

# South Korean Educators' Understanding of Refugee Learners' Needs

## in the Context of Non-Formal Educational Settings

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### INTRODUCTION

Amidst growing displacement and resettlement of asylum seekers hailing from Middle Eastern and African regions in South Korea (culturally/ethnically/linguistically homogeneous country), civil society organizations and NGOs have responded to the lack of governmental support for refugee children and youth education through non-formal educational services and programs (Ju, 2019).

Challenges of Non-North Korean Refugees in S. Korea:

- (1) Only 0.2% of refugees gained legal status in Korea in the past two decades (NANCEN, 2021)
- (2) Negative stereotypes in media & public (Chung, 2020)
- (3) Difficulty in accessing to public education & Lack of multilingual resources (Seo, 2017; Yeom, et al., 2022)
- (4) Lack of cultural sensitivity and recognition of refugee presence in school curriculum and teachers (Ko, 2015)

### METHODOLOGY

**Method:** Qualitative study; Virtual Semi-structured 1:1 interviews (on Zoom); Analysis of interview transcripts

**Sampling:** 5 South Korean educators from 4 local NGOs that provide educational services to refugee children and youth from Middle Eastern & African regions

**Data Analysis:** 3 phases of inductive coding on NVivo software to identify emergent themes/patterns (codes) & categorization of codes

*Phase 1)* Descriptive, Values, Emotion, Versus, In-vivo

*Phase 2)* Juxtaposition of all five interview transcripts

*Phase 3)* Concepts of Ladson-Billings (1995) & Bajaj et al. (2017) used to examine participants' beliefs/understandings

**Ensuring Validity:** Respondent validation & Triangulation (Existing literature, transcribed interview texts, research memos during the interviews)

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

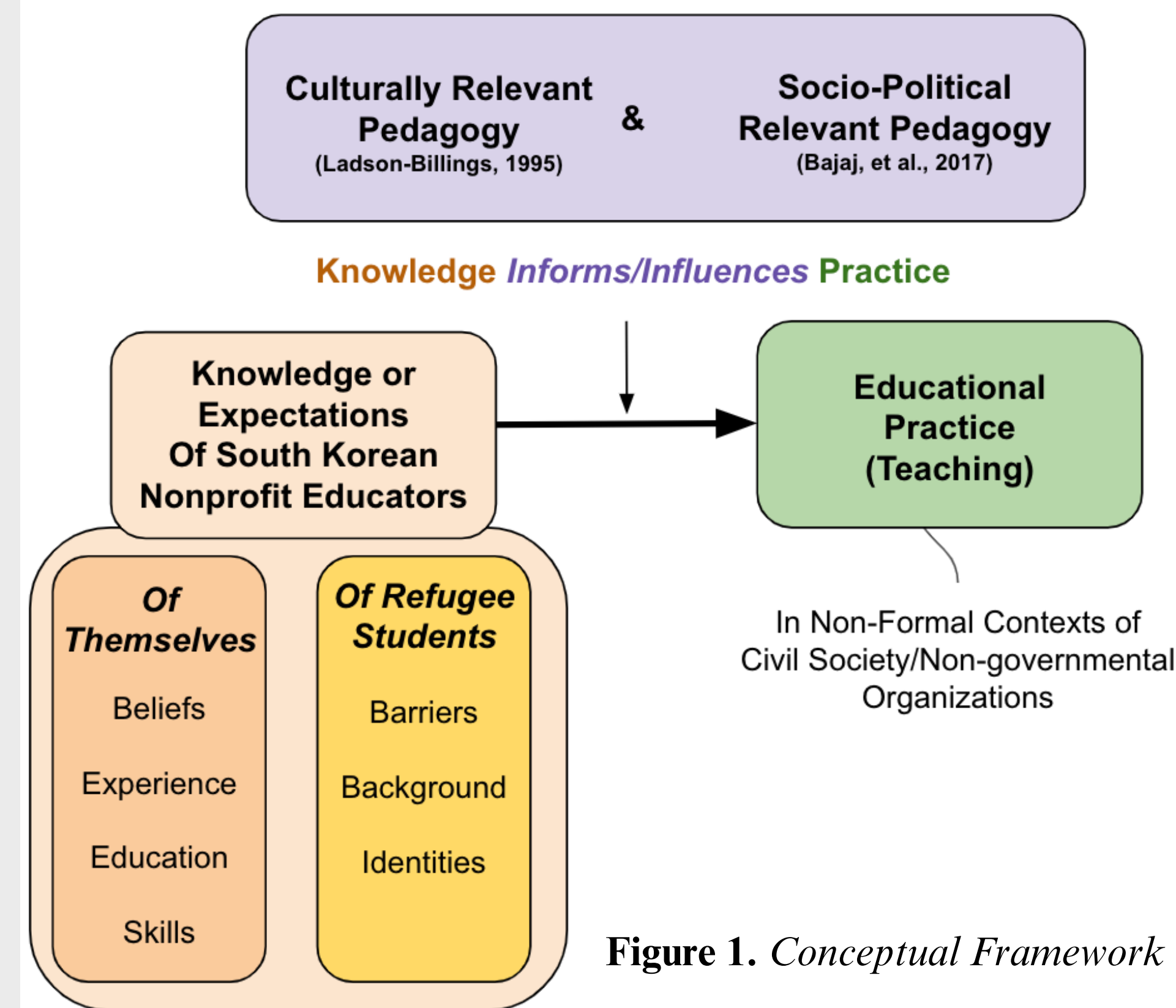


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### FINDINGS

**Self-Reflection:** The participants (educators) actively reflected on their own assumptions and beliefs regarding their refugee learners to inform their own teaching

- Prior exposure to foreign culture and language/living abroad benefitting teachers' interactions with students

Recommendations & Best Practices

- **Collaborative Learning & Raising Students' Self-Esteem:** Acknowledging their potential and cultural knowledge as strengths / Providing learning opportunities outside of academics (e.g. sports, arts, etc.)
- Steering away from **Savior Complex**, or the tendency to think of students through deficit-based perspectives
- **Critical Consciousness:** Recognizing the multi-layered challenges & needs faced by the learners and their families (financial, legal, health, societal discrimination)
- Asking "**local experts & refugee educators**" to build knowledge on refugees' real circumstances

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ1:** How do South Korean educators identify and respond to the needs of refugee learners from diverse backgrounds?

**RQ2:** How do South Korean educators make sense of the challenges regarding race, ethnicity, culture, and language faced by their refugee learners resettled in South Korean society?

**Purpose (See Fig. 1):** This study addresses questions of how South Korean educators identify and respond to the challenges and needs of refugee learners from diverse backgrounds in South Korean society through the lenses of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and Socio-Political Relevant Pedagogy (Bajaj, et al., 2017).

### DISCUSSION

Recommendations for Refugee Education Stakeholders

- More Korean language/multilingual support (language learning and resources) for refugee families
- Asking "local experts", or consultation & partnerships between civil society and governmental bodies (public education system) to aid refugee learners
- Inclusive educational resources (textbooks and curriculum representing refugee presence)

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