Consultation with secondary school refugee teachers in Malaysia: Problem identification, interventions, and outcomes

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Abstract
There is an overwhelming wave of refugee youth in need of secondary education and support in countries which restrict access to education. Refugee primary education, however, has largely been the focus within the literature which limits our understanding

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of the unique problems refugee secondary school students face and potential interventions needed to ameliorate these issues. This study elucidates the concerns of and ways that refugee teachers at informal secondary schools promote change during school consultation in a country that prohibits refugee education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the problems, interventions, and outcomes discussed during consultation with refugee teachers in secondary informal learning centers in Malaysia. Eleven teachers participated as consultees (9 refugees; 2 Malaysian citizens; 6 female-identifying; average age of 33). Problems raised during consultation sessions included refugee student engagement and learning, behavior, refugee student and teacher mental health, teacher self-efficacy, and systemic challenges unique to the refugee context. Interventions discussed included academic engagement, behavior management, and emotion regulation. Teachers cited improvement in student academic engagement, behavior, motivation, and emotions. The discussion section underscores the importance of identifying culture-specific problems and interventions in a global school consultation context, with implications for school psychology practitioners.

Secondary school is a challenging and opportune time for student growth, in addition to being challenging for secondary school teachers (e.g., Pearson, 2023). This is especially true for under-trained secondary school teachers who are refugees teaching in under-resourced refugee informal learning centers in countries which do not recognize refugee rights to education and employment. Such is the case in the country of Malaysia which is the focus of this study (e.g., O'Neal et al., 2016).

The contribution of this study is to open the black box of challenges, interventions, and outcomes discussed in secondary school consultation in refugee informal education. The identification of consultees' problems and interventions is particularly important in international contexts because they may differ or be similar across borders, contexts, and communities. Such culture-specific knowledge, especially with minoritized samples, can be used to inform the development and future iterations of culturally relevant school consultation programs in a global context (Nastasi, 2017). The larger contribution of this study is to articulate both the universal and unique nature of the refugee youth education experience (Nastasi et al., 2020), with strong implications given the wave of refugee youth stuck in neighboring countries with prohibited or restricted education rights and increasingly limited opportunities for safe resettlement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2023). In addition, this paper contributes to a global perspective on school consultation, with implications for school psychology training, research, and practice (Rosenfield & Hatzichristou, 2024).

There is surprisingly little secondary school consultation research (e.g., Hazel et al., 2014). A rich description and systematic coding of problems and interventions would

benefit secondary school consultation scholarship. Identification of specific problems and interventions is especially important for understanding the culture-specific issues and interventions that are relevant to marginalized populations—such understanding may prevent assumptions guided by monolithic, western models around consultation (Nastasi, 2017). A global, intercultural approach in school psychology posits that what may work for one population in a certain context may or may not work for another, and consultants must select and adapt their interventions accordingly (Nastasi et al., 2020).

This qualitative study identifies problems, interventions, and outcomes discussed in refugee secondary school consultation cases in Malaysia. The participants are from a secondary school subset of a larger school consultation study conducted in refugee preschool, primary, and secondary schools in Malaysia (O'Neal et al., 2024). In brief, the trauma-informed, emotions-focused school consultation program was titled Resilient Refugee Intervention (RRI). The goal of RRI was to support refugee teacher self-efficacy in promoting refugee students' emotions, behavior, and academic functioning in class (O'Neal et al., 2024). For each consultation case, RRI had consultants who were Malaysian citizens who were graduate school interns along with their co-consultants who were refugee teachers; the consultees were also refugee teachers.

Refugee education

Refugee education is in crisis given that only 65% of the 44 million refugee children in the world attend primary school, and only 41% are enrolled in secondary school (UNHCR, 2023). Refugee education in transit countries[1] has received even less attention. Refugees are not allowed to attend government or private school in some transit countries, so some students attend informal community-based refugee schools which are operationalized as unregulated, temporary education centers outside of the national education system (UNHCR, 2019). Refugee children who receive education in transit countries are typically taught by teachers who are also refugees, with limited training and little to no pay as an educator. However, many refugee teachers are highly motivated to give back to their refugee communities (e.g., O'Neal et al., 2022). As refugee children grow older, barriers to accessing secondary education become even more problematic (UNHCR, 2018).

Refugee education in Malaysia. Eighty-eight percent of the 150,000 refugees in Malaysia are from Myanmar, and the remaining 11% are from South Asia (e.g., Sri Lanka) in addition to West Asia (e.g., Syria) (UNHCR Malaysia, 2024). Refugees live in urban settings in Malaysia, not in refugee camps; refugee schools are typically in apartments. In Malaysia, both primary and secondary school education are solely provided by refugee informal learning centers because refugee children are not allowed to attend Malaysian public or private schools. Only 30% of the 23,823 primary school-age refugee children receive informal education which is offered by approximately 128 refugee schools (UNHCR Malaysia, 2024). Strikingly, only 16% of refugee secondary school-aged students in Malaysia receive a secondary school education. Only 20 of the refugee schools

provide a secondary school education. The refugee secondary schools are not allowed to provide a Malaysian certification of completion. Even if an individual graduates from a refugee informal learning center, they are not allowed to attend college; thus, the graduates of these secondary refugee schools are not allowed to attend college. English is the primary language used in secondary schools, although there is some code switching between native and English languages. Secondary school-aged refugee students and refugee teachers in Malaysia often struggle to cope with the multitude of stressors associated with displacement. In refugee schools in Malaysia, mental health and behavioral challenges may be impacted by sociopolitical concerns and discriminatory policies (e.g., O'Neal et al., 2022).

School consultation frameworks

The current study and the development of RRI relied heavily on the frameworks of Consultee-Centered Consultation (CCC), Multicultural Consultation (MC), and Participatory Culture-Specific Consultation (PCSC). CCC relies on a constructivist approach involving consultant and consultee co-creation of the consultation process. It includes a non-hierarchical, step-by-step process using established consultation steps and skills that center the consultee's choice of what problem is identified and intervention implemented (Newman & Ingraham, 2017). MC builds on CCC with a cultural, especially a transcultural, perspective. MC places an emphasis on contextual and power influences in addition to multicultural knowledge development (Ingraham, 2000). CCC and MC are ideal models to conduct school consultation with teachers of marginalized and immigrant/refugee students in low- and middle-income countries (LAMIC) because they have the potential to facilitate a collaborative and non-hierarchical relationship between the consultant and the consultee of different cultural backgrounds.

RRI also relied heavily on PCSC in tandem with CCC and MC. The PCSC framework (e.g., Nastasi, 2017) is a culturally relevant ecological model that aims to develop and implement culture-specific interventions. Similar to CCC and MC, PCSC includes steps common to all consultation models—problem identification (PID), intervention, and progress monitoring. PCSC builds on CCC and MC in its relevance to this study because it expects iterative post-consultation analysis of what elements of the program worked well or could be improved to make it more culturally relevant, as done in the current study. PCSC was also relevant to the development of RRI given its reliance on formative research to understand the cultural context, cultural adaptation of interventions, and participatory involvement of the target refugee teacher community as co-consultants. Overall, these three frameworks were all selected as a match for the current study and informed the RRI consultation intervention because they (a) fit the transcultural nature of RRI with participants from diverse cultural and contextual backgrounds; (b) informed the goal of this study which was to uncover culture-specific problems and interventions; and (c) facilitated the potential for a non-hierarchical, non-prescriptive consultation process given the elasticity of CCC, MC, and PCSC in transcultural, global school consultation.

Secondary school consultation research

Secondary school provides a path to higher education and career opportunities; however, there have been few secondary school consultation studies. With the exception of two studies (e.g., Hazel et al., 2014; Masse et al., 2013), we are not aware of any other published secondary school consultation research. Hazel et al. (2014) conducted a district-level consultation case study which focused on one high school in which the authors engaged in both systemic and individual consultation to increase on-time graduation rate at an urban secondary school. The study findings suggested that individual teacher and cross-disciplinary team consultation sessions were beneficial for provision of at-risk student supports and for systems-level change made by administrators at the school and district-level. In addition, a study conducted by Masse et al. (2013) incorporated a functional behavioral assessment process into consultation with teachers who had at least one student experiencing behavioral difficulties, with positive behavioral outcomes from the consultation. Future secondary school consultation research would benefit from systematic coding of problems and interventions in order to detail the specific problems and interventions unique to secondary school consultation.

Refugee teacher consultation. Teacher consultation with secondary students in a refugee informal learning center is responsive to multiple needs. Teachers who are refugees may have different levels of teaching skills and knowledge, combined with a lack of resources and financial support. Refugee teachers have expressed a need for training, including how to provide socioemotional and psychosocial supports for student well-being and learning (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies [INEE], 2022a). Some group training and group coaching refugee interventions in LAMIC countries have been published. For instance, Learning to Read and Healing Classrooms included group training and informal coaching via teacher learning circles in refugee primary schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo, without significant outcomes 2 years later (Torrente et al., 2019); they did not identify specific problems and interventions.

Refugee school research has not reported any individual, one-on-one consultation with refugee teachers in LAMIC countries, other than our recent consultation study with teachers of preschool, primary, and secondary school-aged refugee children (O'Neal et al., 2024). Our study found that individual consultation with 107 refugee teachers improved refugee teacher self-care and self-efficacy (O'Neal et al., 2024). What was not examined in our study was the specific problems and interventions raised by the consultants and consultees during the consultation process.

In sum, consultation provides an opportunity to identify and intervene in student and teacher challenges, as well as build student and teacher strengths via interventions (Newman & Rosenfield, 2024); however, little secondary school consultation research has been published. This study responds to the need to shine a light on problems, interventions, and outcomes in secondary school consultation in a global context, especially with marginalized populations.

Research questions

1. What do secondary teachers participating in a refugee teacher consultation program identify as problems during consultation?
2. What interventions do they consider or implement during consultation?
3. What do they identify as outcomes during consultation?

Methods

Study design

This study was designed as a qualitative exploration of school consultation conducted with refugee secondary school teachers. Specifically, this study examined the identified problems, interventions, and outcomes of 11 cases in which consultation was conducted at refugee teacher consultee's schools over 3 months in 2019. The 11 consultees met the criteria of refugee teachers who only taught secondary school. They participated in the RRI refugee teacher consultation program ($n = 107$ consultation cases) in Malaysia which found positive effects on teacher self-efficacy, self-care, and peer consultation skills (O'Neal et al., 2024). The number of sessions per case ranged from one to seven, with an average of five sessions. A couple had only one or two sessions, given their busy schedules. There were a total of 56 sessions across the 11 consultation cases. All consultation sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, excluding pleasantries or conversation because this study was narrowly focused on the problems, interventions, and outcomes discussed. Examples of conversation topics excluded from transcription were conversations about the weather, talk about setting up the recording, a need to change rooms for the consultation, etc. Of the 56 sessions, 54 secondary school sessions were transcribed and coded; two sessions were not transcribed due to poor audio quality. All materials and procedures used in this research were approved by a U.S. university review board.

Participants

Recruitment involved an initial recruitment session with 20 interested refugee school leaders. Seven of those 20 schools provided informal secondary school education to a small number of students. We operationalized secondary schools as those serving students aged 13 to 18. Of the 107 participants who agreed to participate in RRI, only 17 teachers met this study's requirement of solely teaching secondary school students. Only 11 of these secondary school teachers chose to be a consultee, who were the focus of this study. Hence, there were 11 cases in this study. Only one of these 11 consultees chose to be both a consultee and a consultant with a secondary teacher in this study. The remaining 10 were only consultees in this study. For the 10 who were only consultees in this study, seven of those 10 were also consultants of primary school teacher consultees as part of the overarching RRI study (O'Neal et al., 2024); however, consultation sessions with primary school consultees were not included in

Table 1. Consultation cases.

Case	Refugee consultee	Intern consultant	Refugee school consultant
Case 1	Participant 1	Participant 12	-
Case 2	Participant 2	Participant 13	-
Case 3	Participant 3	Participant 14	-
Case 4	Participant 4	Participant 15	Participant 22
Case 5	Participant 5	Participant 16	Participant 7
Case 6	Participant 6	Participant 17	Participant 23
Case 7	Participant 7	Participant 16	Participant 24
Case 8	Participant 8	Participant 18	Participant 25
Case 9	Participant 9	Participant 19	-
Case 10	Participant 10	Participant 20	Participant 26
Case 11	Participant 11	Participant 21	Participant 27 and Participant 28

this study. All 11 cases had graduate interns as consultants; seven of the cases had refugee school co-consultants with the interns. One of these seven cases had two refugee school co-consultants (participants 27 and 28). See Tables 1–4 for detailed information on the cases and their demographics. Table 1 details the participants in each of the cases. Table 2 shows the refugee consultee demographics. Table 3 includes intern consultant demographics. Table 4 includes refugee school consultant demographics (Table 4).

Resilient Refugee Intervention design and framework. RRI is a school consultation intervention designed to promote student emotion regulation and engagement, as well as teacher self-care, within informal refugee school settings. Between 2010 and 2019, RRI evolved through three major iterations in Malaysia, guided by formative input and feedback from teachers of refugee students (Gosnell et al., 2021; O'Neal et al., 2016, 2017, 2022). RRI evolved from a group training model into a peer-led teacher group training format and then to the present school-based consultation approach. The present study features a triadic consultation model, which involves pairing graduate students ("interns") with refugee teacher consultants to provide consultation to refugee teacher consultees in a collaborative manner.

Aligned with the PCSC model, RRI followed key consultation steps, namely PID, intervention, and progress monitoring, while integrating culturally responsive practices tailored to refugee classrooms (e.g., Nastasi, 2017). Additionally, RRI incorporated the formal consultation model of CCC, which is based on constructivist principles and emphasizes collaboration between the consultant and consultee to shape the consultation process (Newman & Ingraham, 2016). Central to RRI is empowering and collaborating with refugee teacher consultees, who maintain ownership of the problem while receiving support from the consultant to develop skills and reframe challenges, which ultimately

Table 2. Refugee consultee demographics.

Participant	School	Age	Years lived in MY	Years taught in MY	Sex	Country of origin	Ethnicity	Religion	Role in RRI
I	A	32	Lifetime	8	M	Malaysia	Indian-Malaysian	Christian	Consultee only
2	A	41	7.08	2	M	Liberia	Mandinka	Christian	Consultee only
3	A	46	Lifetime	3	F	Malaysia	Chinese-Malaysian	Christian	RS Consultant & Consultee
4	B	20	1.5	1.5	F	Pakistan	Ahmadi	Ahmadi Muslim	Consultee only
5	C	21	1.5	1.5	F	Pakistan	Pakistani	Ahmadi Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
6	C	27	5	2.25	F	Pakistan	Pakistani	Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
7	C	47	2	0.17	F	India	Ahmadi	Ahmadi Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
8	D	24	9	4	M	Myanmar	Karen	Christian	RS Consultant & Consultee
9	E	62	7	5	M	Iran	Tehranis	N/A	RS Consultant & Consultee
10	F	23	11	5	M	Myanmar	Kachin	Christian	RS Consultant & Consultee
11	G	21	1	0.08	F	Pakistan	Pakistani	Ahmadi Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee

Note: Only one of these consultees acted as a consultant with secondary school refugee teacher consultee participants in this study (Participant 7). The rest of the consultees in this table who acted as both consultants and consultees were also consultants with primary school refugee teachers who were not consultee participants in this secondary school study.
RRI, Resilient Refugee Intervention.

Table 3. Intern consultant demographics.

Participant	Age	Sex	Nationality	Religion
12	28	F	Malaysia	Agnostic
13	24	F	Malaysia	Buddhist
14	32	M	Malaysia	Christian
15	25	F	Malaysia	Buddhist
16	37	M	Bangladesh	Omnist
17	28	F	Malaysia	Atheist
18	33	M	Malaysia	Christian
19	24	M	Malaysia	Buddhist
20	26	F	Malaysia	Agnostic
21	24	F	Malaysia	Buddhist

enables them to address both current and future issues to improve student well-being and academic success (Newman & Ingraham, 2016).

Refugee school consultees. The 11 refugee secondary school teacher consultees consisted of nine refugees and two Malaysian citizens, five identified as male and six as female (Table 2). Out of the nine refugees, the refugee teacher consultees included refugees from Pakistan, Myanmar, India, Iran, and Liberia. They were between 21 to 61 years of age with an average age of 33. Education levels ranged from secondary school to college, and two had master's degrees.

Resilient Refugee Intervention refugee school consultants. There were eight refugee school consultants (see Table 4; the eighth consultant was participant 7 whose demographics are in Table 1 because they were also a consultee). Only one of the eight were solely a secondary school teacher (participant 7), and the rest were either a primary and secondary school teacher or solely a primary school teacher. One identified as male and the rest as female. Three were from the Ahmadi religious minority from Pakistan; two were from Myanmar (Karen and Kachin); one from India; one from Eritrea; and one from Somalia. They were between the ages of 20 and 47 with an average age of 26. Their education level was high school.

Resilient Refugee Intervention graduate student intern consultants. Graduate student intern consultants ($n = 10$) were graduate students in either clinical or counseling psychology master's programs (Table 3). Participant 16 was an intern consultation for two of the 11 cases. The interns were between 24 to 37 years of age, 60% identified as female, and all were Malaysian citizens except for one who was from Bangladesh.

Resilient Refugee Intervention supervisors. The six RRI supervisors provided weekly supervision to intern consultants. They listened to audio recordings of consultation sessions and provided feedback. Of the supervisors, one had a doctorate in clinical psychology

Table 4. Refugee school consultant demographics.

Participant	School	Age	Years lived in MY	Years taught in MY	Sex	Country of origin	Ethnicity	Religion	Role in RRI
22	B	31	1	0.5	F	Pakistan	Pakistani	Ahmadi Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
23	C	24	2.5	2.25	F	Pakistan	Pakistani	Ahmadi Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
24	C	21	2	0.58	F	Pakistan	Pakistani	Ahmadi Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
25	D	38	10	1	F	Myanmar	Karen	Buddhist	RS Consultant & Consultee
26	F	18	7.17	2	F	Myanmar	Chin	Christian	RS Consultant & Consultee
27	G	24	3	2	F	Eritrea	Eritrean	Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee
28	G	28	6	1	M	Somalia	Somalian	Muslim	RS Consultant & Consultee

RRI, Resilient Refugee Intervention.

and the second had a doctorate in counseling psychology; four had master's degrees in clinical psychology. Five of the six identified as female; had an average age of 33 years; five were Chinese-Malaysian; and one was white and from the United States.

Consultation training

The intern and refugee consultants received consultation training from the RRI supervisors. Intern co-consultants completed a 2-day consultation training while refugee co-consultants completed a separate 2-h consultation training at their schools. The refugee consultant training was only two hours because they are understaffed at refugee schools. In addition to training on consultation skills (Newman & Rosenfield, 2024), the trauma-informed training topics included refugee education; trauma and healing; culturally sensitive consultation approaches; refugee teacher stress and self-care; socioemotional learning and behavior; and academic instructional match. An optional tool box resource of interventions related to these topics was also shared with the consultants-in-training (O'Neal et al., 2019). Based on a CCC and MC approach, trainers communicated that the primary goal of consultation was to address any problems raised by the consultee, in addition to collaborating on intervention development in a culturally sensitive manner while prioritizing the refugee co-consultant and consultees' ideas on culturally relevant interventions.

Coding and category development

Data analysis was conducted using Conventional Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to derive codes directly from the consultation transcripts with the goal of identifying and categorizing any problems; interventions considered and/or implemented; and outcomes discussed during consultation. The coding team included four graduate students. Two faculty researchers with doctoral degrees supervised the coding process. The faculty trained the coders in coding procedures and Conventional Content Analysis.

To begin coding, each coder read the transcript carefully and repeatedly to derive codes. NVivo software was employed for the coding process. The team met regularly to discuss, compare, revise, and gain consensus on the codes until no new codes emerged. After establishing the codebook, three consultation transcripts were analyzed by all four coders to judge inter-rater reliability, yielding a Cohen's Kappa of .76 as an average across coders; a Kappa of 0.61 to 0.80 indicates "substantial agreement" (Cohen, 1960). Then, the remainder of the cases were coded independently. A number was calculated for each code which indicated the number of cases for which the code was applied. The four coders and two coding supervisors independently organized the combined list of codes into categories within the areas of problems, interventions, and outcomes (Supplemental Tables 1–3). They met as a team to discuss the categorization of codes in order to gain consensus.

Trustworthiness

Quality indices were employed to ensure the integrity of the qualitative findings: dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability of the study was enhanced by conducting coder training, codebook development, and consensus coding in our team coding approach. Moreover, inter-rater reliability was calculated to ensure that coders can replicate consistent results. The inter-rater reliability reported above was a Cohen's Kappa of .76 as an average across coders; a Kappa of 0.61 to 0.80 indicates "'substantial agreement'" (Cohen, 1960). Discrepancies and disagreements about emerging codes, categories, and meanings were discussed until a consensus was reached. Furthermore, the coding supervisors served as peer reviewers throughout the analytical process and met with all coders over weekly sessions. Transferability was preserved through descriptions of the refugee schools to facilitate the transferability of our findings to similar contexts.

Relevant to credibility and positionality, the two coding supervisors are authors on this paper; they include one white school psychology faculty member from the U.S. and a Chinese-Malaysian faculty member and practitioner who both had "prolonged engagement" in the refugee school context in Malaysia through their conducting previous teacher trainings, consultation, and formative, pre-consultation research over the past 15 years in Malaysia. The coders are also authors on this paper; one is Malay-Malaysian, and the others are white and Asian Indian American U.S. citizens. All were graduate students in school and clinical psychology with training in refugee education in Malaysia and globally. Implicit bias may have impacted the white female authors from the U.S. due to influences of Global North colonialism and white supremacy. Regular peer debriefing and reflexive discussions were held to challenge researchers' personal biases and assumptions.

Findings

Problem identification

The categories of problems identified across a number of consultation cases were engagement and learning; behavior; student and teacher mental health and negative emotions; teacher self-efficacy; relationships; and systemic challenges in refugee education (see categories, codes, and examples of each code in Supplemental Table 1); categories were listed in the order of categories with the highest to lowest number of cases. Throughout these findings, we will alternate between providing direct quotations and providing summaries of consultee expressions and sentiments.

Within the category of engagement and learning, engagement challenges were striking given that the code of "Difficulty paying attention" was raised by 10 of the 11 cases. Indeed, in the first session, one case described two students that displayed difficulty paying attention to the lecture. The consultee expressed that one student would not pay attention without her "scolding" him while the other student often looked tired. The next most common learning problems, raised in five cases, were "Do not understand

course materials," "Low academic performance," and "Do not complete homework." An example of a learning challenge discussed in a particular case was a refugee student having difficulty understanding course material. It is difficult to attribute the cause of why the student did not understand the course material, but one interpretation could be that it was caused by a lack of the right instructional match for the student.

The four most prevalent student behavioral challenges were "Interrupting class," "Disturbing other students," "Do not follow instructions," and "Overactive" which were raised in nine, eight, seven cases, and five cases, respectively. An example of behavioral problems was when one case discussed a student who "always likes to interrupt." The student made noises or initiated random conversations (e.g., about a movie) while she was teaching.

The main issues raised related to student mental health and negative emotions were students "Concealing [their] emotions" and students seeming "Tired," which were discussed in four cases each. In this category, a consultee described an instance in which they felt a student was "hiding their real emotions," despite knowing the student was feeling "stress" and "confusion." In another case, a teacher observed that a student was showing up to class tired with swollen eyes, which led the consultee to deduce that the student had not slept "for [a] long time."

The most common problem in the teacher mental health and negative emotion category was feeling stressed and overwhelmed, which was raised by eight teachers. The following are summaries of what consultees expressed in their direct quotes: one consultee expressed feeling tired and stressed due to students not understanding the content; the same consultee experienced a separate instance of stress due to their own confusion around how to build strong relationships with students. An additional consultee expressed worry about students who did not have the protection of a UNHCR refugee card.

Five teachers raised the self-efficacy concern of feeling ineffective as a teacher, often related to lacking time due to teaching so many classes and students. One teacher even mentioned having to teach two classes simultaneously. For the self-efficacy codes of "Feelings of inadequacy" and "Feeling judged," each had four cases discuss those topics in consultation. The following are summaries of what consultees expressed in their direct quotes: one case said that they felt they lacked teaching skills and experience. Relationship challenges were brought up by a small number of cases. "Peer relationship difficulties" and "Poor boundaries" were each raised in three cases. For example, a consultee discussed a cultural gap between themselves and their students, in which community beliefs and fear made some students or groups in the community resist engagement. Regarding the category of systemic concerns, three cases discussed how their schools lack resources. For instance, one consultee talked about students' barriers to opportunities because they were refugees in a country that denies rights to refugees.

Intervention

Overall, a wide breadth of interventions were considered and used (see examples of each code in Supplemental Table 2). Note that any intervention that was discussed during

consultation was coded; therefore, interventions which were solely considered, but not implemented, were included in the intervention coding. Also, interventions which were implemented were included in the coding. The intervention categories which emerged were academic engagement; positive reinforcement; behavior management; teacher self-care; student emotion regulation; relationship-building; and games. Throughout this discussion of intervention findings, we will alternate between providing direct quotations and providing summaries of consultee expressions and sentiments.

In the academic engagement interventions category, a wide variety of interventions were discussed—seven cases discussed "Multiple modes of teaching delivery" (e.g., visual, oral, and written modes), and three discussed "Checking on academic progress." An example of a case which used multiple modes of teaching was a teacher who employed music and dance in class to engage students in learning.

For the positive reinforcement category, "Praise" was discussed in four cases. One teacher used positive encouragement via "Instilling hope" to motivate a refugee student to perform well in secondary school despite refugees not being allowed to go to college or obtain legal employment in Malaysia. The teacher also explained to the student that completing secondary school would benefit the student when they eventually get resettled.

For behavior management, four cases discussed "Physical punishment" (e.g., requiring the student to stand up for a period of time). When reviewing the cases, we noticed that five teachers shifted from their reliance on punishment before consultation started to more non-punishment-based methods (e.g., reasoning with a student) during consultation. One consultee utilized physical punishment before starting consultation, and she continued using it until her third consultation session out of six total sessions. In session three, that same consultee implemented reasoning with a student who was crossing boundaries with personal questions. She continued to use "scolding" as a behavior management strategy throughout all six sessions. Teacher self-care was discussed in a variety of cases. The self-care techniques seemed to largely have the goal of helping the teachers calm down. "Prayer" was raised as a self-care tool by four teachers. A small number of cases discussed student emotion regulation strategies as interventions. Three raised "Journaling" as an intervention. For instance, a teacher used journaling to calm the students.

Intervention outcomes

There was typically only a brief discussion of outcomes during consultation (Supplemental Table 3) given that systematic tracking and assessment of outcomes were not expected in this consultation program. The consultants seemed largely to casually ask how the intervention went, to assess if the intervention was attempted and how it may or may not have been effective. The three most prevalent student-related intervention outcome categories were improvement in (a) academic engagement and performance; (b) student behavior; and (c) teacher and student motivation and emotions. Within the category of student academic engagement and performance, seven cases raised "Increased academic engagement" and four discussed "Increased academic

performance." In discussing these intervention outcomes, we will alternate between providing direct quotations and providing summaries of consultee expressions and sentiments.

"Increased compliance" was the most frequent code in the improvement in student behavior category, and it was raised in seven cases. This code encapsulated student behavior such as better "listening," being quieter in the classroom, and following teacher instructions. One teacher said that a student began to ask permission to leave the classroom, compared to his previously leaving the class without permission. In the category of improvement in student behavior, three cases discussed an "Increase in compliance," and three raised a "Decrease in classroom disturbance." For example, one consultee shared that improvement in student behavior left her feeling more respected.

Another category was improvement in student motivation and emotions. Five cases discussed an increase in student positive emotions because of the interventions. And, two cases raised an "Increase in teacher's motivation." For instance, one discussed an increase in the teacher's ability to pay attention which allowed the teacher to not only be more attentive but to also be more motivated to notice what worked and what did not work with the students.

A conceptual shift was another outcome category. Four consultees expressed that they saw the child in a more positive way as an outcome of the consultation. Interestingly, one consultee who had a conceptual shift expressed developing an awareness of injustices against her refugee students in Malaysia. In addition, four consultees said that there was no change in the target students' behaviors as an outcome of the intervention. For instance, one saw no improvement after using a monetary intervention.

Discussion

The main contribution of this study was opening the black box of school consultation in refugee secondary schools, which is especially important given the high numbers of refugee secondary-aged students who are stuck in transit countries with restricted education opportunities (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a; UNHCR, 2023). Secondary students in refugee contexts face direct and indirect challenges that can make school difficult to navigate (Bellino, 2021). The problems experienced by students and teachers in refugee secondary education merit identification, in conjunction with identification of interventions which may ameliorate the problems. Another contribution of this paper is the systematic detailing of the content of refugee secondary school consultation. Indeed, this paper's qualitative examination of PID, interventions, and outcomes in a refugee secondary school setting holds implications for culture-specific secondary school consultation through a global, intercultural, PCSC lens which may make future iterations of consultation more culturally relevant rather than a one-size-fits-all, culture- and contextually-blind approach (Nastasi, 2017; Nastasi et al., 2020). Given that western models tend to be oriented towards majority white groups, it is problematic to assume the generalizability of consultation. However, the findings from this study also hold implications for the universal nature of the refugee school consultation experience.

Content analyses found that the challenges and interventions discussed in consultation primarily fell into the broad categories of academic engagement, behavior, emotions, and relationships. Only for the problems (not the interventions) were systemic issues raised about the refugee context. While some of these overarching category labels may initially seem similar to those in non-refugee settings, the refugee context introduces additional complexities that create a layered dimension. This aligns with the idea that PID and intervention are at least partially shaped by the population and context (Downer et al., 2018). For example, the issue of teacher self-efficacy—specifically, the code "Lack of time"—may be a common struggle for educators worldwide. However, in the refugee context, this challenge is significantly amplified. One teacher, for instance, described being so understaffed that they had to teach two different subjects in separate classrooms simultaneously. Similarly, "Lack of self-efficacy" may appear to be a universal concern for teachers, but in this context, it is exacerbated by policies in Malaysia that prohibit teachers who are refugees from accessing higher education, including formal college-level teacher training (Gosnell et al., 2021; O'Neal et al., 2016). Moreover, refugee teachers often did not explicitly attribute their challenges to refugee-related circumstances. For instance, while "Lack of school resources" is a common issue in many educational settings around the world, in the transit refugee education context, it can be attributed to the systemic exclusion of refugees from adequately resourced formal education. While the data cannot definitively classify all of the problems and interventions raised as either culture-specific or universal, the following discussion section offers insights into how the refugee context may uniquely shape these challenges as well as where they might align with universal education-related problems.

Problem identification

The largest category of problems discussed in consultation was student engagement and learning (Supplemental Table 1). Nearly all cases raised concerns about students paying attention in class. Relatedly, some students were viewed as lacking motivation and confidence. A possible interpretation of the teachers' experience of low student engagement, motivation, confidence, and academic performance is that the problems were due to an instructional mismatch. An instructional mismatch is operationalized as the academic material being at a higher level than the student's actual academic level, and this could lead to low motivation and engagement (Rosenfield, 2014). It is remarkable how challenging it is to strike an instructional match with each refugee student in a single class because refugees have frequent interruptions in their education; for example, a class with all 16-year-old refugees often has some students at the academic level of a 10-year old in transit settings (O'Neal et al., 2016). Attentional engagement and instructional match may be a common problem reported in the consultation literature in non-refugee settings, but the nature of the problem in this study may reflect the unique refugee education context.

Interrupting class and disturbing other students were common behavioral challenges raised in consultation, along with being non-compliant and overactive. Discrimination against refugee youth in transit countries, and for those who have been resettled, has

been found to be related to emotional and behavior problems in cross-sectional studies (e.g., Beiser & Hou, 2016). Teachers in Jordan have reported challenges with teaching Syrian refugee children due to students' behavior, low achievement, and their own teaching self-efficacy caused by a lack of training and preparation (Alkhawaldeh, 2018). But if refugee youth in transit countries are able to receive support and be resettled to a safe country, then their behavior may improve (e.g., Bouclaous et al., 2019).

Strikingly, some teachers viewed students as concealing emotions, along with students being tired. For instance, one teacher expressed concern about a quiet child who the teacher thought internally contained their persistent state of anxiety caused by not having a UNHCR refugee status card which offers protection and hope of resettlement. Emotion containment could be a way to cope with the liminal state of uncertainty given that they do not know when or if they may be resettled to a safer country than Malaysia. Indeed, emotion containment might be adaptive in some cultures and/or after trauma (Morelen et al., 2012).

Refugee teachers also reported feeling tired, which may be due to just being tired from juggling multiple roles in addition to lacking time, training, and resources. However, it seems likely the tiredness is a symptom of stress and/or mental health from being over-whelmed by their demanding position as a teacher along with being a refugee in a country hostile to refugees, as reported in previous research when teachers who were refugees defined stress and mental health in terms of somatization like being "tired" (Gosnell et al., 2021). Based on the discussions during this study's consultation sessions, the sim-ultaneous experience of self-efficacy, teacher-student relationships, student behavior, instructional match, and student engagement challenges seemed to be impacting refugee teacher well-being. Unfortunately, the stress and exhaustion from being a refugee teacher is not unique to Malaysia but has also been reported across other urban refugee settings and refugee camps (e.g., Mendenhall et al., 2021). Indeed, INEE has prioritized interventions focused on both refugee teacher self-efficacy and well-being (INEE, 2022a, 2022b). In a PCSC and MC context, understanding the cultural rele-vance of teacher exhaustion and student attentional engagement problems, for instance, holds implications for future research and consultation with refugee teachers in transit contexts.

Interventions

As we observed the consultation sessions unfold during RRI, we speculated that refugee secondary school teachers seemed to rely less on interventions from the RRI optional intervention tool box (O'Neal et al., 2019) compared to primary or preschool teachers. As a reminder, the tool box was simply offered as a resource to the co-consultants and was not required to be used. Indeed, consultants were encouraged to be open to any inter-vention ideas. We wondered if some of the tool box interventions were less appropriate as a developmental match for secondary students (e.g., Good Morning Song). Indeed, as the data were systematically coded, we found that only 38% of interventions discussed during consultation in this study came from the tool box. Perhaps, thinking outside of the tool box when exploring possible interventions might be interpreted as refugee

secondary school teachers acting as agents of change in themselves and their classroom (Mendenhall et al., 2021).

Facilitating academic engagement was the most common intervention discussed by refugee teachers and students. The nature of their promotion of academic engagement included multiple modes of instruction delivery based on students' interests. It also included making time to connect with students on their academic progress, which has been found to be related to student engagement (e.g., Lee, 2012). There was a long list of interventions coded under the category of academic engagement of students (Supplemental Table 2) suggesting that the refugee teachers and consultants considered and/or implemented a wide variety of engagement interventions.

Positive reinforcement interventions were used as a way to encourage and connect with students in order to improve their behavior. For instance, a case discussed saying positive things about students' work prior to giving students corrective feedback. The most frequently raised behavioral management intervention was physical punishment (e.g., making the student stand with arms overhead); however, such punishment was apparently used prior to or early on in the consultation process before the teachers and their consultants considered more non-punishment behavioral management alternatives. The Phenomenological Variant of the Ecological Systems Theory (Spencer, 2008) emphasizes the importance of the chronosystem (e.g., change over time), the influence of the cultural context, and adaptation which may be reflected in a shift towards a non-physical punishment alternative over the course of consultation.

Although instilling hope was only discussed with one teacher, we have since heard from some refugee secondary school teachers that refugee secondary school students often lose hope, with some becoming disruptive in class, disengaged, or dropping out (Dryden-Peterson, 2016b). Those teachers have worked to motivate their students to have hope so that the students stick with their studies despite there being no legal jobs or few opportunities to go to college in Malaysia (O'Neal et al., 2016). A necessary future study is if and how refugee teachers instill hope and perseverance in disengaged or discouraged secondary refugee students to complete secondary school despite no immediate promise of resettlement to a country with rights to work and higher education.

The two most frequently discussed self-care strategies were praying and deep breathing which largely seemed employed to cope with the stressors and frustrations of both teaching and being refugees. Faith is a common source of comfort, collective support, and meaning-making reported by refugees, including among refugee teachers in Malaysia (Gosnell et al., 2021). Interventions, like prayer, might also be viewed as universal, given that they are used across many contexts. However, the process of cultural adaptation and eliciting community members' input on making interventions culturally relevant can be important in transcultural consultation (Nastasi, 2017).

Outcomes

Although outcomes were not closely monitored, some improvements were reported by teachers during consultation. The consultees' main focus in the problem and intervention phases was on academic engagement and behavior, and the same was true for the

outcome of improvement in engagement and behavior, along with improvement in motivation and positive emotions in themselves and their students. Strikingly, some also expressed a conceptual shift to a more positive view of their teaching and students. A consultee's conceptual shift is one of the goals of CCC, with an assumption that if the teacher views the student more positively, then the teacher will treat the student more positively, with positive outcomes for the student (Newman & Ingraham, 2016).

At the same time, some saw no improvement as a result of their interventions, which raises the question of why there may not have been change. Perhaps there was no improvement due to the limited consultation training of the consultants. It is worth exploring under what circumstances and with whom individual consultation is enough for teachers to see improvement in a challenging educational context. It could take more than just individual teacher consultation to change the challenging circumstances which oppress refugees in countries which do not give rights to education. An education-in-emergencies environment may also require advocacy consultation for systemic and policy change with a social justice approach (e.g., Ortiz et al., 2024).

Limitations

There are some areas of reliability and generalizability of the findings which may act as limitations. The intervention results encompassed both interventions that were implemented and those that were only considered by the consultants and consultees, without the findings distinguishing between the two. Indeed, it was not possible to accurately distinguish between the two in this dataset. This is a significant limitation of the study, with potential for future studies benefiting from distinguishing the two, if possible. Also, RRI did not explicitly train consultants to ask about student or teacher strengths.

Consultants were only briefly trained on progress monitoring, and progress monitoring was not emphasized in supervision. Therefore, outcomes were not consistently or systematically identified by all of the consultants. Indeed, progress monitoring can be challenging in the education-in-emergencies field, given time constraints of the refugee teachers and the often shifting nature of the problems and interventions which makes it difficult to pin down outcomes over time. However, there may have been some bias in the reporting of outcomes during consultation sessions.

The intern consultants received 2 days of training on the multiple RRI topics and consultation skills. We suspect that only a couple hours of training was not enough for the refugee teacher consultants, who anecdotally expressed after RRI that they wanted more training to be consultants. In the future, more training opportunities would be ideal for the refugee teacher consultants. To do so in understaffed informal learning settings, it will be necessary for future studies to staff the school with substitute teachers for ideally 2 days of training. It is possible that the lack of adequate training of the co-consultant refugee teachers could have impacted the quality of the consultation sessions.

The current study did not conduct an analysis across the trajectory of each case. For instance, this study does not identify what problems were identified that led to different interventions. We would recommend tracking the problems and subsequent interventions

and outcomes across each case in future research. In addition, potential biases may exist in reliance on consultees' self-reported data. Finally, the limited discussion of systemic issues during the consultation sessions may suggest a gap between the conceptual framework emphasizing systemic context and practical application of the framework.

Conclusions and implications

The overall contribution of this study was to detail the concerns, considerations, and ways to promote change which were discussed during consultation with secondary school refugee teachers. A conclusion from the findings was that academic engagement and learning were prioritized as problems and interventions discussed in consultation. Another important result was the teachers' feelings of inadequacy and stress around handling such challenges. This feeling of inadequacy and stress may be due to their being new and/or not having adequate preparation given restrictions for refugee teachers due to lack of access to teacher education and the demands of teaching secondary school-level content. Some students were reported to be stressed and tired, similar to the teachers. The teachers discussed improvement in academic engagement, performance, student compliance, and some shifted to seeing the positive in their students. An implication of these findings is that context-specific engagement, learning, and behavior may merit consideration for interventions implemented by school psychologists and/or other school consultants when doing secondary school consultation in refugee informal learning contexts.

Knowledge gleaned from global contexts is necessary to adapt and inform school consultation through a global lens (Nastasi, 2017). Indeed, using qualitative research in school psychology to uncover what is centered in the lives of marginalized groups "can produce knowledge that challenges our ethnocentric assumptions about the social world" (Sabnis et al., 2023, p. 5). At the same time, such research can improve our understanding of what concerns may be universal across global contexts. The results of the current study have the potential to expand our thinking about the growth that refugee teachers in transit countries with restricted education rights want to see in themselves and their classrooms. Guided by PCSC, CCC, and MC models, the culture-specific insights gained from these refugee teacher consultation sessions hold implications for future iterations of global school consultation with marginalized groups.

Consent to participate

The informed consent was verbal due to risk of breach of confidentiality for a marginalized population of refugees in a country which does not recognize refugee rights.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Data availability

It is not possible to share the data due to the sensitivity of the data and sample due to the refugee context.

Declaration of conflicting interest

Ethical considerations

The University of Maryland, College Park IRB provided approval for this study (#1369203-1) on February 21, 2019.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1. A transit country is operationalized as a country in which they are in a trans-migration phase between their country-of-origin and their future resettlement country. Most transit countries do not formally accept refugees, allow them to legally work, or officially permit them to resettle as a refugee there. Refugees are often stuck in transit countries for years (Fee, 2021).

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