

Breaking Barriers or Building Walls? The English Language and Literacy Support for Refugee-Background Students in Regional NSW

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This ongoing study examines the current English language and literacy support provided for refugee-background students in regional New South Wales (NSW) to facilitate their integration into mainstream academic classes. The literature highlights significant language barriers that hinder effective education for refugee-background students in regional NSW. However, little is known about the provision of English language and literacy support in the public high schools of regional NSW, despite the crucial role that these schools play in developing the English language proficiency and literacy of students. This study therefore aims to investigate the multiple layers of context surrounding the current English language and literacy support provided for refugee-background students in the public high schools of regional NSW. These layers of context identified via Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) include the following: state policies, school-based strategies, classroom-level practices and the lived experiences of refugee-background students. Data collection methods employed in the study include an analysis of state policies related to English language and literacy education in NSW, and semi-structured interviews with external stakeholders, high school teachers, school leaders, refugee-background students and their parents. Phase one of data collection involved an analysis of four state policies: NSW Multicultural Plan, NSW Multicultural Policy, NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and NSW Strategic Plan. Bacchi's (2009) 'What's The Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR) theoretical framework was employed to investigate the representation of refugee-background students and the regional context in policies related to English language and literacy education in NSW. The findings reveal the limited recognition of the distinct language and literacy needs of refugee-background students, the conflation of refugee-background students under the LBOTE category, and the invisibility of the regional context and its challenges in NSW English language and literacy policies. These findings highlight the need for an increased visibility and a more accurate representation of refugee-background students and the regional context in policy to ensure the provision of adequate resources and targeted interventions.