



Citizen Identity and Schooling of Domestic Students and Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Toward a Theory of Child Voice in Citizenship Discourse

Patricia K Kubow**Indiana University, USA****Corresponding author:** Patricia K Kubow, Indiana University, USA**Received Date:** October 24, 2024**Published Date:** October 30, 2024

Introduction

Globally, the ontological positions and conditions from which children and youth build their citizen identities is not well understood. Increasingly, young people are being called upon to develop their citizen social identities amidst poverty, forced migration, conflict displacement, and social unrest. Jordan (along with Turkey and Lebanon) has the greatest influx of Syrian refugees in the world. Two-thirds of Jordan's population are under the age of 30, and one-third of youth are unemployed [1]. To address overcrowding, a public (government) double shift school system operates in Jordan, whereby Jordanian students attend school in the morning and Syrian and other refugee students in the afternoon in same-sex classrooms. Double shift schools in Jordan have become the main tool for educational provision to Syrian refugee children, though refugee dropout rates are twice the national average in Jordan compared to other host countries. Schools, therefore, serve as critical sites for interrogating what, and how, systems of identity are upheld or altered by Arab children and youth. Because Arab children are spoken about (though often not heard) in national and international development literature and are the express target of educational policy mandates, it is necessary, relevant, and timely to draw upon student voice to uncover how children and youth view their citizen social identities and to disclose the role formal schooling plays in creating those identities.

Citizen Identity and Schooling

Approximately 230,000 school-aged Syrian refugees experience numerous educational obstacles in Jordan, which are most acute for children aged 12 and older [2]. According to the World Report 2024 by Human Rights Watch, only 25% of secondary school-aged Syrian refugee children in Jordan were enrolled in school. It is within this context that I conducted an empirical qualitative study that explored citizen identity formation of domestic students and Syrian refugee youth in Jordan. My work centers student voice and Arab-Islamic ontologies for the purposes of learning from schoolchildren to improve schooling and to broaden citizenship discourse with the infusion of non-Western perspectives. Focus group interviews were conducted in 10 public schools in Amman to illuminate the social ontologies of domestic (Jordanian) students and Syrian refugee schoolchildren (aged 10-18) in Grades 5-11 to ascertain their constructions of citizen being, becoming, and belonging in Jordan.

Moving beyond the traditional Western philosophies that have heretofore largely framed citizenship discourse, I apply process philosophy—a strand of philosophy centered on ontology and concerned with the dynamic sense of being as becoming or occurrence—to a field dominated by political considerations while also paying attention to social circumstances. With an eye to

complex historical, local, and national contexts of migration and (in) security in the Middle East, my study offers a reconceptualization of citizen identity and education to better reflect the development of socio-civic identities amidst displacement. Based on direct access to double shift schools in Jordan, the collection of students' conceptualizations of citizen identity were used to theorize education for citizenship based on real and challenging experiences of Syrian refugees as well Jordanian students. As such, the work extends beyond the context of Jordan to inform regional and international discourses, policies, and initiatives surrounding refugees and education in emergencies. Focusing on the role of double shift schools, educational policy, and provision, my work interrogates how citizenship and child/youth identity is rooted, upheld, and altered over time.

Results and Discussion

Schools are microcosms of larger social forces that require an examination of the civic identities being formed. For most Syrian refugee schoolboys in Jordan's double shift system, schooling in Jordan is devoid of learning about the interplay of Western interests in Arab countries, and teaching does not engage them in processing the on-going war in Syria [3]. An Arab Islamic identity is strong among the Syrian refugee boys, but they differ in their assessments of the war in Syria and whether U.S. and Russia are interfering with Arab affairs. It seems that adherence to a national identity as promoted by the Jordanian government through its double shift schools may not be garnering refugee allegiance to Jordan, despite a national curriculum heavily focused on the history of Jordan, its monarchy, and its famous religious and historical sites [3]. Multiple identity discourses frame nationalism among Jordanian schoolboys in Amman. The constructions of citizenship they hold represent a heterogenous identity composed of Arab nationalism, Palestinian-Jordanian nationalism, and Jordanian nationalism, all of which are operating in the society at large [4]. The Jordanian boys are concerned with the common good and social equality while also valuing Jordan's peace and security. Schooling acquaints them with Jordan's ancient past, Bedouin culture, Islam, and the Hashemite dynasty [4].

For Syrian refugee and Jordanian adolescent schoolgirls, conflict is considered dysfunctional to peace and safety, national development, and their own ontological security [5]. Schooling in Jordan reinforces the need for students to shun religious extremism and political protest to avoid violence that can destabilize the state [5]. Peace and social cohesion are promoted through school curriculum that romanticizes Jordan's past, emphasizes a moderate Islamic identity, and favors volunteerism as the most acceptable form of social participation [5]. Jordanian and Syrian refugee adolescent girls differ as to whether the double shift system is inclusionary or exclusionary, with Jordanian girls tending to gloss over differences between Arabs in favor of an equality rhetoric ("we are all the same") and Syrian girls expressing feelings of emotional and physical separation from their Jordanian peers [5]. It seems that public schooling in Jordan seeks to instill ontological security in its schoolchildren. The state's preoccupation with maintaining

ontological security though may be obscuring from view other ways of seeing citizen identity beyond that of securitization [6].

Arab Islamic unity and an erasure of difference among Arabs are embedded in a dialogue of belonging as expressed by Jordanian primary schoolgirls and a dialogue of social alienation as articulated by Syrian refugee schoolgirls [7]. While both groups hold an Arab Islamic identity, double shift schooling gives scant attention to sensitive political and economic developments in the region [7]. The contemporary moment is overshadowed by an emphasis on historical learning in Jordan's double shift schools, while the international community and aid organizations continue to frame Arab schoolchildren and youth through a lens of crisis [7]. The Jordanian girls in primary schools in Amman discussed more proactive and determined stances, for example the liberation for struggling Arab populations, while a sense of helplessness and uncertainty for the future was prevalent among Syrian refugee girls [7]. Most Syrian primary schoolgirls felt displaced in Jordan and were mixed in their views as to whether Jordanian peers and the society at large have aided their transition in Jordan [7].

Conclusions

Citizen identity studies that extend beyond the Western hegemon can challenge citizenship's conceptualization and provide a more nuanced understanding of nationalism. The value in ascertaining children's social ontologies, which are largely missing from citizenship discourses globally, is to also apprise education policy and practice [4]. In essence, this work—as captured in my recent Routledge book [8]—is a call toward a theory of child voice in international and comparative education research to inform citizenship discourse. The socio-civic identities of Arab urban youth are being formed in government double shift schools in Amman, where the largest numbers of Syrian refugee youth reside. A confluence of influential identity markers (namely culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, and the state) are shaping citizen identities amid forced migration and conflict displacement. Examining students' citizen ontologies informed by Arab-Islamic perspectives signifies a major conceptual turn for international and comparative education by going beyond Western traditions and philosophies to frame citizen identity discourses anew. I have addressed this scholarly gap in citizenship studies by centering Arab child voice and applying process philosophy. This work foregrounds the relationship between child mind and world to theorize citizen identity from ontological considerations in student discourse [9,10].

Acknowledgement

The research for this book was conducted through a Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to Jordan that I received from the U.S. Department of State and represents the culmination of my study data, findings, and analysis of Syrian refugee and domestic Jordanian children and youth in Amman.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

References

1. United States Agency for International Development (2021) Unlocking the potential of women and youth.
2. Human Rights Watch (2024) World Report 2024. Jordan events of 2023.
3. Kubow PK (2018) Identity discourse and Jordan's double-shift schools: Constructing nation and citizen in a Syrian refugee host state. *Global Comparative Education: Journal of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES)* 2(2): 31-48.
4. Kubow PK (2021) Framing nationalism amidst conflict migration: Multiple identity discourses among Jordanian boys in Amman's public schools. *Global Comparative Education: Journal of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES)* 5(1-2): 43-63.
5. Kubow PK (2019) Through a girl's eyes: Social ontologies of citizen identity among Jordanian and refugee students in Jordan's double-shift secondary schools. *Prospects: Comparative Journal of Curriculum, Learning, and Assessment* pp. 1-21.
6. Browning CS, Joenniemi P (2017) Ontological security, self-articulation, and the securitization of identity. *Cooperation and Conflict* 52(1): 31-47.
7. Kubow PK (2020) Systems of social identity: Citizen identities shaping female Jordanian and Syrian refugee students in Amman's public schools. *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies (JEMS)* 1(2): 21-42.
8. Kubow PK (2023) Citizen identity formation of domestic students and Syrian refugee youth in Jordan: Centering student voice and Arab-Islamic ontologies. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
9. Kubow PK, Webster N, Strong K, Miranda D (Eds.). (2023) *Contestations of citizenship, education, and democracy in an era of global change: Children and youth in diverse international contexts*. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
10. Kumaraswamy PR (2006) Who am I?: The identity crisis in the Middle East. *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10(1): 63-73.