continuing on more specifically to Karen refugees in schools, followed by a look at challenges faced by students attending high poverty schools, which will then narrow down to challenges faced by Karen refugees who attend high poverty school, and finally ending with Karen refugee children in schools. This study will contribute to the initial literature reviewed here, but also will serve as a starting point from which additional research can commence.

Karen Refugees Story/History

It should be noted that the history stated in this section is largely retrieved from the Karen National Union website and may contain biased information. The story of the ethnic Karen goes back centuries. A nomadic tribe that migrated south from Mongolia, eventually they settled in what is now the southeastern tail of Myanmar (Burma). This is the land they continue to call home today (Karen National Union, 2017). Their story would not be complete, without a contextual understanding of the government of Myanmar (Burma) over time. After British rule of Burma ended in 1948, the citizens of the country were optimistic about the prospect of living in an independent nation (Pederson, 2015). U Nu was elected prime minister in an overwhelming victory and the formation of an independent government was underway. This lasted only until 1960, when General Ne Win of the Burmese Army organized a military coup in response to the prime minister's push for Buddhism as a state sanctioned religion, among other

things (Myanmar profile - Timeline, 2017). This coup would turn out to be the start of the longest civil war in history. Lasting over fifty years, the military's rule of Myanmar (Burma) was focused on targeting the 135 different ethnic groups that reside in the boundaries of the country (Pederson, 2015).

The Karen are the largest ethnic group in Myanmar (Burma). At over eleven million people, their population seems small in a country of nearly 53 million, however they were a crucial target of the Burmese Army during their rule (Karen National Union, 2017). While all ethnic groups were targeted, the Karen were large enough to fight back. The Karen National Union (KNU) has an army of their own. With weapons, the KNU Army has fought back against the Burmese Military since their rise to rule in 1960 (Karen National Union, 2017). The Burmese, however, were not quick to retreat, and began fighting back. Burning villages, raping women, and torturing children became commonplace. The KNU Army continues to fight, but as the war progressed, many Karen began to flee. In the 50 years of war, in fact, over six million Karen fled Myanmar (Burma) for a chance at survival (Karen National Union, 2017).

The country of Thailand, which borders the Karen State in Myanmar (Burma), became a place of refuge. The Thai government offered land to build nine refugee camps for the ethnic groups fleeing Myanmar (Burma), 90% of whom were Karen (Karen National Union, 2017). The Thai government was tolerant of the refugees, but not welcoming (Amnesty International, 2017). They were to stay in the camps at all times and were not given any rights. Food was scarce and jobs were nonexistent. Amnesty International (2017) also mentions that the refugees never seemed to settle into their lives in the refugee camps. They are, instead always in limbo as the population of the camps constantly changes from families being relocated to new countries.

The United States has a history of accepting such people and over the course of the war 40,000 Karen landed in America, generally after a 10-15 year waiting period in the camps (Karen National Union, 2017). While the war in Myanmar (Burma) is technically over, the Karen are still unable to return to the communities in their homeland. Not only have their villages been toppled, but landmines litter the Karen State region of Myanmar (Burma) (Karen National Union, 2017).

Many Karen, after going through the resettlement process, have found themselves in dramatically different situations when compared to their lives in Southeast Asia. Going from the jungles of Thailand, they now often find themselves in rough neighborhoods of major cities, such as Philadelphia (Gilhooly, 2017). A population of about 200 Karen have settled in a small pocket of South Philadelphia (Karen Community of Philadelphia, 2016). These students are a permanent part of our country; once they arrive, they are able to receive a permanent resident green card and even are able to apply for full citizenship after five years (U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, 2017). Educators need to be prepared to teach students from this background as they continue to enter our schools.

Refugee Children in Schools

Globalization is a force that continues to influence and change schools in the United States. With a continued influx of school aged refugee children, it has become the role of educators to accommodate the many needs that follow children with atypical pasts. Schools have a critical role to play in the settlement of refugee young people and in facilitating transitions to citizenship and belonging (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). The school setting is a place of trust and comfort where interventions can be conducted, both academically and emotionally (Tyrer &

Fazel, 2014). After conducting this literature study, it has become evident that there is a severe gap in research for refugees from specific ethnic backgrounds, including the Karen. The particular needs of refugee students have been ignored by education policymakers and by academic researchers, who have focused more recently on migrant and multicultural education (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). By lumping refugee students in with other immigrant student subgroups, many unique needs go unnoticed. Refugees deal not only with post migration issues ranging from language proficiency to racism in the school setting, but this population also must deal with pre-migration trauma. The nature of being a refugee indicates that there was some type of trauma which caused the person to flee their home (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). A history of trauma should drastically change the approach to educational and behavioral modifications. The lack of targeted research indicates a need that will only grow with time as more refugee students enter our schools.

For many refugee students, needs are directly impacted by their individual cultural background and the nature of how they came to live in America. These experiences are different for every refugee child. Several authors, however, have identified a wide range of needs that seem to occur across a diverse range of refugee students. Dr. Yatta Kanu (2008) has narrowed these needs down to a concise list of ten items taken from correlations identified during interviews with refugee students. The two most common needs were

1. Separation from family (“my mother disappeared during the war; she used to provide the boundaries we needed”)

Separation from family can cause acute loneliness for many of the students, which made it difficult to concentrate in school (Kanu, 2008). Additionally, Dr. Kanu realized that by losing

family members, students also often lost ever important role models who brought stability into their lives. Without these role models, it was difficult for many students to perform their best. Some students hoped for structure from the school system, but were not always held to the high standards they should have been (Kanu, 2008).

2. Grade placement based on age and English language assessment tests rather than academic ability.”

This caused a tough gap in education. Students often report frustration as they are asked to repeat classes they have already learned due to their English language ability (Kanu, 2008). For these students, they felt the school was more focused on their language skills rather than their actual academic abilities.

These needs identify a large gap between refugee students and their American peers. With such a large gap, it is clear to see that these students are at a severe disadvantage when entering American schools. Noting the lack of research for the population, it becomes clear that teachers have a monumental task when refugee children sit in their classes.

There is already some research on best practices for teachers when working with students in their class who have a refugee background. While the existing research has flaws, namely the lack of testing through additional studies, the data that exists most certainly gives a starting point for teachers in the classroom. Authors Taylor and Sidhu (2011) discuss their findings of good practice from literature. Their three most consistent findings were:

- “1. the importance of a welcoming environment, free of racism
2. the need to meet psycho-social needs, particularly if there are prior experiences of trauma

3. linguistic needs”

These three findings make up what Taylor and Sidhu identify as a holistic model of education, which meets the unique needs of refugee children. They found this to be the most effective way to accommodate students from this population through their work with students in four separate schools. By acknowledging these three findings, teachers would be more equipped to tailor their instruction and interactions with these students allowing for a greater potential of success academically, socially, and emotionally.

Additionally, recently resettled Karen refugees also have to navigate the needs of being a student in an impoverished urban school setting. According to Robertson, Wilding, and Gifford (2016), 42% of refugees resettled in the United States are placed in an underserved urban community. A placement of this type adds to the challenges these students must overcome.

Challenges Faced by Children in High Poverty Urban Schools

Many of the challenges faced by refugee children are the direct result of their placement in high poverty urban schools. High poverty urban schools provide a very challenging mission for school staff. The students come to school daily from traumatic experiences (Ullucci & Howard, 2015) and are expected to learn with minimal resources in understaffed situations (Chiang & Fisher, 2015). On top of that, the turnover of staff in these schools fluctuates much more than a low poverty school. All of these challenges together create a difficult learning environment for students of any background. According to Robertson, Wilding, and Gifford (2016), 42% of refugees resettled in the United States are placed in an underserved urban community. A placement of this type adds to the challenges these students must overcome.

It is not uncommon to expect a lack of resources when thinking of high poverty urban schools. There is, in fact, an opportunity gap between these schools and well-funded suburban schools. Expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information resources are commonplace in many suburban schools, but rare in underfunded high poverty schools in urban settings (Carter & Welner, 2013). Stories of sharing textbooks, rodent and insect infestations, lack of support staff such as librarians and guidance counselors, along with minimal technology are typical examples of life in a high poverty urban school (Carter & Welner, 2013). These conditions are a far cry from acceptable when students are trying to learn.

In addition to a lack of resources, teacher turnover is also highest among high poverty urban schools. For teachers entering their first year of teaching in a high poverty urban school, there is a 50% chance they will leave the school the following year (Ronfeldt & Lankford, 2011). Additionally, city schools have as much as 18% turnover on average in their schools each year, as is the case in New York City (Ronfeldt & Lankford, 2011). The study conducted by Ronfeldt and Lankford provides empirical evidence that high teacher turnover in urban areas negatively affects students. The lack of consistent instruction proved to limit the growth students made in both reading and math by up to 7% of a standard deviation according to Ronfeldt and Lankford. For refugee students who enter the American school system with severe education gaps, a consistent level of instruction is critical to success.

Even worse, students who are not affected by turnover in these high needs schools show regression as a result of the overall climate within the school (Ronfeldt & Lankford, 2011).

These challenges introduce serious concerns that add to the already vast challenges found in high poverty urban schools.

Aside from challenges within the school, students in these schools are dealing with daily trauma and disparities outside the classroom, which impacts them greatly upon their return to school. Authors Ullucci and Howard (2015) indicated that “Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have access to medical care, which can allow vision, dental, hearing, and other health ailments (including asthma) to go untreated” (p. 189). These health impairments can cause further distractions in school (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). They also acknowledge that students living in dilapidated conditions can be exposed to lead paint, which has been linked to cognitive delays in children. These delays will make learning even harder for refugee students who already often have gaps in their education. A lack of continuous schooling is also an issue for high poverty urban students. Due to financial constraints, these families are much more likely to move frequently, causing gaps in education from school to school (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). The gaps in education that are a result of the instability in their lives make it even harder for refugee students to perform in the classroom at the same rate as their same age American peers.

Challenges Faced by Refugee Children in Urban Schools

Beyond migration struggles, many refugees are relocated to urban areas where jobs and social resources are concentrated and more easily accessible (Thorstensson, 2013). The drawbacks from these locations, however, include crime, opportunity for misbehavior, underfunded schools, along with the many other struggles of living in a high poverty urban neighborhood (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Thorstensson, 2013). According to Chiang and

Fisher (2015), this also causes the refugees to have a marginalized view of themselves within their community. They found that these students frequently feel insignificant compared to their peers because of the neighborhoods in which they reside. Chiang and Fisher (2015) also recount incidents of tremendous trauma experienced by some of the students they interviewed. These refugee students are so familiar with violence and trauma that a level of normalization in these areas begins to form (Chiang & Fisher, 2015). A student shared with the authors “If you heard about violence around you, it’s really scary. But I’m used to this kind of thing you know. It’s not really that scary for me; I could just walk one mile to school and one mile back, so it’s okay. But maybe other outsiders come in you know, they’re probably – they be scared to death, but I’m used to it.” This level of normalization adds to the already extensive trauma these students experienced in their past. Many of these students have never known a world where they could let down their guard.

Other factors of living in a high poverty neighborhood effect refugee students as well (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). A lack of resources and time are vital factors for these students as they try to reach their educational aspirations. These obstacles create more stress and allow for excuses to stop chasing educational dreams.

Racism is also an issue in urban schools attended by Southeast Asian refugee students (Chiang & Fisher, 2015). A lack of cultural awareness from both students and school staff create an environment where racism can flourish. One student recounted an event from middle school “Kids would try to mock us like ‘ching-chong’” like that, you know. They would call us Chinese even though we are not” (p. 17-18). Racist events are all too common among refugee students (Correa-Velez, 2017). In addition to the racism faced in an urban school setting, underfunded

urban schools can also create a large disparity for refugee students. Just in 2013, the School district of Philadelphia was forced to lay off over 4,000 staff district wide (Strauss, 2013). Many of those laid off were guidance counselors or nurses and classrooms began to overflow with class sizes approaching 40 students (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). These issues impact all urban youth, however McWilliams and Bonet argue that refugee students are particularly vulnerable in situations like these, specifically as a result of the lack of guidance counselors. McWilliams and Bonet (2016) cite the traumatic histories of many refugee youth as the reason for this gap in performance between refugees and the general populations in urban schools.

Existing literature reveals a daunting struggle among refugee students living in an urban setting and attending urban schools. Their self-perception within their school and home community tends to be one of isolation and doubt. The urban experience has proven to add stress to the already traumatic past refugee students are trying to deal with while attending school and student success. When interventions and accommodations were implemented, students felt more accepted and understood, providing a more rich educational experience (Lerner, 2012). While the existing research has flaws, namely the lack of testing through additional studies, the data that exists most certainly gives a starting point for teachers in the classroom. Authors Taylor and Sidhu (2011) discuss their findings of good practice from literature. Their three most consistent findings were:

- “1. the importance of a welcoming environment, free of racism
2. the need to meet psycho-social needs, particularly if there are prior experiences of trauma
3. linguistic needs”

Strategies and Interventions

There is already some research on best practices for teachers when working with students in their class who have a refugee background. Research conducted is minimal at best, but a good start for teachers to understand the need for accommodations when teaching students from refugee backgrounds. A quote by Kugler (2009) is a strong reminder of the need for individualized strategies and interventions when working with this population: “Students who are refugees often bring deep emotional scars. Escaping countries at war, they may have experienced repeated violence, a factor itself linked to lower academic achievement” (p.1).

In one study, three findings make up what Taylor and Sidhu identify as a holistic model of education, which meets the unique needs of refugee children. They found this to be the most effective way to accommodate students from this population through their work with students in four separate schools. By acknowledging these three findings, teachers would be more equipped to tailor their instruction and interactions with these students allowing for a greater potential of success academically, socially, and emotionally.

Additional findings provide teacher specifics when working with a refugee. A list has been compiled of simple, yet effective, strategies for teachers to create a positive school environment for refugee students (Lerner, 2012). Many of the items on this list are related to alternative communication styles that can allow the students to interact with other students and adults in their school without the use of the English language. Some accommodations that were seen as effective include engaging the student in social games, using art and dance activities, assigning peer buddies, and teaching the class some basic words in the refugee child’s first language (Lerner, 2012). This same study also identified several interventions teachers can

implement to ensure success of students from a refugee background. Lerner (2012) lists the following strategies to help in this area: Get to know each child individually, be observant, use a lot of group work activities, establish a peer tutoring partner, conduct home visits, conduct personal research on the child's home culture, and allow the child to use their home language in school. These strategies are wonderful, but also vast. Refugees all arrive in our classrooms from drastically varying backgrounds, meaning not all of the listed interventions and accommodations may be needed. A more specific analysis of each culture could be more helpful for educators as they receive students with a refugee background.

Karen Refugee Children in Schools

Ethnic Karen children are resilient people. They have learned to deal with horrific situations that we, as Americans, cannot begin to imagine. Adding to their list of challenges to overcome as refugees, is learning to function in a culture completely different from their own (Prior & Niesz, 2013). A major setback for these students is that culturally, parental involvement in schools is minimal at best for many of these refugee students (Harper, 2016). Absent parents becomes an issue since the level of parental involvement in a child's education is directly related to both their educational performance as well as their mental health status (Wang, 2013). This, along with many other challenges mixed together create a difficult scenario for learning no matter what resources the school is able to provide.

For many Karen students, their first formalized western classroom experience does not occur until they are in their classroom in their country of resettlement (Chia and Kenny, 2012; Harper). In the refugee camps, classrooms are quite different. They are multi-age lectures held

in outdoor classrooms. Class size is limited only by the number of students who want to attend (Chia & Kenny, 2012). Adapting to a traditional American classroom is a challenging task.

The very nature of being a refugee indicates a history of traumatic events. This follows suit for Karen refugees just as it does every other group who has been targeted in a political or religious way. Karen refugee children enter our schools with traumatic pasts (Tran & Hodgson, 2015).

“The association between war experiences and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression in refugee children is well established” (Pacione, Measham, & Rousseau, 2013, p. 4). The data is staggering when looking at mental health needs within refugee children. Pacione, Measham, and Rousseau (2013) indicate that 89.3% of children from war torn regions such as Myanmar (Burma) meet the criteria for PTSD. Additionally, the researchers found that 43% of refugee students meet the criteria for depression. These mental health blocks directly impact a child’s ability to learn. The numbers are alarming and indicates the importance of addressing needs within the school setting for Karen refugee students.

Studies have proven that there are, in fact, ways to help young students reflect on their transition to a traditional classroom setting (Prior and Niesz, 2013). Artwork has proven to be an effective medium for Karen children to voice their feelings about their educational transition (Prior and Niesz, 2013). Authors Prior and Niesz (2013) saw a strong correlation between the opportunity for Karen refugee students to share their story through artwork and comfort level within their new classroom. By sharing their feelings, they were able to appear vulnerable and, in turn, build relationships with their new teachers and peers (Prior and Niesz, 2013). This creates a more meaningful educational experience and allows for a more seamless transition to their new school setting.

Conclusion

More research is needed to truly understand and support this growing population that has settled all around the United States. Without a clear assessment of needs for Karen students in particular, accommodations are simply guesses. By conducting more research and contributing to minimal literature available, educators will be able to make informed decisions to best help their Karen refugee students.

Through this study, I hope to begin a trend of literature on Karen refugees in American schools. I will identify the specific needs of the Karen refugee student population in a school setting. This study will identify these needs through surveys and interviews given to a small representative group of Karen students from Philadelphia. By identifying these needs, teachers will be able to better gauge instructional and emotional supports for this at-risk population within their classrooms, along with laying the groundwork for further research into how to best meet the identified needs. The next chapter of this study will begin to look at how data was collected to begin assessing the needs of this population that continues to grow.

Chapter Three - Methodology

Overview

In order to assist public educators with the instruction of Karen students from a refugee background, this study was designed. The research for this population of students is minimal even though their presence in our schools continues to grow. The purpose of this study was to target specific student needs that may have gone unnoticed. By identifying these themes, recommendations could also then be made for teachers working with the Karen population. Having a set of trending needs and list of recommendations will allow teachers to easily support Karen students in their classroom, making the student educational experience more personalized and meaningful. In addition to interviewing Karen students and families, this study also requested several public school educators who are currently teaching Karen students to respond to a survey in order to identify their successes and frustrations with Karen refugee students in their classroom. Because teachers are already working with this population, it is important to first identify the experiences that have already been reflected upon before determining recommendations for meeting the needs of these students.

The Karen people of Myanmar (Burma) continue to be resettled in the United States. Over 40,000 have already begun new lives here (Karen National Union, 2017). They have been fleeing a war for over sixty years and conditions continue to deteriorate in Myanmar (Burma). In fact nearly one out of every four refugees approved for resettlement in the US is fleeing from the Military Junta in Myanmar (Burma) (Karen National Union, 2017). One of the expectations of this population is the opportunity for a quality education that will help lift their family from

poverty. By targeting needs and promoting recommendations in this study, the refugees will be more likely to achieve the level of education to which they dream.

This study was divided into two sections. First, a group of teachers were selected to answer a series of questions via an online survey to allow flexibility for it to be completed at a time convenient for them. The second part of this study was conducted via in-person interviews. Both Karen refugee students and their parents and/or guardians were interviewed separately. These in-person interviews were recorded and translated via an interpreter to reduce a lack of understanding. Each question was carefully chosen and targeted to identify the needs of the Karen refugee population in public schools.

Participants

The participants of this study were grouped into one of three categories: students, parents, or teachers. Ten students were recruited for the survey through the Karen bilingual counselor who works in their schools. They were each informed that there was no benefit or disadvantage as a result of their participation in the study. The students were chosen from two schools, both neighborhood schools for the area of South Philadelphia where the Karen population has settled. The students range in age from 12 to 16 and have conversational English skills.

The parent participants in the study were again recruited through the Karen bilingual counselor. Ten parents of current public school students of Karen descent agreed to participate in an in person interview. These participants all live in South Philadelphia and speak minimal English. A translator was available during the parent interviews to help ensure understanding of questions and responses by both the participants and the interviewer.

The final group of participants in this study is made up of ten current educators of Karen refugee students. The teachers range from grade six to grade twelve and are currently educating at least one Karen student on a daily basis. The teachers were recruited for this study through the Karen bilingual counselor. They were informed that their participation was purely voluntary. They were also notified that their participation would require a minimal time commitment for a brief online survey which could be completed at a time convenient for them.

Apparatus and Materials

Due to the nature of this study, a variety of materials were used in order to collect data. The educators that participated in this study were sent a link to a survey on Google Forms. This application allows for the presentation, distribution, collection, and organization of all data provided by the teachers. All information collected is saved into a spreadsheet automatically by the Google Forms application. Additionally, a series of visual representations of the data is automatically created by the application, which aided in the quick understanding of gathered data. In the survey, teachers were asked to respond to ten questions. Of these ten questions, three utilize a ratings scale and the other seven are short answer response questions. The questions were carefully worded as to only require a short response to respect the busy schedules of the teachers who responded. Teachers were notified of the survey and given a deadline of one week after they first received the link. A follow up email was sent to the participants three days before the deadline and a thank you email was sent to all participants after the deadline passed.

For the second part of this study, students were interviewed. The interview consisted of fifteen questions. The initial three questions gathered demographic data and the remaining twelve were focused on family history and school experience. Follow up questions were also

identified prior to the interviews in order to ensure correct data was gathered. The interviews were conducted in a conversation style and intended to be relaxed for the student participants. They were recorded to allow for revisitation of answers after the interviews were completed. The students were notified of the recording up front. All answers were documented by the author of the study in a Google Form. Google Forms was utilized for the live interviews because of the same benefits the application offered the responses to the teacher survey including visual graphs and automatic sorting of data into a spreadsheet. A recorder and translator were also utilized during each interview to assist with any translation that may be needed.

The final part of the student involved the interviews of parents and/or guardians of Karen refugee students. These adults were chosen based on their willingness to cooperate with an interview process and are not necessarily the parents or guardians of the students who were interviewed in the second part of this study. The adult Karen participants were given a set of ten questions. All but two of the questions were open ended and required a thoughtful response from the participants. Follow up questions were ready when needed in order to ensure accurate data was collected. Just as with the other parts of this study, Google Forms was utilized by the author of the study to document answers easily onto a spreadsheet and allow for visual representations of the responses. As with the students, a recorder and translator were also utilized in order to ensure questions were correctly understood and answered.

For all in person interviews, dates and times were set up via a Karen community organizer who the author of the study was in contact with throughout the process of the study. All interviews were conducted at the Karen Community Center to allow for convenience and familiarity on the part of the participants. The community center is a storefront in South

Philadelphia which is widely used by members of the Philadelphia Karen community for various events.

Ethical Considerations

Realizing this study involved a vulnerable population, several steps were taken to ensure the participants were being treated in the most ethical ways possible. Additionally, all ethical considerations were reviewed by an Internal Review Board to ensure high ethical standards throughout the study. To ensure confidentiality, participant names were not gathered in during the formal data collection process. In any location where a participant voluntarily listed a name, the information was omitted from the results of the study. Participants were informed that their identity would be kept private during the study and that none of their answers would be able to be traced back to them in both the data collection stage and final reporting of the study. Participants were also informed prior to their acceptance that they would be recorded during interviews. In addition to preparing the participants for the interviews and surveys, they were also informed that their participation was solely voluntary and that there would be no direct risks or direct benefits as a result of their participation in the study.

To ensure the participants were comfortable, interviews were conducted in the Karen Community Center in South Philadelphia. This location is familiar to the Karen students and their parents/guardians. Also, to aide in the comfort level of the participants, a translator was on hand. The translator also worked as a cultural medium who ensured the interviews were conducted without any unintentional miscommunications between the participants and the author of the study.

Furthermore, the individual interview questions posed to the student and adult Karen refugee participants were heavily vetted before making it to the list of final interview questions. Each question was scrutinized to ensure it was being asked and could be answered with respect. In order to ensure no cultural misunderstandings would take place, the questions were previewed by a Karen Community Leader as well as a Karen student, both who are fluent in English and Karen culture and customs. In addition to vetting questions for cultural purposes, questions were also reviewed to ensure they would not trigger any unwanted memories or past experiences for the refugee participants. While the traumatic events of their past have shaped who they are as people and how they react in situations like assimilating into a foreign school, the experience of reliving those events from their past could have had long lasting negative effects on the participants.

In order to ensure all of the above considerations were presented to participants prior to accepting to participate in the study, a letter of consent was drafted listing each ethical consideration. This letter was also translated to Karen and back translated to English, allowing participants to read its content in their preferred language. The letter was signed by each participant and kept on file by the author of the study.

Procedure

The procedure of this study was broken into three separate parts in order to find data themes from all stakeholders in a child's education: teachers, parents, and the children themselves. Given the different role of each stakeholder, three separate sets of questions were compiled in order to gather data. Teachers were sent an online survey designed in Google Forms in order to diminish the burden their participation in the study may cause. The students and

parents and guardians were interviewed in person at the Karen Community Center in South Philadelphia. A translator was present for each of these interviews. These questions were asked in person to ensure no information was lost in translation, which would have been difficult to ensure in an online survey.

Teacher Survey - Appendix A

Teachers were included in this study in order to help identify needs that have already been established and addressed. Being respectful of professional time, the teachers who participated were sent their questions as a survey via Google Forms. This format allowed for flexibility in when they could respond, which proved to be important when searching for teachers who would be interested in participating. The teachers responded to a total of ten questions. Since they were responding via survey, different data collection methods, such as ratings scales, were utilized for some questions.

The first three questions asked on the survey were intended to gather basic demographic information. The teachers were simply asked what grade(s) or subject(s) they teach, if they had ever directly taught Karen refugee students and how they would rank their understanding of Karen culture on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most confident. These questions are important for establishing the credibility of the teacher data when determining trends between students, parents, and teachers for students with a Karen background.

The second set of questions asked in the teacher survey asked the teachers to reflect on their experience working with this population of students. They were to identify both positive and challenging experiences they have found while working with Karen refugee students. A third question focusing specifically on social challenges teachers have observed is also asked in

this section. These questions help to identify what needs are already being met and what teachers feel should be focused on when working with this population.

The next two questions in the teacher survey are rating scales asking about the level of support the students receive in their school. The questions are based on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being fully supported. The first question asked about how well supported the students are when learning the English language. The second question asked how well supported the students are with assimilating into the school culture. These two questions were included in the teacher survey to help establish what supports are available and being utilized by students of the Karen population. Having knowledge of these supports will help when determining recommendations for working with these students.

The final question in the teacher survey was an opening for teachers to share anything they wanted about how they best support the Karen refugee students in their classroom. This question was included to give the participants a place to record any information they wanted to share that did not fit into the other ten questions in the survey. This question allows for additional data to be collected that may have not been in the foresight of the author of this study during the development stage of the survey questions.

Student Interviews - Appendix B

The student interviews are the core of this study. The voice of these students was critical in determining educational themes, both positive and negative, within their population. The student participants were asked a total of sixteen questions during a live interview, which was recorded. A translator was present, although the interviews were conducted mostly in English. The questions were grouped into several sections.

The first section of questions during the students interviews focused on basic demographic information. These questions helped to establish the validity of the students being interviewed. These basic questions included the age of the student, when they came to the United States, who lives with them in their home, where their other family members live, what school they attend, and their level of English proficiency. This information is critical for analyzing themes within the data.

After the first section of demographic questions, the prompts became more extensive. The next section had the students reflect on their lives in the refugee camps of Thailand and compare them to their lives in Philadelphia. They were asked about differences in the schools, favorite parts of living in each place, and what country had their preferable school style. These questions helped to establish each student's emotional connection to both Thailand and Philadelphia. It is important to see their underlying view of living in Philadelphia when analyzing their opinions of going to school in Philadelphia.

The next group of questions from the student interviews focused on the child's specific school experience. They were asked about how involved their parents are in their schooling, if they would like them to be more involved, and what would help them be more involved. The students were also asked to reflect on their biggest challenges in school, both academically and socially. As a follow up question, several students were also asked about what would make them more comfortable around students who are not of Karen descent. Additionally, the students were asked about their homework routines, participation in extracurricular activities, and the level of respect they feel their culture receives from their teachers. All of these questions were designed to give an in depth picture of each child's academic career, with an understanding that

academics occur in more than just the school setting. With this information educational themes, both positive and negative, can be established between students, parents, and teachers.

The final question students were asked during their live interviews asked about how prepared they felt for college, if they had a college in mind, and what worries they have about attending college. These questions were designed to establish a trend in thought for higher education among Karen refugee youth.

Parent and Guardian Interviews - Appendix C

The parents and guardian interview questions were similar in a way to the student questions. They were asked a total of twelve questions during their interviews, not including follow up questions. They did not, however, go into as much detail as the student questions. Additionally, the questions posed to the parents in their interviews were formed with more basic language to prevent any misunderstanding during translation.

The first four questions in each parent or guardian interview established basic demographic information. The information collected was more basic than student demographic information that was gathered since they are not the main focus in this study. The first questions simply asked when the parent/guardian moved to the United States, where their family is located, either in their home, elsewhere in Philadelphia, and/or Myanmar(Burma), if they feel comfortable having a conversation in English, and to which school their child goes.

The next two questions asked of the parents and guardians were designed to identify the emotional connection with where they lived. They were asked to explain their favorite parts of living in Myanmar(Burma) or Thailand and their favorite parts of living in Philadelphia. This

question is asked in order to explore a correlation between emotional response to living in an urban environment to an academic success for their child.

The next set of questions made up the bulk of the interview. They focused on the educational habits of family. This set of questioning starts by exploring the parent's perspective of how their child is doing in school. A very direct question of *Is your child a good student?* is then followed up with questions seeking to pinpoint what makes the parents most proud and what they believe their child could do better. These questions help to establish an explanation of why each parent feels the way they do about their child's performance in school. This section also includes questions about accessibility of resources both inside and outside the school setting. Parents were asked a question about whether they believe their child gets enough help to be successful in school. They were also asked if their child has access to help outside school if homework is confusing at night. Additionally, this section of the interview probed parents and guardians to find out if they feel welcome at their child's school, with a focus on understanding of Karen culture by teachers along with accessibility to communicate with school personnel using the parent or guardian's preferred language. This section of the interview was designed to give insight into what does and does not educationally work for Karen families in their own homes.

The final question the parents and guardians were asked was designed to determine any themes relating to long term goals for students from Karen families. The parents and guardians were asked what their hopes are for their child after they graduate high school. The purpose of this question is to see if higher education is on the radar of families whose educational backgrounds are limited due to their experiences as a refugee.

Conclusion

This chapter of the report addressed the target participants for the study and the survey and interview questions used to gather data to inform the conclusions at the end of the report. Ethical considerations were also explained in this section, including what was and was not done in order to best meet the needs of the participants. Additionally, a summary of the summary and interview questions was included.

The next chapter will begin to look at the results of the interviews with the Karen students and parents/guardians as well as the surveys from the teachers. Trends in the needs of Karen refugee students will be identified in the data gathered through the questions and surveys and recommendations will be offered.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Results

This chapter will introduce the preliminary findings from this study. The data gathered from this study has identified many additional areas of research that will need to be conducted. Due to the difficulty in setting up interviews, it was more challenging to recruit study participants in the time allotted for this study than originally anticipated. As a result, the sample sizes are small, however themes did emerge. There were a total of seven student participants and three parent participants. Teacher participants were unable to be secured in the given time of this study and will be assessed further in the future. The results will be broken into two categories starting with Karen student responses and then continuing to parent responses. Each subsection will be further organized by the types of questions from the interviews. The student responses will be broken into six categories including demographics, location based questions, school based questions, cultural acceptance, education outside of school, and outlook for the future. The second core group of results will be focused on Karen parents. These results are also further divided into separate categories including demographics, perception of living circumstances, education, support, and expectations after high school.

Findings

The next section will discuss the findings from the research study. The findings will be divided into student interviews and parent interviews, which will have further elaboration..

Student Interviews

In total, seven Karen refugee students were interviewed for this study. Four interviews occurred at the Karen Community Center with some occurring in private homes. Each interview

was recorded and lasted from 15-30 minutes depending on how involved each conversation became.

Demographics. The Karen refugee students who were interviewed for this study ranged in age from fourteen to eighteen and had all spent a portion of their lives in a refugee camp in Thailand. The students were interviewed at two locations including the Karen Community Center and the home of a Karen family. The students had varying answers as to how long they have been in the United States. Of the seven students, four have been in the US for more than five years. The other three were here for fewer than five years.

All but one student surveyed lives in a house with their immediate family. Both parents were present in six of the seven homes. The student who does not live with his parents instead lives with his aunts and grandparents. Additionally, three of the students surveyed have other family who reside in the city of Philadelphia. Finally, all but one of the students still has family living in Thailand. Of the six who have family abroad, all but one of the students remains in contact with them.

Five of the Karen students interviewed attend their community school (see figure 3). Three attend Neighborhood School 1 and two attend Neighborhood School 2. There were, however, two students who attend the high ranking magnet schools Magnet School 1 and Magnet School 2. As identified in the parent interviews, the expectation of education is high within the Karen community, so it brings to question why so few Karen students apply to magnet schools.

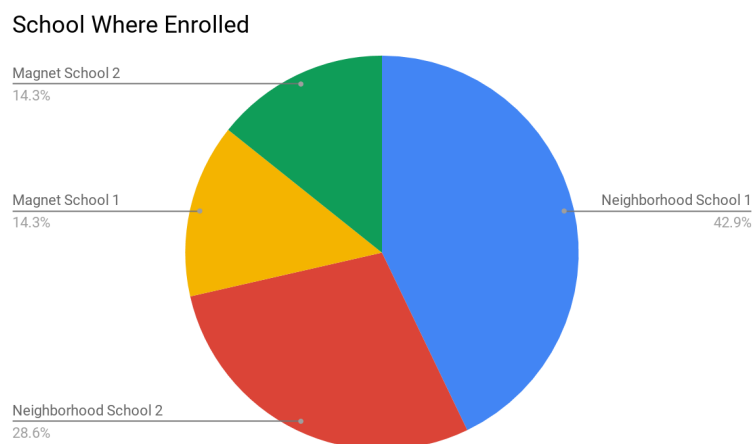


Figure 3: Pie chart showing the location of school attendance for Karen student participants.

The student survey also showed a strong self-indicated rating of English proficiency. The students were asked to rank themselves using a scale based on ACTFL proficiency guidelines (see appendix E). An additional category was added to indicate no understanding of the English language. Of the students interviewed, three students rated themselves at Advanced Low for English proficiency, one student rated himself as Intermediate Mid, two students rated themselves as Intermediate Low, and one student ranked herself as Novice High (see figure 4). It can be determined that the younger the student was, the more confident they were in their English speaking abilities. That correlates to the timeline for each student's arrival to the United States. The younger students, 14-16 years old, have lived in the country for eight years, meaning they have been exposed to a lot of English. The older participants, 18 years old, had all been in the country five years or less. The amount of time in the US shows a strong relation to their confidence in speaking the English language.

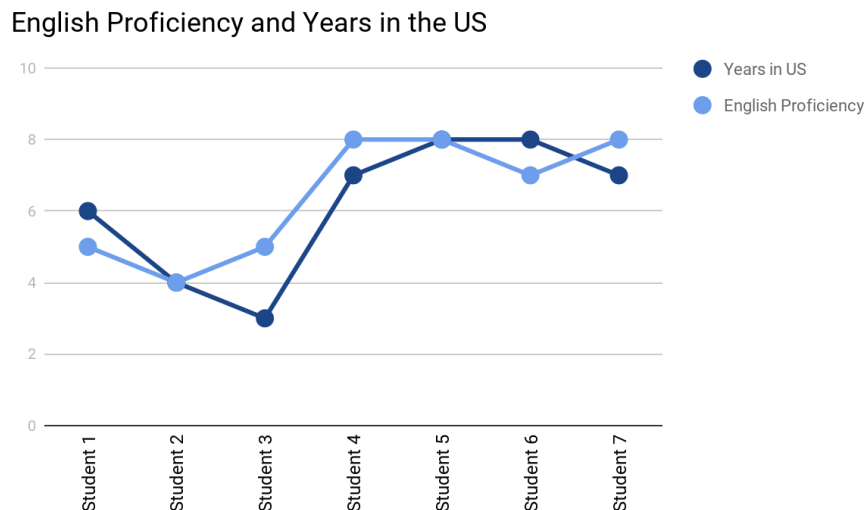


Figure 4: Line graph showing the correlation between the length of time each student spent in the United states and their self-indicated level of English proficiency.

Location based questions. The second section of the student survey focused on questions about locations where the Karen students have lived and their experiences in those locations. All of the students interviewed have spent a portion of their life living in a Karen refugee camp in Thailand. All but one student reported that their mind still frequently wanders to memories from their life in Thailand (see figure 5).

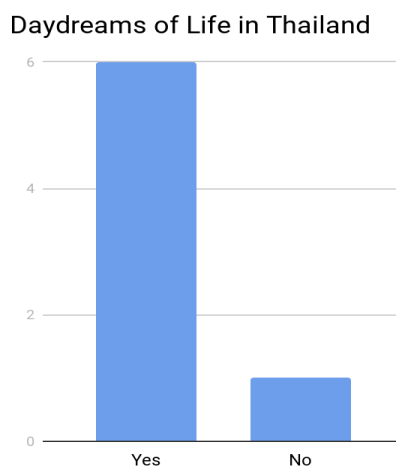


Figure 5: Column chart representing the data of how many student participants find themselves distracted by memories from their past when living in Thailand.

Some of the students were even more specific. In fact, 1/4 of the students interviewed reported that their mind wanders only to bad memories from the refugee camp. Additionally, an alarming 5/7 of the students interviewed agreed that these memories distract them in school (see figure 6).

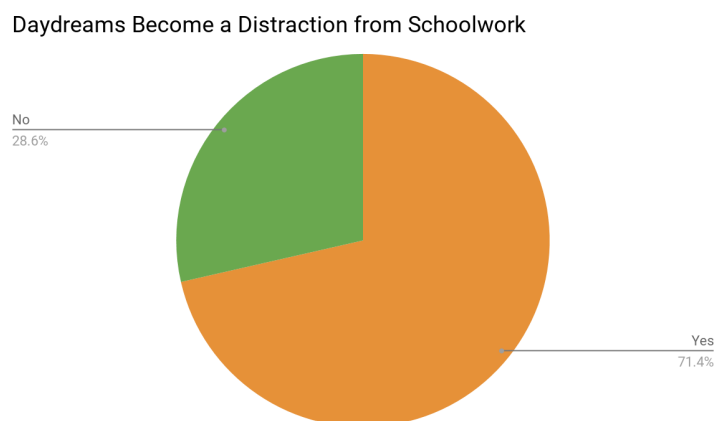


Figure 6: Pie chart showing the results of whether or not the Karen student participants find themselves distracted by memories from their past when in the classroom.

Not all of their comments about life in the refugee camps were bad, though. One question asked the participants to reflect on their favorite parts of living in Thailand. Their

answers were quite specific and almost all had to do with the joy of living outdoors. “I get to farm and play outside.” and “I liked living around plants, trees, and river.” are some examples of the fond memories these students have of their past.

Similarly, each student participant was asked about their favorite parts of living in Philadelphia. These answers were encouraging as 5/7 of the students mentioned school as one of the best parts of living here. Notably, the concept of freedom was mentioned by 3/7 of the students in response to this question. “[I am] free to go to school, have freedom, and free to go anywhere” is how one student put this quality of life they did not experience until moving to the United States.

School based questions. The third category of questions the Karen students responded to had to do with their schooling experience in Philadelphia. To begin questioning on this topic, the participants were asked to compare their school in Thailand to their school in Philadelphia. Of the students questioned, 6/7 enjoy their school in Philadelphia more than their school in the refugee camp. Only one of the students enjoyed school more in Thailand. Most notably, the students cited the resources available to them in Philadelphia as the reason for their decision. “Nicer, more equipment and resources”, “School in Thailand don’t provide lunch for student”, and “In Thailand school, I don’t have computer, school building, uniform.” are some examples of why Philadelphia school are more highly regarded than the schools from their refugee camps.

When asked about current challenges faced in school, the Karen student participants had varying answers. In total, three of the participants cited language as a major challenge for them in school. This included both speaking and reading. Writing was not mentioned as a challenge. The two students who attend magnet school both cited more academic challenges including

“chemistry” and “time management”. Finally, one of the participants identified a challenge in “talking about where I from.” While many of the students also identified with that statement later in the survey, it was notable that one student felt that is a major challenge of attending school in Philadelphia. Additionally, six of the seven student participants said that they felt comfortable discussing their challenges in school with teachers. Only one student noted that he was not comfortable discussing his challenges with his teachers. The student who did not feel comfortable approaching his teachers for help noted his language competency as the reason.

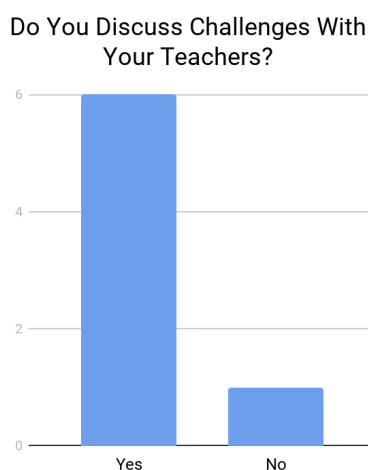


Figure 7: Column chart indicating the number of students who responded that they are comfortable approaching teachers in their school about problems they are having.

Within this category of questioning, each student participant was also asked about the level of involvement from their parents. A total of six out of seven students surveyed remarked that they would like to see their parents more involved in their education. One student who was interviewed felt his parents were already well involved in his education. Many of the comments about how their parents are involved, though, showed the parents more in the background as a cheerleader rather than up front helping. One student remarked “My parents really encourage

me to go to school and understand English Language.” and another student said “[My family is] involved enough to go to meetings.” English is seen as the barrier between school and home for most of the students. In all, 5/7 of the students felt that if their family spoke better English, they would be able to be more involved in the schooling of their children. Also, notably, One child mentioned “working less” in addition to learning English as a way for his family to be more involved.

Cultural acceptance. The next category of questions the students were asked focused on their Karen heritage in the school setting. Of the students interviewed, all mentioned that they prefer to be friends with other students of Karen descent. Several reasons were given for this including “because I speak same language”, “because we the same culture”, and “they are the same race as me.” When asked what could help them expand their circle of friends, 6/7 students cited a stronger understanding of Karen culture among their peers. A language barrier was also stated as a reason for mostly associating with students of their own culture.

Impressively, six of the seven students interviewed felt their school respects the Karen culture. This number however drops when asked how much their teachers understand about their culture (see figure 8). One student did not respond favorably to this topic of acceptance of Karen culture, however, he is one of the students who attends a magnet school. He noted that there are only three Karen students in his school and their teachers just don’t know about the culture because it is not discussed. This student also noted that in order to improve their understanding, he wished his teachers would ask him more about where he is from.

Perceived Knowledge of Karen Culture in Schools

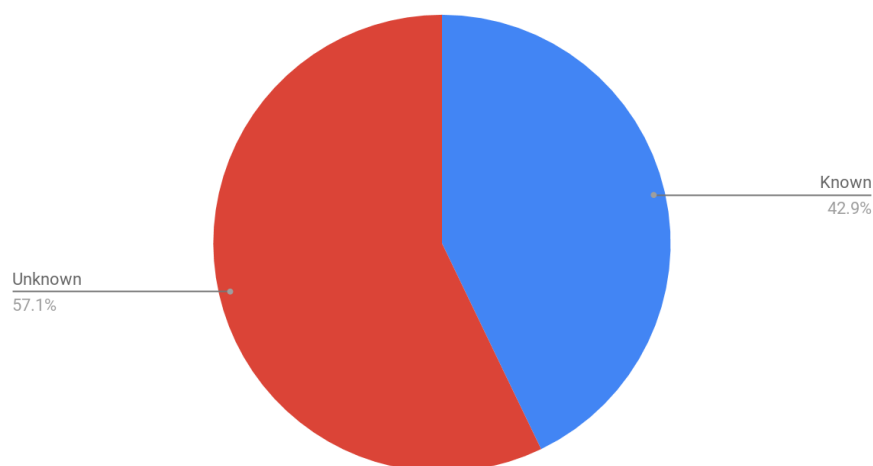


Figure 8: Pie chart representing the percentage of student participants who believe the Karen culture is well understood by their teachers.

In all, the Karen students feel very supported by their teachers both academically and culturally. “They help Karen student homework learn English.”, “They understand that I am bilingual and my lifestyle”, and “Teach Karen extra even did not get money” were some comments made during the interviews which showed the enthusiasm each student had for the teachers in their school. The students from the magnet schools answered this question more from an academic perspective than cultural since their culture is mostly unknown in school.

Education outside of school. The fourth category of questions focused on the support the students receive with school while at home. There seems to be strong cultural sense of taking ownership of one’s education within the Karen culture. This was evident with the responses I received when asking the student participants about homework. Through our discussion, it was found that six of the students regularly turn in their homework on time. Only one of the students said they are sometimes are late on assignments (see figure 9). This becomes even more

impressive when the students shared that 5/7 of the participants seek out help on their own if a concept is not understood (see figure 10). Two comments were made about having teacher help or a tutor to do better with homework, however most of the students said they depend only on themselves when seeking motivation to complete homework assignments.

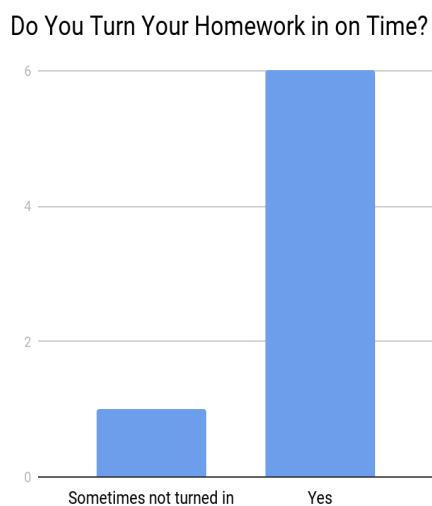


Figure 9: Column chart showing the number of students who reported regularly turning homework in on time.

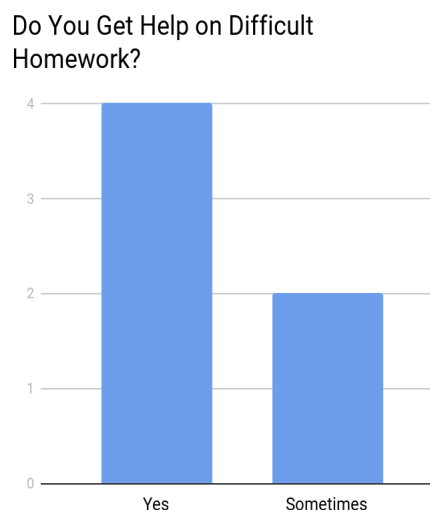


Figure 10: Column chart showing the number of students who reported voluntarily seeking help on difficult homework assignments.

This section also asked students about their participation in extracurricular activities. The number of students who participate in before or after school activities at their school was a low 2/7. Additionally, the students who do participate in extracurriculars were also the students who attend the magnet schools within the city. The two students who participate in extracurriculars felt the helped them to make a stronger bond with their school. One student remarked

specifically that his participation in soccer has helped him make friends outside the Karen community.

Outlook for the future. The final category of questions the Karen students were asked during their interviews had to do with their level of college preparation. Only four of the seven students remarked that they feel they are prepared enough to attend college. With that said, though, college is on the minds of most of the Karen student participants. In discussions, 6/7 of them mentioned that they have a college in mind for when they graduate (see figure 11). This was impressive as less than half the students will be graduating this year.

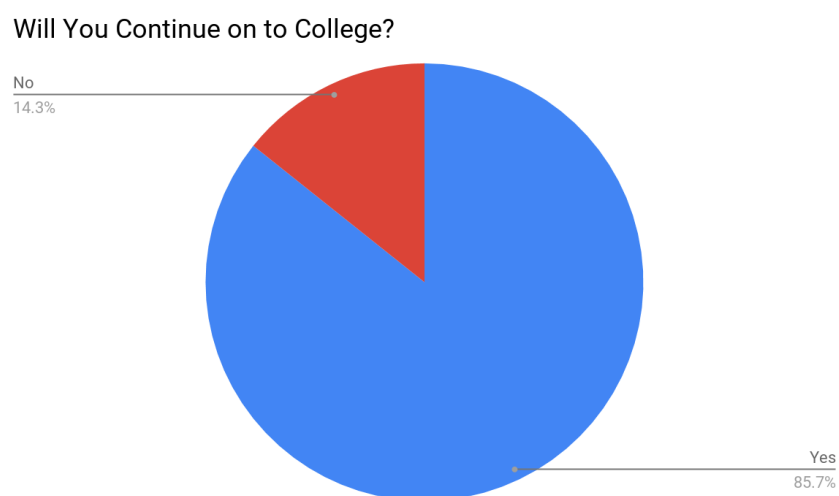


Figure 11: Pie chart representing the number of Karen student participants who said they would prefer to continue on to college after high school.

When asked about the worries they have of attending college, the responses were typical of most high school students. “A lot of homework.”, “tuition”, and “getting into their soccer team” were all mentioned as serious worries the students have about their life after high school. There was also an additional worry of not understanding English well that was mentioned several

times. A real concern for students who feel they have not yet mastered the English language. This was also evident when asked about what could make the college process more smooth for the students. One student remarked that they must first improve their English before applying to college. Some other answers in response to making the process more smooth included “find someone [who] can support me go to college”, “if college accept me in their soccer team”, and “need a teacher that help with homework.” These comments matches almost perfectly to the items the students listed as worries in the previous question.

Parent Interviews

In total four parents were interviewed over the course of this study. Recruitment efforts for the parent group were a challenge. Several times interview locations and times were set, but the participants did not come. Some interviews were eventually given in the participant’s home. This seemed to work much better for the participants as it did not require them to alter their daily schedule. It would be the recommended location for parent interviews in the future. The parents were chosen as a result of their response to recruitment efforts and bear no relationship to the students who were interviewed for this study. Two of the parents were interviewed at the Karen Community Center, one was interviewed in their home, and the final participant was interviewed over the phone. A translator was used during the interview process with each parent participant as each of their English language skills were minimal. This was critical as the entire conversation, apart from initial greetings, with each parent required translating.

Demographics. The first category of questions the parent participants of this study were asked focused on their demographics. Four parents were interviewed and their information had a lot of similarities. All four of the parents interviewed live in South Philadelphia with their

families. They all also have more than one child in the Philadelphia school system. One difference that was found among the group of parents interviewed was their time in the United States (see figure 12). Two of the four respondents were resettled in the US less than five years ago. The other two respondents, though, have been in the country much longer. One was resettled in 2007 and the other was resettled in 2008 meaning they have had over ten years to adjust to the cultural norms of the United States and Philadelphia. Interestingly, only one of the four parents still has relatives living abroad in Myanmar(Burma) or Thailand. This was different from the students who nearly all still have relatives abroad.

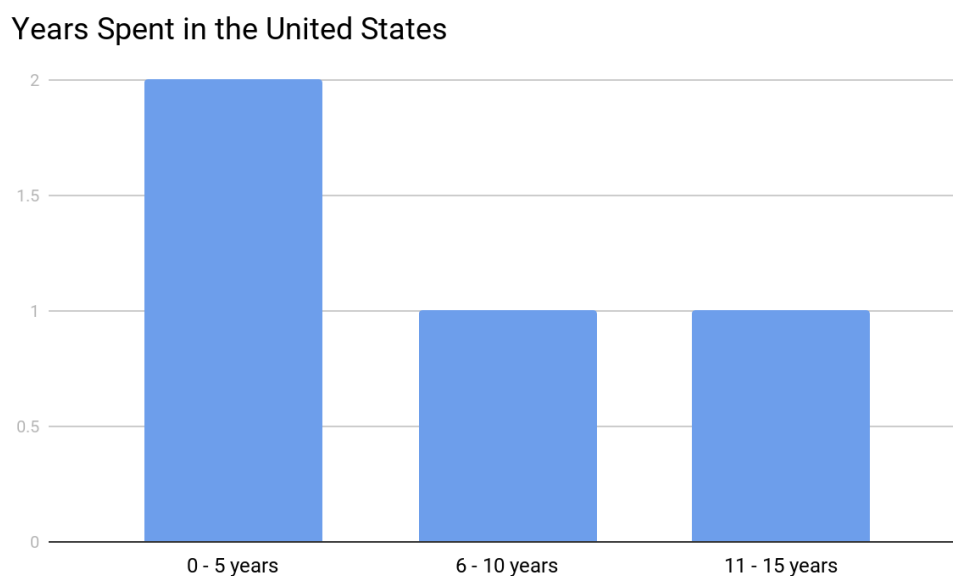


Figure 12: Column graph showing the number of years each parent participant has spent living in the United States.

Of the parents interviewed, most of their children attend the community schools in their neighborhood, Neighborhood School 1, and Neighborhood School 2. Only one parent had a student who attends a magnet school, Magnet School 1. This trend in school attendance matched

exactly the information I saw from the student participants. Interestingly, the parent of the child who attends the magnet school has lived in the United States the longest out of the group interviewed. This leads to some additional questions that could be researched about the time since resettlement vs. school attendance.

Perception of living circumstances. The second category of questions for the parent participants sought to find out information about their feelings of living in Thailand and living in Philadelphia. Of the four parents who responded in the interviews, three said they miss parts of living in Thailand. “Farming and living in my own house” and “raising chickens and plants” are two quotes from parents that summarize the lives these parents left behind and still miss to this day. The majority of the feelings the parents expressed about their lives in Thailand were positive, however, there was one parent who truly had nothing good to say about her life in Thailand. She focused her answer on the negative aspects of living in a refugee camp.

In contrast, every parent respondent had very positive comments to make about living in Philadelphia. Their answers were varied, but all justified their feelings of living in the city. “Opportunity to go to work and get money”, “easy to go anywhere”, and “Kids going to school and getting an education” are some of the reasons parents mentioned during their interviews about why they like living in Philadelphia. All of the parent participants saw life in Philadelphia as an opportunity for their children to become successful in life.

Education. The third set of questions the parent participants responded to all revolved around their child’s education in the Philadelphia school system. The parents responded with overwhelming praise for the schools in which their children attend. Of the four participants, three had wonderful things to say about how welcome they feel in the schools. Those three

mentioned a “parents gathering” where the Karen culture was discussed and represented by the community to the teachers and staff of the school. After discussing this event, one parent used the word “friends” to describe the teachers at their child’s school. It was quite clear that this event helped to bridge the Karen community and the schools which the Karen children attend. One parent also commented that it the younger generation’s responsibility to teach others about the Karen culture, something, she said, the students don’t seem to have many opportunities for.

The parents I spoke with showed immense pride for their child’s work in school. Every one of the four parents noted that their child is a good student, based on their own interpretation of the phrase. They followed up with comments about what they hope to see from their child in the future. “To not suffer and be poor”, “Help people”, and “move on to college” were quotes that were continually stated by all four parent participants during the interview process.

The parent participants were also asked to describe their hopes for their child post high school graduation. College was at the forefront of every response. In fact every one of the participants mentioned continuing education as a top priority for their child after graduating from high school. One parent remarked that after graduation it is “their decision [to go to college] and right now she says she wants to be a teacher.” This follows a strong theme of educational importance within all respondents in this study.

Finally, in this category, the parent participants were asked to respond with an area in which they wish their child would work harder. Again, responses were quite consistent among the participants. Three of the four parents responded with a comment about striving to achieve more from their education. While at first this seemed to contradict their earlier responses in which they claimed their children were good students, upon further questioning, it seemed the

parents were referring to the future and hoping their child would continue the hard work they are currently showing instead of divesting interest in learning as they continue their education.

Support. The final category of questions began by asking the parents about the level of support their child receives both in and out of school on homework assignments. The respondents all stated that their child turns their homework in on time each day. When asked about the level of support their child is able to receive outside of school, the parents all felt there is a lack of resources. Two of the respondents mentioned limited English as the reason they themselves do not help their child. One participant said that it is the child's responsibility to find help since his family is limited English proficient. The final question the parent participants were asked about access to support in school asked the parents in general if they felt their child received enough help to be successful. Surprisingly only one of the four participants felt their child received an adequate amount of help in school. When followed up with a question of what could help their child more parents replied with answers such as "English help" and "It is [the child's] effort, and they don't get help".

Conclusion

Through the parent and student interviews, many themes were able to emerge. Using the data from this chapter, recommendations and conclusions will be made in the next chapter regarding the challenges indicated by the student and parent participants. The data gathered in this study is, unfortunately, representative of only parents and students. Data was not able to be collected on teachers of Karen students due to recruitment issues. Because of this, in the next chapter, conclusions cannot be fully drawn on supporting Karen students in the classroom.

Instead, recommendations and conclusions will be formed for supporting the challenges identified by the groups interviewed during this study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Interpretation of Results

Chapter five is designed to review the qualitative data gathered through the student and parent interview process with the goal of analyzing specific themes that exist within the student responses, the parent responses, and across both stakeholders from the interview process. From the student data, three specific themes will be discussed. These three themes include the lack of magnet school attendance among Karen students, trauma as a distraction in the classroom, and social norms within the Karen community. A different set of themes were identified between the parent participants. These themes include education as a top priority for their children, a strong level of comfort when interacting with their child's school, America being seen as a land of opportunity, and insufficient levels of support from the school. Additionally, themes will be explored that occurred between both the student and parent interview participants. These areas of discussion will include a theme in responses around their outlook for the future and another theme within their responses about levels of support, both in and out of school.

In addition to an analysis of results, this chapter will also explore the limitations that were involved throughout this study. These limitations were important to the results. The lack of teacher participation and difficulty of student and parent recruitment will be discussed. Also, the lack of previous research will be explored within this session.

Finally, this chapter will also explore recommendations for the future. The results of this study brought about many additional questions that will need to be researched in order to provide any type of specific intervention in a classroom, home, or community setting. Minor recommendations for adaptations outside of school will also be discussed in this chapter.

Overview

The Karen refugee population continues to grow in the United States. As of mid 2018, there were over 71,500 Karen students in US schools, and that does not take into account the number of kids born in the United States into a Karen family. This is one of the largest refugee populations in the US, but they are sorely underrepresented in the research community. As noted throughout chapter two, often times refugees are lumped together with other immigrant populations when being researched. This is a disservice to refugees, however, because those students are entering our schools with drastically different challenges than a traditional immigrant. This study should be seen as a starting place for future researchers. Themes were identified, but additional research will be needed as a result of the information gained through the interviews in this study. The information stated in the next section will discuss the themes identified from the parent and student interviews. These results will be able to evolve into research questions of their own which can be addressed through further studies.

Generalizations

Analysis of Student Data

Several themes were identified as a result of analyzing the student data gathered during the interview process. These generalizations will help to form recommendations for the next section.

Magnet school attendance. Among the student responses was a unique correlation between the type of schools the students attended and the areas in which they felt they were most challenged. This unexpected correlation presents an interesting conundrum. The students who attended special acceptance magnet schools were less likely to be focused on their

underdeveloped language skills. In fact, these students also rated themselves higher when asked to rate their English abilities. Likewise, the students who attended the community schools were much more focused on their lacking English skills than the core academics of the classes in which they were enrolled. This separation brings about many additional questions regarding the types of classes in which the students in each school are enrolled as well as the level of expectation within those classes.

The level of cultural acceptance the students felt within their school, however, was exactly the opposite. The students who attended the magnet schools felt their culture was not understood or even known by their teachers. In contrast, the students who attend the community schools felt their culture was well represented within their school. The cultural correlation makes sense based on the number of students who attend the school. The students who attended the magnet schools were each one of only two Karen students in the entire school whereas the students who attended Neighborhood School 1 and Neighborhood School 2, the community schools, were one of dozens of Karen refugees currently attending the school.

This divide needs to be explored with additional research. The high school application process is quite intense in the Philadelphia school system and can be challenging for families who use English as their first language. Also, cultural awareness should be explored within the magnet schools since the students who attend them made clear that they feel as though their culture is in the shadows at these schools. A balance needs to be found that allows the Karen refugee students to apply to and attend the higher ranking magnet schools of the city while still feeling like their culture is understood and appreciated within the school setting.

Trauma as a distraction in school. The second theme that was identified within the student interview responses involves the trauma these refugee students have faced in the past. This is not surprising as it has been identified as an issue for other students who have come from traumatic situations (Pacione, 2013; Prior, 2013). In their interviews most students agreed that their traumatic thoughts from their past distract them from school at times. Their stories tell of a loss of parents, siblings, or friends. They discussed the abysmal conditions of the refugee camps in which they lived in extreme poverty. These stories are a piece of who these children are and they made clear in their interview answers that many of them are still trying to deal with their past. Knowing that their minds are continuing to drift to the trauma of their past while trying to focus in class is an indicator that the students need additional supports to come to terms with their past. The Philadelphia school system has utilized trauma informed instruction in the past, however, because of the lack of teacher participation within this study, it is unclear whether it is being used in the classrooms of the students from the Karen community. Even if those practices are in place, trauma based mental health issues continue to be a challenge these students. Studies in the past have explored different mental health therapies with refugees in the classroom with some success (Prior, 2013). Additional research will need to be done focusing specifically on the impact of trauma on the educational lives of Karen refugees before recommendations can really be made on appropriate interventions.

Social patterns within the Karen community. The final theme identified within the student interview data from the Karen children who participated in this study explores the social patterns of students from the Karen community. Every student interviewed identified as feeling more comfortable when around Karen peers as opposed to peers of a different race or culture.

This is not uncommon. In fact, the national best selling book *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (Tatum, 2017) is centered on this issue. In her book, Beverly Tatum (2017) discusses the importance of identity during adolescence and that, for minority students, a large piece of their identity is their race and their culture. When those pieces of their identity are able to be shared with others, it makes for stronger friendships. Tatum's (2017) book continues with a discussion on the importance of creating opportunities in school for students to interact with others from different backgrounds to counteract the self-segregation that tends to happen with minority students. Her suggestion mirrors what was found within this study.

Extracurricular activities are key. In this study, the Karen students who attended the magnet schools and found themselves isolated away from the Karen community looked to extracurricular activities in order to expand their social circle. One student joined the soccer team and another joined the theater department. Both students saw these opportunities as positive experiences and felt it helped them interact more easily with their non-Karen peers. Many students discussed their thoughts on extracurricular activities and wished there were more options within their school. While the students from the magnet schools seemed to have figured out how to interact with various peer groups on their own, that was not evident among the students who attend their community schools which house a large Karen population. This is an area that needs to retain more of a focus from additional research and receive intervention, specifically within the community schools. Tatum notes in her book that it is fine for students to socialize within their own race or culture during down time, but they need to have the skills to interact with all peer groups when needed. Right now, the Karen students who attend the community schools are lacking those skills.

Analysis of Parent Data

As a result of the parent interviews, several themes were identified in the data. These trends are consistent among the answers of the four parents interviewed during this study.

Education as a top priority. It was evident from the start of each parent interview that education is a priority within the Karen culture. Each interviewed parent expressed this several times during their discussions with the researcher. While many of the parents felt their own level of education was poor, they viewed living in America as an opportunity for their children to receive a world class education. As they compared schooling in Thailand to schooling in the US, it was clear that the parents see their children as being in an entire different league of education simply by attending an American school. This mirrors the research I found on refugee families that was presented in chapter two of this study. Refugee families have a positive view of education and the parents of refugee children encourage them to make the most of their new educational opportunities (Tran & Hodgson, 2015). Even though the parents themselves noted that they are limited in the amount of help they could give their child, they never minimize the emotional support the children need to succeed. This is constructive data to have collected since it can inform the teachers of Karen refugee students of the importance of education within the Karen community. Every parent interviewed mentioned that they welcome feedback, both positive and negative, from their child's teachers and see that feedback as a way to help their children even more.

Welcoming school culture. A second theme found during the parent interviews was with the feelings among the parents in relation to how welcomed they felt at their child's school. The parents were overwhelmingly positive about their own experiences visiting the schools their

children attend. This was quite surprising as it counterd the findings during the research phase of this study. Numerous parents brought up a culture night, which was hosted by several of the schools attended by Karen families. They explained that at this culture night, they were able to share their culture with the teachers, staff, and school community. This event gave them pride. When describing the event, the term ‘friend’ was even used by one parent to describe the teachers of the school. This event seems to bridge the Karen community in an unlikely way with the school district. The schools in which this cultural event took place were all community schools. It seemed that the magnet schools do not have such an event for their school community. It would be interesting to explore, based on this data, the idea of a culture night at every school. This could be a solution to some of the issues found in previous research on getting immigrant and refugee families involved in their child’s school (Wang & Khalil, 2013) and (Harper, 2016).

Themes Identified in all Data

An additional view of the data gathered in this study involves crossing the parent and student answers during the interviews in order to identify common themes. Below are the strongest themes supported by the answers of the study participants.

Levels of support. After completing all interviews from this study, a theme appeared that will most likely need to be addressed through further research and trial of interventions. Both the parents and the students felt that, although their school experiences are positive, the children are not receiving as many supports as they should during the school day. This data, of course, is based only on the accounts of the parents and students as teachers were unable to be contacted. Even with that limitation, it is still a concern that both the students and the parents

feel like there are supports that could be put in place to help the children be more successful.

The areas of needed support that continued to be discussed during the interviews involved homework and English language proficiency. The students felt that they were not being supported as much as they should be with learning the English language. The parents, on the other hand, were more focused on the lack of homework assistance from school since they themselves are typically unable to help their child on homework. As reviewed in chapter two, it is critical for parents to be involved in their child's education (Wang & Khalil, 2013). Since these parents are limited in that way, it raises the question of who can pick up where these educationally limited parents leave off? These areas should be further explored with more targeted research which involves specific data from the teachers in the schools where the Karen population is most high.

Research Question Findings

This study was focused around a single research question with three separate components. The purpose of this research was to identify what barriers Karen refugee children face in public schools. That broader topic was then broken into three more specific areas looking at the barriers reported by students, parents, and teachers. Unfortunately teachers were unable to be recruited for this study, so only two of the initial components of the research question were able to be answered.

The students reported many positive aspects from their current school placement. There were, however, some barriers as well. The students felt they were not always fully supported on difficult assignments. The students who attended the magnet schools also reported that they felt their culture was not understood or even known by the teaching staff from their school. Finally,

the students who attend neighborhood schools also indicated that they are most comfortable around other peers of the same ethnicity. All of these topics require additional, more specific, research in order to determine the best ways to approach these educational barriers.

The Karen refugee parents also had overwhelmingly positive things to say about the educational experiences their children have. One barrier was, however, identified as well. The parents believed that their children are not receiving as much assistance in school as they need in order to be meeting their full potential. They saw this as a problem, but were generally unsure about how to assist their children with filling in the missing gaps. As with the student barriers, more specific research should be conducted in order to find the best way to address these barriers.

Limitations

This comprehensive study set out to explore what challenges Karen students face in the classroom and what interventions could be implemented to support those challenges. While themes have been able to be identified and challenges revealed, a complete picture of the difficulty these children face throughout their school day has not been identified.

The first, and most impactful, limitation this study was exposed to was an inability to recruit teacher participants. Teacher participation was requested two times throughout the study. These requests were made via email through a familiar contact. The researcher partnered with the Karen bilingual counselor who works at both Neighborhood School 1 and Neighborhood School 2, the two schools in the city with the largest Karen population. After partnering with this counselor, the researcher sent him a recruitment email (see appendix D) which outlined the purpose of the study at hand and identified their anonymous role within the data collection

process. The bilingual counselor sent the email to the teaching staff at both the elementary and high schools in which he works, but unfortunately there was no response. A follow up email was sent two weeks later, but there was still no response. At that time, the researcher felt it was appropriate to move on.

Being unable to recruit teachers for this study meant that the classroom needs of this population was suddenly no longer the focus. Without teacher input, it would be impossible to explore challenging themes within the classroom and even more difficult to propose interventions for those challenges. Because of this limitation, the focus of the study turned to general challenges students face from their education in Philadelphia Public schools.

A second limitation that was faced within this study was the sample size of both Karen students and parents. While a reasonable sample was achieved, with seven student interviews and four parent interviews, a larger sample size would have made the data more reliable. When the study was initiated, a sample size of ten participants was the goal for both parents and students. While the parent and student participants in this study were more than willing to share their story with the researcher, it proved quite difficult to set up interview times in which the participants arrived on time or at all. Language barriers made scheduling interviews a challenge, even with a translator. Furthermore, once interview times were set, they were often forgotten by the participants. This limited the number of participants the researcher was able to interview in the allotted time the study was given. With a smaller number of respondents, the results become more difficult to generalize. Additional research with the parent and student groups would be recommended in order to solidify the themes found through this study.

Implications

This study never intended to identify and solve the many issues Karen refugee students face in the American public school system. What this study does, however, is offer a starting point for future research in places where there was no starting point previously. The generalizations stated in the previous section leave a lot more to be desired from research. Now that the initial groundwork is laid, additional research can easily be targeted to the needs of the Karen refugee population. Several qualitative studies should be considered by researchers in the future.

First, researchers need to question to what extent do Karen students understand and give importance to the high school selection process? It was clear through this study that the students who attended magnet schools were more well-rounded. They participated in multi-ethnic extracurricular activities, were more fluent in English, and had a better understanding of support systems in place throughout their school. Karen students would benefit educationally from exploring a magnet school education. Additionally, researchers need to ask what would make ethnic Karen refugee students more likely to apply to magnet schools. Knowing the benefits that appeared as a result of this study makes this an important question to investigate.

Another question to investigate in the future asks what trauma informed instructional practices are being used in classrooms with Karen students? The results of the student surveys showed that these students are overwhelmingly distracted by previous trauma in their lives. They indicated that this trauma, at times, distracts them from their education. Due to the lack of participation by school staff in this study, it is difficult to understand what trauma informed practices are being used in schools with large Karen refugee populations. An investigation in

this area would greatly benefit this population of students.

The students who attended magnet schools were more likely to expand their social circle beyond the Karen community. Researchers need to explore what are the most successful ways to help Karen refugee students interact with culturally different peer groups. While the sense of community between Karen students is admirable, it is also important that these students learn the 21st century skill of collaborating with others in both academic and social settings.

Finally, researchers need to explore the question of how a systemic understanding of the Karen culture could help improve a Karen student's connection to their school? While students who attended their community schools felt as though their culture was known and understood, the students who elected to attend a magnet school did not feel as though their culture was even known. This could be a deterrent for Karen students who may be considering applying to magnet schools and should be explored further.

Each of the above areas is separate yet important to understanding how Karen refugee students best learn in American public schools. No prior research has explored these topics with the Karen population. This group of over 71,500 students is growing larger each day as more children are born into Karen-American families and more refugees arrive from overseas. As educators, it is important to meet the needs of each individual student and with the information from this study, teachers are one step closer to being able to do that with their Karen students.

From working through this study much was learned about the Karen refugee youth population. This peaceful group of people has found a new home within our communities. They have amazing stories to share and will make contributions to make to our country. As educators we need to continue to enrich ourselves in the culture of our students and make their school

experience the best it can be. I will be furthering my knowledge of international education and exploring a further degree in this field through additional research on Karen ethnic refugees in the United States.

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Appendix A

Supporting Karen Refugee Students in Public School Classrooms

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Through the data collected from your survey, we will begin to identify common trends in the needs of refugee students from the Karen ethnic group who attend public schools in the United States. Your participation is voluntary and there will be no benefit or detriment as a result of your participation. If you have any questions, contact Mike Barrett at mbarrett@uarts.edu.

* Required

1. What grade(s) and subject(s) do you teach? *

2. Do you now or have you previously taught Karen refugee students? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. On a scale of 1-10 how confident would you rate your understanding of the Karen culture? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Least confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Most confident

4. What do you find to be the most positive experience from working with this population of students? *

5. What do you find to be the most challenging experience from working with this population of students? *

6. What social challenges have you observed with your Karen students? *

7. On a scale of 1-5, how well supported are these students with learning to speak the English language in school? **Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unsupported	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very well supported

8. On a scale of 1-5, how well do these students assimilate into the school culture? **Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poorly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very well

9. What information would help you better understand your Karen students? *

10. Is there any other information you would like to share about how you best support the Karen students in your classroom? *

Appendix B

Karen Student Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. When did you move to The United States?
3. Who lives in your home with you?
 - a. Do you have other family in Philadelphia?
 - b. Do you have other family still living in Thailand?
4. What school do you attend?
5. How would you rate your English proficiency on a scale from 1-10 with 10 being fully proficient.
6. Do you ever find yourself thinking about your experiences in Thailand - either good or bad?
 - a. Are you comfortable talking about those experiences?
 - b. Do these thoughts ever distract you from school work or other activities?

7. Tell me about your favorite parts of living in Thailand.
8. Tell me about your favorite parts of living in Philadelphia.
9. How is school in Philadelphia different from school in Thailand?
 - a. In which country would you say you enjoy school more?
10. What do you feel are your biggest challenges in school?
 - a. Have you ever talked to your teachers about these challenges?
11. How deeply are your parents involved in your schooling?
 - a. Would you like them to be more/less involved?
 - b. What would help them be more/less involved?
12. Describe your friends. - Who do you like to spend time with at school?
 - a. What makes you more comfortable with Karen students
 - b. Are there ways that students who are not Karen could make you feel more comfortable

13. Do you feel like your culture is respected by your school and your teachers?

- a. How could they work to improve those feelings?
- b. In what ways do they show they respect and support Karen students?

14. Do you regularly turn in homework on time?

- a. Do you get any support on homework if you need it?
- b. What would help you get your homework in on time?

15. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities at your school?

- a. Have these activities helped you connect better to your school?
- b. Would you recommend additional extracurriculars?

16. *For high school students* How prepared do you feel for college

- a. Do you have a college in mind
- b. What worries do you have?
- c. What could make the process more smooth for you?

Appendix C

Parent and Guardian Interview Questions

1. When did you move to The United States?
2. Who lives in your home with you?
 - a. Do you have other family in Philadelphia?
 - b. Do you have other family still living in Thailand?
3. What school does your child attend?
4. Tell me about your favorite parts of living in Thailand.
5. Tell me about your favorite parts of living in Philadelphia
7. Is your child a good student?
 - a. What makes you most proud about their schooling?
 - b. What would you like to see them work harder at?

8. Do you feel welcome at your child's school?

- a. Do the teachers know about your culture?
- b. Are you able to easily communicate with the teachers?

9. Does your child do homework every night?

- a. Does your child have access to help outside school if homework is confusing?

10. Do you think your child gets enough help to be successful in school?

11. What are your hopes for your child after they graduate high school?

Appendix D

Dear educators,

I am a graduate student at the University of the Arts who is currently researching themes in educational challenges among Karen refugee students. As a teacher in a school with a significant population of Karen students, I am asking for your help in the form of an anonymous ten question survey. The survey should take no more than ten minutes of your time and will provide crucial information which will lead to helping the students in your classroom. Please feel free to complete the survey at your leisure before March 31 by visiting the following link:

<https://goo.gl/forms/ty03FII8PCGExoZP2>

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns regarding the survey or the study in general. Thank you in advance for your support.

Fondly,

Mike Barrett
Graduate Student
University of the Arts
mbarrett@uarts.edu

Appendix E

Basic User

Independent User

Proficient User

What's my proficiency level?

ADVANCED HIGH

- Can communicate with ease about a variety of topics
- Does better discussing concrete rather than abstract topics
- Can paraphrase and describe words to compensate for unknown vocabulary

ADVANCED MID

- Narrates and describes in the past, present, and future with few errors
- Communicates well about concrete topics, especially familiar topics
- Can handle an unexpected turn of events

ADVANCED LOW

- Can participate in most informal and some formal conversations
- Narrates and describes in paragraphs
- Can rephrase and describe unfamiliar words
- Speech may be somewhat irregular, strained, and tentative
- Can convey intended message without confusion
- Can narrate a story in the past, present, and future

- Work on supporting your opinion.
- Try to speak with fewer hesitations.
- Add more details to explain complex matters.
- Practice discussing more advanced topics, like politics and abstract topics.

How can I improve myself?

INTERMEDIATE HIGH

- Can use language to do a task that requires multiple steps
- Can handle a situation that may have a complication
- Can present a point of view with reasons to support
- Ask and answer a variety of questions
- Can tell a story in the past, present and future with errors

INTERMEDIATE MID

- Can create with language using some memorized phrases
- Created language is mostly related to self situation or transaction
- Can create my own questions and answer someone else's

- Speak in more full sentences.
- Keep the conversation going by asking follow up questions.
- Keep learning new words.
- Talk around words that you don't know.
- Practice talking about past events.

INTERMEDIATE LOW

- Speaks in complete sentences
- Can hold simple conversations about everyday topics
- Can ask and answer questions on familiar topics

How can I improve myself?

NOVICE HIGH

- Speaks in phrases
- Speech is still limited to memorized material
- Can ask for and give simple directions

NOVICE MID

- Speaks in lists
- 50+ words
- No creation
- Can introduce self and others

NOVICE LOW

- Can give lists
- Uses only memorized phrases
- Occasional short sentences

- Combine your words and phrases into full sentences.
- Practice asking questions.
- Keep learning new words.

How can I improve myself?

Parrot

Survivor

Reporter

*Based on 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines
J. Wardle, Clark County School District