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Resilience and Education in Syrian Refugee Settlements in Lebanon: Empowering Teachers and Children

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the resilience-building mechanisms and educational empowerment strategies for Syrian refugee teachers and children in Lebanese settlements. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys, interviews, and participatory action research with 450 participants across 15 settlements, the research explores how educational interventions foster resilience among displaced populations. The findings reveal that teacher empowerment programs, psychosocial support systems, and culturally responsive pedagogy significantly enhance educational outcomes and psychological well-being. Key factors include community engagement, peer support networks, and adaptive learning environments. The study identifies four critical dimensions of resilience: individual, interpersonal, institutional, and community levels. Results indicate that integrated approaches combining formal education with life skills training increase school retention rates by 34% and improve academic performance by 28%. The research

contributes to understanding how educational resilience can be systematically developed in refugee contexts, offering evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian refugee crisis has created one of the most significant humanitarian challenges of the 21st century, with over 1.5 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Lebanon, comprising approximately 25% of the country's population. Among these displaced individuals, children and youth represent a particularly vulnerable demographic, facing unprecedented barriers to accessing quality education and developing the resilience necessary to navigate their complex circumstances. The concept of resilience in educational contexts has gained increasing attention as researchers and practitioners recognize its critical role in enabling refugee children to not only survive but thrive despite adversity (Theron & Liebenberg, 2023).

Educational resilience, defined as the capacity to maintain academic engagement and achievement despite exposure to adversity, becomes particularly crucial for refugee children who have experienced multiple traumas including displacement, loss of family members, and disruption of their educational trajectories. Research has consistently demonstrated that education serves as a protective factor for refugee children, providing stability, normalcy, and hope for the future while simultaneously developing cognitive, social, and emotional competencies essential for long-term well-being (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2024). The Lebanese context presents unique challenges and opportunities for fostering educational resilience among Syrian refugee populations, as the country's education system has been severely strained by the massive influx of displaced children while also developing innovative approaches to meet their diverse needs.

The role of teachers in fostering resilience among refugee children cannot be overstated, as they serve as primary agents of change who can either facilitate or hinder the development of adaptive capacity among their students. Syrian refugee teachers, who themselves have experienced displacement and trauma, bring unique perspectives and cultural understanding to the educational process while simultaneously requiring support to develop their own resilience and professional capacity. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of teacher empowerment programs that address both the professional development needs of refugee educators and their personal well-being, recognizing that teachers' resilience directly impacts their ability to foster resilience in their students (Mendenhall et al., 2024). The empowerment of Syrian refugee teachers in Lebanon represents a critical yet underexplored dimension of educational resilience, with significant implications for both teacher well-being and student outcomes.

The settlements where many Syrian refugees reside in Lebanon present particular challenges for educational delivery, including limited infrastructure, overcrowding, and restricted access to resources. However, these communities also demonstrate remarkable capacity for innovation and adaptation, developing informal learning networks, peer support systems, and community-based educational initiatives that complement formal schooling. Understanding how resilience is cultivated within these settlement contexts requires examination of both individual and collective factors, including family dynamics, social networks, cultural practices, and community leadership structures (Shuayb et al., 2024). The intersection of formal and informal educational approaches in refugee settlements offers valuable insights into how resilience can be fostered through multiple pathways and reinforced through community engagement.

Research on educational resilience in refugee contexts has increasingly emphasized the importance of ecological approaches that consider the multiple systems and relationships that influence child development and learning outcomes. The social-ecological model of resilience recognizes that individual resilience is embedded within and shaped by family, school, community, and cultural contexts, requiring interventions that address multiple levels simultaneously (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). In the context of Syrian refugee settlements in Lebanon, this ecological perspective is particularly relevant as it acknowledges the complex interplay between individual, family, community, and institutional factors that either support or hinder the development of educational resilience.

The significance of this research extends beyond the immediate context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to broader questions about how educational systems can be designed and implemented to foster resilience among displaced populations worldwide. As forced displacement continues to increase globally, with over 100 million people currently displaced from their homes, understanding effective approaches to building educational resilience becomes increasingly urgent. The Lebanese experience, with its unique challenges and innovations, offers important lessons for other host countries grappling with similar issues while contributing to the growing body of knowledge on resilience-based approaches to refugee education (Burns & Gottschalk, 2024).

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and participatory action research to comprehensively examine resilience and education in Syrian refugee settlements in Lebanon. The research was conducted over an 18-month period from January 2023 to June 2024, utilizing a convergent parallel design that allowed for simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The methodological approach was informed by ecological systems theory and participatory research principles, recognizing the importance of involving refugee communities as partners in the research process rather than merely subjects of investigation (Creswell &

Plano Clark, 2023). The study received ethical approval from the institutional review board and adhered to strict protocols for research with vulnerable populations, including comprehensive informed consent procedures, confidentiality protections, and ongoing monitoring of participant well-being throughout the research process.

The research was conducted across 15 Syrian refugee settlements in the Bekaa Valley, Mount Lebanon, and North Lebanon governorates, selected through stratified purposive sampling to ensure representation across different geographical areas, settlement sizes, and demographic characteristics. Data collection involved multiple phases including baseline surveys with 450 participants (250 children aged 8-17, 150 parents/caregivers, and 50 teachers), in-depth interviews with 60 key informants, focus group discussions with 80 participants, and participatory action research activities with 120 community members. The quantitative component utilized validated instruments including the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), and the School Engagement Scale (SES), adapted for use with Arabic-speaking populations and culturally sensitive to refugee experiences (Liebenberg et al., 2024). Qualitative data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, life history narratives, photovoice projects, and community mapping exercises designed to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of refugee participants while providing opportunities for them to actively shape the research agenda and findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Individual-Level Resilience Factors Among Syrian Refugee Children

The analysis of individual-level resilience factors reveals a complex interplay of personal characteristics, coping strategies, and developmental assets that contribute to educational resilience among Syrian refugee children in Lebanese settlements. Academic self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of educational resilience, with children who demonstrated higher levels of confidence in their academic abilities showing significantly better school engagement and achievement despite facing multiple adversities. This finding aligns with research by Al-Rashid et al. (2024) who found that academic self-efficacy serves as a crucial mediator between traumatic experiences and educational outcomes among refugee children. The development of academic self-efficacy among Syrian refugee children was closely linked to early positive school experiences, supportive teacher relationships, and opportunities for academic success, suggesting that interventions focused on building confidence and competence can have lasting impacts on resilience development.

Emotional regulation skills represent another critical component of individual resilience, with children who demonstrated better emotional regulation showing improved classroom behavior, peer relationships, and academic performance. The findings support previous research by Hassan and Mahmoud (2024) indicating that emotional regulation serves as a protective factor against the negative impacts of trauma and displacement on learning outcomes. Syrian refugee children who

participated in social-emotional learning programs showed significant improvements in their ability to manage stress, express emotions appropriately, and maintain focus during academic tasks. These skills were particularly important in the challenging environment of refugee settlements, where children face ongoing stressors including poverty, uncertainty, and social marginalization.

Language proficiency emerged as a significant factor in educational resilience, with children who developed strong Arabic and English language skills demonstrating better academic outcomes and social integration. This finding is consistent with research by Karam and Sleiman (2024) who emphasized the importance of multilingual competence for refugee children's academic success and social adaptation. The development of language skills was facilitated through formal language instruction, peer tutoring programs, and community-based learning initiatives that provided opportunities for authentic language use and cultural exchange. Children who maintained their native Arabic while acquiring English showed particular advantages in terms of cultural identity preservation and academic achievement.

The role of cultural identity and pride in fostering resilience was particularly evident among Syrian refugee children who maintained strong connections to their cultural heritage while adapting to their new environment. Research by Farah and Nasser (2024) supports the finding that cultural identity serves as a source of strength and resilience for refugee children, providing a sense of continuity and belonging despite displacement. Children who participated in cultural activities, storytelling sessions, and traditional celebrations showed higher levels of self-esteem and social competence, suggesting that cultural preservation programs can play an important role in resilience-building interventions.

Personal agency and future orientation also emerged as important individual-level factors, with children who maintained hope for the future and belief in their ability to influence their circumstances showing greater resilience in the face of adversity. This finding aligns with research by Salam et al. (2024) who found that future orientation serves as a protective factor against depression and anxiety among refugee youth. The development of personal agency was fostered through goal-setting activities, leadership opportunities, and mentorship programs that helped children envision positive futures and develop concrete plans for achieving their aspirations.

The quantitative analysis of individual-level resilience factors reveals significant variations in their effectiveness and impact on different educational outcomes among Syrian refugee children in Lebanese settlements. Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients between five key resilience factors and three primary educational outcomes, alongside intervention effectiveness rates measured over the 18-month study period. The data demonstrates that academic self-efficacy and emotional regulation emerge as the most influential factors, showing strong positive correlations with both academic performance and school engagement. Notably, the intervention effectiveness rates indicate that while some factors like academic self-

efficacy show high improvement rates (85%), others such as cultural identity, despite their importance for emotional well-being, demonstrate more moderate intervention success rates (73%), suggesting the need for more nuanced and culturally sensitive approaches to resilience-building programs.

Table 1. Individual-Level Resilience Factors and Their Impact on Educational Outcomes

Resilience Factor	Impact on Academic Performance	Impact on School Engagement	Impact on Emotional Well-being	Intervention Effectiveness
Academic Self-efficacy	High (r = .67, p < .001)	High (r = .72, p < .001)	Moderate (r = .43, p < .01)	85% improvement rate
Emotional Regulation	Moderate (r = .54, p < .001)	High (r = .68, p < .001)	High (r = .76, p < .001)	78% improvement rate
Language Proficiency	High (r = .71, p < .001)	Moderate (r = .49, p < .01)	Moderate (r = .38, p < .05)	82% improvement rate
Cultural Identity	Moderate (r = .46, p < .01)	Moderate (r = .52, p < .001)	High (r = .69, p < .001)	73% improvement rate
Future Orientation	Moderate (r = .41, p < .01)	High (r = .63, p < .001)	High (r = .58, p < .001)	76% improvement rate

Interpersonal and Social Network Factors

The analysis of interpersonal and social network factors reveals that relationships with teachers, peers, and family members play crucial roles in developing and maintaining educational resilience among Syrian refugee children. Teacher-student relationships emerged as particularly significant, with children who reported positive relationships with their teachers showing substantially higher levels of school engagement and academic achievement. This finding is supported by research from Khalil and Taha (2024) who found that caring teacher relationships serve as a primary protective factor for refugee children, providing emotional support, academic guidance, and cultural mediation. The quality of teacher-student relationships was enhanced through professional development programs that trained teachers in trauma-informed pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching practices, and relationship-building strategies (Muhsyanur et al., 2021).

Peer support networks within refugee settlements demonstrated remarkable importance in fostering resilience, with children who had strong friendships and peer connections showing better emotional regulation and social adjustment. The findings align with research by Omar and Bishara (2024) indicating that peer relationships provide crucial emotional support, social learning opportunities, and identity development experiences for refugee youth. The development of peer support was facilitated through structured group activities, cooperative learning approaches, and peer mentorship programs that connected older and younger

refugee children. These peer networks often extended beyond formal school settings to include neighborhood friendships and community-based social groups.

Family relationships and parental support continued to serve as foundational elements of resilience despite the disruptions caused by displacement and trauma. Research by Mansour and Qasemi (2024) supports the finding that family cohesion and parental involvement in education remain strong predictors of academic success among refugee children. However, the study also revealed that family stress and parental trauma could negatively impact children's resilience, highlighting the importance of family-centered interventions that address the needs of both children and parents. Family support programs that provided parenting education, stress management, and educational advocacy training showed significant positive impacts on children's resilience and academic outcomes.

The role of mentors and role models emerged as an important factor in resilience development, with children who had access to positive adult mentors showing improved self-esteem and academic motivation. This finding is consistent with research by Awad and Sabbagh (2024) who emphasized the importance of mentorship programs in supporting refugee youth development. Mentors included older refugee youth, community leaders, and volunteer educators who provided guidance, encouragement, and practical support for academic and personal development. The most effective mentorship relationships were characterized by consistency, cultural sensitivity, and focus on strengths and assets rather than deficits.

Community social capital and collective efficacy also played important roles in supporting individual resilience, with children living in settlements with strong social cohesion and community organization showing better educational outcomes. Research by Jabr and Khoury (2024) supports the finding that community-level social capital creates supportive environments that promote individual resilience and academic success. Communities with active parent committees, youth organizations, and educational advocacy groups were more successful in creating positive learning environments and accessing educational resources for their children.

Institutional and Educational System Factors

The analysis of institutional and educational system factors reveals both significant challenges and innovative opportunities for fostering resilience among Syrian refugee children in Lebanese schools and educational programs. The Lebanese public education system's response to the refugee crisis has been characterized by both remarkable adaptation and persistent structural limitations, creating a complex landscape for resilience development. The implementation of the second-shift programming, which provides afternoon classes specifically for Syrian refugee children, represents a significant institutional innovation that has expanded access to education while also creating unique challenges related to resource allocation, teacher capacity, and educational quality (Zeitoun & Rabih, 2024).

School climate and organizational culture emerged as critical factors in determining whether educational institutions successfully foster resilience among refugee students. Schools that developed welcoming, inclusive environments characterized by clear behavioral expectations, consistent support systems, and celebration of diversity showed significantly better outcomes for refugee children. This finding aligns with research by Saab and Hariri (2024) who found that positive school climate mediates the relationship between student background characteristics and academic achievement. The development of positive school climate was facilitated through whole-school approaches that involved administrators, teachers, support staff, and community members in creating shared visions and implementing consistent practices.

Curriculum adaptation and culturally responsive pedagogy represented another crucial institutional factor, with schools that modified their curricula to include refugee perspectives and experiences showing improved student engagement and academic outcomes. Research by Darwish and Ghandour (2024) supports the finding that culturally responsive teaching practices enhance learning outcomes for refugee students by validating their experiences and connecting new learning to existing knowledge and skills. Effective curriculum adaptations included incorporation of Arabic language instruction, recognition of Syrian educational credentials, and integration of cultural content that reflected students' backgrounds and experiences.

Teacher professional development and support systems emerged as fundamental institutional factors that influenced the capacity of schools to foster resilience among refugee students. Teachers who received training in trauma-informed pedagogy, cross-cultural communication, and differentiated instruction were more effective in supporting refugee students' academic and social-emotional development. This finding is supported by research from Mourad and Fakhoury (2024) who emphasized the importance of comprehensive teacher preparation for working with refugee populations. Professional development programs that combined theoretical knowledge with practical skills and ongoing coaching showed the greatest impact on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

The availability of specialized support services within educational institutions significantly impacted students' resilience development, with schools that provided counseling, language support, and academic tutoring showing better outcomes for refugee students. Research by Chahine and Makkawi (2024) indicates that wraparound services are essential for addressing the complex needs of refugee students and supporting their academic success. The most effective support services were those that were integrated into the regular school program rather than being provided as separate or stigmatizing interventions.

Table 2. Institutional Factors and Their Effectiveness in Promoting Educational Resilience

Institutional Factor	Implementation Rate	Student Satisfaction	Academic Impact	Teacher Effectiveness	Resource Requirements
Second-shift Programming	78%	6.2/10	Moderate	7.1/10	High
Positive School Climate	65%	8.4/10	High	8.7/10	Moderate
Culturally Responsive Curriculum	42%	7.9/10	High	7.3/10	Moderate
Teacher Professional Development	58%	7.6/10	High	8.9/10	High
Specialized Support Services	34%	8.1/10	Very High	8.2/10	Very High

Community-Level Resilience and Collective Agency

The examination of community-level resilience factors reveals that Syrian refugee settlements in Lebanon have developed sophisticated systems of collective agency and mutual support that significantly contribute to educational resilience among children and families. Community leadership structures, while informal, play crucial roles in organizing educational activities, advocating for resources, and maintaining social cohesion within settlements. The findings demonstrate that communities with strong leadership and governance structures are more successful in creating environments that support children's educational development and resilience (Kassem & Rida, 2024).

The development of informal learning networks within refugee communities represents a remarkable example of collective resilience and innovation in the face of limited formal educational opportunities. These networks include community-based tutoring programs, skill-sharing initiatives, and peer learning groups that supplement formal schooling and provide culturally relevant learning experiences. Research by Nouri and Hamdan (2024) supports the finding that informal learning networks serve as important sources of educational support and social connection for refugee families. The most effective informal learning networks were those that combined academic support with social activities and cultural preservation efforts.

Community organizing and advocacy efforts have emerged as important mechanisms for building collective efficacy and promoting educational access for refugee children. Parent committees, youth organizations, and community advocacy groups have successfully lobbied for improved school facilities, transportation services, and educational resources. This finding aligns with research by Abdel-

Rahman and Khatib (2024) who found that community organizing empowers refugee communities to become agents of change rather than passive recipients of services. The development of advocacy capacity was supported through leadership training programs, legal education initiatives, and partnership development with local and international organizations.

The role of cultural and religious institutions in supporting educational resilience has been particularly significant, with mosques, community centers, and cultural organizations providing spaces for learning, social connection, and identity preservation. Research by Saleh and Bashir (2024) indicates that faith-based and cultural organizations serve as important sources of social support and community cohesion for refugee families. These institutions often provided after-school programs, homework assistance, and cultural education that complemented formal schooling while maintaining connections to Syrian heritage and traditions.

Economic cooperation and resource sharing within refugee communities have created important foundations for educational resilience, with families pooling resources to support children's education and developing micro-enterprises that generate income for educational expenses. This finding is supported by research from Tariq and Jaber (2024) who found that economic cooperation builds both financial capacity and social capital within refugee communities. The most successful economic cooperation initiatives were those that involved multiple families and had clear agreements about resource sharing and mutual support.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study of resilience and education in Syrian refugee settlements in Lebanon reveals the complex, multifaceted nature of educational resilience and the critical importance of addressing individual, interpersonal, institutional, and community-level factors simultaneously. The findings demonstrate that while Syrian refugee children and families face significant challenges related to displacement, trauma, and limited resources, they also possess remarkable capacity for adaptation, innovation, and growth when provided with appropriate support and opportunities. The development of educational resilience is not simply a matter of individual strength or determination, but rather emerges from the dynamic interaction between personal assets, supportive relationships, enabling institutions, and empowering communities.

The implications of this research extend beyond the immediate context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to broader questions about how educational systems can be designed and implemented to foster resilience among displaced populations worldwide. The study's findings suggest that effective resilience-building interventions must be comprehensive, culturally responsive, and community-centered, addressing the multiple systems and relationships that influence child development and learning outcomes. The critical role of teacher empowerment emerges as a key finding, highlighting the need for professional development programs that address both the technical skills and emotional well-being of

educators working with refugee populations. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of recognizing and building upon the strengths and assets that refugee communities bring to the educational process, rather than focusing solely on deficits and needs. The development of sustainable, scalable approaches to fostering educational resilience among refugee populations represents an urgent priority for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working in this field.

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