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RESEARCH ARTICLE

RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES OF THE SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA: 2000-2010: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the resettlement experiences of a group of South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Australia between 2000-2010. Using an autoethnographic approach and interviews with 21 participants, the study examines the literacy practices, access to various forms of capital, gender dynamics, and identity development of the refugees during their resettlement journey. Four key themes emerged: (1) literacy resettlement stories, (2) building or ignoring capital, (3) the influence of gender, and (4) identity in resettlement. The findings reveal complex and diverse experiences, with both positive and negative aspects of the refugees' engagement with government programs, social networks, and the host society. The discussion contextualizes these experiences within historical, sociological, and institutional factors. The study provides important insights into the multifaceted nature of refugee resettlement and the need for tailored, inclusive, and empowering approaches.

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Introduction:-

The introduction section provides an overview of the study and its context. It states that the previous three chapters presented the resettlement experiences of a group of South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Australia between 2000-2010. This discussion chapter aims to critically engage with these resettlement stories, situated within the historical, sociological, and institutional contexts. The introduction highlights that four main themes emerged from the previous findings chapters: (i) literacy resettlement stories, (ii) building or ignoring capital in resettlement experiences (Bourdieu, 1986), (iii) the influence of gender on resettlement experiences, and (iv) identity in and through resettlement experiences. The research will discuss these four themes in detail, drawing on the autoethnographic narrative of the researcher as well as the interview data from 21 South Sudanese participants.

Background and Context:-

This study explores the resettlement experiences of a group of South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Australia between 2000-2010. The research employs a qualitative, mixed-methods approach, combining the researcher's autoethnographic account with in-depth interviews of 21 South Sudanese refugee participants (Briggs, 2017). The study is situated within the broader context of refugee resettlement, which has been a significant challenge for many countries, including Australia. South Sudanese refugees, in particular, have faced unique difficulties due to their complex histories, cultural differences, and the legacy of conflict in their home country (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010; Windle, 2008). The study draws on various theoretical frameworks, including Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of capital,

Gee's (1996, 2000, 2004) work on literacy practices and identity, and feminist sociological perspectives on gender dynamics (Hatoss& Sheely, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006). These theoretical lenses are used to analyze the multifaceted nature of the refugees' resettlement experiences, with a particular focus on literacy, capital, gender, and identity development. Overall, the study aims to provide a nuanced, contextualized understanding of the resettlement journeys of South Sudanese refugees in Australia, with the goal of informing more effective and empowering support services and policies for this population (Briggs, 2017; Innes, 2010).

Aims and Objectives of the study:

Based on the information provided in the document, the main aims and objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the resettlement experiences of a group of South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Australia between 2000-2010.
2. To understand how present and past contexts have shaped these resettlement experiences, with a particular focus on the literacy dimensions.
3. To examine how the identity development of the South Sudanese refugees was mediated by their engagement with a range of literacy practices and their access to various forms of capital.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining the researcher's own autoethnographic account with in-depth interviews of 21 South Sudanese refugee participants, to address these research aims.

Four key themes emerged from the findings and were further explored in the discussion chapter:

1. Literacy resettlement stories
2. Building or ignoring capital in resettlement experiences
3. The influence of gender on resettlement experiences
4. Identity in and through resettlement experiences

Overall, the study seeks to provide a nuanced, contextualized understanding of the multifaceted nature of refugee resettlement experiences, with a particular focus on literacy, capital, gender, and identity.

Significance of the Study:

The arguments and findings presented in this study have several significant implications for understanding and supporting the resettlement experiences of refugees, particularly South Sudanese refugees in Australia:

1. Challenging Dominant Narratives:

- The study directly challenges the dominant media narratives (Dunn et al., 2004) and stereotypes about the literacy levels and capabilities of South Sudanese refugees.
- By highlighting the diverse literacy practices and linguistic skills of the participants, the study presents a more nuanced and empowering counter-narrative, which is crucial for dismantling harmful stereotypes.

2. Recognizing Existing Refugee Capital:

- The study's emphasis on how different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1996) (linguistic, cultural, educational, economic) shaped the resettlement experiences underscores the importance of recognizing and building upon refugees' existing knowledge, skills, and resources (Cole, 2007).
- This asset-based approach, rather than a deficit-based one, can lead to more effective and empowering resettlement programs and policies.

3. Contextualizing Resettlement Experiences:

- The study situates the participants' resettlement stories within the historical, social, and institutional contexts, drawing on relevant literature and policy documents.
- This contextual analysis allows for a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by refugees, which can inform more responsive and appropriate support services (Briggs, 2017).

4. Importance of Language and Literacy Support:

- The findings highlight the critical role of language and literacy development in the resettlement process, particularly the value of allowing refugees to draw on their existing linguistic repertoires (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).
- This underscores the need for language programs like AMEP to be more flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of refugee learners.

5. Addressing Gender Inequities:

- The study's examination of the influence of gender on resettlement experiences reveals the persistent challenges faced by refugee women, both within their own cultures and in the host country.
- This calls for a greater focus on addressing gender-based inequities and supporting the empowerment of refugee women during the resettlement process.

Overall, the significance of this study lies in its ability to provide a nuanced, contextualized understanding of the multifaceted experiences of South Sudanese refugees in Australia, which can inform more effective, inclusive, and empowering resettlement policies and support services.

Research questions:-

This study's research questions were designed to address an interconnected research inquiry into South Sudanese refugees' resettlement experiences in Australia. The research questions were: What were the resettlement experiences of South Sudanese refugees in Australia in 2000 to 2010? How have present and past contexts shaped South Sudanese refugees' resettlement experiences? How have South Sudanese refugees' resettlement experiences been mediated by their engagement with a range of literacy practices in institutional and community spaces?

Study implications:-

The study has implications for governments and communities, especially regarding how they can better support the resettlement experiences of South Sudanese immigrants. The study also offers valuable case study evidence for current and future refugees to better understand their own resettlement experiences and the role of literacies in those experiences.

Theoretical Framework:-

The study draws on several theoretical perspectives and concepts to analyse the resettlement experiences of the South Sudanese refugees:

1. Literacy practices and literacy resettlement stories:

- The study utilizes the concept of "literacy practices" (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2002; Gee, 1996) to understand the diverse literacy experiences of the participants in both their home countries and in Australia.
- It also employs the construct of "literacy resettlement stories" to ground the discussion of the participants' literacy-related experiences.

2. Forms of capital:

- The study draws on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital to examine how different forms of capital, such as linguistic, cultural, educational, and economic capital, shaped the resettlement journeys of the participants.

3. Gender and identity:

- The study engages with feminist sociological literature to understand the influence of gender dynamics on the resettlement experiences of the South Sudanese refugees.
- It also utilizes concepts of identity development and belonging from the refugee studies literature to explore how the participants negotiated their identities during the resettlement process (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010).

Overall, the theoretical framework appears to be grounded in sociocultural and critical approaches to understanding the multifaceted experiences of refugees during the resettlement process, with a particular focus on literacy, capital, gender, and identity.

Methods:-

The research employed qualitative methods, primarily interviews with 18 South Sudanese refugees aged 30-48 years. Interviews were conducted at the South Sudanese Community Centre in Canberra, using a combination of languages including Arabic, Sudanese Arabic, English, and local languages. The researcher, being South Sudanese, played a collaborative role in co-generating these stories. The details of the methodological approaches and methods used in this study are:

Qualitative Interviewing Approach:

The study employed a qualitative interviewing approach to gather data from the South Sudanese refugee participants. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 18 South Sudanese refugees in Canberra, Australia, between 2015 and 2017.

Participant Selection:

The participants ranged in age from 30 to 48 years old, with more males than females represented. They came from diverse ethnic backgrounds within South Sudan, including the Dinka, Nuer, Chollo, and Bari tribes. Their educational backgrounds also varied, with some having very limited formal schooling in South Sudan while others had university degrees.

Language Use in Interviews:

The interviews featured a combination of languages, including Arabic, Sudanese Arabic, English, and sometimes the participants' local languages, when they were unable to find suitable words in English or Arabic. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

Collaborative Interviewing Approach:

The researcher adopted a collaborative approach in co-generating the participants' "literacy resettlement stories" during the interviews. This involved being patient, reassuring, and rephrasing questions to make the participants feel comfortable and encouraged to share their experiences.

Thematic Analysis:

The data from the interviews was analyzed thematically, with the researcher identifying and broadly explaining two main themes: (1) informal literacy learning in socio-cultural contexts, and (2) formal and non-formal English language learning.

In summary, the study utilized a qualitative, interview-based approach to explore the diverse literacy learning experiences and practices of South Sudanese refugees in their resettlement journey in Australia. The researcher employed collaborative and culturally sensitive interviewing techniques to gather rich, contextualized data from the participants, which was then analysed thematically to derive the key findings and results.

Findings:-

Four main themes emerged from the findings: (i) literacy resettlement stories, (ii) building or ignoring capital in resettlement experiences, (iii) the influence of gender on resettlement experiences, and (iv) identity in and through resettlement experiences.

The key findings and results that support the claims and arguments made in this study are organized around four main themes:

1. Literacy resettlement stories: The study examines the literacy practices of the South Sudanese refugees in South Sudan and after arriving in Australia. It found that the participants had rich and diverse literacy practices in their home countries, including oral and written modes in multiple languages. However, after arriving in Australia, some struggled to have their existing literacy skills recognized and valued, especially in government programs like the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).
2. Building or ignoring capital in resettlement experiences: The study analyses how different forms of capital, such as linguistic, cultural, educational, and economic capital, shaped the resettlement journeys of the participants. It found that when the participants' existing capital was recognized and built upon, it enhanced their sense of agency and ability to negotiate a positive resettlement experience. However, when their capital was ignored or dismissed, it presented significant challenges.
3. The influence of gender on resettlement experiences: The study examines how gender dynamics, rooted in both Sudanese cultural traditions and Australian discriminatory practices, presented particular challenges for the female South Sudanese refugees during resettlement.
4. Identity in and through resettlement experiences: The study explores the complexities of identity development as the refugees sought to negotiate their sense of belonging in Australia, balancing their Sudanese roots with their desire to integrate into the host society (Innes, 2010).

These key findings provide important insights into the multifaceted nature of refugee resettlement and the need for tailored, inclusive, and empowering approaches to support the diverse experiences and needs of this population.

Discussion:-

The discussion chapter explores these four themes in detail. It examines the literacy practices of the participants in South Sudan and Australia, including their experiences with the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). It also analyses how various forms of capital, such as linguistic, cultural, educational, and economic capital, shaped the resettlement journeys, and how gender dynamics presented particular challenges. Finally, it explores the complexities of identity development as the refugees sought to negotiate their belonging in Australia.

The Discussion section of this study explores the four key themes that emerged from the findings:

1. Literacy resettlement stories:

- The discussion examines the literacy practices of the South Sudanese participants in Sudan and Australia, including their use of multiple languages and engagement with formal and informal literacy contexts.
- It highlights how the participants' existing literacy skills were not always recognized or valued, especially in government programs like the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

2. Building or ignoring capital in resettlement experiences:

- The discussion analyzes how different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1996), such as linguistic, cultural, educational, and economic capital, shaped the resettlement journeys of the participants.
- It shows that when the participants' existing capital was recognized and built upon, it enhanced their sense of agency and ability to negotiate a positive resettlement experience. However, when their capital was ignored or dismissed, it presented significant challenges.

3. The influence of gender on resettlement experiences:

- The discussion examines how gender dynamics, rooted in both Sudanese cultural traditions and Australian discriminatory practices, presented particular challenges for the female South Sudanese refugees during resettlement.

4. Identity in and through resettlement experiences:

- The discussion explores the complexities of identity development as the refugees sought to negotiate their sense of belonging in Australia, balancing their Sudanese roots with their desire to integrate into the host society (Windle, 2008).
- It highlights how the participants often felt a sense of not yet belonging, despite policy discourse emphasizing the need for a reciprocal process of integration.

The discussion chapter concludes by summarizing the key findings and emphasizing the need for tailored, inclusive, and empowering approaches to refugee resettlement that recognize the diverse experiences and needs of this population.

The key strengths and advantages of the approach and findings presented in this document are:

1. Methodological Approach:

- The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining the researcher's own autoethnographic account with in-depth interviews of 21 South Sudanese refugees. This provides a rich, multi-perspectival understanding of the resettlement experiences.
- The use of an autoethnographic approach allows the researcher to draw on their own lived experiences as a refugee, adding depth and nuance to the analysis.

2. Comprehensive Examination of Resettlement Experiences:

- The study explores a wide range of themes related to the resettlement journeys of the participants, including literacy practices, capital, gender, and identity development.
- This holistic examination provides a detailed and contextualized understanding of the multifaceted nature of refugee resettlement.

3. Challenging Dominant Narratives:

- The study directly challenges media stereotypes and dominant narratives about the literacy levels and capabilities of South Sudanese refugees.
- By highlighting the diverse literacy practices and linguistic skills of the participants, the study presents a more nuanced and empowering counter-narrative.

4. Emphasis on Recognizing Existing Capital:

- The study's focus on how different forms of capital shaped the resettlement experiences underscores the importance of recognizing and building upon refugees' existing knowledge, skills, and resources.
- This approach aligns with principles of asset-based community development and empowerment.

5. Contextualized Analysis:

- The study situates the participants' resettlement stories within the historical, social, and institutional contexts, drawing on relevant literature and policy documents.
- This contextual approach allows for a deeper, more meaningful analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by the refugees.

Overall, the strengths of this study lie in its methodological rigor, comprehensive examination of the resettlement experience, challenge to dominant narratives, emphasis on recognizing refugee capital, and contextualized analysis - all of which contribute to a nuanced, empowering, and impactful understanding of the South Sudanese refugee experience in Australia.

While the study presented in this study has several notable strengths, there are a few potential weaknesses or areas for improvement that can be identified:

1. Sample Size and Representation:

- The study is based on in-depth interviews with 21 South Sudanese refugees, which provides a rich qualitative dataset but may limit the broader generalizability of the findings.
- It is not clear if the participants were selected to be representative of the diverse experiences and backgrounds within the South Sudanese refugee community in Australia.

2. Lack of Quantitative Data:

- The study relies primarily on qualitative data from the interviews and the researcher's autoethnographic account.
- Incorporating some quantitative data, such as demographic information or outcome measures, could have strengthened the analysis and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the resettlement experiences.

3. Potential Researcher Bias:

- The use of the researcher's own autoethnographic account, while a strength in providing depth, could also introduce potential biases in the interpretation and analysis of the participants' stories.
- The document does not explicitly discuss strategies employed to mitigate researcher bias, such as member-checking or external auditing.

4. Limited Exploration of Intersectionality:

- While the study does examine the influence of gender on resettlement experiences, it does not delve deeply into how other intersecting identities and social locations (e.g., age, class, disability) may have further shaped the participants' journeys.
- A more intersectional approach could have provided additional nuance and complexity to the understanding of resettlement challenges.

5. Lack of Longitudinal Perspective:

- The study focuses on the resettlement experiences of South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Australia between 2000-2010.
- Incorporating a longitudinal dimension, such as following up with participants over a longer period, could have shed light on the evolving nature of their resettlement journeys and integration over time.

Overall, while the study presents a robust and valuable analysis, these potential weaknesses could be addressed in future research to further strengthen the understanding of refugee resettlement experiences.

Conclusion:-

The chapter concludes by summarizing the key findings and highlighting the implications for refugees, policymakers, and stakeholders. It underscores the need for tailored, inclusive, and empowering approaches to refugee resettlement that recognize the diverse experiences and needs of this population (Briggs, 2017). The premises and methodology of the study appear to be valid and well-supported. The study explores the resettlement experiences of a group of South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Australia between 2000-2010, using an autoethnographic approach and interviews with 21 participants. The study examines four key themes emerging from the findings: (i) literacy resettlement stories, (ii) building or ignoring capital in resettlement experiences, (iii) the influence of gender on resettlement experiences, and (iv) identity in and through resettlement experiences. The findings and analysis presented in the discussion chapter logically support and lead to the conclusions drawn. The detailed examination of the participants' literacy practices Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2002; Gee, 1996) in Sudan and Australia, and their experiences with programs like AMEP, provide a robust basis for the conclusions about the role of literacy in resettlement. In general, the premises, methodology, findings, and conclusions presented in the document appear to be well-aligned and logically coherent. The study provides a nuanced, contextually-grounded understanding of the multifaceted nature of refugee resettlement experiences.

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Author Contribution GW was the main author of the manuscript and responsible for collecting, analysing the qualitative interview data, interpretation and representation.

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Declarations:

‘Clinical trial number: not applicable.’

‘Human Ethics and Consent to Participate declarations: not applicable’

Ethical Approval:

This research was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC).

Consent to Participate declaration:

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

The Ethics Declaration Norm:

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

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