

School Success for Migrant and Refugee Children: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

In less than a decade, conflicts have driven two massive waves of refugees to the European Union, mainly from Syria and Ukraine but not only. Many of these refugees are children whose education has been disrupted. This article aims to identify the elements that foster school success for migrant and refugee children in their host societies. To investigate this, we conducted a systematic review following the PRISMA statement, focusing on three databases: Elsevier's Scopus[®], Clarivate's[™] Social Sciences Citation Index[™], and Emerging Sources Citation Index[™]. Our search yielded 651 articles, with no restriction on publication date. After a rigorous inclusion and exclusion process conducted independently by different researchers, 38 articles related to the education of refugee and migrant children and families were fully screened. Ultimately, 30 articles were included in the review, and their methodological quality was assessed independently by two researchers. The analysis, conducted deductively, highlights the importance of establishing interactive learning environments for students, involving the community in the educational process, and designing effective training for teachers and other professionals to manage the educational trajectories of these young people. In the final section, we discuss the limitations of this study and suggest areas for further exploration.

Plain language summary

A summary of what we know about promoting educational success among migrant students

The article emphasizes several key findings related to fostering school success for migrant and refugee children: a) Interactive Learning Environments: Creating engaging spaces for students is crucial. b) Community Involvement: Collaborating with local communities enhances support networks. c) Teacher and Professional Training: Educators need specialized skills to address students' unique needs. d) Methodological Quality: Rigorous methodology ensures reliable findings. Limitations and Further Exploration: The study acknowledges limitations and suggests areas for future research. Remember, a holistic approach is essential, considering both academic achievement and well-being.

Keywords

migrant, refugee children, educational success, community participation, Interactive Learning environments

Introduction

Rationale

At the end of 2023, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide was estimated at 117.3 million. The estimated percentage of refugees, people in refugee-like situation and other people in need of international protection who are children was 40%, and women and girls

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account for 49% (UNHCR, 2024). According to the most recent data on refugee enrollment in education, only 68% attended primary school, 34% attended secondary school, and a mere 5% pursued higher education (UNHCR, 2021). These figures highlight the significantly lower participation rates in education for children from these backgrounds compared to their peers at all educational levels.

Moreover, as of May 2022, not all children and young people who fled Ukraine due to the war had enrolled in schools in the host countries (Eurydice, 2022). This underscores the challenge of involving refugee families, even within Europe. While these displacements can be dangerous and traumatizing, the massive arrival of child refugees also poses significant challenges to the host countries' social and mental health services. This is particularly true for the settings where their education process needs to take place and the contexts in which these children reside, such as refugee camps, hotspots, or reception centers. These factors are crucial as they can have devastating consequences for children's psychosocial development and social inclusion. Health and well-being-related vulnerabilities can exacerbate existing inequalities in the education system and society in general.

Additionally, students with a migrant background in Europe are much more likely to leave school early (EC, 2016) and to underachieve (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/European Union [OECD/EU], 2018) compared to their peers from the host countries. The scientific literature points to numerous barriers that hinder proper access to quality education for refugee and migrant children, ranging from financial and legal constraints to social, cultural, and economic challenges (Graham et al., 2016).

Access to quality education is not only a basic human right but also critical for safety, social inclusion (Sheikh & Anderson, 2018), and stability (Taftaf & Williams, 2020). In the long term, it is essential for full inclusion on an equal footing in society, as education is one of the most effective strategies to promote the integration of forcibly displaced and migrant children. The EC Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) emphasizes that "education and training is the foundation for successful participation in society and one of the most powerful tools for building more inclusive societies" (EC, 2020, p. 8).

Refugee and Migrant Children Education

A 2011 review by the UNHCR revealed several concerns regarding refugee education. Firstly, it found that refugee education is often of very low quality and fails to serve its protective function due to a lack of focus on learning (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Secondly, access to refugee education is limited and uneven across different

regions and settings of displacement, particularly for girls and at the secondary level (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Lastly, the review highlighted a need for more human and financial resources (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

In a study analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on the education of refugee and migrant children, Koehler et al. (2022) identified specific barriers that these children face in their educational trajectories, especially in light of the global pandemic. Refugee and migrant children can be affected by language difficulties, the socio-economic status of their parents, and a lack of technological skills, as well as limited access to technological devices and the internet (Koehler et al., 2022). Additionally, refugee children often endure disadvantages due to precarious living conditions that are not conducive to studying, particularly during the COVID-19 closures in host countries. They also suffer from lost education and adverse experiences before and during their journeys (Rude, 2020).

Cerna (2020) found that parents may have more limitations in supporting their children due to limited knowledge of the education system, curricula, and teaching styles in the host country. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges, such as virtual teaching tools that are not fully adapted for non-native speakers. This limitation affected not only the children but also migrant and refugee parents' ability to support their children during the COVID-19 confinement and home-schooling periods (Koehler et al., 2022). Additionally, refugee and migrant parents are overrepresented in the key workers' category, which meant they spent much time outside the house during the closure, further diminishing their capacity to support their children (Koehler et al., 2022).

Cerna (2020) also points out that insufficient information about school closures, online learning arrangements, and other services due to language barriers adds to the obstacles faced by these groups. Moreover, the incorporation and persistence of some virtual components in schools nowadays add a burden to some refugee and migrant families. Finally, in a recent systematic review, Aleghfeli and Hunt (2022) found that in the case of unaccompanied refugee minors, educational resilience can be enhanced by intervening at the microsystemic and mesosystemic levels: reception-related (supportive biological/foster parents, quality foster/residential care), school-related (strong school placement, supportive teachers, supportive classmates), and supportive friends.

In 2009, Nusche conducted a review of the evidence available regarding what works in migrant education, published by the OECD. In this review, Nusche (2009) identifies ways in which educational policies might influence system, school, and individual factors to close the achievement gap between migrant and native children. At the system level, Nusche focuses on reducing

educational segregation, allocating resources for migrant education, and recruiting and retaining effective teachers for migrant education. At the school level, Nusche emphasizes language learning, intercultural education, and parental involvement in schools. Koehler et al. (2022) highlight the role of translators and cultural mediators in overcoming language barriers between migrant, refugee parents, and schools.

The Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education recommended: learning content, pedagogical approaches, and fostering an inclusive and democratic learning environment; empowering teaching professionals; enhancing cooperation with parents, communities, and wider partners; promoting a lifelong learning approach; and strengthening the role of research, assessment, and sharing best practices (van Driel, 2020).

Europe faced an ongoing humanitarian and refugee crisis due to the Russian army's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. So far, the European Union's member states have responded in various ways to address the needs of refugees, including their educational and psychosocial needs. Regarding education, some of the responses, which have been uneven in their implementation among EU members, include: top-level guidance to support schools welcoming learners from Ukraine, top-level regulations or recommendations on the initial assessment of newly arrived learners' competences and needs (educational and language), and fewer have also included personal needs (social, emotional, mental health). Other measures include learners' integration into regular classes combined with intensive support for learning the language of schooling (and other subjects), support for refugee learners who wish to follow the Ukrainian curriculum through distance learning, allowing for the recruitment of, or collaboration with, Ukrainian teachers, specific guidelines or materials to help schools and teachers support the well-being of refugee learners from Ukraine and address themes such as war, fear, terror, or crises, and facilitating the work of external psychosocial service providers with regard to psychosocial support for refugee learners from Ukraine (Eurydice, 2022).

This situation has arguably highlighted the need for "structural measures aimed at ensuring access to quality education for all" (EC, 2022, p. 7), not only for refugee but also for migrant children whose results are still behind those of native children.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to identify, within the scientific literature, the elements that promote effective and socially innovative educational practices aimed at

enhancing the academic success of children with migrant and/or refugee backgrounds. This is intended to facilitate the promotion of scientifically informed educational policies for these vulnerable groups.

Methods

This article is a systematic review, conducted using the PRISMA model due to its thoroughness and wide acceptance within the scientific community. The popularity of this model is evident from the number of citations received by the articles and guides describing it, as well as the proliferation of systematic reviews that employ this model. The items described in the following section have been adapted for our study from various sources (Finn et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009, 2015; Shamseer et al., 2015).

Eligibility Criteria

We selected the studies based on the following inclusion criteria:

Study Designs. All study designs were accepted, provided they were presented in a peer-reviewed article. This approach ensures that the studies have undergone a quality check before being accepted for publication and that the study designs meet minimum standards in terms of data collection, analysis, and conclusions.

Participants. Studies included in our sample had to focus on the target population of the H2020 REFUGE-ED project. This means that only those studies which included migrant, refugee, forcibly displaced, asylum-seeking children, and/or unaccompanied minors were considered. Consequently, many studies that focused on low Socioeconomic Status (SES) families, children with special education needs, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, etc., but did not mention any of the groups of interest for the H2020 REFUGE-ED project, were excluded.

Intervention. Studies included in our sample had to focus on the target population of the H2020 REFUGE-ED project. This means that only those studies which included migrant, refugee, forcibly displaced, asylum-seeking children, and/or unaccompanied minors were considered. Consequently, many studies that focused on low Socioeconomic Status (SES) families, children with special education needs, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, etc., but did not mention any of the groups of interest for the H2020 REFUGE-ED project, were excluded.

Timing. There was no restriction regarding timing.

Setting. There was no restriction regarding the setting where the study took place. On the contrary, we were hoping for a diversity of settings that could represent the reality of the phenomenon that we study.

Language. We included articles in English, Spanish, Italian, or French, which are the languages spoken by the authors. In the review process we had to exclude one article in Korean.

Availability. The last criterion was the availability of the paper. In the review process some articles were excluded because they were not available for download for the authors.

Information Sources

The systematic literature review was conducted using three electronic databases: Elsevier's Scopus®, Clarivate's™ Social Sciences Citation Index™ (which includes records and cited references from 1900 to the present), and Emerging Sources Citation Index™ (with records dating back to 2005). These databases are among the most representative for social sciences, the field that informs our systematic review, which is why we chose them.

Search Strategy

The search was conducted in the three databases (Scopus®, SSCI™, ESCI™) in June 2022. The same combination of keywords, agreed upon by all authors, was used across all three electronic databases. No time or other limitations were applied at the time of the search. The search was carried out in two phases.

In the first phase, we used 81 combinations of the keywords established in the H2020 REFUGE-ED project framework. In the second phase, we combined the project's target population with two key concepts from the education research literature: "successful educational action" (a concept that emerged from the FP6 research project INCLUD-ED, 2006-2011) and "culturally responsive leadership." All these combinations are detailed in the Appendix 1 of the article.

Study Records

Data Management. The systematic literature search results were imported into Rayyan, a web-based, free-of-charge software for systematic reviews. This software allowed for the collaborative and blind screening and selection of

the literature search results, meaning that one researcher could not view the inclusion/exclusion decisions of the other researcher(s) involved in these stages of the systematic review. The full record details and PDF files of the articles were uploaded to Rayyan, and researchers organized an internal session via Teams to explore how Rayyan worked and to discuss the use of the inclusion/exclusion criteria before starting the review.

Additionally, the quality of the empirical articles included in the sample was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018). Two internal sessions were also organized to explore and agree on the use of the MMAT tool by the researchers. This assessment was carried out independently by different researchers, and in cases where the scores did not match, the discrepancies were referred to a third researcher. The third researcher made recommendations that were accepted and implemented by the researchers who conducted the initial assessment.

Selection Process. Researchers screened the titles and abstracts of the articles uploaded in Rayyan. In cases where researchers were uncertain about including an article, they agreed to seek more details within the article. Most of the articles that presented uncertainty were related to the target population. In such cases, researchers would look for information in the "Methods" section, where they expected to find details about the study participants.

During the first phase of the literature search, there was a total of 12.5% (46) articles with differing inclusion/exclusion decisions among the researchers. In the second phase of the literature search, the conflict rate (different inclusion/exclusion decisions) increased to 43.75% (14) of the articles. In both instances, the opinion of a third researcher was sought to resolve the conflict cases. The decisions of the third researcher were accepted and implemented by the researchers who conducted the initial selection.

Finally, both the raw data and a draft version of this paper were made available to the consortium for review, comments, and suggestions.

Data Items

In line with the objectives of this systematic review, researchers sought data—either quantitative or qualitative—that demonstrated improvement in the educational situation and well-being of refugee children, migrant children, asylum-seeking children, unaccompanied minors, forcibly displaced children, and/or their families, following an intervention, program, or quantitative data analysis. As mentioned earlier, there were no

limitations regarding the study design or type of data to be collected, as long as it met the inclusion criteria.

Data Analysis

Data collected in our systematic review was analyzed deductively (Koehler et al., 2022). Through this process, the research team identified three key categories of analysis, each linked to important agents in the educational process: a) students, b) teachers, and c) community. The selection of these categories was based on the research focus of the EU's H2020 REFUGE-ED project (anonymized for the peer review process).

The first step involved collecting all relevant data from the papers included in the sample. In the second step, two researchers independently coded the data under each of the three categories. Finally, once the coding was completed, the results were compared, and any differences were resolved through multiple rounds of dialog between the two researchers (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Results

Study Selection

As shown in Figure 1, we started with a total of 651 articles, which were reduced to 400 after removing duplicates. This reduction is not unexpected, as many scientific journals are included in multiple electronic databases. In the second step of the systematic review, we eliminated 357 articles after screening all the titles and abstracts and seeking additional information in the articles, as mentioned in the "Selection process" section of the article. In the third step, we applied the inclusion criteria (see "Eligibility criteria" section in the paper) to the 43 eligible articles, resulting in a final sample of 30 articles.

Study Characteristics

In Table 1, we can see the main features of the 30 studies included in the sample. First, we notice that most of the studies (10) were conducted in the United States, followed closely by Spain, with 8 articles. At the opposite end, we have the United Kingdom with three articles, Canada with two, and China, Germany, Greece, New Zealand, and Palestine each with one article. Most of the articles (19) include refugee or migrant students as participants in the study, while another 8 studies, which do not include migrant or refugee students, do include migrant or refugee families. Finally, regarding the methodological design, most of the studies (20) use a qualitative methodology, one uses mixed methods, and the remaining (8) use quantitative methodology.

Quality Assessment. Quality assessment was conducted by two independent researchers. In cases where the overall score of an article differed by more than 20% between the two reviewers, the final decision was made by a third researcher, as was done in the previous steps of selecting the articles for the sample. When the difference was 20% or less and did not imply different levels of quality, the average of the two scores was calculated. The articles were then divided into five quality levels: 100–80 high quality; 79–60 good quality; 59–40 average quality; 39–20 low quality; 19–0 very low quality. Our MMAT assessment identified 24 studies as high quality, 1 study as good quality, and 2 studies as average quality. Therefore, most studies complied with the high-quality criteria, with 13 studies meeting all five criteria (scoring 100). Finally, there were three articles in our sample that were not empirical, so they were not assessed with the MMAT tool.

Educational Settings. The educational settings for migrant and refugee students vary across different countries, with public schools being the most common environment. In countries like the United States, Spain, and China, these students are integrated into standardized school systems that strive to incorporate inclusive practices. In Greece, however, there are refugee-specific support environments, such as evening schools, which not only provide a safe and instrumental learning space but also address the psychosocial needs of the children. Within the framework of EU policy, instrumental learning is defined as the process of acquiring the skills and competences necessary to prevent social exclusion and to ensure full participation in society and the economy. This form of learning is integral to the EU's lifelong learning strategy, which aims to provide inclusive and equitable education and training opportunities for all individuals, particularly those at risk of marginalization.

Community centers play a significant role in the US and the UK, especially in areas with high immigration rates. They complement formal education by offering educational resources and safe spaces, as seen with the Hmong youth in Minnesota. The majority of the studies, approximately 70%, focus on public schools, while the remaining are split equally between community centers and special schools, each accounting for 15% of the studies. This distribution reflects the emphasis on both formal and informal contexts that support the education of migrant and refugee students.

Geographical Coverage, Children's Backgrounds, Methodologies. The analysis of the studies included in our systematic review reveals a geographical diversity in the research. Most studies were conducted in the United States (10 studies) and Spain

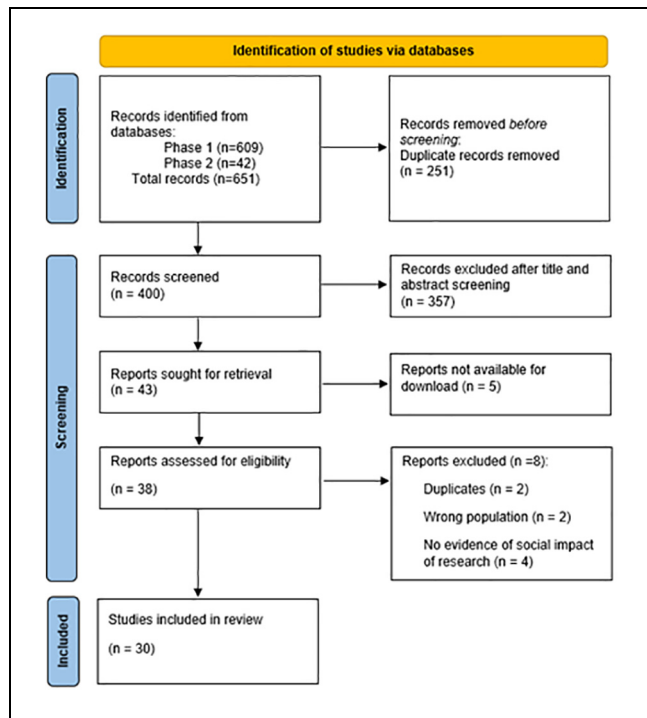


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

(8 studies), followed by the United Kingdom (3 studies), Canada (2 studies), and other countries with 1 study each, such as China, Germany, Greece, New Zealand, and Palestine.

Of the studies reviewed, 19 specifically include refugee or migrant students, while another eight focus on migrant or refugee families. This distinction highlights the different ways in which the education of children in situations of forced displacement is addressed and how educational practices may differ depending on whether the participants are students or family members.

Most of the studies adopted a qualitative methodology (20 studies), one used mixed methods, and the remaining studies (8 studies) applied quantitative methodologies. This qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural context and individual experiences of participants, which is particularly relevant in the analysis of educational practices for vulnerable populations such as migrants and refugees. For instance, in the United States, Lee and Hawkins (2008) discuss how community centers can provide safe spaces and foster collaboration between families and schools. In Greece, Huss, Ben-Asher, Shahar, et al. (2021) examine how instrumental learning and safe spaces help refugee students adapt better in the school context.

These examples illustrate the diverse educational settings and methodologies used to study the education of migrant and refugee children, as well as the importance

of considering cultural context and individual experiences in this research.

Study Limitations. Most of the studies included in the review were conducted in high-income countries, particularly the United States and select European countries. This geographical focus limits the generalizability of the findings to global contexts, especially in other regions in the world with the higher refugee populations. Additionally, the review primarily concentrated on educational activities within formal settings, such as regular schools. However, many refugee children lack access to these formal educational environments, which further restricts the applicability of the findings.

Interactive Learning Environments for Refugee and Migrant Students. The category of interactive learning environments encompasses strategies and actions that promote academic learning across formal, non-formal, and informal education settings. These strategies aim to foster a diverse range of interactions, particularly around educational and cultural themes, involving high-quality learning experiences. The interactions can occur among the participants themselves, with teachers, other professionals, or community volunteers.

From the analyzed studies, five main factors emerged that specify how to create interactive learning environments contributing to school success for migrant and refugee students. The first factor is creating safe spaces, which involves establishing environments where educational actions are provided. For immigrant children, Lee and Hawkins (2008) emphasize the importance of creating safe spaces in schools for children to express different identities and accept the contributions of immigrant families and communities, which helps develop a sense of belonging. For refugee children, Huss, Ben-Asher, Shahar, et al. (2021) found that safe spaces in afternoon schools offered a dialogic alternative to violence in problem-solving, improving relationships and fostering academic motivation and instrumental learning.

The second factor is fostering positive relations and atmosphere inside and outside educational spaces. A positive atmosphere based on egalitarian relations increases positive interactions and enhances the learning process (Garcia-Yeste, Morlà-Folch & Inoescu, 2018). Diab et al. (2018) also found that encouraging practices from teachers and parents, as well as good peer relations, contribute to high academic achievement and can protect against the negative impacts of traumatic war experiences.

The third factor is taking a multicultural and inclusive approach. Recognizing and respecting children with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds fosters learning

Table 1. List of Studies Included and Their Main Characteristics.

Author and year	Country of the study	Participants	Method	Contribution	MMAT score
Lee and Hawkins (2008)	United States	Hmong immigrant children/ youth, staff, and volunteers from three community center sites	Observation and interviews	Safe spaces; collaboration between families and schools	90
Huss, Ben Asher, Walden, & Shahar et al. (2021)	Greece	Refugee children, teachers, volunteers and school manager	Participatory case study	Safe spaces; instrumental learning	90
Garcia-Yeste, Gairal-Casado, and Gomez-Gonzalez (2018)	Spain	Migrant and non-migrant parents, students and teachers	Communicative daily life story, communicative focus groups, semi-structured interviews with communicative orientation and questionnaire	Positive relations and atmosphere; family education	100
Diab et al. (2018)	Palestine	Palestinian children and their parents	Questionnaires and standard tests	Positive relations and atmosphere	90
Hannover et al. (2013)	Germany	Immigrant students	Questionnaires and standardized literacy performance test	Multicultural and inclusive approach	100
Conteh and Kawashima (2008)	United Kingdom	Parents of South Asian heritage	Interviews and participant observation	Multicultural and inclusive approach	90
Boit et al. (2021)	United States	Refugee mothers, agency directors, and teacher	Semi-structured interviews	Multicultural and inclusive approach; family participation in school; family education; education as a means for social upwards mobility	95
Lu and Zhou (2013)	China	Public and migrant elementary school children	Questionnaires and standard tests	Instrumental learning	90
Kirmaci et al. (2019)	United States	Teachers	Focus-groups, interviews, participation observation	Children involvement; family education; shared educational programs teacher-families	95
Bal and Arzubaga (2014)	United States	Ahiska students (aged 9–13), Ahiska parents, educators	Ethnographic case study	Children involvement; family support	100
Carpenter et al. (2016)	United States	administrators, teachers, parent involvement coordinators, school support staff, and parents	Secondary data analysis	Family participation in school; family education; shared educational programs teacher-families	100
Wassell and Hawrylak (2021)	Spain	Teaching And Administrative staff, students, parents	Ethnographic case study	Family participation in school	100
Soriano et al. (2022)	Spain	School children	Systematic literature review	Family education	Not empirical
Garcia-Yeste, Morla-Folch, and Ionescu (2018)	Spain	Migrant and non-migrant mothers	1 communicative daily life story and 7 semi-structured interviews with communicative orientation	Family participation in school; family education	65

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Author and year	Country of the study	Participants	Method	Contribution	MMAT score
A. Flecha (2012)	European	Representatives from local administrations and community organizations involved in the school professionals working in the school, family members and students	Open-ended interviews, communicative daily life stories, communicative focus groups and communicative observation	Family education	100
Baird et al. (2015)	United States	1 family (2 sisters, mother)	In-home observations	Family education	95
Stolz et al. (2004)	International	Students aged 14–17	Survey and scales	Family support	100
Lees et al. (2009)	United Kingdom	Parents	Interviews	Education as a means for social upwards mobility	90
Rios et al. (2019)	Spain	Pre-service teachers	Mixed methods (open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and group interviews)	Shared educational programs teacher-families	40
Da Silva Iddings and Reyes (2017)	United States	Pre-service teachers; Family and Community Liaison	Longitudinal study spanning over 5 years	Shared educational programs teacher-families	90
De Botton et al. (2014)	Spain	Migrant mothers	Communicative observations, as well as interviews and informal conversations	Family education	100
Valls and Kyriakides (2013)	Spain	Teachers, students, and family members	Three case studies	Safe spaces; instrumental learning; positive relations and atmosphere; children involvement; family participation in school	100
Foncillas Beamonte et al. (2020)	Spain	Primary school students	Qualitative (written communicative accounts and argued drawings that these students)	Safe spaces; instrumental learning; positive relations and atmosphere; multicultural and inclusive approach; children involvement	50
Gil (2019)	United States	Hispanic families	Qualitative (case study)	Family education; multicultural and inclusive approach; instrumental learning; positive relations and atmosphere	100
Taleni et al. (2018)	New Zealand	Nine Pasifika leaders living within New Zealand	Talanoa (a Pasifika research methodology that is authentic and natural in driving and leading conversations with the participants in multiple ways)	Multicultural and inclusive approach; instrumental learning; education as a means for social upwards mobility; positive relations and atmosphere	100
Johnson (2014)	Canada, United States, United Kingdom	Three educational leaders	Qualitative (historical analysis)	Multicultural and inclusive approach; positive relations and atmosphere; family participation in school	Not empirical

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Author and year	Country of the study	Participants	Method	Contribution	MMAT score
Kleijnen et al. (2015)	International	Children from non-Western migrant families	Systematic literature review	Instrumental learning	Not empirical
Prinsen et al. (2013)	Netherlands	Primary school students of nine different schools	Quasi-experimental study with a pre-test, post-test, control group design	Instrumental learning	100
Kanoute et al. (2008)	Canada	Migrant families	Qualitative (case studies)	Instrumental learning; education as a means for social upwards mobility	100
Stevens et al. (2011)	United States	Latino children ages 2 to 18 years	Quantitative (questionnaires, different measures and scales)	Instrumental learning	90

Note. Authors' own.

engagement and self-confidence as learners (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008). Migrant and refugee students can benefit from their bilingualism in the learning process, and schools can become more welcoming by accepting and encouraging the use of multiple languages (Boit et al., 2021).

The fourth factor is the importance of instrumental learning, which is crucial for both academic success and social integration of refugee and migrant children. Lu and Zhou (2013) found that migrant children demonstrated improved school performance and well-being when attending public schools as opposed to all-migrant schools. Huss, Ben-Asher, Shahar, et al. (2021) also found that focusing on instrumental learning provided structure, safety, and hope of integration in Europe for refugee children and their parents.

The fifth and final factor is children involvement. Fostering children involvement in the learning process is crucial. Kirmaci et al. (2019) highlighted aspects that favor children involvement, such as building relationships with students and families on an individual basis, making collective decisions, and providing more time for peer discussions and problem-solving skills. Educational success of migrant children can also inspire and empower other children in their communities to succeed at school (Bal & Arzubiga, 2014).

Based on our analysis, these factors are essential for creating interactive learning environments that contribute to the academic success and social integration of migrant and refugee students.

Community Involvement. The second category identified from the systematic review emphasizes the significance of community involvement in the education of migrant, refugee, or asylum-seeking students. Community involvement has been universally recognized as important for enhancing instrumental learning and coexistence, and it is even more crucial for these students. Addressing the home-school connection is vital for many students' prospects, and in non-formal education environments, better alignment with the communities should not be overlooked. A clear strategy to ensure that the right to education is not hindered and high expectations are maintained is essential. This approach is also the best strategy to promote cultural awareness in educational centers.

Five main factors emerged from the analyzed studies, specifying the type of community involvement that contributes to school success for migrant and refugee students. The first factor is family participation in schools, which, according to Garcia-Yeste, Morlà-Folch, & Ionescu (2018), increases positive interactions between family, community, and schools, contributing to a positive atmosphere in classrooms. Similar results

were obtained by Carpenter et al. (2016), who studied parental involvement in middle and high schools on the Texas-Mexico border with a high attendance of Latino students. Their results indicate that parents' participation improved the school atmosphere by learning how children learned and behaved, as well as discipline management and school discipline standards. This helped parents adjust their expectations and reinforced children's behaviors at home, leading to improved behavior at school. Other improvements from family participation in schools include shared activities between parents and teachers and better communication between parents and schools, which are reflected in increased learning outcomes (Boit et al., 2021; Carpenter et al., 2016). These benefits of family participation in refugees' learning outcomes have been identified since early ages and include the promotion and acceptance of multiple and diverse languages within the classroom, as well as the creation of a safe and welcoming community where refugees' cultures are respected and valued (Boit et al., 2021). Therefore, open-door, collaborative, and community-based approaches in schools are the cornerstone of inclusive schools (Garcia-Yeste, Gairal-Casado, & Gomez-Gonzalez, 2018) and the agency of students, families, and educators (Wassell & Hawrylak, 2021).

The second factor is collaboration between families and schools. Lee and Hawkins (2008) studied the impacts of three community-based after-school programs in the United States addressed to low-income Hmong youth. They observed that through collaboration between families and schools, youth were able to express their Hmong and American identities and values and build a sense of community, which contributed to bridging academic and cultural barriers that marginalized them. A common characteristic of the three centers is that they were grounded in participants' culture and values and involved families in designing both the structure of the program and activities, which included homework help, reading and writing instruction, and non-formal education activities, among others.

The third factor includes family education within the school setting, which, according to several studies, is related to an improvement in children's learning and academic performance (Carpenter et al., 2016; Garcia-Yeste, Gairal-Casado, & Gomez-Gonzalez; Garcia-Yeste, Morlà-Folch, & Ionescu, 2018; Soriano et al., 2022) as well as students' engagement in school (Kirmaci et al., 2019). Several authors concluded that when parents participate in learning activities in schools, they gain self-confidence, enhance home interactions with their children, and become educational role models for them, which is reflected in an improvement in children's learning (De Botton et al., 2014; A. Flecha, 2012; Garcia-Yeste, Gairal-Casado, & Gomez-Gonzalez, 2018). Boit

et al. (2021) also highlighted the importance of high expectations and interactions between parents and children and concluded that family's funds of knowledge play an essential role in shaping parents' learning and children's future learning in the receiving countries. Baird et al. (2015) also concluded that interactions between family members are at the core of children's learning. Their study with bilingual families found that the inclusion of diverse members (including parents and siblings) as well as the presence of texts in all the languages in literacy activities at home is beneficial for children's language learning.

The fourth factor of community involvement is family support. Quantitative results obtained from the Cross-National Adolescence Project (C-NAP) support this evidence and point to a significant association of paternal emotional support with academic achievement in 10 national and ethnic groups (Stolz et al., 2004). Qualitative evidence from an ethnographic study conducted by Bal and Arzubiaga (2014) also points to the importance of family support in children's academic performance. They narrate a case in which motivation and support from the extensive community helped an Ahiska girl to succeed academically.

Finally, the last factor is related to education as a means for social upward mobility. Education can take place in diverse settings, including schools (Boit et al., 2021) and non-formal educational settings (Lees et al., 2009). In both cases, community and social networks play an essential role in helping migrant children to succeed at school, supporting and developing children's knowledge and learning of the language. Specifically, when schools and non-formal communities help parents find a job, learn the language, or complete compulsory education, they are indirectly impacting children's learning (Boit et al., 2021; Lees et al., 2009).

These factors underscore the importance of community involvement in the education of migrant and refugee students and provide a framework for creating supportive and inclusive educational environments.

Teachers and Other Professionals' Preparation. The third category identified in the systematic review pertains to strategies and actions aimed at teachers and other professionals working in educational settings with migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, or unaccompanied minor students. The literature emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive leadership and the need for professional development to be research-driven, with the ultimate goal of improving the academic achievement and well-being of all students.

The results of the selected studies highlight the significance of shared educational programs between teachers and families in contributing to the school success of

migrant and refugee students. Rios et al (2019) analyzed the impact of volunteering in Learning Communities for pre-service teachers and found that these experiences helped transform their prejudices against families from diverse cultural backgrounds. This transformation was attributed to the solidarity that emerged from the Successful Educational Actions, which are based on scientific evidence.

Moreover, when teachers and parents share educational activities, schools reported better parent-teacher communication and improvements in children's learning outcomes (Boit et al., 2021; Carpenter et al., 2016). These programs also serve as a cultural immersion for teachers, increasing their awareness and critical consciousness about the role of families in migrant children's education. Kirmaci et al. (2019) studied the impact of science workshops for teachers and Latino families and found that the program increased teachers' sense of responsibility toward Latinx children's education and supported parents in encouraging their children's learning.

Additionally, pre-service teachers can benefit from these educational programs by getting to know families from diverse cultural backgrounds, which may increase their awareness and responsiveness to migrant families' knowledge (Da Silva Iddings & Reyes, 2017).

These findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive leadership and the need for professional development programs that are grounded in research and focused on fostering collaboration between teachers and families. Such programs not only enhance the educational experiences of migrant and refugee students but also contribute to the professional growth of educators.

Discussion

In relation to the objective of this paper, which is to identify elements in the scientific literature that promote effective and socially innovative educational practices aimed at enhancing the academic success of children with a migrant and/or refugee background, we found three main categories: creation of interactive learning environments, promoting community involvement, and ensuring adequate preparation and training for teachers and other professionals working with migrant and refugee children and their families. These categories highlight the importance of multiplying and diversifying educational interactions, the necessity of using scientific evidence, and emphasize the use of dialog when designing educational actions to promote the school success of migrant and refugee children. Thus, they are consistent to previous research that have already emphasized the key role played by interactions for all learners (Molina Roldán et al., 2021; Soriano et al., 2022; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013), and even more important for those whose native

language is a different one from the host one, which is mostly the case of migrant and refugee children (Bal & Arzubaga, 2014; De Botton et al., 2014; EC, 2022; A. Flecha, 2012; Wassell & Hawrylak, 2021).

One factor that contributes to interactive learning environments is creating safe spaces where refugee and migrant children can express their identities and where their families and communities can contribute from their respective cultural backgrounds and daily life experiences (Aleven et al., 2003; Molina Roldán et al., 2021). When their voices are heard and their identities accepted and valued, these children can feel more motivated and engaged with school learning. Another related factor is maintaining positive relations and atmosphere in the places where education takes place, such as schools, but also at home, especially for children affected by war and other violent traumas. A third factor is applying a multicultural and inclusive approach to the education and learning processes of refugee and migrant students. Being acknowledged and valued can enhance their self-confidence as learners and increase their motivation. Our review of the scientific literature identified two more factors that favor the creation of interactive learning environments, namely the emphasis on instrumental learning and promoting child involvement in their education and learning processes.

A well-developed multiple identity contributes to the school adjustment of migrant students, promoting their academic and emotional engagement. This multiple identity not only enhances school success but helps students navigate between their home and host cultures, resulting in greater self-confidence and academic resilience (Makarova & Kassis, 2022). Resilience factors such as family support, bilingual skills development, and the implementation of structural support mechanisms (Roxas & Fruja, 2019), such as mentoring programs or cultural competency training, are crucial in helping migrant students overcome barriers and achieve school success in challenging contexts (Dueggeli et al., 2022).

As for the second category, promoting community involvement in the educational and learning processes of migrant and refugee children, we found several factors that can contribute to it: family participation in schools, collaboration between families and schools, family education, family support, and education as a means for social upward mobility. Regarding the last category, the adequate preparation and training for teachers and other professionals working with migrant and refugee children and their families, our review identified different types of shared educational programs between teachers and families that have shown great potential in promoting the school success of migrant and refugee students.

The categories identified in our systematic review align with the parental involvement in school (Nusche, 2009) and the ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting

Common Values and Inclusive Education recommendations regarding fostering an inclusive and democratic learning environment; empowering teaching professionals; enhancing cooperation with parents, communities, and wider partners; promoting a lifelong learning approach; and strengthening the role of research, assessment, and sharing best practices (van Driel, 2020). These actions may complement other actions, such as those implemented by European states with Ukrainian refugee children and could be extended to all refugee children to offer equal opportunities for school success and social integration for all.

Conclusions

More research is needed to further investigate the academic success of refugee children and its potential impact on their integration and well-being. Although the existing studies are of high quality, as indicated by our MMAT assessment, most of the research focused on refugees consists of institutional reports. In contrast, the scientific literature we found primarily addresses migrant students and their families. As shown in Table 1, the majority of studies are led by countries with considerable migration patterns, such as the United States, even if these trends are relatively recent, as in the case of Spain. Notably, populations that have long been involved in forcible displacement, like Palestinians, or countries that have recently received a high influx of refugees, are represented in only one article each. It is also surprising to note the absence of studies from countries with a high percentage of refugees within their borders, particularly African countries.

Our findings also reveal that most educational activities were implemented in formal contexts, such as regular schools, similar to the psychological interventions for refugee and asylum-seeking children in the systematic review by Tyrer and Fazel (2014). This is problematic because we know that this is not always the reality for all refugee or other forcibly displaced children. Consequently, many children affected by conflict do not have access to the protective environment of learning spaces that can restore a sense of normality to their disrupted lives, nor to quality education that offers social support through positive interactions with peers and educators. In any case, many of the factors that have been identified here as being conducive to improvements in their learning can be promoted in a wide diversity of contexts.

Moreover, most of the factors identified in this systematic review do not impose additional economic costs on educational systems, as they rely on the organization and use of resources available in host communities,

including volunteers. The contribution of this paper is to highlight the decisive role of multiplying and diversifying educational interactions for migrant and refugee children, and using scientific evidence and dialog, for example, in training teachers, professionals, and volunteers who work in these educational spaces. This approach can be applied in any context to enhance the school success of all children.

Finally, we call upon researchers and policymakers to act. Unless educational and mental health and psychosocial support interventions are provided for children with a migratory background, especially refugee, asylum-seeking, and unaccompanied minors, it will be unlikely for Europe to advance toward a fully inclusive and sustainable society, which is a constitutive pillar of the European political project and the UN Sustainable Development Goals agenda (Goal 4).

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Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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- II. OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And learning
“refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “education success”
- III. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “education intervention”
- IV. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “academic success”
- V. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “teaching program”
- VI. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “academic achievement”
- VII. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “academic performance”
- VIII. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “school engagement”
- IX. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And hot-spot And “school liking” OR “school motivation”
- X. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families OR “forcibly displaced children” And reception Or identification And learning
- XI. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And reception Or identification And “education success”

Appendix I. Search Combinations

Phase I

- I. “refugee children” OR “migrant children” OR “asylum seeker children” OR “unaccompanied minor” OR family OR families

	“unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “education success”		
XXX.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “education intervention”	XL.	“forcibly displaced children” And school And “education intervention” “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “academic success”
XXXI.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “academic success”	XLI.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “teaching program”
XXXII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “teaching program”	XLII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “academic achievement”
XXXIII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “academic achievement”	XLIII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “academic performance”
XXXIV.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “academic performance”	XLIV.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “school engagement”
XXXV.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “school engagement”	XLV.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “school liking” or “school motivation”
XXXVI.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And kindergarten And “school liking” or “school motivation”	XLVI.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “education arena” And learning
XXXVII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And learning	XLVII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “education arena” And “education success”
XXXVIII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And school And “education success”	XLVIII.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “education arena” And “education intervention”
XXXIX.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or	XLIX.	“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “education arena” And “academic success”

- LXXI. “forcibly displaced children” And “after-school” And “academic performance”
“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “after-school” And “school engagement”
- LXXII. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “after-school” And “school liking” or “school motivation”
- LXXIII. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “residential institutions” And learning
- LXXIV. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “residential institutions” And “teaching program”
- LXXV. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “residential institutions” And “academic achievement”
- LXXVI. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “residential institutions” And “academic performance”
- LXXVII. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “residential institutions” And “school engagement”
- LXXVIII. “refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “residential institutions” And “school liking” or “school motivation”

Phase 2

“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “successful educational action”

“refugee children” Or “migrant children” Or “asylum seeker children” Or “unaccompanied minor” Or family Or families Or “forcibly displaced children” And “culturally responsive leadership”