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**Narratives of Agency:
Afghan refugee background students'
experience of schooling in New Zealand**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Education at Massey University,
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Abstract

Little is known about the experiences of refugee background students in New Zealand high schools, and more specifically we lack narratives from more recent groups like those from Afghanistan. Research about Afghans in New Zealand does not address the experiences of how young Afghan students engage with schooling and education in the new environment. As schools are often a challenging navigational space during the transition and adaptation for these students, it is imperative to reflect on their experiences for transformative purposes. This study aimed to understand those transitional experiences through the lens of the students' sense of agency.

Data were drawn from a phenomenological research approach that included in-depth interviews with six senior high school students who were former refugees from Afghanistan. The study examined the role and ways in which a sense of agency helped these students to succeed in achieving their educational goals, by identifying the factors that provided impetus for the development of their sense of agency in the educational context. The study's conceptual framework was built on an ecological model. The ecological perspective illuminated the links between the students' agency, their funds of knowledge, and their socio-cultural capital.

The findings highlighted multiple contexts in which the students illustrated their capacities for agency, and how that ultimately helped them to navigate ways in which they believed, decided and acted. The findings also underscored the need to recognize as well as leverage on refugee background students' agency and their agentic resources. These students' narratives can inform and reform underlying premises of current policy, practices and pedagogy for refugee students, which can lead to a more engaged and authentic understanding about their learning and experiences.

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