PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF DISPLACED CHILDREN TO NEW EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS: THE ROLE OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

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Psychological Adaptation of Displaced Children to New Educational Environments: The Role of Parental Support

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Abstract

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyze the mechanisms through which displaced children – those forced to relocate due to conflict, persecution, or humanitarian crises – adapt psychologically to new educational environments. Focusing on three distinct national contexts – the United States, Germany, and Poland – the study seeks to identify common and divergent factors that influence the success of this adaptation process. To achieve a multidimensional understanding of psychological adaptation among displaced children, the study employed a mixed-methods research design integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The methodology comprised two core components: systematic Literature Review (2015-2025), comparative case analysis (United States, Germany, Poland). Evidence across contexts indicates that parental involvement, emotional support, and active engagement significantly enhance displaced children's emotional adjustment, academic engagement, and sense of belonging. In the U.S., newcomer school programs with wraparound services benefit integration. In Germany, structured language and mentorship programs support students academically and socially. In Poland, schools provide psychological-pedagogical support and emergency educational accommodations. Nonetheless, socioeconomic hardship, parental stress, and systemic constraints attenuate these positive effects. Parental support emerges as a crucial buffer in the psychosocial adaptation process for displaced children. Nonetheless, institutional frameworks that empower parents – through language access, mental health services, and inclusive school policies – amplify effectiveness. Policy and programmatic interventions should be tailored to strengthen caregiver capacities alongside child-focused initiatives.

Keywords: displaced children; psychological adaptation; educational integration; parental support; refugee education; child well-being.

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Introduction

Displaced children – whether they are classified as refugees fleeing across borders due to armed conflict, persecution, or disaster, or internally displaced within their own countries – face significant and multifaceted challenges during their transition into host-country educational systems. The disruption of stable schooling environments is one of the most immediate consequences of displacement. Educational continuity is often broken, curricula differ from those of the countries of origin, and many children enter new classrooms after long periods of educational absence. In addition to academic disruption, these children often suffer the loss of familiar social ties – extended family, peers, and trusted adults – which are vital for emotional regulation and identity formation. Their psychological well-being is further compromised by prior exposure to war-related trauma, forced migration, and uncertain living conditions (Salazar Andrade *et al.*, 2023). Upon entering host-country schools, displaced children must navigate an unfamiliar cultural context, frequently without fluency in the dominant language and with limited access to psychological support.

Schools in host countries vary widely in their capacity to accommodate these needs. While some educational institutions offer trauma-informed teaching, language assistance programs, and cultural integration initiatives, others are under-resourced and lack specialized personnel trained to work with vulnerable or multilingual populations. These systemic differences create inconsistencies in the quality of educational inclusion and emotional support provided to displaced children (Yilmaz, 2024).

Amid these structural challenges, parental support emerges as a key mediating factor in facilitating the psychological and educational adjustment of displaced children. Supportive parenting – including emotional warmth, consistent routines, involvement in the child's education, and advocacy within school systems – can mitigate stress, reinforce resilience, and foster a sense of safety and belonging. When parents actively engage with educators and maintain close communication with their children, outcomes such as school attendance, academic achievement, and emotional stability tend to improve significantly (Kapur, 2022).

By the end of 2024, an estimated 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, with children comprising a large share (UNHCR, 2025). Between 2010 and 2024 the number of displaced children nearly tripled to ~48.8 million (UNICEF, 2025). Education systems are under acute strain: in 2023, about 272 million children and youth were out of school globally, and refugee learners face especially steep drop-offs at secondary level (UNHCR, 2025; World Bank, 2017).

Amid barriers such as language acquisition, trauma exposure, housing instability and bureaucratic hurdles, parental support is a proximal, modifiable

buffer that improves readiness to learn, attendance and a sense of safety. Caregiver engagement – emotional availability, stable routines, collaboration with teachers and advocacy – consistently associates with better socio-emotional adjustment and academic engagement for displaced learners; moreover, schools can strengthen these behaviours via low-cost, scalable practices (family liaisons, translation/interpretation, co-designed support plans).

This article seeks to compare how such parental support functions within the educational frameworks of three specific national contexts: the United States, Germany, and Poland. By analyzing both protective mechanisms (such as wraparound school services, language mediation, and psychological counseling) and systemic barriers (such as legal constraints, resource shortages, or institutional unpreparedness), the study aims to illuminate the critical intersection of family dynamics and school systems in shaping displaced children's adaptation. Through this comparative lens, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of effective practices and policy interventions that can enhance educational inclusion and mental well-being for displaced youth across diverse geopolitical settings.

We present a three-country comparison (United States, Germany, Poland) centred on parental engagement mechanisms, linking micro-level caregiving practices with meso-level school designs (newcomer programmes, welcome classes, intercultural pedagogy) and exo-level policy frameworks. Methodologically, we synthesise 2015–2025 peer-reviewed evidence alongside official datasets and reports (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, World Bank, RAND Europe) and provide a transparent PRISMA-style account of study selection (UNHCR, 2025; World Bank, 2017).

The theoretical foundation of this article is constructed on the integration of three interrelated frameworks that collectively provide a multidimensional understanding of displaced children's psychological adaptation and the role of parental support within educational systems. These frameworks – Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the Protective Resilience Framework, and Educational Integration Models – offer complementary perspectives that guide both the conceptualization and interpretation of findings across the U.S., Germany, and Poland.

The first and overarching theoretical lens is Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory conceptualizes human development as occurring within a nested set of interrelated systems: the microsystem (e.g., family, school), mesosystem (interconnections between microsystems), exosystem (institutional and policy environments), and macrosystem (sociocultural values and ideologies). Applied to the experience of displaced children, this model emphasizes how psychological and educational outcomes are influenced not only by the child's individual characteristics but also by the complex interactions between their family dynamics, school environments, and broader community contexts. For instance, a child's ability to adapt is shaped by the availability of stable caregivers, the responsiveness of school staff, the accessibility of language and counseling

services, and societal attitudes toward migration (Michalek, et al, 2024).). This ecological perspective allows the article to examine the systemic nature of both risks and supports, underscoring the need for multi-level interventions.

Building upon this systemic view, the article integrates the Protective Resilience Framework, which focuses specifically on the mechanisms through which children maintain or regain psychological well-being in the face of adversity. Within this framework, parental support is conceptualized as a primary protective factor – a source of stability, emotional regulation, and advocacy in uncertain and often fragmented educational settings. Resilience is not seen as an inherent trait but rather as a dynamic process, significantly fostered through supportive caregiving, secure attachment, and positive reinforcement within the school–home relationship. Parental involvement can help displaced children navigate trauma, manage academic transitions, and reestablish a sense of agency and belonging. This theoretical position is supported by empirical studies documenting how high parental emotional availability and engagement correlate with lower rates of anxiety and behavioral dysregulation among refugee children (Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

The third pillar of the conceptual framework comprises Educational Integration Models, which provide a structural and policy-oriented perspective on how school systems respond to the needs of displaced learners. In the United States, this includes newcomer programs – specialized educational tracks that combine English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, socio-emotional learning, and wraparound services to facilitate rapid adjustment. These programs often integrate parents into the adaptation process through school-family liaisons and community resource navigation. In contrast, Germany employs a dual-model system, offering both parallel classes for newly arrived students and integrative classrooms for those more advanced in language acquisition. The German approach has increasingly embraced intercultural pedagogy, emphasizing cultural sensitivity, identity preservation, and social inclusion within mainstream education (Crul *et al.*, 2019). Poland, while relatively new to large-scale displacement management, has rapidly implemented psychological-pedagogical support units and language adaptation services, with varying levels of integration and parental involvement.

Together, these three frameworks provide a holistic understanding of displaced children's adjustment by bridging individual psychological processes, family dynamics, and institutional practices. They allow the article to analyze not only what internal factors (such as parental support) promote resilience, but also how external systems (such as school design and national policy) can either facilitate or hinder this process. By applying these interlocking theoretical models, the article situates displaced children's adaptation as a relational and systemic phenomenon, requiring multi-level responses from educators, caregivers, and policymakers alike.

Methodology

We conducted a mixed-methods review combining: a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed studies (2015–2025), and a comparative analysis of policies and programmes in the United States, Germany and Poland.

Peer-reviewed databases: Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, PubMed/MEDLINE, ERIC and PsycINFO. Official and organisational sources: UNICEF (2024), UNHCR (Global Trends; Refugee Education Reports), UNESCO UIS and GEM/SDG-4 Scorecards, World Bank (Forced Displacement) and RAND Europe policy papers, plus national/ministerial portals.

The review covers publications from 1 January 2015 through 30 September 2025, a window selected to encompass post-2015 policy frameworks (e.g., SDG 4) and major displacement- and education-related shocks during 2015–2016 and 2022–2025. English was the primary language for search, screening, and synthesis. To capture country-specific legislation, policy briefs, and program evaluations that are not consistently available in English, we selectively included sources in German, Polish, and Ukrainian when they offered unique national context or data. Titles and abstracts for these non-English items were screened in English where available (via bilingual records or publisher-provided translations); otherwise, targeted translation was used to assess eligibility and extract key variables. All non-English sources were held to the same inclusion/exclusion criteria and quality thresholds as the English-language literature.

We operationalized the search as a five-block Boolean string that intersected core concepts with AND and expanded each concept with synonyms using OR. The population block captured displacement status –(«refugee» OR displaced OR migrant)—while the age/role block broadened youth references via truncation – (child* OR student* OR youth) – to retrieve singular/plural and lexical variants (e.g., child, children, students). The schooling context block – (school OR education OR classroom OR newcomer) – included «newcomer» to surface literature on welcome/newcomer classes. Family involvement was represented by (parent* OR caregiver*), again using truncation to include parents, parenting, parental, caregivers. Outcome/construct terms – (adapt* OR integration OR resilience OR «mental health») – combined stems for adaptation/integration/resilience with the exact phrase «mental health» in quotation marks. Parentheses enforced precedence across blocks; quotation marks constrained multi-word phrases; and the asterisk served as a right-hand wildcard. Database implementations followed native syntax (e.g., TITLE-ABS-KEY in Scopus, TS in Web of Science, textwords plus MeSH terms in PubMed, ERIC descriptors, PsycINFO Thesaurus). Where supported, we tested proximity operators to tighten relevance (e.g., pairing parent with engagement within a few words) and limited to title/abstract fields in pilot runs to improve precision before full retrieval.

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they were published between 1 January 2015 and 30 September 2025 and underwent peer review, comprising empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods) or systematic/scoping reviews. Each study had to focus on displaced, refugee, or migrant children or adolescents within school settings (K–12/compulsory education) and report outcomes pertinent to parental/caregiver engagement, psychological adaptation, educational integration, or broader well-being. To contextualize findings with robust macro-level evidence, we also included official reports from UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, the World Bank, and RAND Europe for global statistics and policy analyses. We excluded records published before 2015; studies limited to adult populations or to tertiary/higher-education contexts; opinion pieces, editorials, and commentary lacking empirical or official evidence; research conducted exclusively outside school settings without educational outcomes; and items for which the full text was not accessible. Conference abstracts without full papers, duplicate records, and protocols with no results were also excluded.

All records were imported into a reference manager and de-duplicated before screening. Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts against the predefined eligibility criteria. Conflicts were resolved by discussion, with a third reviewer available for adjudication. A calibration round was conducted at the outset, and inter-rater agreement (Cohen's κ) was monitored to ensure consistency. Potentially relevant studies were then retrieved in full and assessed against the same criteria, with reasons for exclusion recorded. A PRISMA-style flow table summarises counts at each stage (identification, screening, eligibility, inclusion). Data were extracted using a structured template capturing bibliographic details; country/region and educational setting; population characteristics (age range, displacement/refugee/migrant status); study design and methods; parental/caregiver mechanisms (e.g., engagement, school–family communication, routines, liaison/interpretation supports); and outcomes spanning emotional/behavioural indicators, academic engagement/attendance, and sense of belonging or school connectedness. Extraction was performed by one reviewer and verified by a second. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus. When necessary, study authors were contacted for clarification, and results lacking sufficient statistics were included via narrative synthesis (Table 1).

Table 1. PRISMA Flow and Database Search Strategy (2015–2025): Records Identified, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion

PRISMA Phase (2015–2025)		Records (n)	
Identification: database records (Scopus 820; WoS 610; PubMed 390; ERIC 275; PsycINFO 280)		2,375	
Identification: additional records (UNICEF/UNHCR/UNESCO/World Bank/RAND)		95	
Duplicates removed		1,120	
Screening: titles/abstracts		1,350	
Eligibility: full-text assessed		120	
Included in synthesis		25	
Source	Timeframe	Example query	Hits / Included
Scopus	2015–2025	TITLE-ABS-KEY(refugee AND child* AND school AND parent*)	820 / 10
Web of Science	2015–2025	TS=(refugee OR displaced) AND TS=(child* OR student*) AND TS=(school) AND TS=(parent*)	610 / 6
PubMed/MEDLINE	2015–2025	("Refugees"[MeSH] OR displaced) AND (child* OR adolescent) AND (school OR education) AND parent*	390 / 3
ERIC	2015–2025	(refugee OR newcomer) AND (student*) AND (school) AND (parent* OR family engagement)	275 / 3
PsycINFO	2015–2025	(refugee OR displaced) AND child* AND school AND (parent* OR caregiver*)	280 / 2

Results

Newcomer programs represent a structured and targeted approach within the U.S. educational system to support the academic and psychological adjustment of recently arrived immigrant and refugee children. These programs are designed not merely to address linguistic barriers but to create holistic, trauma-informed learning environments that recognize and respond to the complex needs of displaced students. At their core, newcomer programs aim to establish a sense of safety, continuity, and belonging in the school setting – factors that are particularly critical for children who may have experienced war, persecution, family separation, or prolonged displacement. Language acquisition, especially English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, forms a central component of these programs; however, their scope typically extends beyond academics to include social–emotional learning (SEL), psychological support, and wraparound services such as access to school counselors, mental health professionals, social workers, and community-based partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a).

The success of newcomer programs is closely tied to the degree of parental involvement, which functions as a key mediating factor in displaced children's educational integration and emotional well-being. Schools that actively engage parents – by providing translation and interpretation services, offering cultural liaison support, and maintaining open channels of communication between home and school – are more effective in fostering trust, consistency, and collaborative problem-solving. Parental participation in school activities, parent-teacher conferences, and homework supervision not only reinforces academic engagement but also contributes to children's psychological sense of normalcy and security. When parents are empowered to advocate for their children's educational needs, navigate institutional structures, and maintain strong relational bonds at home, children demonstrate increased optimism, resilience, and classroom participation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

Moreover, these positive outcomes are often amplified when combined with peer support systems, such as mentoring, buddy programs, or inclusive classroom practices that promote intercultural dialogue and mutual respect. The presence of empathetic and socially supportive peers can reduce isolation, encourage language use, and model adaptive coping behaviors. Thus, effective newcomer programs recognize that adaptation is not an individual endeavor but a socially embedded process, requiring the coordination of institutional resources, family engagement, and peer relationships to foster a truly inclusive and responsive learning environment for displaced children (Crooks *et al.,* 2022).

In Germany, educational integration models for displaced and newly arrived immigrant children encompass a spectrum of approaches, ranging from fully integrated classrooms to parallel preparatory classes that provide intensive language support prior to mainstream placement. In the fully integrated model,

refugee and migrant students are placed directly into regular classes alongside native-born peers, with supplementary support – often in the form of in-class language assistance or pull-out sessions – to facilitate both academic progress and social inclusion (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie, 2024). This approach is intended to promote early immersion in the host language, encourage participation in the full scope of school life, and foster peer relationships that aid social adaptation. However, it requires that schools have well-trained teachers, access to intercultural resources, and sufficient staffing to support differentiated instruction.

By contrast, parallel classes – sometimes called «welcome classes» or «preparatory classes» – offer newly arrived students an initial, intensive focus on German language acquisition and orientation to the local school system. These classes typically operate separately from mainstream lessons, with the goal of equipping students with the linguistic competence and foundational subject knowledge necessary for eventual integration into regular classrooms. While this model can protect students from the immediate pressure of competing academically in a foreign language, it also carries the risk of social isolation if the transition to mainstream education is delayed or insufficiently supported (Deutschlandfunk, 2025).

In recent years, Germany has increasingly shifted toward intercultural education, a pedagogical approach that explicitly values cultural diversity as a resource rather than a challenge. This paradigm seeks to go beyond mere language instruction by embedding principles of identity-respecting pedagogy into the curriculum and school culture. Intercultural education promotes mutual respect, challenges stereotypes, and encourages students to maintain and develop their cultural heritage while engaging fully in the host society. Teachers are trained to apply inclusive teaching strategies, adapt materials to reflect multicultural perspectives, and create classroom environments where students' backgrounds are acknowledged and affirmed (Kamande, 2025).

This shift reflects a broader recognition within German educational policy and practice that successful integration involves more than academic assimilation – it requires the preservation of self-esteem, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging for displaced children. By combining structural models that address linguistic and academic needs with pedagogical practices that honor students' cultural backgrounds, the German system aims to balance the demands of social cohesion with the rights and well-being of refugee and migrant learners.

In Poland, the educational response to the unprecedented influx of Ukrainian refugees following the escalation of the war in 2022 has been rapid, large-scale, and multifaceted. By mid-2023, nearly 170,000 Ukrainian children had been enrolled in Polish schools, spanning primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. To address the immediate and long-term needs of these students, schools introduced psychological and pedagogical support services aimed at mitigating

the effects of trauma, anxiety, and displacement-related stress (Chomiuk, 2023). These services often involved school psychologists, pedagogical counselors, and social workers who provided both individual and group interventions. In parallel, accelerated Polish language instruction was implemented, frequently through intensive preparatory classes, language workshops, and the integration of bilingual teaching assistants, to enable students to participate more fully in academic and social activities within mainstream classrooms.

Despite these proactive measures, Polish educators faced significant challenges in delivering effective integration and support. Many teachers had limited prior experience working with refugee populations, particularly in contexts where students arrived with varying levels of prior education, differing curricula backgrounds, and in some cases, gaps in formal schooling. The sudden increase in student numbers also strained class sizes, teaching resources, and administrative capacity. Moreover, teachers were required to adapt their instructional methods to meet the diverse linguistic, academic, and emotional needs of students while navigating an evolving policy framework for refugee education. Nonetheless, one of the most effective adaptive strategies that emerged was collaboration between teachers and parents. Regular communication with Ukrainian parents – facilitated by interpreters, cultural mediators, or bilingual staff – helped educators better understand students' personal histories, learning needs, and emotional states. This partnership approach enhanced trust, improved student engagement, and allowed for more tailored educational and psychosocial interventions (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2023).

However, significant vulnerabilities persist within the system. A substantial number of Ukrainian adolescents remain outside of the Polish school system, often due to barriers such as limited availability of places in secondary schools, difficulties in navigating the Polish educational bureaucracy, economic pressures requiring older children to work, or continued engagement in Ukrainian online schooling. These gaps in access are accompanied by challenges in adaptation for those who are enrolled, particularly at the upper secondary level where academic demands, linguistic barriers, and social integration pressures are most acute. The risk of educational disengagement and early school leaving remains high for this group, underscoring the need for targeted outreach, flexible educational pathways, and sustained support mechanisms to ensure that refugee students not only enter the Polish school system but also thrive within it (Świdrowska, & Stano, 024).

Across the United States, Germany, and Poland, parental support – whether expressed through emotional presence, active educational involvement, or advocacy within the school system – emerges as a consistent and powerful driver of displaced children's successful adaptation. In the U.S., newcomer programs offer a structured network of school-based supports, including language instruction, social-emotional learning, and wraparound services such as counseling and family outreach. However, the true effectiveness of these initiatives is contingent upon the meaningful participation of parents, whose engagement helps reinforce learning,

strengthen children's sense of security, and bridge cultural and linguistic gaps between home and school (Zaidi *et al.,* 2021).

In Germany, the adoption of flexible integration models – ranging from immediate placement in regular classrooms to parallel preparatory classes – allows for tailored responses to students' language and cultural adjustment needs. These models show the greatest impact when accompanied by active parental engagement, such as collaboration in homework support, attendance at school events, and participation in intercultural programs. Parental involvement not only accelerates linguistic and academic progress but also fosters a more cohesive integration process by aligning home and school environments (Janta & Harte, 2016).

Across all three contexts, several key obstacles undermine the optimal engagement of parents. Language barriers often restrict parents' ability to communicate with teachers, understand curricular expectations, or participate in school governance. Parental stress, socioeconomic hardship, and trauma – including post-traumatic stress symptoms and the pressures of resettlement – can limit the emotional and physical capacity for involvement in school-related activities. Finally, institutional unpreparedness, particularly in situations of sudden and large-scale displacement such as Poland's experience after 2022, can leave schools without adequate resources, training, or structural mechanisms to integrate parents effectively into the adaptation process. Addressing these barriers is essential for ensuring that parental support, which consistently proves to be a decisive protective factor, can be fully mobilized to enhance the educational and psychosocial outcomes of displaced children.

The analysis of educational responses across the United States, Germany, and Poland highlights several concrete results concerning the adaptation of displaced children to new school environments. In the United States, newcomer programs have proven effective in supporting the academic and psychological adjustment of recently arrived immigrant and refugee children by combining language instruction with social–emotional learning, counseling, and wraparound services. However, their true effectiveness depends on the degree of parental involvement: schools that provide translation and cultural liaison support, maintain active communication with families, and encourage parental participation in school life demonstrate higher levels of trust, collaboration, and child engagement. When parents are empowered to advocate for their children and reinforce learning at home, displaced students show increased resilience, optimism, and classroom participation. These outcomes are further amplified by peer support systems, such as mentoring or buddy programs, which reduce social isolation and encourage adaptive coping (Martinez, Jimenez-Salazar & Suárez-Orozco, 2024).

In Germany, two main models of educational integration have been implemented: full immersion in mainstream classrooms with supplementary language support and parallel preparatory "welcome classes" focusing on intensive language acquisition.

The first approach facilitates early immersion in German language, fosters peer relationships, and promotes social inclusion but requires well-prepared teachers and intercultural resources. The second model provides a protective space for linguistic and academic preparation but may risk social isolation if integration is delayed. Recent years have also seen a clear policy shift toward intercultural education, which treats cultural diversity as a resource and seeks to maintain displaced children's self-esteem and cultural identity while supporting academic progress. This reflects the recognition that successful adaptation requires not only language acquisition and academic success but also the preservation of belonging and dignity.

In Poland, the educational response to the mass arrival of Ukrainian refugees after 2022 was rapid and large-scale, with nearly 170,000 children enrolled in schools. Measures included psychological and pedagogical support aimed at addressing trauma and displacement-related stress, as well as intensive Polish language instruction facilitated by preparatory classes, workshops, and bilingual assistants. Despite these efforts, teachers faced considerable challenges, such as limited experience with refugee populations, increased class sizes, and resource shortages. One of the most effective strategies proved to be collaboration between teachers and parents, which improved trust and allowed for more tailored interventions. Nonetheless, systemic barriers persist, as many Ukrainian adolescents remain outside the school system due to bureaucratic hurdles, economic pressures, or ongoing participation in Ukrainian online schooling. For those enrolled, adaptation remains particularly challenging at the upper secondary level, where academic demands and linguistic barriers are greatest (UNICEF, 2025).

Across all three contexts, the results converge on the decisive role of parental involvement as a consistent protective factor in displaced children's adaptation. Whether through direct engagement in school activities, reinforcement of learning at home, or advocacy within educational systems, parents significantly enhance children's academic progress, psychological resilience, and sense of belonging. At the same time, common obstacles – language barriers, socioeconomic hardship, trauma, and institutional unpreparedness – continue to limit the full potential of parental engagement. These findings underscore that successful adaptation of displaced children is not an individual process but a socially embedded one, requiring coordinated efforts between schools, families, and peers to create inclusive, supportive, and identity-affirming educational environments.

Discussion

This review set out to explain how parental support functions as a proximal, modifiable buffer in the psychological and educational adaptation of displaced children, and to compare how school systems in the United States, Germany, and Poland enable – or constrain – this support. Synthesizing peer-reviewed

studies and policy evidence from 2015-2025, our findings converge on a clear pattern: when schools make it easier for caregivers to engage (through language access, family liaison roles, mental-health signposting, and predictable school-home routines), displaced learners show better emotional adjustment, stronger academic engagement, and a more robust sense of belonging. Conversely, when communication barriers, caregiver stress, and institutional unpreparedness accumulate, the protective power of parental involvement is blunted.

Interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems lens, the most persuasive mechanisms operate at the mesosystem – i.e., the quality of connections between family and school. In the U.S., newcomer programs intentionally strengthen this mesosystem via embedded wraparound services, translation/interpretation, and dedicated staff who normalize parental presence at school. In Germany, dual integration models (welcome classes alongside early immersion) can either scaffold or stall mesosystem ties: where transitions into mainstream classes are timely and intercultural pedagogy is enacted, family-school alignment is strengthened; where parallel provision becomes prolonged and socially isolating, it weakens. In Poland, the rapid influx of learners since 2022 catalyzed psychological-pedagogical supports and intensive language instruction. Yet variability in schools' capacity, plus adolescents remaining out of school, leaves many mesosystem linkages underdeveloped. Across contexts, then, parental support "works" best when school designs deliberately lower activation costs for caregivers and provide consistent points of contact that respect families' linguistic and cultural repertoires.

The resilience framework helps clarify why these mesosystem investments matter. Resilience in displacement is not a trait but a dynamic process: predictable routines at home, emotional availability of caregivers, and a shared plan with teachers for monitoring progress and distress signals together reduce uncertainty, a key driver of anxiety and behavioral dysregulation. Where schools equip caregivers with concrete, low-burden actions (e.g., simple homework routines, attendance cues, brief emotion-coaching scripts, who to call and when), children's coping improves. Peer-based supports (buddying/mentoring) amplify these effects by widening the child's immediate social ecology and modeling adaptive behavior –particularly important for learners negotiating a new language.

At the exosystem/policy layer, we observe notable cross-national contrasts. U.S. newcomer models most fully institutionalize family engagement inside the school day. Germany increasingly codifies intercultural education but exhibits heterogeneity in how quickly welcome-class students transition into mainstream settings. Poland has built a necessary first line of support at scale but is still consolidating pathways for consistent family participation, especially for older students and those navigating mixed schooling (Polish on-site + Ukrainian online). These differences underline a central implication: parental support is a powerful buffer, but its effect size is policy-dependent. Systems that finance language access, staff time for family liaison, and caregiver mental-health referrals create the conditions in which the same parent can be far more effective.

Conclusion

This comparative review confirms that parental support is a fundamental protective factor in the psychological and educational adaptation of displaced children, consistently associated with better emotional adjustment, stronger academic engagement, and a greater sense of belonging. However, the degree to which this support translates into tangible benefits is highly context-dependent, influenced by the readiness of educational institutions, the nature of sociopolitical policies toward refugees and migrants, and the availability of material and human resources within host communities. In contexts where school systems are well-prepared, policies are inclusive, and resources are sufficient, parental involvement can operate at its full potential, reinforcing resilience and promoting smoother integration. Conversely, in environments marked by institutional unpreparedness, restrictive policies, or resource scarcity, the capacity of parents to engage meaningfully is often diminished, limiting the protective power of their support.

To address these disparities and optimize outcomes, several strategic recommendations emerge from the analysis. First, parent-school communication must be strengthened through the provision of professional translation and interpretation services, the employment of cultural liaisons who can bridge linguistic and cultural divides, and the adoption of inclusive school policies that actively encourage and facilitate parental participation regardless of language proficiency or legal status. Second, targeted mental health and social services should be made available to caregivers, recognizing that parents under acute stress or struggling with unresolved trauma may find it difficult to sustain consistent engagement in their children's education; supporting their well-being is thus integral to supporting the child. Third, the institutionalization of integrated newcomer programs with comprehensive wraparound services – tailored to the specific needs and capacities of each national context – can provide a coordinated platform for addressing academic, social, and emotional needs simultaneously. Finally, teacher training in intercultural pedagogy should be prioritized, equipping educators with the skills and cultural competencies needed to foster inclusive classrooms, address the diverse needs of displaced students, and work effectively with their families.

By implementing these measures, educational systems can create conditions in which parental support is not only possible but maximally effective, thereby enhancing the resilience, academic achievement, and long-term integration of displaced children.

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