

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

GIFTED AND DISPLACED: NAVIGATING THE
CHALLENGES AND ASPIRATIONS OF GIFTED
PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

by
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon are an underrepresented group of students in education, despite exceptional academic and artistic potential. Their experiences are shaped by displacement, legal exclusion, socio-political instability, and limited institutional support, which can hinder the identification and development of their giftedness. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore how gifted Palestinian refugee students at the secondary level narrate their experiences, focusing on how they navigate challenges and envision their future aspirations. A narrative qualitative design was employed. Storytelling interviews were conducted with 11 gifted Palestinian students identified through teacher nominations and portfolio reviews. Findings from these interviews were analyzed using a narrative analysis approach guided by the Contextual Narrative Interpretation Model. The study revealed that students face a number of challenges, such as financial hardship, professional restrictions, exposure to camp instability, and limited access to opportunities. Despite these challenges, students demonstrate remarkable agency, self-motivation, and resilience by resorting to coping strategies, personal strengths, familial support, community networks, and religious faith. Their aspirations were a motivating force that led them to view their education as a pathway to success, dignity, and financial uplift. The findings of this study contribute to the limited literature on gifted refugee students in Lebanon by showing how giftedness coexists with adversity. It challenges deficit-oriented narratives surrounding refugee students by amplifying their voices, strengths, and aspirations. The results can interest policymakers, teachers, and school counselors working with refugee populations by highlighting the need for responsive identification practices and supportive environments to nurture their gifts and talents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Sometimes the greatest genius is hidden in darkness” (Plautus, 62, 2008).

This darkness is often shaped by life's injustices or unseen struggles, which tend to conceal brilliance. It reminds us to look for hidden talents beyond the surface, since the extraordinary often lies where few dare to seek it. This quote encapsulates the plight of gifted individuals whose potential remains unrecognized. Within inclusive education. This challenge raises a question about whose abilities are recognized and nurtured among students. Particularly among them are those from marginalized backgrounds, such as Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, who are often viewed as "invisibly gifted" - a term that aptly describes individuals whose exceptional abilities are obscured by a confluence of sociopolitical instability and systematic marginalization (Al-Hroub et al., 2023; Davis et al., 2014). As both refugees and learners with exceptional abilities, these individuals occupy a double marginalized position within educational systems that are often ill-equipped to respond to their complex realities.

The concept of giftedness, however, is inherently complex and defies a singular definition. Gifted individuals are broadly described as those who possess exceptional potential in intellectual capacity, creativity, leadership, or specific academic skills (National Association for Gifted Children, 2019). This general definition is widely used in educational contexts to guide the identification and support of gifted learners. Moreover, Marland (1971) emphasizes the diverse and individualized nature of gifted traits, extending beyond traditional academic measures. Similarly, the American Office of Education delineates six types of giftedness: intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability (Marland, 1971). This comprehensive model underscores the varied manifestations of giftedness.

Despite this expanded understanding, dominant gifted identification frameworks remain largely shaped by Western, standardized and resource-intensive models that privilege measurable performance over contextualized expressions of ability (Davis et al., 2014). These assessments fail to recognize the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity that characterizes populations and inadvertently impacts those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and do not align with the conventional standards and expectations of giftedness. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon exemplify such populations, with their abilities overshadowed by the complexities of their refugee status. Their potential is often misinterpreted or dismissed, with many placed in remedial classes rather than programs for gifted learners. Such systematic oversights not only impede their development but also perpetuate a cycle of invisibility that denies them the opportunity to reach their full capacity (Davis et al., 2014). This exclusion raises pressing concerns echoed in education and human rights frameworks, which emphasize the right of all learners to access quality and inclusive education that nurtures their full potential.

A crucial dimension of understanding these students' experiences lie in exploring how gifted Palestinian students envision their futures and aspirations. This includes examining their dual identity that influences their aspirations and personal growth. Hence, this proposal illuminated the lived experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon by exploring their challenges and aspirations, uncovering the resilience and brilliance of these students whose potential deserves to be seen, valued, and supported. By centering their voices, this research asserts not what these student lack, but what they are capable of achieving when their abilities are recognized, supported and meaningfully engaged.

Background of the Problem

Refugees, defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019), are individuals who have fled their home country to seek international protection due to conflict, widespread violence, persecution, or significant disruptions. Following the Nakba in 1948, 750,000 Palestinians were forced to be displaced into multiple regions, among them Lebanon (Albadawi, 2015; Suleiman, 2008), which currently encompasses around half a million Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2023). Within this population, 39,982 Palestinian refugee students are enrolled in 63 schools operating under UNRWA (CERD, 2020; UNRWA, n.d.). Despite their significant presence within the Lebanese education landscape, the educational experiences of Palestinian refugee students are often examined through lenses of vulnerability and deficit, while their exceptional abilities and strengths remain largely unaddressed.

Gifted education has historically centered on more privileged populations, neglecting gifted students from low-income and refugee backgrounds, who are frequently unidentified and underserved (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2021). This is evident in the case of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where language barriers and socio-economic hardships compound their exclusion from high-quality education (Khansa & Bahous, 2021). Teachers' limited understanding of giftedness further exacerbates this issue, with many Lebanese educators insufficiently trained to identify and support gifted learners effectively (Antoun et al., 2020). These challenges stem from systematic constraints that restrict educators' capacity to recognize and nurture diverse expressions of giftedness.

Moreover, the scarcity of governmental mandates, official educational policies for gifted learners, and Arabic diagnostic tools hinder their ability to recognize and

nurture students' abilities accurately (Al-Hroub, 2022). While Lebanese schools emphasize the importance of hard work and persistence (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020), this has not led to the implementation of specialized educational provisions for gifted students (Rindermann & Ceci, 2018; Shavinina, 2009; Subotnik et al., 2011). Instead, teachers often rely on one-size-fits-all curricula, which limit the development of gifted learners (Al-Hroub, 2022; Al-Hroub & El Khoury, 2018; Sarouphim, 2010).

Lebanon's socio-political and economic crises exacerbate the issue of giftedness among refugees, placing a strain on an already underfunded education system (Sarouphim, 2015). Refugees face financial barriers that prevent access to private schools, which may offer enrichment programs for high-achieving students (Al-Hroub, 2022; Sarouphim, 2015). Also, public schools hold limited resources, leaving teachers ill-equipped to address the needs of gifted learners (Al-Hroub, 2022). Therefore, educational opportunities become closely tied to economic access, further marginalizing gifted refugee students.

For Palestinian refugees specifically, the situation is further complicated by the separation of their education system in UNRWA schools, which adhere to the Lebanese curriculum (Shuayb, 2014); however, the marginalization of Palestinian identity stems not from the curriculum itself, but from restrictions imposed by UNRWA on the content of history and social studies education, further limiting students' opportunities to engage meaningfully with their identity academic journey. Additionally, UNRWA schools are plagued by poor conditions, limited resources, and inadequate support systems, which limit their ability to nurture students' potential and gifts (Al-Hroub 2014, 2023b; 2023c; Shuayb, 2014). Consequently, Palestinian refugees experience higher dropout rates and lower academic achievements as compared to their Lebanese peers (Sultana, 2007).

Furthermore, there remains a lack of initiatives that emphasize identifying and supporting the Palestinian Refugees' capabilities. While few local NGOs address the general needs of refugees, they are isolated from the field of gifted education (Al-Hroub, 2022). This absence of support results in neglecting students' exceptional abilities, restricting their potential for development.

Hence, the convergence of these factors – the sociopolitical crisis, an underfunded education system, and the absence of policies for gifted education – limits the opportunities available to gifted Palestinian refugee students. This underscored the urgent need for localized research to explore the intersection of giftedness and refugee status.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the challenges faced by gifted Palestinian refugee students and to understand how they visualize their futures and aspirations. This topic represents an underexplored area in educational research. While significant research has extensively focused on refugee education, the specific needs and aspirations of gifted individuals within refugee populations remain largely overlooked. This study aimed to fill this gap and contribute to the discourse on educational equity by highlighting their voices and experiences.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following overarching research questions:

1. How do gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon narrate their educational experiences, including their socio-political, financial, psychological, academic, and environmental challenges?
2. How do gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon navigate challenges while pursuing their aspirations?

Rationale

Gifted refugee students face a range of obstacles that hinder their ability to realize their potential, including displacement problems, trauma, inadequate access to resources, and socio-economic challenges (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Elnakib et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, evidence suggests gifted students exhibit remarkable resilience and adaptability, particularly when environments recognize and nurture their abilities (Betts & Neihart, 1998; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). Unfortunately, UNRWA schools in Lebanon lack the infrastructure, resources, and training to address the specific needs of gifted students (UNICEF, 2019).

While much of the global research has focused on either gifted education or refugee education separately, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these two intersect, particularly in Lebanon. For instance, Ford (2011) argued that integrating students' cultural background into their learning experiences enhances the engagement and academic success of gifted students by bridging gaps between home and school environments and fostering a sense of belonging and validation. However, his work focused on minority students in the U.S. and African Americans rather than gifted refugee students, which does not account for the complexities of forced migration, interrupted education, and legal restrictions faced by refugees in Lebanon. Moreover, Castellano (2022) and Rushing (2023) argued that trauma-informed practices are essential for gifted refugee students as they face language barriers and emotional trauma by providing them with a safe and emotionally supportive learning environment. Additionally, studies showed the importance of inclusive policies to ensure equitable access to gifted education for refugee students, to address systematic barriers, and to foster socioemotional development and academic success (Al-Hroub, 2022; Antoun, 2022) by enhancing

teacher preparedness and integrating them into mainstream gifted programs (Al-Hroub & Jouni, 2023). Yet much of this work remains focused on identification frameworks, policy recommendations or generalized refugee experiences, with limited attention to how gifted refugee students themselves understand their experiences and navigate their constraints.

Furthermore, Alodat and Almomani (2019) further illustrates this gap where they provided empirical evidence on the availability, importance, and use of gifted education standards in Jordanian schools for Syrian gifted refugee students, through using the National Association for Gifted Children Standards (2019) and highlighting the disparities between Jordanian and Syrian students and between students inside and outside refugee camps. However, these studies did not focus on how they can be implemented in Lebanon. This underscores the need for local context-specific research that attends to the unique realities of gifted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Furthermore, in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees face significant systemic challenges that was examined within the frameworks of identity and nationalism (Shabaneh, 2012) and inclusive exclusions (Kiwani, 2021); however, these works did not specifically examine gifted refugees. Numerous studies, such as those by Hammoud (2017) and Shuayb (2014), highlighted the general obstacles to education that refugees face in Lebanon, including legal restrictions, discriminatory policies, and socioeconomic challenges that limit their access to quality education. While these studies focused on significant educational barriers for refugees, they did not examine how these barriers uniquely affect gifted refugee students and their academic aspirations. As a result, giftedness within refugee contexts often remains deactivated, not due to the lack of ability but due to the absence of recognition, opportunity, and supportive pathways (Al-Hroub, in press).

Future aspirations are a critical driver of success, yet they can be constrained by systemic barriers such as poverty, social stigma, and limited opportunities for advancement (Appadurai, 2007; Masten et al., 2012). While studies such as Antoun (2022) and Al-Hroub (2022) examined gifted education in Lebanon, they focused solely on identification, programming, and resources for gifted Lebanese students and on the general educational challenges among refugees in Lebanon. Furthermore, Al-Hroub and Jouni's (2023) work highlighted systematic gaps in gifted education and the need for inclusive policies in Lebanon, emphasizing barriers faced by underprivileged and refugee communities in accessing gifted programs. However, their study did not specifically examine gifted Palestinian refugee students and their aspirations. This absence leaves a gap in understanding how giftedness, resilience, identity and aspiration intersect with displacement conditions.

Thus, this study shifted the focus from barriers alone to the aspirations of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, a perspective absent from the literature. This gap left gifted refugee children unrecognized and unsupported. Not only did this fail to enhance their potential, but it also deprived host countries of valuable human capital. This study, however, shifted the focus to the positive aspects of gifted refugee students and their aspirations, fostering hope and driving change. By emphasizing their potential and achievements, this research responded to an ethical and educational responsibility to recognize gifted refugee students not as passive recipients of hardship, but as individuals with the potential to contribute meaningfully when provided with equitable opportunities and support.

Significance

Palestinian refugees represent a significant portion of the refugee population in the Middle East. According to UNRWA, there are approximately 5.9 million registered Palestinian refugees globally, with Lebanon hosting around 479,000 refugees (UNRWA, 2023). This high population highlights the significant number of individuals who can serve as a transformative human resource for various countries, including Lebanon. However, their talents remain underexplored due to a lack of policies, identification protocols, and specialized services for gift development (Alodat & Momani, 2018). Thus, exploring this topic underscores the indispensability of early identification of gifted capacities among refugees so they can receive appropriate, tailored services that match their unique talents. Such recognition is not a matter of enrichment alone, but of educational justice, allowing gifted refugee students to contribute meaningfully to their communities and to the country.

As a primary goal, this study filled a gap in the literature by exploring the intersection of giftedness and refugee context in Lebanon, whereby most research had focused on either one. By centering the perspectives and aspirations of gifted Palestinian refugee students, this study contributes knowledge about how potential is sustained, suppressed and reimaged within structurally constrained environments. In addition, the implications of this study extend beyond Lebanon, offering valuable insights for other countries that host refugees. The challenges identified in Lebanon are likely to be parallel to those in other countries where gifted refugees struggle with systematic barriers such as legal restrictions on school enrollment, financial hardship, inadequate institutional support, trauma, and identity struggles. By investigating these challenges that prevent gifted refugees from accessing advanced learning opportunities and exploring their

aspirations for the future, this study underscored the urgency of developing equitable educational opportunities for marginalized populations. It highlighted the need of strategies to empower them, ensuring that they are not left behind.

This study also intended to inform education systems and policymakers about the gaps and deficiencies that prevent these students from reaching their full potential by advocating for the integration of gift and talent development into the education system. In doing so, it supported the development of a more inclusive and holistic education system that not only addressed the educational needs of gifted refugees but also provided targeted support for them, thereby enhancing the overall quality and equity of education.

Insights gained from this research, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasized inclusive and equitable education for all, encouraged a more nuanced approach to educational equity for marginalized refugee students. By foregrounding students' perspectives, this research captures the context of displacement as it is lived and interpreted by gifted Palestinian refugee students. Rather than framing displacement through trauma and instability solely, the findings highlight students' strengths, aspirations, coping strategies and relational supports while also acknowledging how constraints obscure the recognition of giftedness. This understanding enables educators and policymakers to adopt more effective identification and support strategies tailored to the realities and capacities of these students. For instance, specialized programs can integrate psychosocial support and intellectual enrichment, offering interventions that address the trauma these students face and the requirements of their intellectual stimulation, leading to improved educational outcomes.

Furthermore, this study offers valuable contributions to the field of refugee education by emphasizing the role of aspirations in overcoming adversity. It has been

evident that aspirations, shaped by personal experiences and socio-cultural contexts, can act as a driving force for academic success and resilience (Maste et al., 2012). Thus, understanding the aspirations of gifted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon enables educational practitioners to develop programs that align with their ambitions, motivating them to achieve their full potential despite the challenges they face (Appadurai, 2007). Furthermore, given UNRWA's role in educating Palestinian refugees, findings from this research also advocates for the implementation of gift and talent development in its schools' programs.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and literature review that guided the study of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon. It discusses how, through the lenses of Critical Race Theory, Trauma Theory, Cultural Ecological Model, Resilience Theory, and Self-Determination theory, students leverage their strengths to overcome adversity, aspire toward meaningful features, and maintain their gifted potential in a challenging environment. The chapter then reviews existing literature on giftedness, relevant models, and their limitations within marginalized communities, such as the refugee context. It then explores the impact of trauma and displacement on their cognitive, emotional, and academic functioning. It also discusses how systematic barriers hinder the development and identification of giftedness. Furthermore, this chapter emphasizes the interplay between resilience and aspirations, examining coping mechanisms and protective factors such as cultural identity, familial support, and personal agency that enable them to thrive.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on multiple theories: Critical Race Theory, Trauma Theory, Cultural Ecological Model, Resilience Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. Through these theories, gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon are understood through a broader structural, psychological, cultural, and motivational context that shapes their life experiences. These theories coherently capture both the constraints and abilities that shape the lives of gifted Palestinian refugee students.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the United States during the mid-1970s as a response to the perceived stagnation of the civil rights movement and the persistence of racial inequalities despite legislative advances (Deglado & Stefancic, 2017). It sought to examine how law and legal institutions perpetuate systematic racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995). This theory aims to uncover how racism and bias influence social structure and practices. It posits that prejudice is not only individual but also incorporated into legal systems and policies (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

In the context of Lebanon, CRT provides a valuable framework for analyzing the systematic challenges faced by Palestinian refugees, including those who are gifted. Historical and political factors have led to the marginalization of Palestinians in Lebanon, with many prohibited from practicing certain professions and facing significant barriers in accessing quality education (Al-Hroub, 2015). These exclusions result in the underdevelopment of talents among gifted refugees, as their abilities are often overlooked or suppressed due to discriminatory policies and economic challenges (Al-Hroub, 2022). Integrating this theory enabled a focused examination of how socio-economic precarity, legal exclusion, and political marginalization intersect to shape access to educational resources, practices and opportunities for the development of giftedness among Palestinian refugee students.

Trauma Theory

Trauma emerged as a framework to understand the psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects of adverse experiences on individuals. Foundational contributions by Herman (2015) and Van der Kolk (2014) demonstrate how prolonged trauma disrupts focus, motivation, and emotional regulation, which often leads to long-term impacts on

cognitive functioning and self-perception. These disruptions occur because they influence brain pathways responsible for attention and learning, resulting in challenges such as hypervigilance or disengagement (Van der Kolk, 2014). It contextualizes how external stressors intersect with individual development, which is relevant for addressing the experiences of marginalized populations, including refugees (Mollica, 2009).

In Lebanon, Palestinian refugee students experience cumulative trauma stemming from various layers of challenges, including displacement, poverty, and sociopolitical exclusion. Thus, through this theory, this study aimed to examine how their circumstances shape students' academic engagement and emotional well-being. Al-Hroub (2014, 2023a) accentuates trauma symptoms among refugee students, such as withdrawal and disruptive behavior. These mask giftedness, leaving them with unsupported educational systems and further under-identifying gifts and talents. Similarly, displacement has been shown to result in a loss of stability, which hampers students' ability to focus and engage in learning environments (Shabaneh, 2012).

However, Trauma Theory has been critiqued for its tendency to pathologize experiences, framing refugees primarily as victims of adversity. Consequently, it risks reinforcing deficit and pessimistic narratives by limiting students to their trauma and challenges while neglecting their agency, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies (Burstow, 2003). Additionally, it has been critiqued for its potential to homogenize individual experiences of dealing with these challenges. Levinson et al. (1996) argue that these theories assume that all members of a community respond similarly. However, while some may exhibit withdrawal, others use them as motivators to excel academically and pursue leadership roles (Ungar, 2011). For instance, Mollica (2009) notes that many

refugee students actively engage in self-healing processes that reframe their collective struggles as sources of growth and determination.

Cultural-Ecological Model

The cultural-ecological model was developed by John Ogbu (1981). His foundation work highlights that the educational attainment of minority groups cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural and societal structures and behaviors that influence them. He distinguished between voluntary minorities and involuntary ones, with the former being immigrants who migrate by choice and the latter being refugees displaced due to external factors.

This theory operates on two key dimensions. First, societal and institutional factors are manifested as exclusionary policies, sociopolitical marginalization, and access inequities that shape the availability of minority students' opportunities. Second, cultural adaptation is viewed as students' strategies, behaviors, and attitudes in response to societal challenges. Thus, this study aimed to provide a dual focus on societal and cultural exclusions by analyzing legal restrictions, teacher biases, and resource inequities that prevent the identification and development of giftedness among Palestinian refugee students (Sarouphim, 2015; Shabaneh, 2012).

However, the Cultural-Ecological Model implies that structural exclusion limits students' competence and giftedness by inadvertently neglecting protective factors that enable success in the face of adverse circumstances. However, Salle et al. (2015) address this limitation by integrating Ogbu's (1981) work into the school climate. It showed that schools' role in fostering resilience through teaching practices, culturally responsive curricula, and strong teacher-student relationships can mitigate systemic inequities by developing pathways to success for students.

Nevertheless, this study aimed to emphasize the pivotal roles of both Trauma Theory and the Cultural Ecological Model by illustrating their dynamic interplay with Resilience Theory, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the experiences of gifted Palestinian refugees.

Resilience theory

Resilience theory emerged from developmental psychology in the mid-20th century to understand how individuals adapt and thrive amidst adversity. Garmezy's (1971) pioneering work on children at risk, followed by Werner and Smith's (2019) longitudinal studies, identified individuals who demonstrated exceptional abilities despite exposure to poverty, trauma, and other challenges. These studies further established the concept of protective factors, such as personal strengths and external support, that shield the individual from risks.

Building on this foundation, Masten (2012) redefined resilience as “ordinary magic”, describing it as a dynamic process of positive adaptation driven by protective systems and not extraordinary traits. This conceptualization displayed resilience as an innate quality to understanding it as a product of interactions between the individual and his/her surroundings. Expanding on this perspective, Van Breda (2018) conceptualized resilience as a dynamic process operating across multiple levels, enabling systems to achieve outcomes that exceed expectations despite adversity. This emphasizes the importance of examining resilience through individual, familial, institutional, and societal perspectives.

However, it has been criticized for its central focus on ability and potential, prioritizing visible and measurable achievements while ignoring less subtle ones (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2014). These qualities are equally significant but less easily

quantified. For gifted Palestinian refugee students, resilience may not be solely defined by achievement but also by their capacity to preserve cultural identity, advocate for their communities, and endure psychological difficulties. Furthermore, the overemphasis on the “abilities” aspect can also overshadow the psychological and emotional toll of trauma and the challenges they face (Pieloch et al., 2016). However, Rutter (2012) argues that it does not exclude hardship but rather highlights the processes by which individuals navigate challenges while acknowledging their consequences.

All in all, the Resilience Theory refers to the capacity of individuals to adapt, recover, and thrive under hostile conditions by encompassing both process and outcome. For this study, the resilience theory examined how gifted Palestinian refugee students excel academically, emotionally, and socially despite their circumstances.

Self-Determination Theory

Additionally, the Self-determination Theory (SDT) was developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the mid-1980s as a macro-theory of human motivation and personality. It emerged from earlier work on intrinsic motivation, which focuses on individuals' drive to perform tasks for their own satisfaction rather than external rewards. However, it has since expanded to include the role of extrinsic motivation and its regulation across varying levels of autonomy. Over time, it evolved to integrate both intrinsic motivation, arising from internal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, which depends on external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Through these explorations, this study identified how different forms of motivation affect behavior, resilience, and goal setting.

SDT integrates three primary psychological needs for motivation and personal growth – autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to individuals feeling in control of their choices and actions, competence related to their sense of effectiveness

in interacting with their environment, and relatedness pertains to the experience of meaningful connections and care from others (Cha, 2020; Reeve, 2012). These core principles made SDT an essential framework for understanding motivation in diverse contexts, such as exceptionally gifted refugees.

Moreover, SDT is relevant in analyzing how Palestinian refugee students' intrinsic motivation helps them envision and pursue future aspirations. Gifted refugee students often face multiple challenges, such as limited access to resources and exclusionary policies. SDT helps analyze how these barriers affect their autonomy and competence and emphasizes how protective factors serve as motivators for navigating their experiences as dual identities, being both refugees and gifted individuals. For instance, gifted refugees rely on familial bonds or community to sustain their intrinsic motivation and aspirations despite external hardships (Gruttner, 2024)

However, SDT's emphasis on supportive environments and intrinsic motivations often overlooks the challenges they encounter, whether it be sociopolitical exclusion or structural inequities (Cha, 2020), which profoundly shape the educational opportunities and aspirations of gifted refugees in Lebanon.

All in all, the integration of Critical Race Theory, Trauma Theory, Cultural-Ecological Model, Resilience Theory, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) creates a comprehensive theoretical framework that addresses the complexities of gifted Palestinian refugee students' experiences. Critical Race Theory highlights how bias from policies and institutions excludes Palestinian refugees and marginalizes them; this further hinders the recognition and development of gifted refugee pupils. Trauma Theory contextualizes how challenging circumstances impact students' psychological and cognitive development, reducing their ability to focus and engage meaningfully. This

perspective is often deficit-oriented, overlooking individual agency and resilience. Also, the Cultural Ecological Model highlights the interplay between systematic barriers and cultural adaptations, illustrating how these factors influence gifted students' opportunities and subsequent behaviors. Yet, it tends to overemphasize structural constraints while underestimating personal agency.

Third, the Resilience Theory complements these perspectives by focusing on the adaptive processes and protective factors that enable students to thrive. However, it risks idealizing resilience while neglecting students' challenges. Finally, SDT provides a psychological dimension, exploring how intrinsic motivation, autonomy, competencies, and relatedness sustain aspirations and growth. Its limitation lies in its insufficient attention to structural and cultural nuances. Together, these frameworks address each other's gaps, offering a holistic perspective and a balanced approach that captures the interplay among barriers, individual agency, and protective factors in exploring the experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee students.

The findings of this study were interpreted through Critical Race Theory, Trauma Theory, Cultural Ecological Model and Resilience Theory. The Critical Race Theory examined how systems of power and legal exclusion influence Palestinian refugee students' access to educational opportunities and recognition. This allowed us to understand how discrimination, statelessness, and institutional marginalization coincide with their school life and shape their educational trajectories. In addition, trauma theory complemented the CRT by addressing the psychological consequences of displacement, constant instability, and exposure to violence. It described how trauma coexists with their gifts and talents, influencing their actions, coping strategies, and academic engagement. The Cultural Ecological Model further supported the interpretation of students'

experiences by situating their development within interconnected cultural, familial, school and sociopolitical contexts, highlighting how environment constraints and supports shape the expression of students' giftedness. Then, Resilience Theory expressed students' adaptive capacities in navigating adversity. It illuminated how gifted refugee students see their personal strength, make meaning of circumstances, and persist in sustaining their aspirations. It also showed students' reliance on external support and faith to overcome constraints.

Literature Review

Building on the theoretical framework, this literature review examines the empirical and contextual evidence on the experiences of Palestinian refugee students. It examines how trauma, systematic barriers, protective factors, and aspirations intersect to shape their educational and personal trajectories. It begins by addressing the impact of trauma on cognitive and emotional development; it then delves into how disruptions obscure giftedness, particularly in marginalized and under-resourced areas. It emphasizes how systematic and institutional constraints hinder the recognition and development of gifted potential. The literature then shifts to focus on resilience, highlighting the individual, familial, and community mechanisms that enable students to adapt and thrive despite adversity. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of aspirations, framing them as both personal and communal drivers of success and collective uplift. These cohesive progressions from challenge to adaptive mechanisms with a forward-looking sense provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of gifted Palestinian refugees, contextualizing their struggles and strengths.

Giftedness

The concept of giftedness has been defined through various lenses, with each offering unique insights into individual potential (Al-Hroub, 1999, 2012). Sidney Marland (1971) presents a comprehensive definition of giftedness that encompasses children identified by qualified professionals as capable of high performance in areas such as general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability. He emphasizes the need for differentiated educational programs to cater to these students' unique needs. It also acknowledged that giftedness encompasses both demonstrated achievements and potential abilities.

However, Joseph Renzulli (2021) proposed the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness, which identifies three core traits: above-average ability, high levels of creativity, and high task commitment. By focusing on how these traits interact, the model aims to inspire curiosity about the complexity of giftedness. Above-average ability corresponds to exceptional cognitive skills such as abstract reasoning and memory, creativity represents one's ability to generate original and divergent ideas, and task commitment refers to high motivation, perseverance, and dedication to tasks. This model highlights the dynamic nature of giftedness, emphasizing that these traits interact to produce gifted behaviors. His model moved beyond IQ-based assessments by incorporating creativity and motivation as essential components.

Additionally, Howard Gardner (2011) challenges the traditional view of intelligence as a single, general ability by proposing the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. He identified eight distinct intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. His framework

challenges the traditional IQ-centric view of intelligence, advocating for a broader recognition of talents. It underscores the importance of recognizing individual strengths across diverse domains. However, critics argue that the theory lacks empirical support and consistent assessment tools.

Abraham Tannenbaum (1979) introduced another definition of giftedness, the Star Model of Giftedness. It integrates five factors: general ability, special aptitude, non-intellectual traits, environmental support, and chance. It emphasizes the interplay of all these factors, suggesting that giftedness is the product of both innate abilities and external influences. It also distinguishes between producers, which are creatures of thought or tangible products, and performers, which are demonstrators of artistry or services.

Francoys Gagne (2004) proposes a differentiated model of giftedness and talent in which he perceives gifts as natural abilities and talent as systematically developed skills. He identifies four domains of giftedness: intellectual, creative, socio-affective, and sensory-motor. His model emphasized the role of environmental factors and development in transforming giftedness into observable talent. Unlike Renzulli (2021), Gagne's (2004) framework acknowledges underachieving students with high potential.

A common thread among these definitions is the recognition that giftedness extends beyond academic achievement and encompasses a broad range of human abilities. Giftedness is multifaceted and cannot be fully captured by standardized intelligence tests alone. Gardner (2011), Renzulli (2021), Gagne (2004), and Tannenbaum (1979) highlight the importance of creativity, motivation, and other non-cognitive traits as integral to giftedness. Moreover, Marland's (1971) definition incorporates a wide range of abilities, including creative thinking, leadership, and visual performing arts, which aligns with Gardner's (2011) broader recognition of multiple intelligences. Also,

both Tannenbaum's (1979) and Renzulli's (2021) models emphasize that giftedness involves an interaction of diverse factors, including both intellectual and nonintellectual traits. Gagne (2004) also focuses on the transformation of innate abilities into observable talent through the interplay of natural gifts and systematic development.

The criteria for identifying giftedness vary across models, with each reflecting different priorities and challenges. Marland's definition emphasizes professional evaluations and demonstrated abilities, whereas Renzulli's (2021) model requires the interplay of above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment. However, the latter may exclude underachieving students with high potential but low motivation. Gagne's Model, on the other hand, explicitly acknowledges them through emphasizing that external factors may inhibit the development of talent.

Additionally, Tannenbaum (1979) introduces non-intellectual traits and the element of chance, which some consider less structured compared to Renzulli's (2021) or Gardner's (2011) frameworks. While Renzulli's (2021) model has been critiqued for overlooking external factors that may hinder giftedness, Tannenbaum (1979) acknowledges these influences, offering a more context-sensitive approach. Moreover, Gardner's (2011) theory of Multiple Intelligences has faced criticism for lacking empirical validation and for the lack of consistent measurement tools, unlike the more observable criteria in Renzulli's (2021) and Gagne's (2004) frameworks. Also, Marland (1971) formalized assessment processes that rely on professional evaluations and demonstrated abilities, which differ from the broader but less operationalized approaches of Gardner (2011) and Tannenbaum (1979).

Impact of Trauma on Cognitive and Emotional Development

Trauma within context of displacement is not experienced as a uniform event, but as an ongoing condition that shapes students' cognitive and emotional development. For gifted Palestinian refugee students, trauma is embedded within daily experiences of instability, uncertainty, and structural exclusion. Therefore, this section moves beyond abstract definition to examine how trauma affects attention, memory, and motivation and well as their emotional regulation and engagement with learning.

Effect on Focus, Motivation, and Emotional Regulation

Van der Kolk (2014) provides a foundational understanding of how trauma affects the brain's ability to process information, regulate emotions, and engage effectively with the world, often hindering personal growth and learning. It triggers physiological and neurological responses such as emotional numbness, impulsivity, and hypervigilance, making it difficult for individuals to engage in cognitive tasks or maintain consistent motivation (Van der Kolk, 2014). Refugee children who experience displacement or violence may struggle to regulate their emotions, leading to behavioral challenges such as anxiety, withdrawal, or aggression. These symptoms interfere with their performance and often lead to misinterpretations of their views of the child's actions. Hence, it is viewed as inattentiveness or lack of ability rather than a trauma response. However, Van der Kolk's (2014) work does not offer tailored strategies for fostering engagement among traumatized students in resource-constrained environments. Also, it lacks cross-cultural validation, limiting its applicability to contexts like refugee children in Lebanon.

Supporting this, Pierry (2006) expands on the specific neurological impacts of trauma, focusing on impairments to the brain's prefrontal cortex. This brain region is responsible for essential functions such as attention regulation, decision-making, impulse

control, emotional regulation, and working memory. Trauma-induced damage to the prefrontal cortex undermines children's ability to manage behaviors in social and academic settings, making it challenging for children to focus on classroom activities, follow instructions, and adapt to new information. The resulting behaviors, such as outbursts, fidgeting, and struggling to remember instructions, are often viewed as disruptive behaviors of the underlying trauma as well (Perry, 2006). However, this study does not extend its findings to classroom practices, leaving educators without clear guidance on how to support students struggling with these challenges.

Similarly, Herman (2015) argues that trauma impacts an individual's sense of safety, trust, and self-efficacy, which are critical factors for motivation. She highlights that prolonged exposure to challenges and hardships reduces the child's ability to remain emotionally present in learning environments, as their mental energy becomes consumed by survival strategies. For instance, refugee students often prioritize managing fear and instability over classroom tasks, resulting in underachievement and disengagement from education. Betancourt et al. (2013) reinforce this perspective, showing that trauma often creates significant psychological barriers for children, including refugee populations. It disrupts their ability to engage meaningfully in their environment by possessing extra internal challenges, such as depression and anxiety, which impede their learning and social integration. Especially among refugee populations, education and mental health resources are limited, further amplifying these challenges and making it more difficult for children to recover and reach their full potential. While Betancourt et al. (2013) effectively capture the dynamic impacts of trauma over time, they highlight the limitations of qualitative data in generalizing findings across diverse cultural settings.

These understandings are crucial in understanding the emotional and cognitive challenges of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon. It provides evidence of how trauma-induced behaviors, such as withdrawal, can lead to misidentification and neglect. In contrast to this view of trauma, Mollica (2009) introduces another perspective suggesting that while trauma disrupts cognitive and emotional functioning, it can also catalyze adaptive processes. Drawing on studies of trauma survivors, Mollica (2009) highlights that some children develop extraordinary coping mechanisms, such as reframing adversity into purpose or using education as a pathway to regain control and hope. This can be observed among refugee students who exhibit high levels of self-motivation and goal-setting in response to circumstances. Ungar (2011) supports this claim, emphasizing that resilience emerges through a combination of factors that allow children to transform challenges into pathways for growth.

Manifestation of Trauma Symptoms Masking Giftedness

Trauma can mask giftedness in students, particularly in challenging contexts such as refugee populations, where emotional and behavioral manifestation often obscure their academic abilities. Al-Hroub (2014) highlights how trauma-induced behaviors, such as anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, or hypervigilance, are frequently misinterpreted by educators as deficiencies or learning disabilities. For instance, Palestinian refugee students in Jordan and Lebanon displayed a lack of participation or emotional detachment, often leading to the misidentification of giftedness (Al-Hroub, 2014). Teachers who are untrained to recognize the effects of trauma may perceive these behaviors as indicative of low ability rather than as responses to adversity. This misinterpretation creates barriers to providing the needed type of support for gifted refugee students, leaving many of their potential unacknowledged and overlooked.

Pieloch et al. (2016) further emphasize that trauma affects children's ability to exhibit traditional markers of giftedness. Children with refugee status often internalize their trauma, suppressing behaviors such as curiosity, creativity, or leadership, which are crucial for identifying giftedness. For instance, refugee students may avoid drawing attention to themselves out of fear or insecurity, masking their advanced skills and intellectual curiosity. Additionally, Pieloch et al. (2016) argue that trauma often leads to heightened emotional regulation challenges, which complicate the visibility of gifted behaviors. Traditional approaches to identifying giftedness, which rely on overt academic or creative performance, fail to account for the hidden potential of these children.

These findings align with Ford (2011), who argues that systematic biases in gifted identification frameworks fail to consider trauma-related behavioral suppression, compounding the invisibility of gifted students from marginalized communities. Similarly, Ford & Grantham (2003) note that cultural misunderstanding can exacerbate this issue, as teachers may fail to recognize culturally specific expressions of giftedness, overlooking their talents and leaving their strengths hidden under layers of trauma and misinterpretation.

While the majority of research emphasizes that trauma obscures giftedness, some studies offer alternative perspectives that challenge this notion. For instance, Gagne (2004) argues that giftedness is a multifaceted construct that can remain evident even under challenging circumstances. It suggests that gifted behaviors can still emerge even when traditional indicators such as academic performance are masked. Similarly, Renzulli (2021), who developed the Three-Ring Model of giftedness, emphasizes that while trauma affects certain traits such as motivation and focus, it does not entirely hinder creativity or problem-solving skills that can be identified through alternate assessments.

Displacement and Instability Disrupting Learning Environments

Displacement and instability pose significant barriers to students' educational engagement and success (Al-Hroub, in press). Shabaneh (2012) emphasizes how displacement disrupts the stability needed for effective learning. Similar studies report the detrimental effects of displacement on children aged 0 to 6 years' social-emotional and cognitive development (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Rivera et al., 2024). The World Health Organization (2021) discusses the mental health challenges faced by displaced children, noting that their experiences hinder their emotional regulation and learning. Moreover, the World Bank's report (2020) highlights its adverse educational outcomes for refugees, noting that more than half of children remain out of school.

Refugee children, particularly those within UNRWA education programs, face unstable living conditions, overcrowded schools, and limited access to resources, which hinder their ability to focus and succeed academically. In addition, Shabaneh (2012) highlights that such instability erodes the sense of continuity and routine necessary for students to thrive, exacerbating feelings of insecurity and disengagement in academic settings. Building on this, Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) highlight that refugee children experience educational marginalization due to inadequate resources in schools located in refugee camps. They found that many of these schools exacerbate challenges for students by limiting their ability to participate effectively in their education.

However, opposing views, such as those of Ungar (2011), Mollica (2009), and Masten et al. (2012), often view displacements as a means of fostering resilience and adaptability in students. They believe that students develop perseverance and problem-solving skills needed to overcome educational challenges, further transforming adversity

into motivation. Thus, instead of demeaning gifted refugees, it provides them with a tool to rebuild their lives and communities while achieving their aspirations.

Barrier to Identifying Giftedness

Identifying giftedness among Palestinian refugee students is shaped by a range of interrelated barriers that extends beyond individual ability. Within refugee contexts, these barriers are rooted in how giftedness is defined, perceived and supported within educational systems. This section emphasizes the culturally bounded definitions of giftedness, teacher perceptions influenced by bias, and resource constraints with underfunded educational systems (El Khoury & Al-Hroub, 2028).

Defining Giftedness and Cultural Limitations

Giftedness is traditionally defined as exceptional intellectual, creative, or artistic abilities as well as leadership potential or high achievement in specific academic domains. However, these definitions reflect Western-centric perspectives, focusing on measurable traits such as standardized test performance and academic excellence. Ungar (2011) and Carman (2013) highlight that such definitions fail to account for cultural variations in how giftedness is expressed and recognized. Consequently, this narrow conceptualization excludes students from diverse cultural backgrounds whose abilities do not align with dominant definitions. On the contrary, Sternberg (2005) suggests that intellectual and creative abilities are universally measurable and that cultural differences are less significant in identifying giftedness.

Teacher Perceptions and Cultural Bias

Teacher perceptions play a pivotal role in identifying and nurturing gifted students. In Lebanon, a lack of awareness of the diverse manifestations of giftedness can lead to neglecting gifts and potential. Antoun et al. (2020) investigated Lebanese primary

school teachers' perceptions of gifted and highly able students. They revealed that cultural factors significantly influence teachers' identification and support.

Ford et al. (2008) discuss the underrepresentation of culturally different students in gifted education, emphasizing that deficit thinking leads to low referral rates of Black and Hispanic students for gifted screening and placement in education. This perspective is relevant to Lebanon, where similar biases may affect the identification of gifted students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This disproportionality affects students from diverse backgrounds, with their unique talents and strengths going unnoticed. For instance, Ford (2011) highlights that educator can overlook creativity expressed through cultural traditions or problem-solving skills within familial or community contexts. It also overlooks refugee students' adaptability, resilience, and interpersonal skills (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2014).

Moreover, teachers can misinterpret behaviors like emotional withdrawal and quietness as signs of disinterest or low ability, while they are usually the outcome of cultural norms or trauma. Consequently, students are not identified for gifted programs, thereby perpetuating systemic inequalities (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Resource Constraints and Underfunded Educational Systems

The Lebanese education sector faces numerous challenges, including economic crises, political instability, and an influx of refugees, which strain the system's capacity to cater to diverse student needs. Sarouphim (2015) and Al-Hroub (2012) highlight that the absence of formal policies for gifted education in Lebanon results in a lack of specialized programs and resources for gifted learners. This deficiency is exacerbated by limited teacher training in recognizing and nurturing students' giftedness, leading to under-identification and inadequate support. The economic downturn has further

diminished educational funding, affecting the quality of education and the availability of enrichment programs essential for gifted students' development. This is evident in the World Bank (2021) report, which states that Lebanon's public education system is experiencing declining outcomes due to inadequate investment and systemic struggles. It has reduced public spending on education, affecting infrastructure, teacher salaries, and the provision of learning materials, impacting vulnerable populations, including refugees who depend on these public education services.

The situation is particularly dire for Palestinian refugees, who primarily rely on the UNRWA for education. Shabaneh (2012) discusses how UNRWA's education programs operate under severe financial constraints, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, outdated curricula, and insufficient educational materials. These limitations hinder the school's ability to implement specialized programs for gifted students, leaving their potential undeveloped.

Resilience as a Coping Mechanism

Literature conceptualizes resilience among refugee children as multifaceted processes shaped by the interaction of individual capacities, familial supports systems, institutional environments, and broader community networks. Rather than viewing resilience as an innate personal trait, scholars emphasize its emergence through adaptive coping strategies, relational support, and culturally embedded practices that enable students to adapt, sustain motivation, navigate adversity and pursue growth.

Individual Strategies for Coping and Growth

Pieloch et al. (2016) emphasize that personal traits such as optimism, problem-solving skills, and adaptability are essential components of resilience, particularly in refugee children. These findings align with Mollica (2009), who underscores the

importance of self-healing mechanisms, such as storytelling and cultural rituals, in fostering psychological recovery. Both studies converge on the idea that resilience is not innate but is cultivated through internal strategies and external support systems. Building on this perspective, Sleijpen et al. (2016) highlight the roles of cognitive reframing and maintaining cultural identity in helping refugee adolescents adapt to post-displacement challenges. This resonates with Ungar's (2011) ecological approach, which asserts that individual resilience emerges in interaction with broader environmental and cultural contexts. For instance, refugee children who are encouraged to retain their cultural practices demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy and emotional regulation.

While Pieloch et al. (2016) and Mollica (2009) emphasize the healing and adaptive functions of resilience, Betancourt et al. (2013) add another layer by identifying hope and goal setting as crucial coping strategies. Refugee children who set educational goals often use them as a means of regaining control over their disrupted lives, bridging the personal and societal dimensions of resilience. In addition, gifted refugee students usually exhibit advanced critical and creative thinking, enabling them to navigate challenges. For example, Al-Hroub (2011) conducted a study on gifted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and found that their ability to adapt was closely tied to their intellectual strengths and cognitive flexibility. Emotional regulation also allows refugee students to manage the psychological distress associated with displacement (Pieloch et al., 2016). For example, students rely on positive self-motivation and goal-setting to maintain focus on their education despite external hardships. It helps them channel frustration or fear into constructive behaviors (Ungar, 2011).

Therefore, these studies highlight the role of hope and goal setting, gaining a sense of control and purpose in their lives. This aligns with the idea that aspirations serve as

motivational drivers for gifted students, helping them channel adversity into constructive actions toward achieving their futures. Moreover, they reflect how students confront challenges with unique strategies that intersect giftedness with resilience.

Familial Supports as Protective Factors

Emotional support, cultural values, and familial stability serve as protective factors for refugee students. Families often provide emotional encouragement and a sense of belonging that fosters resilience among children experiencing displacement. Pieloch et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of family cohesion in combating stress by serving as emotional anchors that support them in the face of uncertainty. In Lebanon, many Palestinian refugee families rely on this strong kinship and collective parenting style to instill hope and perseverance. Traditions and religious practices offer emotional support and coping mechanisms during challenging times. For instance, the concept of *sumud*, meaning steadfastness, embodies collective resilience and unity with Palestinian families, reinforcing their ability to withstand adversity (Marie et al., 2018). Cultural values such as collectivism and shared responsibility further enhance familial resilience by promoting emotional stability through family bonds and cultural heritage.

Additionally, the emphasis on education for Palestinian families serves as a pathway to success, instilling purpose and motivation, critical components for preserving dignity and overcoming structural inequities (American Psychological Association, 2010; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). By promoting educational attainment, families empower their children to overcome structural inequity and preserve their dignity amidst displacement.

This cultural prioritization of education fosters resilience by providing children with tools to navigate and adapt to their challenging environment. While reinforcing cultural identity, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation, it enables them to shape their

personal growth, reinforcing their commitment to growth as a communal and individual aspiration.

Systematic Supports for Building Resilience

Institutions, primarily schools, also play a critical role in encouraging resilience among gifted refugee students by offering inclusive environments, mentorship, and supportive teachers. Schools can serve as safe spaces where students access emotional, intellectual, and social support to counteract the instability of displacement. Al-Hroub and Whitebread (2008) found that teachers who identify and nurture gifted students play a vital role in fostering their academic and emotional resilience. By recognizing their talent and potential, educators can provide individualized support that empowers them to excel.

Inclusive teaching practices, such as differentiated instruction and culturally sensitive approaches, allow students to feel seen and valued. For instance, programs that offer language support, extracurricular activities, enrichment opportunities, and trauma-informed educational environments help gifted refugee students overcome the challenge to participate meaningfully in their academic journey (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Valenzuela et al., 2023). While these studies are not conducted in Lebanon, they provide a foundation for developing localized interventions that recognize the nuanced expressions of giftedness among gifted refugee students by considering their backgrounds and challenges.

Community Networks and Collective Resilience

At the community level, cultural networks, peer relationships, and a strong identity serve as vital sources of resilience for gifted refugee students. Communities provide a sense of belonging, shared purpose, and emotional support, enabling students

to overcome feelings of alienation and exclusion. They foster resilience by reinforcing cultural identity and solidarity, helping students remain anchored to their heritage as they navigate their journeys (UNRWA, 2024). Pajevic et al. (2007) assert that participation in cultural or religious practices offers psychological and emotional stability for refugees.

Peer relationships further contribute to resilience by offering emotional support and reducing feelings of isolation. Students who engage with peers facing similar struggles develop a collective sense of resilience that reduces feelings of isolation. Peer groups and mentoring have been shown to facilitate positive adaptation among refugee adolescents, enabling them to maintain mental health despite circumstances (Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 2023)

Collective identity plays a pivotal role in resilience by linking personal success to communal progress. For Palestinian refugee students, educational achievements are often viewed as contributions to their families and communities, reinforcing their sense of responsibility and purpose. Ungar (2011) highlights that this collective identity sustains motivation among students, as they strive to overcome hardships not only for personal gain but also for advancing their broader community.

Therefore, community networks and collective resilience shape gifted refugee children's aspirations and growth by providing emotional support, fostering cultural identity, and creating a shared sense of purpose. This psychological stability and motivation are necessary to envision meaningful futures and navigate their dual identities as both refugees and gifted learners.

Aspirations

Aspirations represent a pivotal component in understanding how gifted Palestinian refugee students navigate their journeys, particularly within contexts of adversity and

displacement. Scholars consistently emphasize that aspirations act as a motivational driver, providing students with a sense of purpose and direction despite systematic challenges (Appadurai, 2007; Masten et al., 2012). For instance, Appadurai (2007) conceptualizes aspirations as a cultural capacity, arguing that the ability to envision future possibilities is influenced by one's social environment. This aligns with Ungar's (2011) ecological perspective, which emphasizes that aspirations among marginalized students are often tied to their cultural identity and community goals. For Palestinian refugee students, aspirations serve a dual purpose: they motivate personal academic success and contribute to communal uplift, as highlighted by Ungar (2011), who underscores the role of collective identity in shaping students' goals.

Aspirations as Motivation for Personal Academic Success

Aspirations act as a driving force for Palestinian refugee students, motivating them to strive for personal academic excellence despite systematic challenges. It provides them with a sense of purpose and agency, which further enhances their vision for a better future. Masten et al. (2012) emphasize that future-oriented thinking helps students maintain hope and purpose while facing challenges. This is also supported by Pieloch et al. (2016), who identify goal setting as a key coping strategy among refugee youth, enabling them to transform experiences of displacement into opportunities for growth. Additionally, Ford (2011) asserts the critical importance of aspirations for high-achieving students in marginalized contexts; they provide the psychological drive needed to persist in resource-scarce environments.

For example, Betancourt et al. (2013) explored the role of aspirations among refugee adolescents in Uganda, finding that students who articulated clear educational goals were more likely to demonstrate resilience and academic persistence despite

overcoming significant barriers such as poverty and displacement. Similarly, Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) note that Syrian refugee youth in Turkey frequently express a desire to pursue higher education, often identifying specific areas such as medicine or engineering. These aspirations help them maintain focus on their studies despite limited access to resources and the uncertainty in their lives.

Aspirations as Contributors to Communal Uplift

Aspirations among Palestinian refugee students extend beyond personal success to encompass a collective sense of responsibility toward their communities. Ungar (2011) emphasizes that for these students, academic achievement is often viewed as a contribution to the social and economic advancement of their families and broader communities. This collective identity drives students to succeed not only for themselves but also to serve as role models and agents of change. Furthermore, gifted refugee students often channel their aspirations into academic pursuits, visualizing education as a pathway to break cycles of poverty. Dryden-Peterson (2016) highlights how Somali refugee students in Kenya viewed education as a means of gaining autonomy and providing for their families. This aspiration was evident in their dedication to schooling despite limited resources. Similarly, Heath and Zahedi (2014) studied Afghan refugee students in the UK and found their aspirations were closely tied to a desire to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to society.

Ford (2011) adds that aspirations among high-achieving students in marginalized contexts enable them to overcome resource scarcity and limited access to quality education. This is supported by the findings of Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015), who noted that Syrian refugee students in Turkey often expressed aspirations to pursue higher education to secure stability and a better future for their families. In this study, aspirations

are examined not only as individual ambitions but also as reflections of students' resilience and determination to excel in adversity.

While these studies were not conducted in Lebanon, they offer valuable insights into the universal potential of aspirations to shape academic resilience across diverse populations. It contextualizes aspirations within the unique challenges and opportunities faced by refugee students and underscores the transformative power of how gifted refugees can envision their futures through education as a means for stability, autonomy, and personal fulfillment.

Summary

The literature reviewed was carefully selected to ensure a comprehensive and focused discussion on the intersection of giftedness, refugee status, resilience, and aspirations. They were included to explore the educational experiences of gifted students, the impact of trauma on cognitive and emotional development, resilience as a coping mechanism in marginalized populations, and aspirations as motivational drivers for personal success and communal uplift. Yet, the literature lacks a specific focus on gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon.

While studies on trauma (e.g., Betancourt et al., 2013; Van der Kolk, 2014) emphasize its cognitive and emotional impacts, they often fail to provide actionable strategies for educators in resource-constrained environments like Lebanon. Similarly, research on resilience highlights individual, familial, and community mechanisms that foster adaptability (Mollica, 2009; Ungar, 2011), but there is limited exploration of how these mechanisms intersect with the unique traits of gifted refugee students. Although systematic barriers such as underfunded education systems and teacher biases are well-documented (Al-Hroub, 2014; Sarouphim, 2015), the specific challenges of identifying

and nurturing giftedness within marginalized communities remain underexplored. Furthermore, while aspirations are framed as pivotal drivers of personal and communal uplift, the literature lacks an in-depth analysis of how they are shaped by gifted refugee students, who encompass high levels of exceptional ability and are displaced individuals.

These gaps highlight the need for research that integrates the interplay of trauma, resilience, systematic barriers, and aspirations in the specific context of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, through providing localized insights to address their unique experiences. Thus, this study builds on these insights through a narrative qualitative approach to amplify the voices of these individuals and examine how their identities as both refugees and gifted students shape their futures.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study to explore the lived experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon. It implemented a qualitative narrative approach, followed by a description of the participant and the purposive sampling used. The data collection instrument employed was interviews. This chapter discusses in detail the procedure and narrative analysis strategy used to interpret the findings. Finally, it concludes with the role of the researcher throughout this process.

Research Design

The study employed qualitative research design, specifically a narrative qualitative approach, as it aligned closely with the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research problem. This guaranteed their voices are heard and contextualized within their broader sociocultural environment (Polkinghorne, 1995). It captures how personal stories are embedded within broader institutional structures, cultural norms, and power relations allowing systematic factors to emerge through lived accounts. Through their stories, these aspects become visible as they are experienced, negotiated, and interpreted in everyday life. Moreover, this approach highlighted the narrative arc of struggle and transformation, which is essential when examining how refugees persist in the face of adversity (Frank, 2013). It moved beyond exploring individuals' hardships to examine how they adapt to thrive toward their goals.

By centering storytelling, it empowered participants to articulate their experiences in their own voices, fostering agency and ethical engagement that are especially critical when dealing with vulnerable populations (Chase, 2005). It also allowed them to engage as co-creators of knowledge rather than being passive subjects. It fostered trust among

participants by creating mutual understanding between participants and researcher, enabling richer, more nuanced data collection on the interaction between personal experience and structural constraint (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Guided by this research design, the study aimed to explore how gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon experience and perceive their educational journeys. Specifically, this study sought to shed light on their challenges, the strategies they use to navigate them, their aspirations within their lived constraints.

Accordingly, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon narrate their educational experiences, including their socio-political, financial, psychological, academic, and environmental challenges?
2. How do gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon navigate challenges while pursuing their aspirations?

Participants

The participants in this study are Palestinian refugee students enrolled in secondary education, particularly in grades 10, 11, and 12, in schools managed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. The selection of students in these grade levels is important since the manifestation of giftedness becomes more pronounced during adolescence. During this developmental stage, students exhibit heightened cognitive abilities, critical thinking skills, and self-awareness, making it a crucial period for identifying and nurturing gifted potential (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2008; Subotnik et al., 2011). These grades also coincide with primary academic milestones in which students prepare for final examinations and decisions regarding higher education or career pathways (Renzulli, 2021); this can amplify opportunities for giftedness to

emerge. The study was conducted in the region of Saida, Lebanon, since it hosts a large number of Palestinian refugees along with the presence of multiple UNRWA schools. This location offers rich contextual insights into the socio-political and educational barriers affecting refugee students.

Given the nature of narrative inquiry, this study prioritizes the depth and richness of individual stories over the breadth of participants to capture their detailed experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Riessman (2008) emphasize that this research type benefits from smaller sample sizes (1-10 participants) to allow for an iterative and comprehensive analysis of stories. In line with this, the study included 11 participants, enabling deep engagement with their narratives.

Sampling Procedure

The research employed purposive sampling to select participants who provided rich insights into the experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee students (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Given the absence of formal identification protocols for gifted students in Lebanon, a teacher-nomination-based identification process is implemented. This method is particularly relevant, as traditional identification tools often fail to account for the obstacles that prevent refugee students from fully showcasing their abilities (Al-Hroub, 2014).

Teachers were asked to nominate students based on observable indicators of giftedness, as measured by the Renzulli-Hartman Scale (Treffinger & Renzulli, 1986). Nominations focused on two primary domains of giftedness: academics and artistic. After that, a pool of potentially gifted students was selected. Students nominated for academic giftedness were categorized into Hard Science or Languages, while those who were identified artistically gifted were classified under music, drawing, or performance.

To further validate their abilities, additional assessment measures were implemented. Academically gifted students underwent a review of their academic records for the past three academic years. In cases where students were identified as gifted in Languages, writing samples were examined. This process was implemented to ensure that the student is of high academic ability. Moreover, for artistically gifted students and gifted writers, a portfolio review was conducted in which students displayed examples of their work including art pieces, music compositions, performances, etc. These submissions were evaluated by at least two experts to assess whether the students' abilities qualify them as gifted. Thus, implementing multiple sources combated the challenge of overlooking students whose abilities manifest in non-traditional ways (Cross & Coleman, 2014; Gagne, 2004; Siegle et al., 2016).

From this pool of identified gifted students, a final sample of 11 students was selected. This selection process ensured a comprehensively representative sample of the target population in terms of gender and socio-economic background and included students with exceptionalities across a variety of disciplines and interests.

Informational sessions with students and their families who agreed to participate in this research were conducted to introduce the study's goals, methods, and ethical safeguards. The consent form was obtained from all participants and their guardians in Arabic, the participants' primary language. In compliance with ethical standards, an assent form was obtained from their parents or guardians because they are under 18. Participants were assured that participation in the research is completely voluntary. The consent and assent forms emphasize confidentiality by explaining that data will be anonymous and securely stored. Pseudonyms were assigned to each student with personal identifiers

removed during the transcription and analysis. This ensures transparency and encourages their participation.

By employing this sampling method and targeting this specific group, this research seeks to capture a representative sample of this population and provide robust data collection, ensuring depth in voicing this population's journey.

Instruments

In this study, data were collected through a narrative storytelling interview, a method aligned with narrative inquiry. This technique allowed participants to construct, interpret, and share their educational journeys in their own words, providing deep insights into their experiences, challenges, and aspirations. Given the marginalization of refugee students within formal educational systems, this method was intentionally selected to foreground students' voices and counter deficit-oriented representations. Moreover, it offered flexibility, enabling participants to reflect on their past, make sense of their present, and envision their future without external imposition, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The use of narrative storytelling interviews is grounded in qualitative research and is particularly well-suited for this study for several reasons. First, it centered the participants' voice, allowing them to reconstruct their experiences rather than merely responding to researcher-imposed categories (Jovchelovitch & Baur, 2000). It also ensured a natural, participant-led flow, reducing power imbalances between the researcher and participants and fostering a conversational atmosphere where students felt comfortable sharing their stories. Additionally, narrative storytelling interviews are particularly valuable for underrepresented and marginalized groups as they provide space for self-expression and personal agency (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Instead of labeling students as gifted or assuming pre-existing challenges, this method enabled them to define their own narratives (McCormack, 2004). Furthermore, it allowed for deep exploration of meaning-making, an essential element when working with refugee students, whose experiences are shaped by historical, social, and personal complexities (Muylaert et al., 2014; Sandelowski, 1991). As White and Epston (1990) argue in their development of narrative therapy, externalizing experiences and re-authoring one's story are powerful tools for resilience and self-understanding. By encouraging students to articulate their experiences as stories, this instrument not only collected data but also served as an empowering practice.

The interview process was structured to facilitate storytelling while maintaining a coherent flow that supports memory recall and deep reflection. It was designed using Siedman's (1998) three-stage interview model, which emphasized building rapport, exploring key experiences, and encouraging reflection and future thinking. It also followed McCormack's (2004) storytelling framework, ensuring that the interviews were flexible and participant-centered. The narrative interviews also followed a structured yet flexible process to maintain consistency across participants while allowing room for personalized storytelling.

To strengthen methodological rigor, data were triangulated through the use of vignettes as analytic provocations enabling participants to reflect on shared experiences without direct self-disclosure. The vignettes presented a short, hypothetical scenario depicting everyday lives common to their refugee contexts, without being specific. It allowed students to project meanings, emotions and values without directly disclosing. This approach was specifically pivotal given the sensitivity of displacement conditions,

as it respected participants' rights to opacity by permitting them to speak indirectly when direct narration felt emotionally demanding (Demetrious, 2023).

Procedure

After the participants were identified through the nomination process, they were contacted. The researcher collaborated with teachers to introduce the study to selected students and their parents/guardians. A preliminary online meeting was scheduled, where participants received a clear explanation of the interview process. During this session, the researcher provided informed consent forms to parents and assent forms to students. To ensure accessibility and cultural sensitivity, the consent forms were provided in Arabic, and participants were encouraged to ask any questions before making any decision regarding their participation (Siedman, 1998). Once consent was obtained, the interviews were scheduled at times and locations convenient for the participants, ensuring they felt comfortable, safe, and at ease throughout the process.

Before the formal interview began, the researcher re-explained the interview process. They were reminded that their identities will remain anonymous, and they may pause, skip questions, or withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions. Ethical considerations were emphasized, especially the importance of voluntary participation and confidentiality.

The interviews were structured according to a three-phase narrative storytelling approach, ensuring a logical and natural flow of conversation (Siedman, 1998). A complete list of interview questions is included in Appendix A. The first phase focused on building rapport and establishing trust, allowing participants to reflect on their daily experiences and interests. Questions were general and non-threatening, ensuring participants felt comfortable before delving into more personal topics. The second phase

explored their academic experiences, challenges, and relationships with others, such as teachers and peers, allowing students to express both their successes and struggles. Moreover, they were encouraged to share their narratives of key moments in their education, including those that made them feel proud, motivated, or even misunderstood. Throughout this phase, the researcher employed active listening techniques, including reflective prompts such as “Can you tell me more about that?” and clarification questions like “How did that experience affect you?” Questions were framed to avoid placing blame on individuals or systems and instead encouraged participants to reflect on their perspectives and meaning-making processes (Siedman, 1998). Furthermore, during this phase, students were presented with a short vignette, a hypothetical scenario illustrating everyday experiences of refugee students, and asked to reflect on it. This approach provided refugee students with a way to express while maintaining a degree of distance from personal disclosure (Demetriou, 2023).

In the final phase, participants engaged in future-oriented reflection, considering their aspirations, goals, and perceptions of personal growth. The use of open-ended questions in this phase encouraged students to envision a future beyond the current circumstances (McCormack, 2004). It also ensured that the interview did not end on a negative note, fostering hope, agency, and self-reflection.

Upon completion of the interview, participants were allowed to share any additional thoughts they wished to discuss. The researcher then provided a debriefing of the next steps in the research process and offered contact information in case participants wish to follow up with any concerns or questions. Participants received a sincere acknowledgment of their contributions, reinforcing the idea that their narratives are evaluable and significant (Seidman, 1998).

Each interview lasted about 60-70 minutes, and sufficient time was given for participants to elaborate on their experiences without feeling overwhelmed (Seidman, 1998). They were audio-recorded after obtaining consent from participants and their parents, and field notes were taken that captured nonverbal cues and emotional responses.

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participant narratives. Afterward, transcriptions were translated into English to facilitate analysis. Then, each translated transcription was reviewed with its recording to ensure the quality of the data collected. To ensure confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Data was securely stored with the researcher ensuring that ethical standards for data protection and participant anonymity were strictly upheld.

Data Analysis

This study employed narrative analysis to explore the experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon. This approach is well-suited because it prioritizes how individuals construct and communicate their experiences (Riessman, 2008). Given the deeply personal and context-dependent nature of their educational journeys, narrative analysis enables rich, holistic, and culturally sensitive interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and has been widely used to examine resilience, identity construction, and systemic barriers in education (McAllum et al., 2019; Phoenix, 2008).

Building on this foundation, the Contextual Narrative Interpretation (CNI) model (Finkelstein et al., 2024) guided the interpretation of participants' narratives. CNI recognizes that personal stories are shaped by broader socio-political, cultural, and institutional forces, which are particularly relevant for gifted Palestinian youth in

Lebanon, and it supports analysis of how individuals communicate their experiences within these contexts (Riessman, 2008).

In addition to within-case analysis, a cross-case comparison was conducted to identify commonalities and divergences across participants' experiences (McAllum et al., 2019; Finkelstein et al., 2024). This highlighted both shared struggles and individual meaning-making processes within the refugee education system. The CNI model also informed analysis of students' future aspirations, emphasizing how they envision their educational and career pathways despite external constraints (Phoenix, 2008). This provided insight into how resilience, adaptability, and external support mechanisms shape self-perceptions of giftedness and opportunity (Tisdell et al., 2025).

Role of the Researcher: Positionality and Reflexivity

In this study, the role of the researcher extended beyond the technical responsibilities of conducting interviews, transcribing and translating audio recordings and analyzing data. Recognizing the qualitative nature of this research study, the researcher occupied a relational and reflexive position that required constant ethical awareness and responsibility towards participants and their narratives.

The researcher identifies as both Palestinian and Lebanese. As a Palestinian who navigates similar contextual constraints to the ones described by participants, the researcher approached this study with an embodied understanding of displacement, restricted opportunity, and identity exclusion. They were not unfamiliar abstractions, but experiences that resonated on a personal level. This positionality allowed a shared sense of cultural familiarity, understanding and emotional proximity to their lived realities. It facilitated trust, openness and rapport building during interviews, enabling participants to speak freely and authentically about sensitive aspects of their lives.

At the same time, this proximity required continuous reflexive engagement. The researcher was constantly aware that familiarity could risk assumptions and unintentional projection of personal interpretations into their narratives. To achieve this, the researcher identified their prior knowledge and experiences and remained attentive on how they could shape the research process. Acknowledging them allowed a more conscious effort in conducting interview. The researcher adopted a non-directive and participant-led approach by asking open-ended questions and reflective prompts to allow participants to freely express their views without being led toward particular responses. Participants were given the space to narrate their experiences on their own terms. This upholds the validity of the study and minimizes potential biases that might arise.

Reflexivity was not only intellectual but also emotional. Several narratives shared during interviews were deeply moving and at times, emotionally overwhelming. Hearing students talk about fear, loss, anger, chronic illnesses, responsibilities, endurance, etc. elicited emotional responses from the researcher and a profound sense of responsibility. The researcher treated these reactions as signals that required ethical attention as they were documented through writing, by distinguishing personal emotional responses from participants' intended meanings. This helped ensure that the analysis remained grounded in participants' narratives, not by the researcher's empathetic reactions.

Listening to the audio recordings during transcription and re-listening to participants' voices was another emotionally demanding stage of the research. Rehearing stories of struggle, hope, and suppressed potential reinforced the weight of representation carried by the study. At this study, reflexivity took the form of responsibility toward accuracy and clarity. The researcher was aware that these participants entrusted them with

their stories to be heard and conveyed with integrity. This sense of moral duty guided decisions in transcription, translation and writing, preserving tone, emotion and nuance.

Participants themselves often expressed a desire for their stories to be shared. Many articulated they wanted to be seen, understood and acknowledged within systems that render them invisible. This reinforced the researcher's commitment to ethically represent them, not by romanticizing resilience, amplifying trauma for impact and nor by simplifying complexity for readability. The goal was to present narratives concisely allowing participants' voices to remain central.

The researcher approached this study with a strong sense of moral and ethical responsibility that shaped how knowledge was produced, interpreted and written. Working closely with gifted Palestinian refugee students, this study acknowledged positionality, reflexivity, and moral responsibility. Their stories are often spoken about but rarely listened to on their own terms. Therefore, this study aimed to create a space for participants' voices to be shared without exploiting their experiences.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of this narrative qualitative study that explored the lived experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee students, aiming to understand how giftedness manifests within the context of displacement. Existing research in gifted Education emphasizes the indispensability of recognizing the individual's strengths, interests, as well as their socioemotional abilities to enhance their engagement and achievement (Gagne, 2004; Renzulli, 2021; Subotnik et al., 2011). Simultaneously, the literature on refugee education primarily addresses trauma, displacement, systematic exclusion, and barriers to proper education (Hammoud, 2017; Kiwan, 2021; Shuayb, 2014), which affect their well-being and academic journeys. While scholars have examined gifted education in Lebanon and the barriers facing refugee students, these examinations remain separate, leaving a gap in understanding how giftedness is expressed within refugee contexts, particularly in Lebanon (Al-Hroub, 2014; Antoun, 2022; Shuayb, 2014).

To understand how gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon experience their educational journeys, this chapter begins by presenting individual case studies that foreground their experiences through a narrative lens. Table 4.1 shows an overview of each participant outlining key demographic and educational characteristics.

Table 1*Demographic and Educational Characteristics of the Study UNRWA Participants*

Participants' Pseudonyms	Grade	Gender	Location	Type of Giftedness	Domain
Ali	12	Male	Ain-El-Heliou	Academically Gifted	Sciences
Ayla	10	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Academically Gifted	Language
Dima	11	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Artistically Gifted	Drawing
Ghada	12	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Artistically Gifted	Music
Ismail	12	Male	Ain-El-Heliou	Academically Gifted	Sciences
Lea	12	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Artistically Gifted	Drawing
Shadi	12	Male	Ain-El-Heliou	Artistically Gifted	Music
Rima	11	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Academically Gifted	Poetry
Sara	10	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Artistically Gifted	Drawing
Shahed	11	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Academically Gifted	Language
Zaynab	10	Female	Ain-El-Heliou	Academically Gifted	Sciences

Narrative Case Studies of Gifted Palestinian Refugee Students

This section presents 11 narrative case studies of gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, highlighting their educational trajectories, lived experiences, and meaning-making within contexts of displacement. Together, the cases reveal both shared structural constraints and diverse pathways of resilience and aspiration.

Ali's Profile (Grade 12, Academically Gifted)

Ali is a grade 12 Palestinian refugee male student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. He was nominated by his teachers as academically gifted,

particularly in Hard Sciences, and according to a review of his academic records, he consistently ranks among the top students in his class. His academic excellence was further evidenced through certificates of distinction awarded by the school administration.

During the interview, Ali reported that he demonstrated strong academic abilities and active participation in school activities from an early age. He recalled a foundational experience of public performance in which he recited a poem written by his father during Nakba Day. Another instance involved him recording a video in which he recites a poem over the rubble of destroyed buildings within the camp. He described these instances as a source of pride not only for himself but also for his family.

However, according to his records and the interview, Ali's journey was disrupted frequently. He moved across three different schools; he described this experience being emotionally difficult and challenging especially having to readapt to new environments and peers. He attended the first school from kindergarten through Grade six. He expressed that these years were relatively stable; however, in later years, the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning exacerbated these struggles and left him feeling detached from learning. Moreover, due to transportation challenges, he was forced to leave this school, which he considered home. He recalled crying and not wanting to move to another school.

He was subsequently transferred to another school, which was difficult for him to adjust to. He attended it from Grades 7 to 9. He reported struggling socially to make friendships, and his academic performance declined during the first year. However, Ali mentioned that his teachers became a primary turning point for him through encouraging him. This allowed him to regain his confidence, improve his performance, excel, and

return to his previous level by ranking first. This improvement was supported by school records which showed that he regained his academic standing.

Ali described grade 10 as the most destabilizing and challenging phase in his educational journey, when he transferred to a third school. He depicted this school as lacking proper structure, discipline, and adequate teacher performance, all of which disrupted his commitment to education. In addition, he also mentioned increased exposure to peer relations, especially girls, through bus transportation. He stated that these relationships diverted his attention from academics. He referred to it as a period of moral conflict, guilt, and self-blame that disrupted his academic concentration. He saw it as an academic setback and a betrayal of his faith and future. Despite these disruptions, a review of his academic records indicated that he maintained high academic performance, ranking second in his class. However, after this experience, Ali reported that he decided to recover from this disruption intentionally by distancing himself from his relationships with others and from behaviors that he saw as not aligning with his morals and goals. He described this period as the “phase of recovery”, where he reassessed his priorities and enhanced his self-discipline.

In addition to educational disruptions, Ali disclosed experiencing a critical health problem. According to his self-report, he suddenly collapsed, entered a coma, and was diagnosed with epilepsy during grade 7. He reported that this condition alongside medication side effects, introduced a cognitive and emotional strain that impacted his concentration and memory. He mentioned that he feels different from others – noting that receiving identical grades as others did not equal his level to them given his health challenges. He expressed his fear that this illness will permanently limit his full potential. At the same time, Ali described these experiences being transformative to him since they

catalyzed his aspirations to pursue neurology. He expressed his motivation to understand his condition and help others who are going through similar struggles.

Moreover, Ali described ongoing financial hardship as a substantial factor impacting his family. He mentioned that his father was a successful manager abroad and later became a trader within the camp. He experienced economic decline due to mismanagement and extreme generosity, leaving him in debt and financial instability. Ali explained that his father's situation placed pressure on him to succeed academically to support his family. He also reported aspiring toward securing a scholarship to study medicine abroad, specializing in neurology. He explicitly linked this goal to both his health experiences and his desire to provide financial support for his parents. However, Ali stated that not receiving a scholarship is his greatest fear, which threatens his ability to continue studying and further improving his family's situation.

Ali also described school-related constraints. He mentioned that the destruction of schools within the camp resulted in double-shift system with shortened instructional time. In response, he reported adopting self-regulation strategies like waking early to study, limiting phone usage, and creating a private space at home to study.

Ali described facing pressures and conflicts at home, which he described as emotionally distressing. However, he also expressed that he relies on two members of his community that support him emotionally and motivate him to achieve his goals by providing the physical space and equipment he needs.

Ali described religion as a central source of coping and meaning-making of his challenges. He stated that praying provides him with a sense of relief, and faith allows him to reinterpret his suffering as purposeful. He also reported shifting from wanting validation from others to relying on God and himself alone.

Ali concluded by mentioning that he envisions a future where he becomes a neurologist abroad to support his family financially and improve their lives. He wants his name to be known and prove that hardship does not dictate his future. He believes that success, if not granted, is earned through endurance.

Ayla's Profile (Grade 10, Academically Gifted)

Ayla is a grade 10 Palestinian refugee female student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as academically gifted, particularly in Languages. Her teachers reported that she demonstrates consistent advanced writing skills and regular composing of poetry and reciting it on school grounds. These were further supported by writing compositions that were identified by experts as being talented in writing.

During the interview, Ayla reported that school is not just an academic space; it is also a place for making meaningful connections. She emphasized peers being pivotal in sustaining her motivation and emotional wellbeing, noting that the made school life more manageable and meaningful.

According to Ayla and the teachers that nominated her, she was highly encouraged to participate in poetry and Qur'an recitation. These actions were accompanied by competition and rewards, which she perceived as reinforcing her confidence, ambition and engagement. However, Ayla mentioned that she faces daily transportation challenges. She explained that her school is far from home, and she has to walk all the way there. During the winter, she has to pass through flooded areas, often making her soaked and physically uncomfortable throughout the whole school day. However, even within this challenge, she expressed moments of relief walking with her friends and sharing conversations that ease the burdens of the journey.

Academically, she reported studying independently without relying on any private tutoring. When she has not fully understood a lesson, she tries to work it out on her own. She also stated that she concentrates intensely during classes to understand the lessons without external help. Ayla also articulated a strong sense of responsibility toward her teachers, explaining that her motivation was not only driven by academic success, but also by a desire to meet the expectations of those who believe in her. Ayla also highlighted that her teachers' reassurances that she is one of the strongest students, sustains her motivation and effort. Evidence from teacher reports and Ayla's interview indicated early recognition of her writing abilities. Ayla expressed that she began writing and performing at a specialized institute at a young age, where her talent was immediately recognized. She also mentioned that writing is an emotionally driven process which comes from the heart and intensifies during hard times.

Ayla also reported that her family plays a huge role in her life by highlighting their presence. Her mother stated that they advocate her focus on studies, reinforcing that her school comes first. She continued by saying that Ayla's father and her also provide small gestures, such as purchasing a microphone, to help her practice reciting poems, and strengthening her abilities.

Ayla also discussed participating in karate and scouts, where she nearly advanced towards a leadership role. However, she had to withdraw to prioritize her academic responsibilities. In addition, despite camp disruptions and instability, Ayla mentioned her adaptation and normalization of chaos. She continues her day, completing her tasks and sustaining concentration.

Ayla also described her aspirations being rooted in justice and advocacy. She hopes to become a lawyer to defend the oppressed and confront injustice. Although she

repeatedly said that her refugee identity may prevent her from pursuing a legal career in Lebanon, she refuses to internalize these restrictions. Instead, she asserted that aspirations should not be constrained by nationality. Moreover, Ayla encounters hurtful remarks such as “*go back to your country*” which she mentioned as having an emotional impact on her.

Ayla also articulated faith as a central meaning-making resource in how she navigates uncertainty. She believes that if she is unable to fulfill her ambitions, something better is written for her. She also described future-oriented goals toward personal independence and familial care. She hopes to own a car, support her parents, and ensure their comfort after all that they sacrificed.

Ayla mentioned engaging in activities that calm and relieve her, such as listening to music, singing privately, and talking with friends to release stress. She also reframed missing social outings and celebrations as a necessary investment in her future. She stated that regret lies not in temporary loss but in abandoning long-term goals.

Ayla identified her ambition and self-belief as her strongest assets. Through the support of her family, teachers, peers, and faith, she described her path as navigable where she envisioned poetry as her present identity, and law as her future calling.

Dima’s Profile (Grade 11, Artistically Gifted)

Dima is a Grade 11, Palestinian refugee female student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as artistically gifted, particularly in drawing. Moreover, upon seeing her art, an artistic teacher confirmed her giftedness in drawing at a young age. This was also confirmed through an expert who reviewed her art portfolio.

During the interview, Dima described school as a place where comfort settles. Her friends and teachers make the school atmosphere warm and welcoming. She stated that

school becomes meaningful for her when Palestine is discussed. For instance, during national occasions, students present poems, theatrical performances, drawing representations, and even music about Palestine's history and culture. She also mentioned that during the war in Gaza, expressions of solidarity became a daily morning ritual in their school. Students would share a message and wear a Kufiyah as a collective symbol of unity.

She was described by her teachers and parents as patient and strong. Her mother calls her a "*little psychologist*" since people are comfortable sharing their issues with her.

Dima's artistic development was supported through both school-based and external opportunities. She discovered her artistic gift in her early years in school, in art classes where the teacher noticed her distinctive drawing style and consistently rewarded her with cards of encouragement and recognition. She then enrolled in an institute for two years to enhance her abilities. However, due to financial difficulties, she mentioned that she was unable to afford the high cost of materials, she left the institute.

Dima identified her mother as her greatest support; she provides emotional encouragement and does her best to create a supportive environment. Dima also stated teachers' encouragement and positive feedback, sustained her motivation. For example, teachers frequently ask her to draw on the board. One teacher even shared a photo of her children with her and asked her to draw them. However, she expressed that accessibility to art materials poses a problem due to their financial circumstances. Though this never prevented her from stopping. In one instance, she mentioned wrapping a wooden board with white fabric and securing it with a metal pin to create a Canva.

Dima reported challenges within the physical learning environment. The double-shift system and newly constructed classrooms in the playground created overcrowded, narrow

spaces. Students in each classroom ranged from 40 to 45, making class management difficult, and lessons were frequently postponed.

At home, she mentioned having trouble studying. She lives in a small house with one living room and one bedroom. Her mother has private tutors in one room throughout the day, creating constant noise. While she studies alone in the bedroom, door closed, she still cannot concentrate because of the noise of students, neighbors, and frequent celebrations in the camp. She also described the camp as constantly insecure with persistent violence, which caused her fear. One incident occurred where one bullet passed close to her, leaving her shaken with fear.

Dima expressed art as being a significant factor in her identity, and she hopes to pursue a specialization in university that includes art, such as engineering and interior design. She is aware of the restricted opportunities for Palestinians in Lebanon. However, she remains committed to her aspirations. Inspired by role models who overcame adversity, she stated her confidence in her ability to succeed. She views challenges as part of her journey and not reasons to stop. Guided by her faith, she is convinced that persistence will allow her to reach her goals.

Ghada's Profile (Grade 11, Artistically Gifted)

Ghada is a Grade 12, Palestinian refugee female student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as artistically talented, particularly in music and identified her participation in musical activities within extracurricular settings. Moreover, upon reviewing prior video recordings of her performance, she was identified to be talented in music through two experts.

According to the interview, Ghada was recently transferred to a new school during grade 10. She mentioned that she started this new school hesitantly and did not want to

stay. However, she later described it as a fortunate coincidence. She appreciated the school with time, especially her teachers and classmates, whom she described as genuinely supportive. Her first days were reported as negative and emotionally heavy. However, she stated that she gradually adjusted till eventually, she felt happy in this school.

A major influence in her growth, as she mentioned, is her involvement with the scouts. One notable thing she remembers is how they taught her first aid. She saw how valuable this training was when she witnessed a student losing consciousness in school, and she was able to act quickly and support her. She described it as one of her unforgettable moments because she demonstrated the ability to help others under pressure. She further explained that this experience helped her reframe her earlier fear that she had when she was younger, when she witnessed the sudden death of a neighbor.

Through scouting, Ghada also mentioned learning to play the drums and participating in a marching band in public events and processions. However, when she became a troop leader, her responsibilities increased, and she had to step back from the band. She mentioned that she did not have the time to practice regularly. However, she highlighted that she still feels motivated to play whenever she gets the chance. She described the scout as one of the primary factors that have helped her become more confident, responsible, and socially engaged.

As described by her teachers, Ghada participated in many initiatives at the school, including psychological support and awareness that address topics such as bullying and well-being through workshops. Ghada stated that during her involvement with them, they once even prepared a play about the use of substances.

Academically, Ghada reported a significant transformation in her performance, especially in mathematics. In grade 10, she mentioned that she struggled and received extremely low scores. However, she put her mind to “*close the math file*” and started performing better. In Grade 11, she studied hard and received a full mark. This was further indicated in her report card. This shift became a source of pride for her. She mentioned that this decision also came after the realization that these grade levels are essential for obtaining a scholarship. Therefore, she was motivated to set a goal and raise her overall average, further becoming one of the top students in her class. She even received a formal recognition in mathematics and further evidence it through the “*excellent*” evaluation. She also mentioned that she started to enjoy mathematics more and prepared summaries and other materials for students.

Ghada reported facing structural barriers due to her Palestinian identity. As she approaches the final school year, she mentioned that she feels extreme pressure to choose a university major. At the same time, she repeatedly hears that certain occupations are not accessible to her, and the priority is always for those who are Lebanese. According to Ghada, this reality has shaped her ambitions. She stated that she strongly wanted to become a veterinarian because of her deep interest in and attachment to animals, but she felt blocked from pursuing this path. She also mentioned law, but, similarly, she would have to work under another’s name, losing her professional recognition. Moreover, she expressed that she does not envision herself leaving Lebanon; she mentioned feeling a strong sense of attachment to the country, community, and family.

Ghada reported that, initially, she experienced tension and social judgment from her peers at school due to her Lebanese accent. Some even bullied her. She was also teased about her darker skin and curly hair during childhood. Over time, she worked on these

experiences and even contributed a self-video to her school discussing her journey from bullying to self-love.

During the interview, Ghada described herself as highly self-reliant. She reported processing challenges internally and thinks deliberately through situations before acting. She believes that depending on oneself is necessary, especially as she transitions from school to university. Reflecting at the end of the day helps her realize not everything is worth carrying. She described this mindset as means to allow her to maintain a positive mindset. When she is overwhelmed, she distances herself from the phone and turns to nature to enhance her well-being. She noted that speaking to her friends about her problems often brings her relief. She views expression as a form of healing.

Moreover, Ghada reported possessing a wide range of interests like drawing, gardening, and constructing meaningful objects from discarded materials. She repurposes items through creativity and resourcefulness. She also demonstrated a strong interest in agriculture and is actively learning about it by planting and studying insects using online resources. Ghada mentioned that she values education, learning, and curiosity. Rather than being consumed by trends and passively scrolling, she sees technology as a valuable tool for discovering critical information. She believes personal growth is one's own responsibility.

Ghada concluded by describing her imagined future grounded in a small home, animals, and nature, reflecting her strong interest in a calm, simple life. She aims to finish university with an advanced education. She reports that life is temporary and that maintaining hope, love, and persistence is essential. Through painful moments, she always remembers the pinch of sugar – the small space of light and meaning.

Ismail's Profile (Grade 12, Academically Gifted)

Ismail is a Grade 12 Palestinian refugee male student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. His teachers nominated him as academically gifted, particularly in Hard Sciences. His physics teachers particularly described him as having strong analytical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to his school records, Ismail consistently achieved the highest average. In recent years, he was exempted from his exams because he achieved an average above 90%.

According to Ismail's interview, he developed an early interest in technology and mechanical systems. By the age of ten, he was dismantling and reassembling devices, toys, and old phones to understand how they work. He watches online videos on circuits, programming, and repairs to learn how to replicate them. He mentioned that these experiments shaped his aspirations to pursue Mechatronics Engineering, a field that integrates mechanics, electronics, and programming – disciplines he mentioned to enjoy and align with his goals. However, Ismail expressed frustration that the school does not offer opportunities to learn on computers.

According to Ismail, one of his most notable experiences in school was participating in a project called "Speak Out", which required students to present different countries using their native languages. He entered as a regular member, but then took responsibility for organizational components, including sound systems, and visual and material representations. He mentioned that within two weeks, he resolved the issues, and the project succeeded. He further stated that this experience developed in him a sense of responsibility, leadership, and problem-solving.

Ismail reported prioritizing education over social activities. He does not go out unless he completes his tasks. He does not perform an exam unless he is fully prepared, so he

finishes everything before exams. He also mentioned that he encounters interpersonal challenges where he tends to trust others quickly. Over time, he became aware that others approached him primarily for academic assistance and then disengaged. He chose to distance himself and set boundaries. Ismail described his adaptability to the camp's context by mentioning that he is accustomed to violence and conflicts. To him, these are normal aspects of their everyday lives.

He expressed variability in teaching quality, with some teachers supportive and effective, while others struggle to deliver the curriculum fully and appropriately. He relies on himself to study and occasionally resorts to his older sister for help. He also stated that some teachers assert that students must work hard to secure their futures, reinforcing that their education is their primary tool to advance.

Ismail identified his family as central in sustaining his motivation. He reported that his parents avoid comparisons and emphasize that his academic path belongs to him alone. He also mentioned a close friend who emotionally supports him through companionship and humor during difficult times. To manage stress, Ismail also reported resorting to self-regulation such as taking long walks and listening to music of resistance.

Ismail expressed commitment to his studies, obtaining a scholarship, and working abroad. He described abroad as a place where his aspirations are more accessible. He envisions himself as a Mechatronics engineer, establishing his own enterprise. He also emphasized his desire to build something in his own hands that is purposeful and practical for others to use. He depicts himself as persistent, disciplined, and solution-oriented. He mentioned that no problem occurs without a solution. His goal is to have a dignified future for himself and his family, in which he improves their financial situation.

Lea's Profile (Grade 12, Artistically Gifted)

Lea is a Grade 12 Palestinian refugee female student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as artistically gifted, being exceptionally good at drawing while also having strong academic abilities. Lea mentioned that she started drawing at a very young age, but she uses art only as a form of expression. Moreover, upon reviewing her drawings with two experts, Lea was identified as having an artistic gift.

Lea stated that she is actively engaged in school life and described it as more than just academic; it is also a place shaped by friendships and activities. She described it as a place where “action”, shared experiences, challenges, and moments of joy occur. She recalled instances when students were dancing, highlighting how the festive, cheerful atmosphere in school is a vivid memory of her school experience. She also mentioned that her teachers are a supportive community where they can influence her in the long term. They play a role in strengthening her confidence and encouraging her to move forward.

Academically, she reported being interested in scientific subjects and mathematics. She describes herself as being self-reliant. When facing academic challenges, she resorts to AI tools, videos, research, and even asks teachers or strong classmates for help. She described enjoying studying and hopes to become a dietitian. She is motivated by her admiration for scientific subjects and her desire to contribute meaningfully to society. She hopes to establish her own clinic with a known name and broad impact. She also mentioned interest in addressing social issues affecting girls, such as body shaming and bullying on social media. She hopes to build others' confidence. She believes she must strengthen herself first to become the right face for others.

Lea described her artistic giftedness as central to her identity as well. She discovered her abilities in grade 5 through an attempt to observe, imitate, and practice. She also experimented with fashion designs by drawing dresses. Her teachers mentioned that she actively participates in art-related activities. During the war, she contributed to the school's wall painting and participated in an exhibition where they drew something related to Gaza. Lea described drawing as a way to relieve her emotions and enjoy her time. However, she mentioned that she does not want to pursue something related to her artistic abilities. She sees it simply as a hobby and a way to express herself.

Structural injustice is a major part of her narrative. She notices that her older sister, despite having a university degree, is constantly rejected from several jobs because of her nationality. She mentioned that this led her to question the value of education when opportunities are restricted. She sees how Palestinians are marginalized “on the side”. Moreover, she stated that her family history creates another layer of challenges. She was born in the UAE, and they relocated to Lebanon after financial collapse and discrimination. Her father attempts to rebuild stability, but this took a toll on them emotionally and physically. However, she also described these experiences as fuel to her determination - to build a future in which she can improve her family’s financial circumstances and provide stability.

Lea reported that her mother is her most trusted support system. She described her as emotionally protective and affirming. She stands beside her through everything, defending her in public and correcting her in private. Lea stated that her unconditional support gives her a sense of security and shapes her vision of becoming a similar parent in the future.

Lea identified herself as confident, patient, resilient, and able to support others. She explained that even when something affects her, she does not collapse. She feels sad for a couple of hours but refuses to remain emotionally stuck. She searches for solutions and seeks help from her family, believing they may have other perspectives and be wiser in situations. She acknowledged her need for financial support to access university. Through faith and perseverance, she sees that she can achieve her ambitions. She concluded that hardship does not define a person, and that by believing in herself and in God, she can become the hero of her own story and protect her aspirations from anything that tries to stop her.

Shadi's Profile (Grade 12, Artistically Gifted)

Shadi, a Grade 12 Palestinian refugee male student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. His teachers nominated him as having artistic abilities, particularly in music performance, as he plays the clarinet. He mentioned that his musical teachers and fellow musically talented peers recognize him for his rapid progress, strong musical ear, and confident stage presence. Upon reviewing his musical videos, two music experts directly identified him as musically talented.

Shadi described his years in a public school as the happiest of his life. He stated that students were treated exceptionally well and with dignity. His transition to an UNRWA school, along with strikes and the COVID-19 pandemic, made him feel as if he were moving from one life to another. He lost friendships and had to refamiliarize himself with another environment. One friend remained with him, which eased his burden, knowing he was not alone.

Academically, he described himself as a high achiever in earlier years. He remembered vividly moments when the school principal announced his grades and his

name among the top-ranked students in his class. He remained a high achiever until grades 7-8, after which he began to experience a noticeable decline, which he attributed to distractions and peer influence. This shift affected his journey; his grades did not qualify him for a scientific track, so he entered the humanities instead. Despite this setback, he mentions his aspirations to pursue business, driven by his desire to be a leader and what he describes as “glory”. He reported wanting to build a name and achieve visible success.

Shadi also described a moment of personal growth. He participated in a school project called Speak Out, where students present a country through language, tradition, and culture. He first wanted to present Italy, but out of shyness and fear of the stage, he did not participate. Later, another student withdrew, and the teacher insisted he take the role. He practiced with a peer repeatedly till he overcame his fear and was able to perform publicly. Shadi mentioned that this experience pushed him and helped him build his confidence.

Shadi continued saying that his musical abilities emerged through his involvement in a community-based institution that supports youth development. His father was part of this institution during wartime, and later he joined as well. He was offered a position in the music section, and after learning that the clarinet was available, he joined immediately, as he had previously been interested in learning it. Once he started, his musical journey accelerated quickly. He mentioned that his teacher described him as talented, and after a few sessions, he selected him to participate in an advanced summer camp where skilled musicians perform. Shadi reported that this experience strengthened his sense of competence and belonging. Music was a place where he felt seen and capable.

Beyond music, Shadi described his interest in physical training. He began going to the gym at 12 years old. Even when access to the gym was difficult, he adapted by setting

up a mini gym at his home. He mentioned that his father also buys him weights and equipment and encourages him to commit to it. Shadi described exercise as a great way to build his confidence and emotionally regulate.

Shadi then highlighted the challenges that shaped his experiences. During his childhood, he was bullied for being taller than others his age. He was also restricted from playing with them in the playground to prevent him from physically hurting others. This made him feel deprived of his childhood. Currently, he described struggling with consistency; he values routine and discipline, but he gets bored easily. He recently noticed moments when he is so dependent on his phone, which is affecting his sleep patterns, so he deleted social media apps. He also reported his emotional sensitivity to others' words. His mood is contingent upon his surroundings.

He described adaptability towards the camp's instability. He recalled moments when roads get closed, intense conflicts occur, and families are forced to stay at home. He shared a memory of when his father was injured during a conflict. Regardless, he still experiences the camp as "home" and described it as a place that brings relief after a long day.

Within the school, he mentioned that some teachers are highly competent. They repeat explanations until students understand. They read through students' eyes. At the same time, he described others who are assigned outside their specialization, leading to confusion and weak comprehension of material. He also emphasized that due to overcrowded classes, teachers are under a lot of pressure. Students are forced to rely on themselves to learn the material.

He described a personal space at home where he dedicates a corner to music, the gym, and gaming. He withdraws to this room whenever he needs to regulate his emotions. He

also relies on running with a specific schedule at the corniche. He tries to learn new music, such as improvisations and jazz. He mentioned finding calmness in gardening and drawing as well.

He also highlighted the role of one teacher who recognized his “charisma” and advised him to pursue a business career. Shadi saw this feedback as meaningful because it addressed a past weakness in his self-confidence. Moreover, Shadi described his music teacher as crucial factor in developing his talent through providing him with expensive books at no cost and selecting him for advanced sessions. One of Shadi’s proudest moments was when he stepped in during a musical performance and executed a difficult passage. He mentioned that his peers and teacher told him that he saved the show.

Shadi described himself as persistent and someone who will keep working on something broken until he gets it done. He reported that growth is gradual, with minor improvements that accumulate into progress. He mentioned that he envisions himself owning his own business. In music, he hopes to become locally popular and significant. He expressed that school does not help in developing his ambitions, but it is a necessary step in his education. He stated that the institution and the musical mentor are the ones developing his musical path.

He described himself as committed, passionate, responsible, driven, and talented. He admitted that he struggles with patience and tends to become lazy, but he hopes to overcome them. He concluded by saying that he is committed to continuing even when losing because the actual loss is when he stops. Endurance to him creates a possibility of change.

Rima's Profile (Grade 11, Academically Gifted)

Rima, a Grade 12 Palestinian refugee female student enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as academically gifted, particularly in Languages and poetry. She was also described as talented in Dabke performance and music in which she participated and performed through extracurricular activities. Upon reviewing her records of the last years, she showed excellent performance in Languages, especially Arabic, and according to two experts, her poem writing and performance were exceptional.

Since an early age, around 6-7 years old, Rima reported actively participating in scouts and exploring a variety of interests, including Dabke, poetry, music, and sports. She described herself as someone who consistently seeks new experiences and skills, believing that these are the years a person should develop their abilities.

Rima mentioned a significant event in her life that occurred during the year 2018, when she discovered a brain tumor. This year, she participated in the basketball Olympiad but was unable to play in the finals due to her health. She also recalls that during this time, her aunt visited for the first time in years, and that this reunion was emotionally meaningful to her. She mentioned that her aunt is someone she deeply trusts and can speak openly and freely with. She described this as a renewed sense of hope, and a “restart” from all the challenges and exhaustion she was facing.

She stated that she learned about her condition unexpectedly when her family were discussing her situation and she overheard them. She mentioned feeling hurt to see her family carrying this much sadness and fear, while she remained unaware. After that, she sought medical care and was prescribed a medication, which led her to experience depression and talk about death frequently at a young age. The medication also resulted

in her gaining weight, which led to comments about her physical shape. However, she stated that she does not remain silent in such instances. She portrayed herself as someone strong and emotionally secure. She emphasized that she continues to study and manage her responsibilities despite these challenges.

Rima reported that her school life includes several challenges. She acknowledged incidents of unfair discipline and administrative neglect in her early years. She was severely injured by a teacher, which led to a broken hand, and the principal minimized the depth of this occurrence. In later years, she mentioned peer harassment, rumor-spreading, and issues arising, all of which were accompanied by the administration barely intervening.

She positioned herself as someone who refuses to remain silent when wronged and would defend herself no matter the consequences. She also described herself as a private person. She knows many people but maintains strict boundaries and believes loyalty is only proven in hard times. She also mentioned that she does not rely on friends for support, and she believes her success triggers others' jealousy.

Rima also expressed her academic strengths and clear self-discipline. She identified math and Arabic as her strongest subjects. She also described her deep interest in reading. She highlighted that she manages distractions effectively by turning off her phone. However, during exams, she becomes very stressed and often forgets information. On the other hand, during a crisis, she described herself being calm. For instance, she expressed high adaptability in the presence of conflict or violence.

Rima states that she relies on faith and herself. She believes that hardship is a test from God, and she draws strength from her religious belief that there is meaning in difficulties. Due to earlier experiences of betrayal and disappointment by friends, she

relies on herself. Rima also reports that progress needs time and solutions are constructed gradually. She believes privacy is essential to achieving one's goals without others interfering or envying one's success.

Rima mentions that her primary support system is her family, and especially her mom. She is consistently present, she encourages her, and she stands by her during stressful moments. To her, family gives her strength, and she articulated that she feels a sense of responsibility towards them; she does not want to disappoint them. Simultaneously, she stressed that she should not rely on others as a primary source of support, because if that support disappears, she will collapse.

Looking ahead, Rima envisioned herself becoming a stronger version of herself - more confident and booming. She is interested in a future where she can be a voice for others through professions such as media or politics. She feels driven by injustice and desires to represent those who are silent. While she acknowledges such professions are restricted to Palestinians, she refuses to allow that to be the end of her ambition. She argues that if one track is blocked, another can be created, and the only way through is through persistence. She refuses to surrender and wants to keep moving till she makes her dream come true.

Sara's Profile (Grade 10, Artistically Gifted)

Sara, a Grade 10 Palestinian refugee female student, is enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as artistically gifted, particularly in drawing. They describe her participation in art competitions and receiving formal awards. Certificates of participation and rewards were evident. Two experts identified her abilities as being gifted upon reviewing her art portfolio.

Sara described her artistic abilities as central to her identity and daily life. She repeatedly states that everything in her life is about drawing. This is where she feels most recognized and seen by others. At school, she mentioned that she is the only one asked to draw on the board.

Sara spoke warmly about her friends, saying that they are a key source of emotional support, especially since she is living with a chronic health condition. They stand by her and offer moral encouragement. She also mentioned finding joy in school projects and exhibitions for drawings about Palestine. They are meaningful to her because she is allowed to contribute something beautiful.

Sara mentioned that drawing started as a childhood hobby, and she joined an institute to further develop her skills. She began with pencil sketches and evolved into color work through practice and guidance. She also helps younger students with art. She mentioned that she enjoys it and finds it rewarding. However, she has a terminal illness and expressed that those physical symptoms related to it, draw public attention and questions and makes her emotionally exhausted. They comment on her stomach, age, and outfit. Nevertheless, she reported that she always returns to her mother, whom she sees as her source of strength and stability. Her mom also mentioned that she does not let her stay in her room alone for too long. She always encourages her and supports her emotionally. Her mother continued saying that her whole family constantly reminded her of her strengths and capabilities.

Sara also portrayed teachers and administration as understanding and accommodating. When she is unwell, they reschedule her exams or require alternative arrangements. She also described the principal as empathetic and supportive. They chose her to perform a speech on stage, and she took this stance to thank the school personnel

and friends. She also stated that she received multiple awards for drawings that she created. During moments of camp violence or war, she expressed being emotionally steady. She is not afraid and continues her everyday life, focusing on her school responsibilities.

She shared that she has an upcoming exhibition, and she will display three drawings. She stated that the institution also consistently supports and encourages her. She chooses to attend even when she is sick. She highlighted that attending gives her a sense of purpose and energy. Sara also mentioned that her doctor encourages her and always assures her that she is strong. She praises her commitment to taking care of herself properly, especially regarding health restrictions. Sara mentioned that she imagines a future shaped by art and care. She hopes to become a professional artist and kindergarten teacher. She dreams of starting her own exhibition, building a library, and becoming emotionally stronger with time. She described art as her “life” and her primary source of survival. However, she stated that illness is the only challenge standing in her way. She is learning, however, to live with it rather than surrendering to it.

Sara articulated that art helps her transcend pain, fatigue, and fear. She mentioned that art is proof of her identity and a pathway to her future. She advised those who are similar to her to be strong, pray, and keep moving forward.

Shahed’s Profile (Grade 11, Academically Gifted)

Shahed, a Grade 12 Palestinian refugee female student, is enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers nominated her as academically gifted, particularly in writing and public speaking. They reported her abilities in public speaking where she participated in making videos as an unformal reporter and takes initiative in school-based leadership roles. According to her records and videos, Shahed displayed

high academic performance in Languages and high expressive potential and confidence in Arabic public speaking.

Shahed described herself as calm, rational, and able to listen without judgment. She mentioned that her character made others select her as the Head of Psychological Support at the school. She often finds herself added to groups to organize and lead. She reported her admiration for leadership and being entrusted with responsibility and further stated that that this is what allowed her to stand out. She described her ability to communicate and negotiate with “style”. She also expressed feeling more connected to teachers than to peers and gravitating toward those who are older and more mature.

Shahed stated that she faced direct bullying from other girls because of her dialect, especially since she speaks with a Lebanese accent. They belittled her for not speaking in the Palestinian accent. She was also mocked for her short hair, which she intentionally chose. She mentioned that she was also shamed for choosing hobbies like karate, which led others to label her “boyish”. This led her to leave karate, despite being ranked first in South Lebanon, which she now regrets. However, she always responded by confronting them. She refuses to be mocked, and she sets boundaries. She did not change her accent for anyone and continued to speak in the dialect she wished. Shahed mentioned that silence is complicit. Through these circumstances, Shahed described her aspirations for media emerged as a way to reach others and raise their voices.

Academically, she expressed being passionate about Arabic through expression and writing. She described herself as a vocal person during the Arabic session; she mentioned feeling the most confident and strong in this subject. She also reported engaging in speaking through social media, by uploading videos and building her name.

Furthermore, Shahed reported that throughout her life, the most challenging circumstance was when she experienced the martyrdom of someone very close to her during the war in Lebanon. She described this shock leaving her feel guilty, angry, and sometimes numb. She tried multiple coping strategies like deleting photos of him, removing reminders of him, and trying to act fine; none of them erased his memory in her mind. She reported insomnia, loss of appetite, exhaustion, and extreme stress. She stressed feeling trapped in a cycle in which she acknowledges the solution in theory but cannot put herself in a position to implement it. She further explained feeling alert at all times in which the sound of a car brings her back to the moment when she lost him. She also consistently dreams of him. In her mind, she is reliving this experience over and over again.

However, Shahed mentioned that she rarely discloses her pain. She believes people do not truly know her true pain. She also expressed that, due to her history of losing people, she is afraid to get attached to others and that she may suddenly lose them as well. So, she distances herself and ends relationships with others before they abandon her.

Shahed reported having a supportive surrounding. Throughout the interview, she mentioned that her teachers, principal, and peers speak highly about her. Her parents support her ambitions, but they do not really know what is going on with her emotionally. She tries to turn pain into a voice through posting on social media. She also resorts to faith and tries to find a reason for everything. She volunteers with a group to support youth. Especially during war, she reframed circumstances as a responsibility to care for children in schools.

Shahed continued by saying that she views the stage as her “game” where she feels most comfortable. She mentioned that words come out naturally. Looking ahead, she

imagined herself as a public figure, specifically dreaming of appearing on Al Jazeera. She sees this channel as one that speaks the truth and speaks for the oppressed. She mentioned that she links this to her Palestinian identity and speaking the right narrative. She also described herself as someone who will reach high levels and meet influential people. She stressed her desire to make her name memorable and known. She also stated that she wants her future daughter to be proud of her.

She finally concluded her narrative with a metaphor explaining that a dark rose in a colorful garden doesn't make her less beautiful; it makes her misunderstood in a surrounding that does not resemble her. She also highlighted that she seeks the light at the end of the dark tunnel, remaining hopeful within all challenges. She stated that her story has not yet finished and she will keep on going.

Zaynab's Profile (Grade 10, Academically Gifted)

Zaynab, a Grade 12 Palestinian refugee female student, is enrolled in an UNRWA school in Saida, Ain El-Hilweh camp. Her teachers identify her as academically gifted, particularly in Hard Sciences. Based on her records of her last academic years, she is consistently ranked among the top students.

One of her most memorable moments took place in grade 9, when she and her classmates organized a fun school day before their final exam. They brought their phones, put on music, ordered food, and spent time together. This represented a moment of joy and relief from academic pressure.

Zaynab mentioned taking pride in her academic achievements. Through grades 1 to 6, she ranked second in her class. At the end of grade 6, she set a goal to become the first-ranked and she was able to achieve it throughout grades 7-9. She stated that this accomplishment was due to her persistence and self-discipline. Her study routine is

structured. She studies regularly. Aware of the academic pressure in the upcoming year, she studied extensively over the summer and completed a large portion of the curriculum. She rarely goes out, and she prioritizes her academic goals. She also tutors her younger siblings and balances her responsibilities at home with her workload. She described math as her strongest subject and attributed that to her natural strength in it as well as to the teaching style. She expressed her admiration for problem-solving and often sees it as fun.

Zaynab stressed that her strengths are persistence, self-control, and the ability to delay momentary gratification in pursuit of long-term goals. However, she described extreme anxiety during examinations. She starts having stomach problems. Time pressure impacts her as well. She mentioned that her stress doesn't allow her to perform to her true abilities.

She also expressed that she lives in an unstable environment where consistent violence occurs. She recalled a traumatic incident with her younger brother, who was shot and required multiple surgeries. She describes feeling a great pride in being Palestinian while also being connected to Lebanon. Zaynab further described legal restrictions against Palestinians and how they influenced her decision about her profession; she changed from aspiring towards Law to aspiring towards Dentistry. She asserted that she would rather work under another than not work at all.

Zaynab also mentioned how her parents consistently support and encourage her academic goals, without comparing her to anyone. They reinforce the value of education. They also provide her with occasional rewards for her achievements. She also described how teachers motivate and reassure her about her abilities. Furthermore, Zaynab discussed her hopes to study abroad and become a dentist. She hopes to achieve high grades in the upcoming years. She envisions a future of success, humility, and service to

others. Zainab mentioned that faith is a central aspect in her life and the guide to her journey, where she maintains patience, effort, and persistence.

Findings from the narrative storytelling address the study's research questions and fill this gap in the literature. Thus, this chapter continues to foreground the voices of gifted refugee students to understand how they interpret their experiences, navigate their challenges, draw on their support systems, and develop their strengths and coping mechanisms. It also highlights how they envision their futures despite their numerous constraints. Accordingly, the findings are organized into two domains – challenges and aspirations – each displaying foundational themes that occurred consistently across participants' narratives.

Challenges of Gifted Palestinian Refugee Students

For the first research question, students' narratives were examined into one overarching theme where they narrate their legal, financial, educational, psychological and environmental challenges.

Legal and Structural Constraints

Across students' narratives, one of the primary and pivotal conditions that Palestinian refugee students reported is their awareness of their restricted right to practice certain professions. These constraints were described by most cases to restrict their future pathways.

Ayla, an academically gifted female student, reported reconsidering her educational investment due to profession restriction stating,

“I cannot work on everything. When I was young, I wanted to be a lawyer, but I couldn't- so why should I exhaust my energy studying something I cannot practice?”

Similarly, Shahed, an academically gifted female student, with reported strengths in public speaking and media, mentioned nationality barriers in pursuing her career aspirations. She stated:

“I really want to work at Al Jazeera, but there, if you are a Palestinian, you must have another nationality... so it feels like a barrier.”

Furthermore, other participants also reported observing the impact of legal restriction through others’ experiences. Dima, an exceptionally talented female student in drawing, explained that:

“Our Palestinian nationality is sometimes a barrier” and “you regret that you were born with this nationality since it deprived you of many rights.”

She recognized that her nationality poses an obstacle. She continued by describing how her relative, despite being an engineer, cannot work under his own name due to his Palestinian identity.

Socioeconomic Hardships

For gifted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, students narrate that financial constraints impact their education, access to resources and ability to pursue opportunities.

Ali, an academically gifted male student, described his financial precarity as directly affecting his plans of higher education. He stated that:

“If I do not receive a scholarship, I might not be able to enter university, or I may be forced to work instead of studying.”

He described planning his path around the possibility of financial interruption. He further explained that,

“My financial situation greatly impacts my future, and this affects the future I dream of.”

Similarly, Dima, an artistically gifted female student in drawing, reported that socioeconomic hardships limit her access to materials, consistent practice, and opportunities for exposure. She stated that,

“The materials are expensive; the colors are expensive, and the canvas too”.

She reported mainly drawing in pencil due to the cost of materials and described improvising tools like cloth and pins to create a canvas.

Psychological Burdens

Across narratives, gifted Palestinian refugees, reported that their environment is shaped by ongoing anxiety, grief, fear, and hypervigilance. For example, Ali, an academically gifted male, reported a major health incident that affected his life.

“I fainted... I fell into a coma... they discovered I have epilepsy.” He then continued: “I feel different from others... if I get an 85, it is not like when they do.”

He reported that his illness impacted how he viewed himself in comparison to others. He also revealed emotional difficulties within his family. He stated that,

“It is very hard at first, especially when parents are not good with you”.

Another female student, Rima, who is academically gifted, expressed her emotional burden stemming from health concerns as well as extreme bullying.

“I discovered I have a tumor in my brain... I entered a phase of depression... why should I seek treatment? I am going to die anyway”.

Simultaneously, she described enduring physical and emotional abuse at school.

“The teacher hit my hand with a stick, and it broke in three places”, “they name-called me as trash... square-headed... and insulted me a lot”.

Moreover, a third student, Sara, who is highly talented in drawing, also reported a psychological burden due to her chronic illness, which impacted her physical experience.

“My stomach would fill up with water... and people keep asking... I am affected by people’s comments”.

She also stated,

“I see my friends wearing things that I cannot wear.” She feels different from others and wishes to be normal like them.

Shahed, an academically gifted female, explained how her emotional reality is highly shaped by trauma and grief.

“Many people I knew were martyred... before I lose someone, I remove them from my life myself”, “at night I don’t sleep, I don’t eat... I am exhausted from all of this” and “the first love of my life is my grandfather... the last thing he did before dying was eating from my hand... a shock.”

Environmental Instability

Environmental instability emerged as a pervasive condition shaping students’ daily lives within the camp. Participants described living in spaces characterized by unpredictability, recurrent violence, and persistent disruptions, where safety could not be assumed and routines were frequently interrupted. Instability was also experienced through constant noise, overcrowding, and war-related sounds that sustained heightened state of alertness. These conditions impacted their emotional security, concentration, and sense of control.

Camp Instability and Violence

Multiple refugee students described their living environments as an unpredictable place where clashes, gunfire, and violence occur as part of their daily routines.

Zaynab, an academically gifted female student, explained that,

“At any moment something could happen, so I grab my things and escape”. She also stated that “suddenly there was gunfire... a bullet passed right next to me” and “from the sound of one bullet, I get afraid and immediately escape.”

Dima, another artistically gifted female, noted multiple exposures stating that,

“Sometimes they suddenly fight and the shooting starts” and “At the camp, a lot of problems arise, and I get afraid immediately. I tremble all the time.”

“The bullet was shot on my brother’s leg, and it exploded”, “My father was shot during a personal conflict”

“There was a Dushka on the rooftop firing, their target fired back, and it came towards our apartment”

These are distinct students who have experienced personal encounters with the camp’s violent aspect.

Noise and War-Related Sounds

Beyond the visible dangers of the camp, gifted Palestinian refugee students described an environment filled with constant noise and disruptions, ranging from the simple to the shocking.

Dima, artistically gifted female, stated that,

“Our home is small; buildings are so close to each other... my mother tutors privately at home... I study in the bedroom and close the door. However, I still hear the sound of students as well as noise from the neighbors”

“My brother is young and constantly wants to play as well”. She also explained that “every two or three days, parties occur. Noise continues throughout the night”.

At the end, some students described the traumatic exposures to war-related sounds.

“During the war, we were affected by the sound waves and bombing”

“One time, a strong sound wave occurred above us; we cried and continued to recite the Shahada”

“When a loud sound occurs, I get scared – it could be as simple as a sound of a car, but I relive the moment”.

School Limitations

Alongside the above-mentioned constraints, students repeatedly described how the school restricts the development of their gifts. The educational environment described mainly portrays overcrowded classrooms, ineffective time shifts, inadequate teaching quality, and limited enrichment opportunities.

Overcrowded classes

Multiple students reported that classrooms are overcrowded, making learning impossible.

“There are around 40-45 students inside the classroom... sometimes the teachers get exhausted trying to control the students, time passes, and they postpone the lesson to the next day.”

Similarly, others stated that

“There will be around 45-50 girls in the class... in such a class size, there are students who would not understand”

“They should divide us into two classes”

They describe how overcrowding makes the classroom an unmanageable environment and results in inadequate instruction.

Two Shifts

Gifted Palestinian refugee students also described how the impact of violence in camps led to the destruction of certain schools, which led them to have two shifts, during the morning and the afternoon. Many have expressed the negative impact it had on them.

“During the two shifts, the time was short, and they pressured us more”, “During the afternoon shift, we arrive at 12.30 and leave at 5. Imagine coming home at five and studying until morning, then have to wake up to go to school without sleeping the night before” and “there are now two shifts and time become wasted, time got shorter and teachers teach quickly. We become weaker academically.”

Students illustrated that the double-shift compresses crucial instructional time, accelerates teaching beyond their abilities, and disrupts their ability to manage their time and study effectively.

Inadequate Teaching

Gifted students describe instructional inadequacy as a barrier to academic development. For example, Zaynab, an academically gifted student, reports inconsistency between instruction and assessment. She stated that,

“The math teacher explains one thing, then brings something completely different in the exam”

Another academically gifted male student, Ismail, expressed that,

“Once a teacher finished the curriculum only two days before the end of the year; she teaches extremely slowly”

“Before official exams in one month, we have not yet completed the curriculum, so the administration brought a substitute teacher to finish quickly”.

These inconsistencies oscillated between slow-paced instruction and last-minute, overwhelming, rushed teaching.

Limited opportunities

Several gifted Palestinian refugee students have narrated that their school lacks enrichment experiences. For instance, an academically gifted student Ismail, he described that,

“The education system did not support my ambitions. They did not give us any real opportunities to learn on computers, even though these things are essential for my future.”

Another musically talented male student, Shadi, adds that,

“I love business, but I need someone to guide me into its details”

This indicates the absence of mentorship in fields aligning with their interests. Additionally, Ali, an academically gifted male, critiqued that,

“There should be appropriate management... the current system depends on quantity rather than quality”.

Also, Rima, an academically gifted female, noted that,

“They should develop skills and help those who require the assistance”.

Across the mentioned narratives, it appears that the barriers that gifted Palestinian refugee students face are their legal constraints, financial hardships, psychological challenges, environmental limitation and emotional burdens. These barriers are interconnected, and they narrow the trajectories that allow giftedness to be recognized and developed.

Navigating Challenges

For the second research question, gifted refugee students moved beyond describing their challenges and narrate how they actively navigate them. Amidst their structural, socioeconomic, emotional, environmental, and educational challenges, they develop mechanisms to manage their realities while pursuing their future aspirations. Their experiences reveal that coping strategies are shaped through endurance, support systems, resilience, and optimism. Simultaneously, they articulate clear goals for their future professions and demonstrate resilience in pursuing their ambitions. Thus, two overarching themes emerge. The first explores how gifted Palestinian refugee students cope and navigate the constraints they encounter. The second examines how gifted Palestinian refugee students continue to aspire and plan for their future goals, demonstrating how hope and determination are pivotal for their lives.

Coping Strategies

For gifted Palestinian refugee students who face chronic instability, coping strategies become a daily practice that enables them to function and persist in their circumstances. The narratives of gifted Palestinian refugee students represented a pattern of coping through adaptation, cognitive reframing, problem solving, self-management, and religion that allows them to maintain their ambitions.

Personal Adaptation within the Legal System

Gifted Palestinian refugee students described how they operate within a legal system that prohibits them from practicing certain professions. They modify their expectations and behaviors in response to external conditions through personal adaptation.

This is evident in the students' narratives and how they maneuver their lives around structural exclusions. Ismail, an academically gifted male, describes that,

“Legally, I can be affected negatively, but if I traveled, it might work out. I can overcome these structural barriers by getting high grades, receiving a scholarship, and traveling abroad.

Similarly, Ali, another academically gifted male, states that,

“I hope to study medicine abroad” and “I do not want to waste time here because of the limited opportunities. Abroad, I can work in the field I aspire to”.

They position abroad as a place of possibility where they can achieve their aspirations.

Coping is also evident in how gifted Palestinian refugee students reshape their aspirations in response to the legal system. In this sense, rather than letting go of their ambitions, they adapt them to what is legally acceptable. For instance, an academically gifted female student, Zaynab, stated that,

“When I was younger, I wanted to become a lawyer, but I legally cannot. So, why would I struggle trying to study it? So, I decided on dentistry. I might not be able to open a clinic, but I can work under another doctor. What matters is that I work”.

She recalibrated her aspirations to being able to hold a possibility of a future career. Another academically gifted female student, Lea also mentioned that,

“Being Palestinian will be an obstacle since I cannot open something on my own, so I would have to partner up with someone else”.

She had to compromise full autonomy in favor of shared ownership to maintain a legally acceptable profession.

Personal Adaptation within Camp’s Instable Environment

The camp’s instability is inevitable for the students’ lives. However, gifted Palestinian refugee students displayed adaptation to this environment. Their narratives showed a pattern of normalization that allows them to make sense of their surroundings. An academically gifted female student, Zaynab, smiled while saying,

“You could literally see the bullet passing in front of your eyes.”

She described violence as an ordinary incident. Another academically gifted student, Rima, expressed that,

“They bombed near our house; I was laughing and wanted to record it”.

She continued by saying that while she and her family were escaping, she met armed militants and,

“Started greeting them... wanted to take a photo with the gun”.

Some students also move throughout their days as if nothing happened. Ayla, an academically gifted female, stated that,

“Some girls get scared, but I do not. One time, I even bought falafel and continued my day normally.”

Another participant, Ismail, an academically gifted male, expressed that,

“War did not affect my studies... it was normal; we were adapted to the situation”.

For these students, adaptation is embedded in continuity. This student also says,

“When we hear gunfire in the morning, we would be happy because there would be no school.”

Despite all the chaos around them, the camp remains significant to some. A musically gifted male student, Shadi, described it as a comforting place,

“When I go to the camp, I get the same feeling as when I return home after a long trip – peace of mind, calm.”

Reframe struggles with Optimism and Strength

Several gifted Palestinian students narrated their challenges as fuel that sharpened their motivation and determination to pursue something better. For instance, an academically gifted male student, Ali, stated that,

“It did not matter that there were pressure and problems at home – on the contrary, these circumstances enhanced my determination”.

His household difficulties did not weaken his aspirations but were reframed as a source of resilience. This same student also stated that,

“I want to study neurology because I suffer from epilepsy and I want to understand help those who experience it as well “and “after everything I have went through, I became even more motivated to enter medicine.”

He framed his illness as the reason he aspires toward medicine by transforming a challenge into a purposeful goal. He also viewed mistakes as lessons, stating that,

“I made mistakes and learned from them. They cost me a lot, but they also taught me a lot.”

He makes sense of his actions to preserve his motivation.

Some gifted Palestinian refugees reinterpret adversity with optimism and strength. For instance, an academically gifted female student, Ayla, described her difficult daily commute stating,

“I walk through puddles of water... get soaked the entire way, and my whole day becomes irritating”

– yet she immediately highlights the bright side saying,

“There is also a nice part... I walk with my friends; we talk and have fun... hardship has small moments that ease the struggle.”

Another student, Lea, artistically gifted, stated,

“The psychological circumstances I have gone through showed me how strong I am... I am patient, tolerant, and I listen to others and support them.”

She narrated her experiences as proof of her inner strength.

Furthermore, Ghada, a musically gifted student, also emphasized her emotional strength, saying that,

“No matter what happens with me, I will not weaken or break down... I might get sad for a couple of hours, but I sleep and wake up as if nothing happened... nothing impacts me negatively”

While she recognized it is normal to experience emotional struggles, she refuses to let it halt her. Moreover, Ali, an academically gifted student, also expressed his stance to face adversity,

“No pain, no gain.”

Rima, academically gifted female, affirms that,

“Some people complain, but I am proud of what I live.” She also stated: “do not let anything affect you – let it only affect your future positively”.

Others also see the optimistic side by reframing moments of war. Ghada, a musically gifted female, narrated that,

“We could see the shelling in the south and Beirut... it shook our hearts.”

But she also recalled her family’s solidarity in hosting a displaced family, saying,

“It was beautiful that we were able to host them.”

Amidst fear, she acknowledged their kindness and human connection. She also highlighted her positive engagement with the community during these times, saying,

“I was a scout volunteer... we did initiatives in schools and streets... we played and danced with the children.”

She continued by narrating that,

“In the middle of all the negativity, we were able to provide something positive.” She transformed chaos and instability into moments of care and joy. Similarly, an academically gifted student, Shahed, also recalls her positive role during the war, stating,

“I was volunteering in schools during the war... I was not afraid or anxious – on the contrary.”

She reorients her fear with a purposeful action.

Academic Planning

Gifted Palestinian refugee students also revealed problem-solving and self-management mechanisms to maintain focus and pursue their goals. Some students expressed problem-solving through a structured academic schedule. Zaynab, an academically gifted student, reported that she spent two months over the summer studying, dedicating her time to preparing for the school year. This behavior is intentional to manage her time effectively. She stated,

“I solved previous school exams with my tutor.” She also says that: “During the examination periods, I do not even look at my phone... I stop using it.”

She highlighted how she reduces distractions to maintain her focus.

Ali, an academically gifted student, also reported that, due to double shifts at school, he had difficulty dedicating time to study. He had to go to school during the second shift in the afternoon, so he stated:

“I had to gain as much time as possible... I cannot stay up late to study, as it impacts my health due to my illness... so, I set my alarm at 4 a.m. to study.”

He thus uses time management to complete his studies.

Moreover, a musically gifted student, Ghada, demonstrated academic difficulty in understanding mathematics due to an inadequate teacher’s instruction. She stated,

“I put a goal in my head that I want to overcome this problem, so I studied and put a lot of effort till I got 80/80. I was so proud of myself.”

She had a goal to improve in this subject, so she intentionally planned to improve her abilities. She redirected her struggle from the teacher’s inadequate instruction to a goal that she hopes to overcome as proof of her competence –

“I succeeded”.

Clear Prioritization of Goals

Across participants’ narratives, some reported prioritizing their academic goals over distractions and social activities. An academically gifted student Zaynab, said,

“My education is my priority... I do not go out unless I have completed all my tasks.”

She articulated her disciplined approach to studying clearly. Similarly, another academically gifted male student, Ismail, expressed that,

“I do not enter the exam room before finishing all the material, even if it was 10 minutes prior to the exam.”

He demonstrates strong commitment to ensuring he is fully ready for the test. He also says,

“I promised myself not to slack off again.”

He faced this issue previously, learned from it, and is working against it.

Others expressed their ability to compartmentalize emotional burdens to focus on their academics. Lea, an artistically gifted student, explained that,

“I put all problems aside... I do not let things impact me... I do not mix my problems with my studies... I study as if my life is perfect”.

The student uses this mechanism to maintain her motivation despite her life stressors. Additionally, some described their future as a priority, emphasizing academic achievement as a personal responsibility. Ghada, a musically gifted student, expressed,

“No one will provide for me... my degree will though... my education is the future that I will build.”

She sees educational attainment as a pathway to liberation.

Hence, prioritizing education was mostly described as a practice which gifted Palestinian refugee students use by organizing their time, regulating distractions, and sustaining focus on long-term goals.

Meaningful and Practical Practices

Gifted Palestinian refugees reported engaging in meaningful acts to manage emotional distress and regulate their wellbeing. For instance, an academically gifted student, Ismail, reported,

“Sometimes I go out and refresh myself.”

This shows how he disengages from the problem, allowing him to breathe and regain clarity about the situation. Another academically gifted student, Shahed, stated that when she was bullied, she spoke about her problem:

“I went and talked about this issue on stage.”

She used public expression to release emotional burden while connecting with others who face the same problem.

Furthermore, some students, in grief, navigated loss through routine acts such as visiting the cemetery and writing to them daily. Shahed expressed that,

“I used to go to the cemetery every other day.... I used to write him every day”.

These practices allowed her to manage her pain.

Moreover, some students solved their problems emotionally by developing internal strategies to cope with their distress. Ghada, a musically gifted student, expressed that,

“The moment I speak about the problem, it gets solved... if I cried or spoke about it, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the problem is resolved... once we express, it is considered a healing process.”

Through verbal expression, she releases her emotional burdens and prevents them from escalating.

Some participants reported using practical strategies rooted in persistence and help-seeking. Ismail, an academically gifted student, expressed,

“I am stubborn with the things I love... if it gets broken, I stay behind it to fix it.”

Another artistically gifted female, Lea, stated,

“I search for a solution. I can ask someone like my parents or sisters. They might see the situation from a different point of view”.

She is willing to seek help from others to overcome challenges if she is unable to do so.

Faith as Meaning-Making

Across participants' narratives, they reported relying on faith as a way to endure challenges and understand them. Most students put their trust in God, and they surrender to his wisdom. For instance, an academically gifted student, Rima, expressed,

“I have faith in God... if something is meant to happen, I face it... I do not run away from it”.

Another student, Shahed, also quoted a Quranic verse:

“But perhaps you hate a thing, and it is good for you. ”

She continues saying:

“This is always in my mind”.

She views challenges as part of greater wisdom. Similarly, another artistically gifted student, Lea, also interprets life events through a religious lens. She stated that:

“What we go through is given to us by God for a reason. I always say thank God for the challenges we encounter, for what we go through is given to us by God for a reason... if it were not for what I have faced, I would not be the girl I am today”.

Furthermore, Ghada, a musically gifted girl, also displayed that her faith is her moral compass:

“During the day of judgment, everyone will be judged for their own sins. So, write your own story. God will not question you about other people – so write your own story”.

She described faith as guiding her choices and actions.

For many students, their faith is linked to hope. For instance, Zaynab, an academically gifted student, explained that:

“As long as God gave us the ability to imagine a dream, it will come true.”

Her ability to imagine is sanctioned, empowering her to overcome constraints.

Ayla, another academically gifted student, mentioned that,

“I believe that if I were not able to major in what I desire, law, then God has written something better for me”.

She articulated her unmet desires as a trajectory towards something better.

Through these lived experiences, gifted Palestinian refugee students hold to their religion as a way to make meaning of their challenges, while maintaining hope for their future.

Faith as Emotional Strength

Across gifted refugee students' narratives, they reported faith as a source of emotional strength during challenging experiences. Prayer emerged to some as an act of emotional relief. Ali, an academically talented student, stated that,

“Prayer helped me a lot... I felt psychological relief afterward.”

This ritual allowed his anxiety to be released, replaced by inner peace and calm. For another student, Ghada, artistically gifted, her faith in God is seen as a source of support when human support is absent. She mentioned that,

“I do not need support from anyone but God.”

Also, an artistically gifted student, Sara who is facing a chronic illness, was asked to advise someone undergoing a similar challenge. She said,

“Keep faith that God will cure you”.

Her faith allows her to cope with her illness and have hope that God will heal her.

Students also view their hardships as a sign of resilience rather than punishment. An academically gifted student, Shahed, also expressed,

“I believe that God provides problems to those who can truly endure them”.

She views challenges as a form of strength, reinforcing her capacity to overcome them.

When asked about their strengths, most described their faith in God as their strongest quality. Their statements included,

“My faith in god is my biggest strength”, “I am a strong person who has faith in herself and in God.”

“I have a strong faith, in God and in myself.”

“I have faith in God... whoever has a pure heart, God provides for him and grants his wishes.”

“God is with me” and “I am proud of the circumstances I have lived... those who are not have low faith in God.”

These expressions reveal that faith is at the core of their emotional strength, reinforcing their self-confidence and providing spiritual support amid uncertainty.

To sum up, amidst all uncertainty, religion becomes a reliable source for refugees to navigate their challenges with confidence, patience, and hope.

Support Systems

Gifted Palestinian refugee students also reported navigating their challenges through the social environment surrounding them such as family members, peers, teachers, administrators, and community institutions.

Family Support

Throughout the narratives of gifted Palestinian refugee students, family emerged as one of their strongest sources of support. They provide them with emotional, academic, and material support, which subsequently enhances their motivation and determination to face their challenges while pursuing their aspirations.

Most students describe their families as a foundational emotional resource that validates their abilities and worth. For instance, one academically gifted female student, Ayla, stated that,

“My parents support me” and “my mom says that she sees a future in me.”

Moreover, to some students, parents play a role in nurturing their gifts and talents. Ayla significantly recalled that,

“My father heard my poem recital and told me Well done... it left a big impact on me.”

Similarly, another artistically gifted male student, Shadi, described that,

“My father encourages my music gift; he takes me to the association”.

Also, Shahed, an academically gifted female, expressed that:

“My parents tell me you are talented, always keep going” and “my dad tells me that one day they will watch me on TV.”

Their parents’ encouragement is viewed valuable where they view their gifts as purposeful and seen.

Family was also described as providing the necessary material support needed to develop their abilities. Ali, an academically gifted male student, shared that,

“My aunt gave me the money for the SAT book”.

Another artistically gifted student, Ghada, also stated that,

“My biggest support is my mom, and she tries to provide me with the necessary tools and environment”.

This material support is appreciated among students, mainly because these two participants face financial hardship. They value this effort and support from their family.

In addition, some students report that their families reject their attempts to compare them to others. One student emphasized that,

“My parents do not compare me to anyone... they support and guide me.”

Another mentioned that,

“They do not compare me.”

These sentences were written by two academically gifted students, Zaynab & Ismail, who demonstrated that their determination towards academic success is supported by an environment that does compare them to others. Lea, artistically gifted female, stated that,

“My mother talks to me, supports me, guides me, and does not let me be alone”.

The student feels heard rather than judged or misunderstood.

Furthermore, family support also emerged through motivational rewards. An academically gifted student, Zaynab, said that,

“Any high grade I receive, I get a reward.”

She views them as motivators for academic success. She continued stating that,

“My family has always been my source of passion towards education.”

Teachers and Administration Support

Teachers and Administration were also portrayed as one of the most impactful sources in shaping the motivation of gifted Palestinian refugee students. Most students described their teachers as being active influencers on their success. An academically gifted male student, Ali, shared that,

“The teachers supported me from grades 7-9 and I remained the top in my class.”

Their sustained encouragement improved his academic performance. Sara, an artistically gifted student, also expressed teachers’ support during a hard time, saying,

“The teachers stood by me during my illness” and “if I feel tired because of my illness, they excuse me from doing the exam”.

She highlighted how teachers’ support extended beyond academic instruction. They were able to be a protective factor against her health issues. A third artistically gifted student, Dima, also highlighted that,

“Teachers understand our circumstances. They reduce workload if necessary or give us alternative exams.”

Teachers are responsive to students’ circumstances.

Furthermore, students frequently mentioned how teachers play a role in grounding their identities. Students report that,

“They tell us you are Palestinian students; you must be the best especially that we are not living in our own country.”

“They always encourage us to be the best.”

“You are Palestinian, so you have to work harder than others because if you do not work on yourselves from now, you will lose your opportunities.”

“Your degrees are your weapon.”

“We are strong and unique people.”

Teachers encourage students toward academic motivation and success to combat systemic exclusions.

Teachers also appeared as a strong source for nurturing gifted refugee students’ talents. Ayla, an academically gifted student, explained that,

“What I love in the school is that they encourage us to recite poems and the Quran. They tell us you can do it! This highly motivates us”.

She continued by saying,

“My teacher was one of the people who made the biggest difference in my life... she encouraged me” and “the teacher asked me if it was my first poem recital and encouraged me to keep going. Ever since I started reciting poems”.

These small acts of recognition validated the student’s gift and encouraged them to push forward with it. Moreover, Dima, an artistically gifted student, also reported,

“During the art session, the teacher supported my drawings and started giving me reward cards,” and “The art teacher gave me a sketchbook and asked me to keep drawing... I still have it till now.”

The teachers’ recognition and support activated the development of her abilities.

Another crucial dimension explored in students’ narratives is teachers’ support in recognizing their abilities and guiding them toward meaningful career choices that align with their character. An academically gifted male student, Ismail, mentioned that,

“A teacher alerted me towards mechatronics specialization.”

Similarly, another artistically gifted student, Shadi, expressed:

“A teacher directed me towards business... she says I have charisma and I shouldn’t underestimate myself.”

Teachers’ recognition of students’ strengths heightens the students’ understanding of their abilities.

Peer Support

Gifted Palestinian refugee students reported viewing their peers as a form of academic, emotional, and social support. Friendship is seen as a source of belonging in a community surrounded by instability. Multiple students expressed how spending time with their friends uplifts their experiences. Students stated that,

“Friends make you love school more”, “there are beautiful moments with friends.”

“The atmosphere created by my friends makes me feel comfortable and full of life.”

Peers create joy and normalcy within a challenging atmosphere. Lea also stated:

“We lived the sweet and bitter together, that’s what I love the most”.

Through their collective experiences, they support one another through both downfalls and successes.

Peers are also seen as emotional companions. For instance, a student Ismail expressed that,

“I have a close friend who helps me emotionally. We are more like siblings... he plays a pivotal role by changing my mood and reminding me I am not alone”.

He revealed the importance of this social support in navigating distress. Others also stated friends help them cope with personal hardships; one participant, Sara, who is artistically gifted, explained:

“My friends support me especially during my sickness.”

Students also report peer support in the face of academic challenges:

“When I have a difficulty in studying, I resort to my friends to help me”.

Others express peer affirmation as a way of support for their gift. One student, Ayla, academically gifted, shared that,

“My friend complimented my poem. Her words pushed me a lot.”

Shahed, also a gifted student, said,

“My friends support my videos; they help me edit and repost my work... they are happy that one of us is doing something like that.”

Peers, in this sense, create a form of talent visibility and motivation for the individual.

Community and Extracurricular Support

Community support was also frequently mentioned in the narratives of gifted Palestinian refugee students, whether through community-based programs, institutions, or individuals. They offer students an environment for self-acknowledgment and growth. Some described joining such programs as turning points in their lives. Ghada, artistically gifted, expressed,

“Joining the scouts is what strengthened me. I proved myself”.

Community members also play a pivotal role. Ali, academically gifted, stated that,

“The sheikh has had a big impact on me; he supported me emotionally a lot. He provided me with a space on his roof to exercise. Anything I want, he and his wife support me.”

The sheikh acts as emotional regulator, especially given the burdens he faces in his own household.

For others, extracurricular spaces served as a way to identify and develop their talents. Shadi, musically gifted, shared that,

“His music teacher within the institution told me I was talented.”

Similarly, Ayla, an academically gifted female, stated that,

“When I was young, I was in an institute that taught poetry writing. Ever since I started performing on stage.”

Also, Ghada, a musically gifted student, stated,

“I saw the music band was interesting when I entered the scouts, so I entered and learnt with the help of the leader.”

These statements show that specialized teachers and programs can identify and nurture giftedness among students.

For some students, certain programs offer ways to emotionally regulate oneself. Ali, an academically gifted student, stated,

“I entered a center that taught us how to develop communication skills and learned about different forms of intelligence. We learned about emotional intelligence and how to control our emotions”.

This program aided him to navigate psychological challenges.

Future Trajectories

Regardless of the challenges gifted Palestinian refugee students face from displacement, participants also expressed their visions for the future, revealing their ability to dream beyond adversity. These aspirations, however, are formed from the challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they resort to. So, it is not simply imagining a future but rather resisting their present circumstances to reach one.

All gifted Palestinian refugee students narrated their aspirations towards certain careers and professions. Some of them were embedded in their gifts and talents, while others emerged from the personality traits and strengths they embody. Thus, they imagine their future as a continuation of what they have been and are still going through.

Future Trajectories Shaped by Gifts/ Talents

For many gifted Palestinian refugee students, aspirations emerged from their exceptional abilities, whether academic or artistic. It functions as a mirror, showing them their potential, and as a map, guiding them towards their future. Therefore, their gifts and talents are seen as a way to imagine their future place in their world.

Students who excel academically aspire to major in disciplines that match their intellectual potential. For Ali, an academically gifted student, his academic giftedness and lived experiences with his illness and structural instability served as motivators to become a neurologist abroad. Similarly, Shahed, an academically exceptional student in linguistic and media expression, aspires to study media and pursue a career in television. Her gift in communication becomes the core foundation of how she envisions her future. Moreover, Zaynab, another academically gifted student, hopes to pursue dentistry, which aligns well with her academic excellence. Furthermore, Ismail, also an academically gifted student, hopes to become an engineer, a career that aligns with his high scientific abilities, and, since he has always expressed curiosity about problem-solving, he chose mechatronics as a trajectory that reflects his interests.

Other students expressed their artistic giftedness as ambitions for their futures. Dima, for example, who acquires high artistic potential in drawing, envisions a future related to drawing, such as interior design or architecture. It is not simply an interest but rather a passion she aims to develop as a future career.

Future Trajectories Shaped by Character and Strengths

Other students' aspirations develop from their internal strengths and values. The future becomes an extension of their current self, rather than what they can do. For instance, Ayla is an academically gifted student and is especially talented in poetry writing and expression. However, she aspires to be a lawyer, drawn to defending others, speaking on their behalf, and challenging injustice. Her aspiration to become a lawyer is an extension of her identity, oriented towards advocacy, justice, and voice. Similarly, Rima, an academically gifted female, aspires to study law and media as an extension of her willingness to speak up for what is right. Her ambitions emerge from her sense of

commitment and responsibility to defend others. Ghada, another artistically gifted female student in music, also has aspirations that go beyond her musical potential. Her interest in living things, such as animals and gardening, extends into a trajectory in which she hopes to become a vet or a landscape architect.

Contrary to Dima, who hopes to extend her artistic talent, Lea is an artistically gifted female who sees her exceptional ability in art as a hobby. She aspires to help and support others. Thus, she wishes to become a dietitian, where she can support girls and help build their confidence. Her aspirations emerged from her commitment to making a positive difference in others' well-being. Similarly, Sara, an exceptionally gifted female student in drawing, expresses her interest in teaching young kids. Her aspirations emerge from her warmth and care for young learners.

Finally, Shadi, who is a musically gifted male, envisions a future in business. He sees music as a talent he hopes to develop and achieve, but as only a minor aspect of his life. His primary aspiration is to major in business, given his strengths in responsibility and commitment.

Future Trajectories Shaped by Responsibility and Identity

Students' narratives revealed that future aspirations were not shaped solely by personal ambition, but also deeply rooted in their moral and political commitments. Many participants articulated future trajectories grounded in obligation to family and commitment to affirm Palestinian identity in contexts of exclusion. These orientations transformed hardship into motivation, positioning success as resistance and visibility.

Desire to Uplift Financial Situation

For many gifted Palestinian refugee students, financial challenges are their primary source of motivation, shaping their determination and future aspirations. They

narrated their financial difficulties as a responsibility, determined to transform their current situation into something better. Ali, an academically gifted student, articulated that:

“Every step I take is for my family.”

His academic effort becomes a duty to uplift his family’s circumstances. He continued,

“I want to live something better than the life I have now.”

His current challenges are motives toward envisioning alternative futures. Ismail also illustrated that,

“I want to travel abroad, work, and come back to help my family.”

He is motivated to succeed professionally to financially support his parents. Similarly, Lea, an artistically gifted student, emphasized,

“I am working on myself so I can provide a better life for my family and for myself”.

These students aim to break the cycle of deprivation and transform their families’ realities.

Furthermore, an academically gifted male student, Ismail, is seeking alternative solutions to all the barriers that he faces, saying that,

“In any way, we can do something... I dream of being financially independent.”

His father’s experiences also motivated him to not repeat the same mistake.

“My father studied in Russia but came back without having graduated... If I were him, I would not have returned. I would not let circumstances stop me.”

His father's potential was unrecognized, which caused their financial difficulties. He refuses to repeat the cycle by studying vigorously to obtain a scholarship that allows him to study and work abroad. Thus, scarcity becomes a driving force to transcend constraints.

All in all, students do not simply endure hardship. They see it as a source of persistence in excelling and improving their socioeconomic situation.

Palestinian Identity Assertion

For some Palestinian refugee students, challenges intensify their desire to assert their identity. So, instead of internalizing their structural exclusion, they reframe it as a reason to elevate their Palestinian identity, where their success becomes a counter to their erasure. They hope to make their identity apparent and respected by connecting it to their success. Ghada, being artistically gifted, rejects being unnamed, saying,

“I could work under a doctor, but my name would not appear. What matters to me is what I produce – not under another’s name”.

She insists on ownership and recognition as she conceptualizes her national identity. She explicitly said,

“I want to reach a level where my name appears with 'Palestinian' next to it.”

She does not separate her identity from her achievement and refuses to submit to the marginalization enforced by the legal system. Similarly, another artistically gifted student, Lea, also articulated that:

“I want to shed light on my identity... maybe in the future I can shed light on my country’s name. Who will shed light on us if not ourselves?”

Political consciousness is rooted in her personal ambition. She sets goals and frames them as acts of visibility, resisting narratives that tend to silence their identity. Moreover, a distinct academically gifted female student, Shahed, also grounded her motivation through Palestinian role models who thrived globally.

“Just like Anas El-Sharif and Shireen Abu Akleh, I want my name to be associated with my country.”

She also mentioned:

“Ambitions do not acknowledge identity.”

She challenges the legal exclusion imposed by the legal system by reframing it as a reason to aspire and push even further.

In conclusion, these narratives show that gifted Palestinian refugee students aspire through adversity. Their future ambitions are intertwined with their gifts, values, strengths, responsibilities, and identities. Hence, their future career pathways blend their potential and moral purpose. Their vision for the future acts as means of resistance to their challenges, reclaiming agency over their lives and transforming barriers into direction.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an interpretation of the findings using Contextual Narrative Interpretation (CNI) to examine how each individual constructs meaning within a complex sociopolitical and personal context. This method was chosen because it aligns with the study's primary aim - understanding how gifted Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon make sense of their educational experiences, constraints, and aspirations. CNI attends to what each participant says, how they say it, and the conditions that shape their narratives. Therefore, each participant's story was examined holistically, respecting their individuality, before exploring any common or distinctive meanings across students. These patterns were then organized around how students navigate their challenges, strengths, and aspirations, thereby forming the primary themes shaping giftedness under displacement. Accordingly, this chapter explores how students interpret adversity and envision their futures beyond it.

Narratives Formed Under Personal and Structural Challenges

The narratives of gifted Palestinian refugee students reveal numerous structural, socioeconomical, emotional, environmental, and educational challenges. Students express these challenges through legal exclusion, poverty, instability, illness, and school limitations that interrupt their ability to flourish. However, through the CNI, their statements were also interpreted in light of how they recount these adversities through adaptation, cognitive reframing, practical problem-solving, and meaningful practices. These reflect the strategies they use to navigate their personal and contextual experiences as both gifted and displaced – highlighting how CNI shows students making sense of their stories. Many challenges are inevitable and unchangeable, while others can be overcome.

Through their narratives, students alternate between describing certain challenges as barriers that hinder their capacities and hide their identities, and as catalysts that enhance their determination and motivation.

Legal Exclusions

“Lebanon is standing in my way”

Findings from this study indicated that legal restriction on professions were a primary factor shaping gifted Palestinian refugee students’ educational aspirations and future planning. Across narratives, participants described how restrictions on practicing certain professions in Lebanon such as law, medicine, media, and engineering – directly impacted how they evaluated potential career pathways. Students in this study frequently articulated that their envisioned futures were shaped by what the laws permit them to practice instead of their abilities and interests.

This study reveals that legal exclusion functions not only as a structural barrier, but as an internal limit that students absorb early in life, shaping what they believe is possible for their futures. Several students described their awareness of these constraints during childhood and adolescence, leading them to preemptively exclude certain professions from their imagined futures. In their narratives, legal exclusion acted as an invisible boundary that narrowed the range of attainable goals and affected their motivation and effort. Students describe how structural limits imposed on their refugee status are constant reminders of what they are not allowed to become.

While existing literature documented the restrictive legal environment faced by Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, particularly in regard to employment and career access (Al-Hroub, 2011; Shabaneh, 2012), this study advances the literature by demonstrating how legal exclusion is lived, narrated and anticipated by gifted students.

Drawing on the Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1995), these findings show that legal systems do not merely restrict access to opportunities; they restructure the foundation of their aspirations by narrowing what is perceived as realistically attainable and worth investing.

Significantly, giftedness requires conditions that allow sustained motivation, exploration and future orientation. When legal structures repeatedly signal that certain futures are inaccessible, motivation becomes fragile and effort is redirected. Narratives from students highlight how exclusions penetrate their lives, affecting their academic determination and investment in paths they perceived unattainable, illustrating how legal exclusion contributes to the deactivation of gifted potential rather than its absence.

On the other hand, this study challenges deficit-based interpretations of constraint by showing that not all students respond to legal exclusion with resignation. Most narratives among students reveal that they refuse to allow legal exclusion to undermine their aspirations and motivation. Instead, they described adaptive responses centered around preserving hope. They reported redirecting their goals toward alternative professions, reframing success through different forms of contribution, or even imaging their futures beyond Lebanon's borders. Notably, studying and working abroad emerged as a narrative symbol of possibility where ability determines opportunities and not their legal status.

These findings align with research on resilience indicating that adolescents in unstable environments develop around the challenges rather than absorbing them (Masten et al., 2012; Ungar, 2011). Simultaneously, through narratives, traveling abroad emerged as a site of dignity and self-actualization. This finding aligns with studies on refugees, in which they envision their futures where their giftedness could flourish beyond imposed

constraints (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). However, this study extends it by showing how mobility is described as means for protecting giftedness from structural erasure. It is where their abilities are not only recognized but also developed and appreciated. All in all, through their narratives, students perceived legal exclusion not as eliminating ambition, but reshaping its direction, geography and investment.

Socioeconomic Hardships

“If I do not receive a scholarship, I might not be able to enter university, or I may be forced to work instead of studying.”

Findings from this study indicate that socioeconomic hardship played a pivotal role in shaping how gifted Palestinian refugee students understood and navigated their educational trajectories. Across narratives, students expressed financial difficulties not merely as a background condition, but as an internal barrier that constrained the recognition and development of their potential and gifts. Participants reported that their educational futures are contingent upon receiving scholarships, and their artistic talents are conditional upon the availability of tools. Therefore, their giftedness and talent were described as being activated solely when the financial circumstances allowed. Their narratives reported that limited resources, opportunities and exposure, leave their abilities underdeveloped despite motivation and potential. In this context, students’ abilities are overshadowed by their economic concerns, requiring them to negotiate survival alongside aspirations.

While these findings align with Gagne’s (2004) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1947), this study extends beyond them illustrating how socioeconomic hardship is not merely an external contextual factor but is internalized by gifted Palestinian refugee students as a limitation on their potential.

They did not describe themselves as lacking giftedness, but they described their gifts and talents as being present but suspended. Giftedness was described as a conditional capacity that is only activated when financial resources, scholarships or material tools were available.

Regardless of these constraints, certain participants reported that they do not view themselves as passive recipients of hardship. Instead, their narratives reflected a goal-oriented persistence, where adversity fueled their determination to improve their economic circumstances and disrupt cycles of deprivation. Their aspirations are rooted in honoring their parents' unrecognized potential, in enhancing their economic circumstances, and in fulfilling their parents' desire to succeed. In this sense, hardship was not narrated as a barrier but a motivating force towards a better future.

While this pattern is consistent with the Resilience Theory, which highlights how youth facing instable conditions often reinterpret adversity as a catalyst for perseverance and future-oriented success (Masten et al., 2012; Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Ungar, 2011), this study extends it by illustrating how resilience is perceived as being morally grounded and as being a relation process. persistence was narrated as an ethical commitment to family, identity and future responsibility. Hardship was not perceived as an endpoint but as a responsibility that demanded action, discipline and planning.

Emotional Burdens

“I feel different from others... if I get an 85, its not like when others do.”

Additionally, findings from gifted Palestinian refugee students' narratives indicated that they experienced emotional burdens that directly interfered with their academic engagement, confidence and sense of competence. Certain students described living with persistent anxiety, grief, illness, fear and instability, all of which disrupted

their motivation and concentration. They also revealed that they feel different from their peers due to their emotional conditions.

At certain moments, their psychological burden predominated and emotional survival took precedence over their cognitive abilities. These findings align with research indicating that gifted refugees often show a clear prioritization of psychological survival over academic and artistic engagement (Betancourt et al., 2013). Such experiences also resonate with the Trauma Theory (Van der Kolk, 2014), which describes how chronic challenges disrupt emotional regulation and attention.

Simultaneously, while these narratives asserted existing research, they added another dimension where students refuse to surrender their circumstances. Gifted Palestinian refugee students reinterpret their suffering as something purposeful, moral, and strengthening. They reported that their illness became a reason to pursue a particular career, academic challenges were transformed into a need to prove competence, and instability became a motivating factor to excel. Through meaning-making, they saw trauma as a driving force towards growth and agency.

Drawing on the Resilience Theory (Masten, 2012; Van Breda, 2018), this study demonstrated that gifted Palestinian refugee students engage in resilience as an identity-governing practice rather than being a coping process alone. They do not describe trauma as something to recover from, but as an experience integrated into their self-conceptions.

Importantly, this study further extends faith-based practices by showing that prayer and surrendering to God's Will function as rituals that helped them stabilize and release their emotional burdens. They depicted it as the most dependable source of comfort, reassuring them that they are not alone. They implement it as a means to make

meaning of their struggles where hardship is interpreted as divine wisdom, a test of personal strength, and a primary factor in their identity development.

Additionally, many students perform mechanisms to transform their pain into something meaningful and purposeful. For instance, they seek fresh air, public expression, routine rituals, and communication as therapeutic practices to release emotional discomfort. These narratives support Sleijpan et al.'s (2016) argument that emotional expression is central for refugee youth. It also extends it by showing that students intentionally implement these strategies to prevent psychological distress that might disrupt their learning.

Environment's Instability

“Suddenly there was gunfire... a bullet passed right next to me.”

Furthermore, findings from this study indicate that gifted Palestinian refugee students grow up with an environment characterized by ambient exposure to violence, conflicts, and gunfire. Students' narratives show that these external constraints are not isolated events, but a constant reality shaping their ability to concentrate, feel safe, and remain mentally present. These findings are consistent with the Cultural-Ecological Model (Ogbu, 1981), which asserts that minority students' lives are inseparable from their environmental and structural conditions (Ogbu, 1981). However, this study extends this model by showing how environmental instability becomes cognitively and emotionally internalized by gifted students, directly influencing how they allocate energy, time, effort and attention. Their academic performance cannot be interpreted independently from their environmental constraints placed upon them.

Several students described heightened alertness, emotional exhaustion, and difficulty focusing. Therefore, gifted students' performance is not solely a reflection of

ability but is also shaped by environmental conditions in which they live. This aligns with Trauma Theory, in which continuous hyperarousal forces the nervous system to remain in a state of vigilance, thereby prioritizing survival over learning and development (Perry, 2006; Van der Kolk, 2014). This study adds nuance by illustrating that for gifted refugee students, hypervigilance does not eliminate intellectual ability but disrupts the conditions under which it can be sustained and expressed.

At the same time, gifted Palestinian refugee students also reported normalization in which violence and instability are framed as ordinary aspects of life. Narratives included moments of laughter, socializing, and purchasing food during aggressive conflicts. These suggest that normalization functions as a survival strategy allowing students to tolerate insecurity and continue their daily lives. This aligns with Ungar's (2011) ecological model, which posits that students adapt to their environments by normalizing their surroundings to function effectively. However, this study adds to it by showing that normalization operates as a double-edged process for gifted students. On one hand, it enables emotional endurance and continuity of daily life. On the other hand, it masks the emotional and cognitive effort required to live under this threat. As a result, students' ability become the reason their need for support is overlooked.

Educational Challenges

“The education system did not support my ambitions. They didn't give us any real opportunities to learn on computers, even though these things are essential for my future.”

Gifted Palestinian refugee students in this study also indicated navigating educational challenges within their school environment. They described their schools as being overcrowded, under-resourced, and instructionally inconsistent. Students repeatedly mentioned that their classrooms contain 40-50 students per class and the

double-shift system also compresses instructional time. These conditions limited classroom management, and teacher attention; it fragmented learning and consequently made individualized instruction impossible. For gifted students, these environments do not challenge and stimulate their abilities but rather they described feeling delayed and disengaged. This aligns with research done by Ford (2011) and Sarouphim (2015) who state that marginalized gifted learners remain un-nurtured in school environments that lack the scaffolding needed for ability development.

Students also reported unclear instructions, mismatched examinations, a slower pace of instruction, and sudden acceleration. They highlighted the inconsistency in teacher instruction as a barrier to their academic performance. Their narratives showed that the academic system fails to provide them with the conditions needed to nurture their abilities. Moreover, students accounted for the lack of necessary exposure to enrichment opportunities and fields of interest.

While Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2004) necessitate environmental catalysts for potential development, such as guidance, resources, opportunities, and models, and Reis (2004) highlight the need for reliable and rich instruction to thrive, this study demonstrates that these catalysts are largely absent in students' schooling experiences. Therefore, the educational ecosystem that should expand potential is narrowing it instead, reinforcing the notion of deactivated giftedness. (Al-Hroub, in press).

Despite these educational challenges, gifted Palestinian refugee students employed multiple problem-solving and self-management strategies, such as structured study schedules, early-morning study, and eliminating distractors. These behaviors are a form of self-regulation that is called executive resilience (Franck & Delage, 2022). They

plan, regulate, and adapt under pressure. This also aligns with Zimmerman's (1990) theory of self-regulated learning, in which high-achieving students rely on intentional routines and set goals to overcome challenges and maintain their academic progress. However, this study extends by showing that self-regulation emerges among gifted Palestinian refugee students out of necessity rather than instructional design.

Students also seek support from family members, peers, and tutors when performing tasks and understanding concepts they missed in the classroom. They try to fill the gaps left by the school system's inconsistent instruction by finding reliable resources. This echoes the ecological model of resilience (Ungar, 2011) and Dryden-Peterson's (2016) model, which posits that refugee students' peer collaboration. Yet, this study highlights a critical point where students' adaptive strategies are often a substitute for institutional responsibility rather than supplementing it.

While challenges are usually expressed as barriers that constrain Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, the narratives displayed a repetitive pattern that hardship can be a catalyst as well. The findings of this study reveal that gifted Palestinian refugee students respond to challenges with heightened motivation, particularly when they view education as a key pathway to stability and financial uplift. They show a high sense of drive, purpose, and responsibility. Thus, this pattern resonated with "purpose-driven resilience" (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomas, 2015) but also illuminated that such resilience emerged as a response to systematic educational limitations in which students did not persist because the system supported them, but because they actively resisted its limitations. They transform their pain into purpose, and their constraints become stimulus for their ambitions in the future. In this sense, students reinterpret their challenges as a means to excel, resist, and reclaim control over their lives. Therefore, their navigation of

educational constraints illuminates the extent to which the education system and structure has failed to activate their potential.

Aspirations Beyond Adversity

Students' narratives revealed that aspirations were not abstract wishes detached from context but were actively constructed through both adversity and support. Rather than aspiring in isolation, gifted Palestinian refugee students articulated future goals that were shaped by relational scaffolds – family, peers, educators and community institutions – that provided emotional grounding, recognition, and reinforcement of their abilities. Simultaneously, hardship emerged as a drive to transform financial precarity, legal exclusion and instability into motives for growth, responsibility and identity assertion.

Support systems as the Scaffold of Aspiration

“My mom says that she sees a future in me.”

Gifted Palestinian refugee students narrated that they do not aspire in isolation; their ambitions also take shape through relational supports that provide them with an emotional foundation and academic reinforcement. Across narratives, students consistently expressed relational support systems through family, teachers, peers, and community institutions. They act as factors that strengthen students' abilities and reinforce their capacity. Aligning with resilience literature (Masten et al., 2012; Ungar, 2011), support systems serve as protective factors that help students navigate challenges. This study extends it by showing that support systems also actively enable aspirations and potential especially within legal and educational constraints.

At the familial level, students repeatedly emphasized emotional encouragement and affirmation. Parents were described as validating students' abilities, avoiding comparisons, and offering reassurance during doubt, illness, and pressure. Even modest

material support was narrated as symbolically powerful acts that affirmed students' potential within financially strained households - purchasing a book, providing art material, or simply offering space to study. Support was also manifested through positive reinforcement and physical rewards which enhanced their motivations and efforts.

This aligns with the literature, which highlights family affiliation as one of the core predictors of students' well-being and determination (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). They affirm that students' abilities deserve to grow. Moreover, parents who avoid comparison and offer emotional safety and security provide a place where their talents and gifts flourish. They protect the students' self-esteem, which is valuable for students navigating both external and internal pressures.

Peers also emerged as a source of emotional grounding and academic reinforcement. Students described friendships providing a sense of belonging, normalcy and relief within unstable environments. They offer companionship during difficult times – illness, family problems, or bullying - which helps them regulate their emotions through shared experiences and humor. They also mentioned that peers contribute to their academic engagement and motivation through studying, sharing notes, and revising further compensating for instructional inefficiencies and overcrowded classes. Not only that, but peer relationships were also described as means to nurture students' gifts by encouraging poetry and artwork, supporting media posts, and recognizing leadership in school settings. These affirmations enhance students' self-esteem in their competencies. In line with Ecological Models of Resilience, peer solidarity serves as a protective factor that supports adolescents during periods of stress (Ungar, 2011).

Additionally, students highlighted the role of community-based institutions in nurturing their abilities and aspirations. These settings provided opportunities for refugee

students to explore, develop, and express themselves. For example, scouts, poetry institutes, music institutes, art institutes, and even emotional regulation workshops were narrated as places where students are recognized and stimulated. They also served as sites for identity formation in which students engaged in activities and practices to express their unique abilities and develop them. Having mentors in the community also served as gift recognizers and emotional anchors, offering them guidance, safety, validation and stability amid broader uncertainty. Through these experiences, students were able to see their abilities as visible, legitimate and worth investing in rather than staying dormant. This further helps students aspire to a future in which they see themselves as capable and confident. These institutes and mentors did not simply supplement schools; instead, they provided them with supportive environments and opportunities to develop their potential. These findings align with research emphasizing the role of community institutions and mentorship in fostering identity development among marginalized youth (Valenzuela et al., 2023).

Taken together, these findings extend existing literature by showing that support systems do more than mitigate adversity; they actively construct how gifted Palestinian refugee students recognize their abilities and sustain their aspirations. These relations function as informal learning and recognition spaces where giftedness is noticed, encouraged and sustained, especially when formal education systems are unable to do so. It also moves beyond traditional school-centered models of gift development by showing their abilities are socially constructed in contexts of displacement.

Aspirations Toward Growth

“After everything I have went through, I became even more motivated.”

Across the narratives of gifted Palestinian refugee students, most students expressed adversity not as a means of suppressing their motivation, but as the core upon which their aspirations are constructed. Financial instability, legal marginalization, emotional burdens, educational limitations, and environmental precarity have become the driving forces shaping students' futures. Deprivation is seen as a responsibility, with students hoping to improve their families' situations. Therefore, their academic success is interpreted as an obligation to secure reliable professions that uplift their households and prevent the intergenerational transmission of financial instability. Students also described their aspirations as being oriented towards reliable professions, financial independence, and educational attainment as pathways toward autonomy and gaining control over their lives. Participants even articulated disciplined goals rather than passive hopes which reveal long-term planning, sacrifice, and persistence. While this pattern is consistent with Resilience Theory, which argues that hardship is translated into a source of power and strength among students facing instability (Masten, 2012; Ugar, 2011), this study extends it by showing that aspiration itself functions as a strategy for survival and navigation, rather than solely being an outcome of resilience. It was central to how students organized effort, motivation and meaning.

Moreover, gifted Palestinian refugee students also expressed their aspirations to assert their identity through their achievements. Most students expressed their frustration towards structural exclusion, specifically regarding professional restrictions. They viewed such laws as an aim to erase their nationality. However, they refused to allow them to diminish their motivation. Instead, they amplified their desire to seek visibility, where their future professional success makes their identity visible. Success is interpreted as a refutation of marginalization. This aligns with Critical Race Theory (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017), which highlights that marginalized groups often interpret success as resistance to structural exclusion. However, this study adds that aspiration among gifted Palestinian refugee students is simultaneously personal, moral and political. They aspire through adversity, because of it and against it. Therefore, their aspirations reflected their determination to achieve personal growth, becoming stronger, more confident, and more independent. In other words, they hope for a future with more control over their lives.

While existing literature conceptualizes religious faith as a coping mechanism that supports emotional regulation under adversity (Pargament, 2011; Betancourt & Khan, 2008), this study advances the literature by demonstrating how faith actively structures aspiration among gifted Palestinian refugee students. Participants did not describe belief solely as a source of comfort, but as a framework through which future goals were interpreted as possible, meaningful, and morally sanctioned despite challenges.

In this study, participants expressed their aspirations through a religious logic, saying that dreams are attainable because God enabled them, and unachieved dreams are a divine redirection towards a better future. In this way, faith did not function only as emotional support, but also as an aspirational compass that guided their effort, patience and long-term planning. Ambitions are intertwined with faith, and their belief becomes a driving force for students to remain persistent and aspire for their desired futures. Refugee students also showed that belief strengthens their persistence by transforming their goals into future possibilities, reinforcing their motivation and determination. Hence, their religious faith becomes a means for resilience. Through it, gifted Palestinian refugee students justify their circumstances through a positive lens and pursue their imagined futures.

Future Career Pathways

“I want to reach a level where my name appears with Palestinian next to it.”

This study moves beyond viewing career aspirations among gifted youth as a reflection of ability or interest alone, revealing how gifted Palestinian refugee students use future career pathways as mechanisms for orientation, identity construction and resistance under conditions of displacement. Across the narratives of gifted Palestinian refugee students, they expressed their future aspirations in career trajectories that either align with their strong abilities or match their personalities and interests. Some students portrayed talent as an identity compass that offers them a sense of direction towards future possibilities where they can express these abilities. Academically gifted students tended to choose fields that reflect their intellectual strengths, such as neurology, dentistry, engineering, or media. Similarly, artistically gifted students extended their abilities to ambitions in interior design or architecture. For those students, their talents are not simply a hobby. These students’ narratives supported the literature on gifted youth who construct their possible future selves around their strengths (Winner, 2000). This study extends the existing literature by demonstrating that gifts and talents are among the predictable factors influencing their aspirations.

A second pattern extended beyond ability-aligned aspirations to reveal career choices grounded in moral values and social commitments. Some students narrated that their choices in future careers reflect who they are and what they stand for, rather than what they simply excel at academically or artistically. Students who aspired to major in law, teaching, dietetics, veterinary work, and business emphasized independence alongside a strong desire to contribute to others and serve their communities. Their aspirations were driven by a sense of responsibility, justice, care and social contribution.

While this aligns with research emphasizing identity- and values-based career development which highlights how individuals construct future profession paths based on their self-concept and moral commitments (Guichard, 2009), nevertheless, this study extends this perspective by showing that refugee students' aspirations can also function as a form of social responsibility and resistance. Through their career choices, students seek not only personal fulfillment, but they also challenge marginalization by asserting meaningful roles within societies.

These findings reconceptualize career aspiration among gifted refugee students as a future-oriented strategy rather than a vocational preference. Career pathways become sites through which students negotiate constraint, preserve dignity and enact agency, by transforming aspiration into a purposeful future rather than a passive response to circumstances.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon are often spoken about through what is missing from resources, rights, and opportunities. This study reverses that lens. By centering students' narratives, it demonstrates that even under conditions of displacement, constraint and uncertainty, gifted refugee students continue to adapt, plan and aspire. The findings of this study show that this population is not defined by limitations, but one marked by capability, discipline, moral responsibility and future orientation.

Drawing on Contextual Narrative Interpretation, this study reveals that gifted students do not experience their challenges and aspirations separately. On the contrary, they view them as continuously interactive, with adversity shaping how their abilities are understood, developed, and anticipated for the future. Students' narratives are shaped within structural barriers, socioeconomic hardships, school limitations, emotional burdens, and environmental instability. These experiences affect their self-perception, academic engagement, motivation, and future planning. However, students engaged in multiple mechanisms to resist being defined by these constraints, including adaptation, cognitive reframing, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and meaning making.

This shows that these conditions do not suppress giftedness, but become the context where giftedness is enacted differently. It extends literature by demonstrating that gift and talent development under displacement is not linear and nor conditional on ideal environments. It is adaptive, relational and purposefully driven. Another central contribution is how students respond to constrained. Instead of dwelling, participants consistently demonstrated navigation. Their giftedness is actively exercised through adaptation.

The study also makes a visible a set of distinct assets that gifted Palestinian refugee students endorse in such as self-discipline, long-term goal orientation, moral responsibility, creative problem solving, emotional awareness, faith-based meaning-making and relational commitment. Students use these functional resources to regulate emotion, sustain motivation, compensate for educational gaps and persist for achievement.

This contributes to literature by framing students as high-capacity learners whose strengths are under-recognized and under-supported. However, just because these students are able, it does not mean that they can be left to manage on their own. This study highlights that their strength does not justify their neglect. On the contrary, their capacity strengthens the ethical and educational case for inclusive practices that recognize their giftedness as it appears under constraint and the development of ways that allow their abilities to develop in low-resource settings.

Their narratives also show how giftedness under displacement is not diminished but reconfigured as a source strength and agency. Students' aspirations do not emerge in isolation from hardship. They are constructed through it. Students express their ambitions for education, career trajectories, and self-growth, including financial responsibility to uplift their families, resistance to marginalization, and the pursuit of recognition and dignity.

Moreover, navigating challenges is not an individual process but a relational one, in which students envision their families, peers, teachers, community institutions, and faith as core support systems that preserve their motivation and determination. These supports actively affirmed students' worth, legitimized their abilities and sustained their belief in future possibilities. This research extends existing literature by showing that

resilience among refugee students is not merely about coping. Gifted Palestinian refugee students aspire to futures that reflect their gifts, inner strengths, and values. For many, their potential becomes a guiding compass for imagining career paths, while others aspire to futures that align with their identity and moral values. Students also hope to support their families and communities. Therefore, students' narratives show that they do not simply cope with adversity; they transform it into purpose.

Therefore, these findings assert gifted Palestinian refugee students are already contributing through planning, discipline and resilience, even within minimal support. The question is not one about their capability but whether systems are willing to meet them halfway. In conclusion, this study advances the field by providing insightful qualitative understandings of how gifted Palestinian refugee students narrate their experiences. Students have shown what they can with very little. All in all, this study advocates for more equitable identification processes and for teachers and institutions to create suitable conditions so that students' abilities are no longer forced to survive but finally allowed to grow.

Implications

The findings of this study carry crucial implications for how giftedness, resilience, and educational equity are practiced within refugee contexts. First, this study challenges traditional conceptions of giftedness that rely heavily on standardized performance, stable schooling and uninterrupted developmental trajectories. By highlighting the lived experiences of gifted Palestinian refugee student, the findings reveal that gifted potential is often obscured by structural, emotional, socioeconomic, educational and environmental constraints. Therefore, conventional identification models risk overlooking exceptional ability since it is expressed differently under instability.

From an equity perspective, this study has strong implications for policy and practice. Gifted Palestinian refugee student constitutes a double marginalized population that are excluded as both refugees and gifted learners. The findings of this study reinforce the educational responsibility to ensure that gifted refugee students are not invisible within educational systems. Therefore, what can be done now within constrained environments, is to adopt portfolio-based identification method. In parallel, low-cost mentorship structures can be embedded within schools and community spaces through pairing gifted students with committed teachers, older peers, volunteers or community professionals to offer guidance, and exposure to future pathways, this minimal recognition from a trusted adult can play a role in sustaining motivation and aspiration.

In addition, micro enrichment opportunities can be implemented within existing educational clusters. Schools can offer project-based activities or thematic sessions that allow students to explore interests and demonstrate ability. Teacher training is another critical implication. Targeted training sessions can help teachers recognize giftedness through diverse expressions such as curiosity, persistence, creativity, leadership and problem solving that were strongly evident in this study. Training should also emphasize that emotional withdrawal or inconsistency can coexist with high potential.

Moreover, the findings also highlight the coping strategies that gifted refugees perform to overcome adversity. They do not merely endure hardship. Instead, they continually reinterpret challenges; they try to solve problems, rely on faith, and purposefully engage in meaningful activities. As such, gift development is intertwined with psychological adaptation and identity construction, not solely academic or artistic performance. Thus, this calls for psychosocial support, and opportunities for purposeful

engagement. For example, reflective activities, goal-setting exercises, discussion spaces and creative expression can support emotional regulation and talent expression.

This study also highlights the protective factors and relational support systems that sustain gifted refugee students' aspirations. Through family encouragement, supportive teachers, peer solidarity, and community institutions, they are able to preserve their motivation and aspirations for the future. This implies that giftedness among refugees is relationally sustained rather than simply individually produced. Therefore, inclusive education must engage not only students but their families, peers and community members as partners in talent development.

All in all, while these approaches do not replace structural reform, they ensure that gifted refugee students are recognized and supported. Current educational systems can capitalize on students' existing assets and create pathways for giftedness to flourish, even under constraint.

Limitations

While this study offers rich insights into the lived experiences of gifted Palestinian students, it is subject to limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalization of its findings.

First, the study identified giftedness solely through teacher nominations. This process might have overlooked students whose potential was masked by displacement challenges or included gifted students who may have dropped out of school. This may underrepresent students who are gifted but overlooked, suggesting a more optimistic view of how giftedness is identified.

Second, findings were collected through narrative interviews, which are subject to selective memory and social desirability bias. Students may have expressed their

experiences in ways that align with cultural expectations. Also, the researcher's positionality may have influenced interpretation despite efforts to be reflexive. Despite efforts to ensure analytic rigor, it is crucial to remind readers that qualitative research is inherently interpretive.

Since students also express their challenges around certain sensitive topics, they may have hesitated to fully disclose their experiences due to emotional discomfort or fear. Therefore, topics about violence, family, or loss may be underrepresented.

Finally, CNI is implemented to make sense of their narratives. This may inadvertently privilege learners who are more expressive, which can impact how themes emerge within the analysis.

Recommendations

Building on the findings of this study, future research may benefit from richer contextual understanding of gifted Palestinian refugee students' experience by engaging with individuals within their immediate social environments.

While this study prioritizes students' narratives to center their lived experiences, future studies could complement these accounts by including perspectives from peers, teachers, family members, or community mentors. This can offer deeper insight into how contextual conditions are perceived and reinforced within students' lives. In particular, future research is encouraged to further explore peer relationships as a central yet underexamined dimension of gifted students' educational experiences under displacement. Findings suggest that peers play a role in emotional regulation, academic support, motivation and the recognition of talents. Additional research could examine how peer dynamics influence students' confidence and persistence.

Future recommendations should also examine teachers' perceptions of giftedness among refugee students, including how educators interpret ability, effort and potential within constrained educational environments. This can help illuminate how giftedness is identified, supported or even overlooked.

Additionally, future research could expand its scope by including students from different geographic contexts within Lebanon. Comparing narratives across refugee camps and urban settings such as Tripoli and Beirut may reveal how local conditions, resources, community support, and exposure to instability shape the way gifted students navigate their lives. This comparison can deepen understanding how context-specific factors influence students' educational experiences and gift development.

All in all, future research that incorporates multiple perspectives and diverse contexts can deepen understanding of how giftedness is shaped, constrained, and sustained under displacement.

APPENDIX 1

IRB ACCEPTANCE LETTER



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

Institutional Review Board
لجنة الأخلاقيات

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

August 29, 2025

Dr. Anies Al Hroub
American University of Beirut
01-350000 ext.: 3064
aa111@aub.edu.lb

Dear Dr. Al Hroub,

On August 29, 2025, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial, Expedited
Project Title:	Gifted and Displaced: Navigating the Challenges and Aspirations of Gifted Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon
Investigator:	Dr. Anies Al Hroub
IRB ID	SBS-2025-0283
Funding Agency:	None
Documents reviewed:	Received on August 26, 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IRB Application• Study Proposal• Interview Assent Form,• Interview Consent Form,• Interview Parental Consent Form,• Nomination Assent Form,• Nomination Parental Consent Form,• Nomination Consent Form,• Interview Questions,• UNRWA Letter,• Peer Nomination Form,• Teacher Nomination Form,• School Director Consent Form,• Recruitment Script,• Vignettes,• Referral Sheet.

The IRB approved the protocol from August 29, 2025, to August 28, 2026, inclusive. Before June 29, 2026, or within 30 days of study close, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a completed "FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report" and required attachments to request continuing approval or study closure. If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of August 28, 2026, inclusive, approval of this research expires on that date.

Please find attached the stamped approved documents:

- IRB Application (received on August 26, 2025),
- Study Proposal (received on August 26, 2025),
- Interview Assent Form (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
- Interview Consent Form (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
- Interview Parental Consent Form (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),

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- Nomination Assent Form (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
- Nomination Parental Consent Form (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
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- School Director Consent Form (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
- Recruitment Script (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
- Vignettes (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025),
- Referral Sheet (English & Arabic versions, received on August 26, 2025).

Only IRB approved documents and consent forms can be used for this research study.

Thank you.

Sincerely,


Lina El-Onsi Daouk, MSc, CIM
SBS IRB administrator

Cc: Lara Nasreddine, PhD, LD
Professor of Human Nutrition
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board, Social & Behavioral Sciences

Rami Mahfouz, MD, MPH
Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Chair Institutional Review Board

Ali K. Abu-Alfa, MD
Chairperson and Professor, Department of Internal Medicine
Director, Human Research Protection Program
Director for Research Affairs (AUBMC)

The American University of Beirut and its Institutional Review Board, under the Institution's Federal Wide Assurance with OHRP, comply with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Code of Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects ("The Common Rule") 45CFR46, subparts A, B, C, and D, with 21CFR56; and operate in a manner consistent with the Belmont report, FDA guidance, Good Clinical Practices under the ICH guidelines, and applicable national/local regulations.

APPENDIX 2 ADOLESCENT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Gifted and Displaced: Navigating the Challenges and Aspirations of Gifted Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

Principal Investigator(s): Dr. Anies Al-Hroub
Address: American University of Beirut (AUB)
Phone: (01) 350 000 Ext: 3064
Site where the study will be conducted: Saida UNRWA Schools

Student Investigator: Reem Al Naamani
Address: Saida
Phone: 70163959

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. A research study is a special way to find out about something. We are trying to find out more about the challenges of gifted Palestinian refugee students and understand how gifted Palestinian refugees visualize their futures and aspirations. You are being asked to join the study because you are a Palestinian refugee student enrolled in grades 10, 11, or 12 at a UNRWA school in Lebanon and have been nominated as gifted in one or more areas—academic achievement, art, or writing—by your teacher and/or peers.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

This is what will happen if you are in this study:

If you decide to take part in this study, you will meet with the researcher to do only one interview where you can talk about your school life, any challenges you face, your dreams for the future, and anything you would like to share about your learning experience. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will take place in a quiet and private place.

With your and your parents' permission, the interview will be recorded using a voice recorder, so the researcher can remember everything you say. You can choose to speak in Arabic or English — whatever makes you feel most comfortable. Around 10 to 12 students from grades 10, 11, and 12 will be part of this study. The whole study will take place over about one month, and you will only need to take part in one interview. There are no tests or exams, and you can stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

WHAT MAKES THIS DIFFERENT FROM THE USUAL TREATMENT?

This study is different from your regular school activities because it is not a class, test, or assignment. Instead of studying a subject, you will be talking about your own experiences at school. The special part of this study is that it gives you the chance to share your personal story—what helps you learn, what challenges you face, and what dreams you have for the future. There are no right or wrong answers, and your voice is what matters most. This kind of study is called a “narrative interview,” and it helps the researcher learn from students like you by listening to your stories in your own words.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are no physical risks from being in this study. You will not be asked to take any medicine, do any tests, or change anything in your daily routine. The only part of the study is a one-on-one conversation (called an interview) where you will talk about your experiences at school.

Sometimes, talking about personal experiences might make you feel emotional or uncomfortable. If that happens, you can choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time. You will not get into trouble, and it will not affect your school in any way.

If you ever feel upset or need support, we will make sure you can talk to someone who can help. You can also talk to your parents or a trusted adult.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

There are no direct personal benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, by sharing your story, you are helping the researcher better understand the experiences, challenges, and strengths of gifted Palestinian refugee students like yourself. Your voice is important and may help educators, counselors, and schools better support students in the future. This study may also raise awareness among decision-makers about the need to recognize and support talented refugee students, which can lead to better programs and opportunities for others like you.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?

If you choose not to take part, nothing will change about your school experience, and there will be no consequences. You can simply decide not to participate, and that decision will be fully respected.

CAN YOU BE REMOVED FROM THE STUDY WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT?

You will not be removed from this study by the study team unless you choose to stop participating. Since participation is completely voluntary, you will remain in the study for as long as you wish to take part.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

Every reasonable effort will be made to keep your records confidential. The data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer and in a locked cabinet accessible only to the study team. Audio recordings and transcripts will be anonymized by removing names and any personal identifiers, and pseudonyms will be used in place of real names.

However, while you are in this study, some people may need to look at your records to ensure the study is being done correctly and ethically. These may include the study sponsors, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), or government agencies responsible for protecting human research participants. We will not share your personal information unless required by law. The study doctor may use the results of the study in publications or presentations, but your identity will never be revealed.

WHAT IF YOU ARE INJURED IN THE STUDY?

Although this study does not involve any physical procedures or medical interventions, if you are emotionally upset or feel uncomfortable during the interview, you can stop at any time. Your parents or legal guardians have been informed about this and have been given contact information to reach the research team if any concerns or issues arise. If needed, appropriate support or referrals will be provided to ensure your well-being.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

WILL YOU GET PAID TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

No, you will not be paid to participate in this study. However, your time, effort, and willingness to share your experiences are greatly appreciated, and you will be personally thanked for your valuable contribution.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT?

Being in this study is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to or you can stop being in the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw later, this will not affect your grades, your school record, or how your teachers treat you.

If you have questions about your rights, you may call:

Institutional Review Board on 01-350000 ext. 5445

You will be told about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to stay in this study.

AGREEMENT TO BE IN THE STUDY

Your signature below means that you have read the above information about the thesis study and have had a chance to ask questions to help you understand what you will do in this study. Your signature also means that you have been told that you can change your mind later if you want to. You will be given a copy of this assent form. By signing this assent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

NAME OF SUBJECT
AGE

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT (13 YRS - 17 YRS)
DATE & Time

PERSON OBTAINING ASSENT
DATE & Time

SIGNATURE

APPENDIX 3 ADOLESCENT CONSENT FORM IN ARABIC

Institutional Review Board
American University of Beirut
Bliss Street
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: (01) 350-000 ext. 5445

الموافقة للاشتراك في البحث العلمي
المراهقين ذو العمر يتراوح بين 13-17

عنوان البحث: الموهوبون والمهجرون: استكشاف التحديات والطموحات لدى اللاجئين الفلسطينيين الموهوبين في لبنان

الباحث: الدكتور أنيس الحروب
العنوان: الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت (AUB)
الهاتف: ٠١-٣٥٠٠٠٠٠ مقسم ٣٠٦٤
الموقع الذي ستجرى فيه الدراسة: مدارس الأونروا في صيدا

الباحث المساعد: ريم النعماني
العنوان: صيدا
الهاتف: 70163959

هدف الدراسة

تطلب منك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لأنك مراهق/ة، يتراوح عمرك بين 15 و18 سنة، وأنت طالب فلسطيني لاجئ مسجل في الصف العاشر أو الحادي عشر أو الثاني عشر في إحدى مدارس الأونروا في لبنان، وقد تم ترشيحك من قبل معلميك و/أو زملائك كطالب موهوب في مجال أو أكثر مثل التفوق الأكاديمي، أو الفنون، أو الكتابة.
نرجو منك قراءة المعلومات الواردة في هذه الاستمارة بتأن وهدوء، واستشارة أهلك أو من تثق بهم قبل اتخاذ القرار بالمشاركة. كما يمكنك طلب أي توضيحات أو معلومات إضافية حول أي جزء من هذه الاستمارة أو عن الدراسة ككل من الباحثة أو أي شخص مسؤول عن الدراسة.

ما يتوجب عليكم القيام به:

- أولاً، سنأخذ موافقة أهلك لمشاركتك في الدراسة، وإذا حصلنا على موافقتهم: قبل البدء بالدراسة:
- سنطلب منك تعبئة استمارة موافقة خاصة بك (نموذج موافقة المشارك) تؤكد فيها رغبتك بالمشاركة.
- سنطلب منك كذلك تخصيص وقت للمشاركة في مقابلة فردية، تجرى في مكان هادئ ومريح، حيث سنتحدث عن تجاربك الدراسية، التحديات التي واجهتها، وأهدافك المستقبلية.

خلال الدراسة

- سنطلب منكم القيام بزيارة واحدة لمدة تتراوح بين 60 إلى 70 دقيقة، حيث سيتم:
 - إجراء مقابلة فردية مع الباحثة لمشاركة تجربتكم التعليمية، التحديات التي يواجهونها، وطموحاتكم المستقبلية.
 - تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً (في حال موافقتكم) لضمان دقة تحليل المعلومات.
 - سيتم احترام خصوصيتكم، ويمكنكم التحدث باللغة التي تفضلونها (العربية أو الإنجليزية).

التأثيرات السلبية/المجازفة:

لا توجد تأثيرات سلبية متوقعة من مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة. المقابلة لن تتضمن أي أسئلة شخصية أو حساسة، ولن تؤثر مشاركتك أو عدمها على وضعك الأكاديمي أو علاقتك بالمدرسة أو الجامعة. ومع ذلك، إذا شعرت بعدم الراحة أثناء المقابلة، يمكنك التوقف في أي وقت، أو تخطي أي سؤال لا ترغب بالإجابة عليه، دون أن يترتب على ذلك أي عواقب إذا شعرت بالضيق، سيتم تذكيرك بوجود عدة مصادر دعم يمكنك اللجوء إليها مثل أصدقائك، والديك، أو المرشد/المرشدة في المدرسة إذا كان متوفراً. كما ستحصل على ورقة إحالة فيها معلومات الاتصال بخدمات دعم نفسي واجتماعي منخفضة التكلفة يمكنك التواصل معها عند الحاجة.

. لا توجد أي عقوبة إذا قررت عدم الاستمرار، ولن يؤثر ذلك على علامتك المدرسية أو على طريقة تعامل أي شخص معك. إذا لم تعد ترغب في المشاركة، فقط أخبر المعلم أو الباحث بذلك.

الفوائد:

من خلال مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة، سوف تساهم في تطوير المعرفة العلمية حول تجارب الطلاب الفلسطينيين اللاجئين الموهوبين في النظام التعليمي، مما يساعد الباحثين والمعلمين والمستشارين التربويين على فهم أفضل لاحتياجاتهم وتحدياتهم. على الرغم من أنه لن تكون هناك فوائد شخصية مباشرة لك، إلا أن مشاركتك ستساعد في تسليط الضوء على قدرات هذه الفئة المهمشة وتعزيز الدعم الموجه لهم في المستقبل.

هل هناك طرق بديلة للوصول إلى الهدف المرجو؟

ليس هناك طرق أو وسائل بديلة للوصول للهدف المرجو. الوسيلة البديلة الوحيدة هي عدم مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة.

السرية

يتعهد الباحثون بعدم الإفصاح عن نتائج البحث أو إعطائها إلا لك. في حال وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، سيبقى اسمك طبي الكتمان. لن يكون لأي شخص، ما لم ينص القانون على ذلك، حق الاطلاع على ملفك باستثناء المسؤول عن الدراسة ومعاونيه، ولجان الأخلاق المهنية المستقلة، ومفتشين من الإدارات الحكومية المنظمة.

ماذا لو حصل لي أي عارض سلبي؟

إذا حصل أي عارض سلبي من جراء المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، لن يكون هناك أي تعويضات مالية لتغطية التكاليف في حال لم تغطيها شركات التأمين الطبي أو الاستشفائي أو أي برامج حكومية.

هل هناك تكاليف من خلال المشاركة في هذه الدراسة؟

ليس هنالك أي مصروف متوجب عليك. لن تحصل على أي مردود مالي مقابل مشاركتك في الدراسة.

في حال قررت الانضمام لمجموعة الأولاد الذين يشاركون في هذه الدراسة عليك أن توقع هذه الورقة. وفي حال قررت أنك لا تريد أن تشترك فلا توقع هذه الورقة، وهذا حتما لن يؤثر سلبيا عليك مطلقا. تذكر الانضمام للدراسة قرارك ولا أحد يجبرك على التوقيع او سوف يستاء من عدم اشتراكك. يمكنك تغيير رأيك في أي وقت. بإمكانك طرح الأسئلة المتعلقة بالدراسة متى شئت.

موافقة المشترك:

لقد أطلعت بكل وضوح على محتوى البحث العلمي المذكور سابقا ومجرباته وتأثيره السلبي الذي قد يحصل ونتائجه المتوخاة، ويتعهد الباحثون بعدم الإفصاح عن نتائج البحث أو إعطائها إلا للشخص المعني. وبناء عليه فإننا أجاز طوعا إجراء هذا البحث وأوافق على الاشتراك فيه وأعلم أن الباحث الدكتور أنيس الحروب ومساعدته ريم النعماني سيكونون مستعدين للإجابة على أسئلتني عند اتصالي على الرقم التالي: 01-350000 - مقسم: 3064. في حال عدم حصولي على إجابة بإمكانني الاتصال بلجنة الأخلاقيات: 5445 مقسم 01-350000. اعلم انه بمقدوري أن اراجع عن الموافقة في أي وقت كان حتى بعد التوقيع عليها كما سأحصل على نسخة منها.

اسم المشترك (ة)	توقيع المشترك (ة)	التاريخ والساعة
اسم الباحث	توقيع الباحث	التاريخ والساعة

APPENDIX 4
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

**AUB Social & Behavioral Sciences Parental
Permission
Permission for Child to Participate in Research**



Study Title: Gifted and Displaced: Navigating the Challenges and Aspirations of Gifted Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

Researcher: Dr. Anies Al-Hroub

Student Researcher: Reem Al Naamani

This is a permission form for your child/child for whom you are legal guardian to participate in a research study. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to permit your child/child for whom you are legal guardian to participate.

Your child's participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully before you decide to allow your child to participate. If you decide to permit participation, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

This research identifies the perceptions of gifted Palestinian refugee students regarding their academic experiences, challenges, and aspirations within the school system in Lebanon. The purpose is to explore how these students understand and navigate their educational journey through the use of narrative storytelling interviews; the study offers participants the opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences and share their perspectives in their own words.

Procedures/Tasks:

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview. The interview will take place in a private and comfortable setting. During this interview, your child will be asked to reflect on their academic experiences, challenges they may have faced, and their aspirations. The interview will last about 60 minutes.

The interview will be audio recorded, but no personal or identifying information will be used in any report or publication. The recordings will be stored securely and only accessible to the researchers. After the study is complete, the recordings will be securely destroyed.

Duration:

Your child's participation in this phase of the study will take about 60 minutes for one interview. Your child will be given an opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts on their education and future, and he/she may withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw your child from the study, there will be no penalties, and your child will not lose any benefits they are otherwise entitled to. Your decision to withdraw will not affect your or your child's relationship with AUB.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no anticipated risks for participating in this study. There will be no rewards or financial compensation for participation. However, each student will be genuinely thanked and acknowledged for their time, openness, and the effort they contribute to this research. Their participation is highly valued, as it provides important insights into the educational experiences and aspirations of gifted Palestinian refugee students. The results of the study are expected to support educators and school counselors in understanding and responding to the needs of gifted Palestinian refugee students, both from a theoretical and practical perspective. While there are no direct benefits to the students participating, their contribution is vital in helping the researcher gain insight into how they perceive their academic experiences, aspirations, and the challenges they face.

By sharing their stories, these students help raise awareness among educators, administrators, and other stakeholders—such as counselors, special educators, and

school leaders—about how giftedness can be recognized and nurtured even in contexts of displacement.

The findings of this study could be used to improve identification processes, guide the development of targeted support and enrichment programs, and influence the design of educational policies that more effectively serve marginalized yet high-potential youth.

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. The data collected during the interview will be securely stored. All audio recordings and notes will be stored on a password-protected computer and in a locked drawer, accessible only to the research team. Your child’s identity will remain confidential; no names or identifying details will be included in any reports or presentations resulting from the study. Only pseudonyms or codes will be used to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

In rare cases, information may be disclosed if required by law or regulatory bodies. For example, if required by law, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may need to be shared. Additionally, your child’s research data may be reviewed by the following groups, as applicable to the research:

The AUB Institutional Review Board (IRB),

The Office of Human Research Protections,

Any other agency supporting or overseeing the study.

After the conclusion of the study, all original data will be securely stored for at least three years to comply with AUB’s archiving policies. After this period, the data will be responsible to protect your child’s privacy.

Incentives:

There will be no monetary compensation or material incentives for your child’s participation in this study. However, your child’s participation is highly valued and appreciated. If your child participates in the interview, they will be thanked for their time and contribution.

The focus of this study is to gather valuable insights into the experiences and aspirations of gifted Palestinian refugee students, and your child’s involvement is crucial for this research.

Participant Rights:

You may refuse to allow your child to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at AUB, your decision about whether or not you allow your child to participate in this research will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to allow your child to participate in the study, you may discontinue his/her participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Your child may choose not to participate or may withdraw at any time without penalty. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from the study will not affect your child’s grades, academic standing, or relationship with the school in any way.

By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you or your child may have as a participant in this study.

The Social & Behavioral Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at AUB has reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable Lebanese and U.S. federal regulations and AUB policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anies Al-Hroub

Phone: (01) 350 000 Ext. 3064

Email: aa111@aub.edu.lb

Student Investigator: Reem Al Naamani

Phone: 70163959

Email: rjn17@mail.aub.edu

For questions about your child's rights as a participant in this study, or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the AUB Social & Behavioral Science Institutional Review Board:

Phone: 01-350000 or 01-374374, Ext: 5445

Email: irb@mail.aub.edu

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to give permission for my minor child (or child under my guardianship) to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to give permission for my child/child under my guardianship to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Printed name of person authorized to give permission for minor subject/participant

Signature of person authorized to give permission for minor subject/participant (when applicable)

Relationship to the subject

Date and Time

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the parent or legal guardian of the child subject/participant before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the parent/legal guardian of the child participant/subject.

Printed name of person obtaining permission

Signature of person obtaining permission

AM/PM
Date and time

APPENDIX 5 PARENTAL CONSENT FORM IN ARABIC

الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت

كلية التربية

إذن موافقة أولياء الأمور

عنوان الدراسة: الموهوبون والمهجرون: استكشاف التحديات والطموحات لدى اللاجئين الفلسطينيين الموهوبين في لبنان

عزيزي ولي امر الطالب،

ندعوك للمشاركة في دراسة بحثية بعنوان: الموهوبون والمهجرون: استكشاف التحديات والطموحات لدى اللاجئين الفلسطينيين الموهوبين في لبنان بإشراف الدكتور أنيس الحروب، كلية التربية في الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت. سيتم تنفيذ هذه الدراسة وفقا للبروتوكول الموافق عليه من قبل مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب الفلسطينيون اللاجئين الموهوبون وفهم كيف يتخلون مستقبلهم وتطلعاتهم. هذا الموضوع لا يزال غير مستكشف بشكل كاف في الأبحاث التربوية، إذ تركز معظم الدراسات على تعليم اللاجئين، بينما لا تزال احتياجات وتطلعات الأفراد الموهوبين داخل مجتمعات اللاجئين مهمة إلى حد كبير.

الباحث الرئيسي: د. أنيس الحروب

العنوان: الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت

أستاذ مشارك في علم النفس التربوي والتربية الخاصة

هاتف: ٣٥٠٠٠٠-٠١ مقسم ٣٠٦٤

البريد الإلكتروني: aa111@aub.edu.lb

الباحثة المشاركة: ريم النعماني

العنوان: الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت، بيروت - لبنان

هاتف: ١٦٣٩٥٩-٧٠

البريد الإلكتروني: rjn17@mail.aub.edu

أ. وصف المشروع

يهدف هذا البحث إلى التعرف على تصورات الطلاب الفلسطينيين اللاجئين الموهوبين حول تجاربهم الأكاديمية، والتحديات التي يواجهونها، وطموحاتهم. تسعى الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية فهم هؤلاء الطلاب لمسيرتهم التعليمية وتفاعلهم معها، من خلال إجراء مقابلات سرديّة تتيح لهم فرصة التأمل في تجاربهم الحياتية ومشاركتها بكلماتهم الخاصة.

غالبًا ما لا يتم التعرف على الطلاب اللاجئين الموهوبين بالشكل الكافي، ولا يتلقون الدعم المناسب، كما أن أصواتهم نادرا ما تكون ممثلة في الأبحاث الأكاديمية. لذلك، تعد هذه الدراسة بالغة الأهمية لفهم الكيفية التي يعبر بها هؤلاء الطلاب عن هويتهم، والعوائق التي يواجهونها، ونوع الدعم الذي يحتاجونه لتحقيق النجاح. تسهم رؤاهم في تشكيل ممارسات تعليمية أكثر شمولًا، وفي تحدي الروايات التقليدية التي تركز فقط على أوجه القصور في تعليم اللاجئين. تجرى هذه الدراسة كجزء من أطروحة ماجستير في علم النفس التربوي - التوجيه والإرشاد المدرسي في الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت. لن يتم طرح أي أسئلة شخصية أو حساسة أو تدخلية خلال المقابلات، وستحفظ جميع الإجابات بسرية تامة ولن تستخدم إلا لأغراض أكاديمية بحثية.

ب. مشاركة الطالب

سيطلب من طفلك المشاركة في مقابلة شبه منظمة، يسمح له خلالها بالتعبير عن نفسه بحرية. لا توجد إجابات صحيحة أو خاطئة. سيرتب لقاء وجها لوجه بين الباحثة المشاركة وطفلك، ويستمر ما بين 60-70 دقيقة. ستسجل المقابلة صوتيا في حال تم الحصول على الموافقة.

ج. الفوائد المتوقعة للمشاركين والمجتمع

لا توجد مكافآت للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة. لكن تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تعزيز المناصرة والدعم للطلاب الفلسطينيين اللاجئين الموهوبين من خلال تسليط الضوء على تجاربهم الفريدة داخل النظام التعليمي. فهي توفر لهم مساحة للتفكير في رحلتهم الأكاديمية، والتحديات التي واجهوها، وطموحاتهم المستقبلية، مع ضمان إيصال وجهات نظرهم بشكل صادق. وقد يمنحهم ذلك شعورا بالاعتراف بقيمتهم وتمكينهم من التعبير عن أنفسهم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تحول هذه الدراسة التركيز من الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب اللاجئين إلى إبراز نقاط قوتهم وقدراتهم العالية، متحديا بذلك السرديات التي تركز فقط على النقص والمعاناة. ويعد هذا التوجه الإيجابي خطوة ضرورية أمام المدارس والمعلمين وواضعي السياسات ومنتخذي القرار، للاعتراف بإمكانات هذه الفئة المهمشة غالبا، والاستثمار فيها، مما يسهم في بناء بيئات تعليمية أكثر شمولاً ودعماً.

د. المخاطر المحتملة

لا توجد أي مخاطر متوقعة من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. لن تكون هناك مكافآت مالية، لكن سيتم شكر كل طالب على مشاركته وتقدير جهوده. يمكن لطفلك أن يختار عدم المشاركة أو الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت دون أي عقوبة. إن رفض المشاركة أو الانسحاب من الدراسة لن يؤثر على علامات طفلك، أو وضعه الأكاديمي، أو علاقته بالمدرسة بأي شكل من الأشكال.

هـ. السرية

ستبقى البيانات التي يتم جمعها سرية تماما ومجهولة الهوية. سيتم تخزين جميع السجلات بأمان على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور، وفي مكان تخزين قابل للإغلاق، بحيث لا يمكن الوصول إليها إلا من قبل الباحث الرئيسي. وقد تخضع البيانات للمراقبة أو التدقيق من قبل مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية (IRB) للتأكد من الالتزام بالمعايير الأخلاقية، دون المساس بسرية المشاركين. لن يتم تضمين أي معلومات تعريفية في نصوص المقابلات، كما سيتم التخلص من معلومات الاتصال الخاصة بالمشاركين عند الانتهاء من الدراسة. وسيتم مشاركة البيانات بشكل آمن عبر مجلد محمي على Google Drive، بحيث لا يمكن الوصول إليه إلا من قبل الباحث الرئيسي والباحث المشارك، وذلك لأغراض التحليل والتخزين الآمن.

و. المشاركة والانسحاب

المشاركة في هذه الدراسة طوعية بالكامل. يمكنك سحب موافقتك في أي وقت خلال فترة الدراسة. كما يمكن لطفلك الانسحاب من المشاركة في أي مرحلة من دون أي عواقب. حتى في حال منحت موافقتك، يحق لطفلك أن يرفض المشاركة. لن تترتب أي نتائج سلبية أو عواقب على رفض المشاركة أو الانسحاب المفاجئ. قرارك بالسماح أو عدم السماح لطفلك بالمشاركة في هذه الدراسة لن يؤثر على علاقتك أو علاقة طفلك بالجامعة الأميركية في بيروت.

معايير الاشتمال:

- 1- الطلاب الذين يدرسون في الصفوف العاشر، الحادي عشر، والثاني عشر.
- 2- الطلاب الذين تم ترشيحهم من قبل زملائهم ومعلميهم.

معايير الاستبعاد:

- 1-الطلاب الذين لا يرغبون في المشاركة.
- 2-الطلاب الذين هم دون الصف العاشر.
- 3-الطلاب الذين لا يستوفون معايير الترشيح.

ز. أسئلة حول الدراسة

1. إذا كان لديكم أي أسئلة أو استفسارات تتعلق بالدراسة، يمكنكم التواصل مع الدكتور أنيس الحروب أو الأنسة ريم النعماني، وتجدون معلومات الاتصال الخاصة بهما أعلاه.
2. وإذا شعرتم أن أسئلتكم لم يتم الرد عليها، أو كانت لديكم أي استفسارات أو مخاوف أو شكاوى تتعلق بحقوقكم كمشاركين في هذا البحث، يمكنكم التواصل مع المكتب التالي في الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت: مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية للعلوم الاجتماعية والسلوكية على الرقم 01-350000 أو 01-374374، مقسم: 5445، أو عبر البريد الإلكتروني: irb@mail.aub.edu :

ح. الموافقة

إذا وافقتم على مشاركة طفلكم، يرجى تعبئة المعلومات التالية:
اسم الطفل:
اسم ولي الأمر/الوصي القانوني:
توقيع ولي الأمر/الوصي القانوني:
التاريخ:

أوافق
 لا أوافق

APPENDIX 6

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction & Building Rapport

1. Can you tell me about your earliest memories of school? What do you remember enjoying the most about those moments?
2. What are some things that make you feel proud during your time in school?
3. What subjects or activities do you enjoy the most in school? Why do you feel drawn to them?

Exploring Challenges (Educational, Familial, Political, Legal, Economic)

1. What have been some of the toughest challenges you have faced in school?
2. Has being Palestinian refugee affected your experience in school? In what ways?
3. How have your family's experiences, including financial or legal issues, influenced your educational journey and your thoughts about what you can achieve in the future?
4. Have you ever felt treated unfairly in school because of your refugee status or background? Can you tell me more about that?
5. Do you feel that teachers understand what you go through as a refugee student? (If yes) How has this affected your experience?
6. Have any specific societal or political issues impacted your experience in school?

Navigating Challenges

1. Can you share with me how you have managed to handle these difficulties? Have you found ways to make things a little easier for yourself?
2. Who or what has helped you keep going during tough times in school or at home?
 - a) Has your family helped you overcome some of the challenges you faced in school. (If yes) How have they helped you?
 - b) Has someone at your school made a difference for you when things were tough? How has their support helped you during challenging times?
 - c) Do you have people outside of school that have helped you when things get tough? (if yes) How did they support you?
3. Despite legal and societal barriers, how do you stay motivated and continue with your education? Can you share any strategies or steps you have taken to overcome these legal barriers to reach your goals?
4. Have there been times when you had to let go of something to keep going with your studies? How did that feel for you?
5. Looking back, what has been the most important thing that has helped you keep going? What have you learned about yourself through these experiences?

Aspirations and Strengths

1. When you think about your future, what kind of person do you dream of becoming?
 - a) What are the dreams or goals you feel most excited about? Can you tell me what makes these dreams special to you?
2. How do you think school helps you move toward your dreams?
 - a) If you could change one thing about your school experience to help you get closer to your dreams, what would it be?
3. When you think about your strengths, how do you see them helping you achieve your dreams?
4. When you think about your future:
 - a) What kind of support do you think would help you most in reaching your goals?
 - b) What kind of impact do you hope to have in the world someday?
 - c) What do you think will be the biggest challenge in achieving your dreams, and how do you plan to overcome it?

Closing and Open-Ended Questions

1. Is there anything else you would like to share that feels essential to your story or that you want others to know?
2. If you could speak to someone else who has been through similar struggles, what would you say to them to inspire hope or encourage them on their own path?

APPENDIX 7

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ARABIC

المقدمة وبتاء علاقة

- هل يمكنك أن تخبرني عن أولى ذكرياتك في المدرسة؟ ما الذي كنت تستمتع به أكثر في لك اللحظات؟
- ما هي الأشياء التي تجعلك تشعر بالفخر خلال سنواتك الدراسية؟
- ما هي المواد أو الأنشطة التي تستمتع بها أكثر في المدرسة؟ ولماذا تشعر بأنك تميل إليها؟

استكشاف التحديات (التعليمية، العائلية، السياسية، القانونية، الاقتصادية)

- ما هي أصعب التحديات التي تواجهها في المدرسة؟
- هل أترت كونك لاجئاً فلسطينياً على تجربتك الدراسية؟ كيف؟
- كيف أثرت تجارب عائلتك، بما في ذلك الصعوبات المالية أو القانونية، على مسيرتك التعليمية وأفكارك حول ما يمكنك لحقيقه في المستقبل؟
- هل شعرت يوماً أنك تعرضت للتمييز أو المعاملة غير العادلة في المدرسة بسبب وضعك كلاجئ أو خلفيتك؟ هل يمكنك أن تخبرني أكثر عن ذلك؟
- هل تشعر أن المعلمين يفهمون ما تمر به كطالب لاجئ؟ (إذا نعم) كيف أثر ذلك على تجربتك؟
- هل أترت أي قضايا مجتمعية أو سياسية على تجربتك في المدرسة؟

مواجهة التحديات

- هل يمكنك أن تشاركني كيف تعاملت مع هذه الصعوبات؟ هل وجدت طرقاً لتخفيفها عن نفسك؟
- من أو ما الذي ساعدك على الاستمرار في الأوقات الصعبة في المدرسة أو في البيت؟
- هل ساعدتك عائلتك في التغلب على بعض التحديات التي تواجهها في المدرسة؟ (إذا نعم) كيف دعموك؟
- هل كان هناك شخص في المدرسة أحدث فرقا في حياتك عندما كانت الأمور صعبة؟ كيف ساعدك؟
- هل هناك أشخاص خارج المدرسة دعموا مسيرتك في الأوقات الصعبة؟ (إذا نعم) كيف دعموك؟
- على الرغم من التحديات القانونية والمجتمعية، كيف تحافظ على دافعك لمتابعة تعليمك؟ هل يمكنك مشاركة بعض الاستراتيجيات أو الخطوات التي اتخذتها للتغلب على هذه الحواجز؟
- هل كانت هناك لحظات اضطررت فيها للتخلي عن شيء ما من أجل متابعة دراستك؟ كيف كان شعورك حينها؟
- عند النظر إلى الوراء، ما هو أهم شيء ساعدك على الاستمرار؟ وماذا تعلمت عن نفسك من خلال هذه التجارب؟

الطموحات ونقاط القوة

- عندما تفكر في مستقبلك، ما نوع الشخص الذي تحلم بأن تصبح عليه؟
 - ما هي الأحلام أو الأهداف التي تشعر بالحماس تجاهها؟ ولماذا هي مميزة بالنسبة لك؟
- كيف تعتقد أن المدرسة ساعدتك في الاقتراب من تحقيق أحلامك
 - إذا كان بإمكانك تغيير شيء واحد في تجربتك المدرسية ليساعدك على تحقيق أحلامك، ما الذي سيكون؟
- عندما تفكر في نقاط قوتك، كيف ترى أنها ستساعدك في تحقيق طموحاتك؟
 - وعندما للأمل في مستقبلك:
- ما نوع الدعم الذي تعتقد أنه سيساعدك أكثر في الوصول إلى أهدافك؟
 - ما الأثر الذي تأمل أن تتركه في العالم يوماً ما؟
 - ما هو أكبر تحدٍ تتوقع أن تواجهه في سبيل تحقيق أحلامك؟ وكيف تخطط لتجاوزه؟

الختام والأسئلة المفتوحة:

- هل هناك أي شيء آخر تود مشاركته تشعر أنه مهم في قصتك أو تود أن يعرفه الآخرون عنك؟
- إذا كان بإمكانك التحدث إلى شخص آخر يمر بتجارب مشابهة لتجربتك، ماذا تود أن تقول له لتمنحه الأمل أو تشجعه في طريقه؟

APPENDIX 8

VIGNETTES

Vignette 1 - Legal Restrictions

Nour is a Palestinian refugee in Grade 11. She is passionate about biology and wants to study medicine. She is one of the top students in her biology class and consistently earns the highest marks on her exams. Her teachers often use her assignments as examples, and she frequently helps other classmates who are struggling. She dreams of becoming a doctor and she talks about it very often.

Lately, however, Nour has become quieter in class. She still performs well, but when the topic of careers or university comes up, she seems withdrawn. Her teacher noticed her asking fewer questions and participating less. Her parents mention that she discovered that due to her legal status as a Palestinian, she is prohibited of practicing medicine in Lebanon. She was extremely discouraged after learning that it is not possible for her to work in Lebanon, and she is not questioning whether she should keep pushing herself if her dream is out of reach.

Like many Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Nour is facing legal barriers that limit the jobs she can pursue. These restrictions can strongly impact one's motivation particularly when their dreams collide with their legal status.

Questions:

- What do you think Nour might be feeling?
- Have you ever had doubts about continuing something you are good at because of Lebanon's legal prohibitions to certain careers? If yes, can you tell me more about
- If Nour was your friend, what would you advise her to do in order to move forward?

Vignette 2 - Financial Hardship

Rami is a Palestinian refugee in Grade 12. He has always loved mathematics and spends his free time solving complex problems and watching videos about it. His math teacher often says he has a sharp and creative mind. He is consistently ranked among the top students in his class.

One afternoon, after class, his teacher asked him if he had thought about applying to universities. He shrugged and said: "What's the point? Even if I get in, I can't afford it." His father has been out of work for months, and his older siblings had to give up their studies to support the family. Rami still loves learning, but the stress about money makes him feel less hopeful about his future.

Questions:

- What do you think Rami might be feeling?
- Have you ever faced a similar issue, and you felt that your goals were out of reach because of something beyond your control? What was that like for you?
- What do you think might help Rami stay motivated and continue doing what he loves, even with the challenges he is facing?

Vignette 3 - Passion vs. Practicality

Mira is a 17-year-old student who always carries a sketchbook in her bag. She fills her notebooks with detailed drawings - faces and cities. Her classmates often ask her to draw for them, and she says her dream is to become a graphic designer.

At home, Mira's parents have different expectations. They tell her to focus on subjects like math or science and remind her how much they have sacrificed to afford her schooling

"Art is a nice hobby, but it will not put food on the table" her father often says. He encourages her to consider something more practical in order to choose a secure career.

Over the past few months, Mira has started drawing less. She finishes her homework, but without the same enthusiasm, and she no longer brings her sketchbook to school. Her teachers describe her as "quietly talented", but worry she is losing confidence in her gift.

Questions:

- What do you think Mira might be feeling putting something aside that she might love?
- Have you ever been in a position where your passion did not match what others expected from you? Can you tell me more about it?
- What kind of support do you think Mira needs to keep going with her artistic dreams?

APPENDIX 9 VIGNETTES IN ARABIC

سيناريو 1 - القيود القانونية

نور هي لاجئة فلسطينية في الصف الحادي عشر. لديها شغف كبير بمادة الأحياء وتحلم بدراسة الطب. تعد من أفضل الطالبات في صفها، وغالبا ما تحصل على أعلى العلامات في الامتحانات. كثيرا ما يستخدم المعلمون واجباتها كمثال للطلاب، وهي تساعد زملاءها الذين يواجهون صعوبات في المادة. تحلم بأن تصبح طبيبة، وغالبا ما تتحدث عن هذا.

لكن مؤخرا، أصبحت نور أكثر هدوءا في الصف. لا تزال تحافظ على أدائها الممتاز، لكنها تبدو منسحبة عندما يتم الحديث عن المهن أو الجامعات. لاحظت معلمتها أنها أصبحت تطرح عددا أقل من الأسئلة وتشارك بشكل أقل في الصف. ذكر والداها أنها اكتشفت مؤخرا أنه بسبب وضعها القانوني كلاجئة فلسطينية، يمنع عليها ممارسة مهنة الطب في لبنان. شعرت بإحباط شديد بعد معرفتها أنها لا تستطيع العمل في لبنان، وأصبحت تتساءل عما إذا كان من المجدي أن تستمر في الاجتهاد إذا كان حلمها غير ممكن التحقيق.

مثل العديد من اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في لبنان، تواجه نور عوائق قانونية تحد من المجالات المهنية التي يمكنها الدخول إليها. هذه القيود قد تؤثر بشدة على الدافعية، خصوصا عندما تصطدم الأحلام بالواقع القانوني.

أسئلة للنقاش:

- ما الذي تعتقد أن نور قد تشعر به؟
- هل مررت يوما بشكوك حول الاستمرار في شيء أنت متفوق فيه بسبب القيود القانونية في لبنان؟ إذا نعم، هل يمكنك أن تشاركنا تجربتك؟
- إذا كانت نور صديقك، ماذا كنت ستصحها كي تستمر وتتجاوز هذا الشعور؟

سيناريو 2 - الضائقة المالية

رامي هو لاجئ فلسطيني في الصف الثاني عشر. لطالما أحب الرياضيات، ويقضي وقت فراغه في حل المسائل المعقدة ومشاهدة فيديوهات تعليمية عنها. غالبا ما يصفه معلم الرياضيات بأنه صاحب عقل حاد ومبدع. وهو دائما من بين الطلاب الأوائل في صفه.

في أحد الأيام بعد انتهاء الحصة، سأله معلمه إن كان قد فكر في التقديم إلى الجامعات. هز رامي كتفيه وقال: "ما الفائدة؟ حتى لو تم قبولي، لا أستطيع تحمل التكاليف" والده عاطل عن العمل منذ عدة أشهر، وإخوته الأكبر منه اضطروا لترك دراستهم من أجل دعم الأسرة. لا يزال رامي يحب التعلم، لكن الضغط المالي يجعله يشعر بقلّة الأمل تجاه مستقبله.

أسئلة للنقاش:

- برأيك، ما الذي قد يشعر به رامي؟
- هل مررت يوما بموقف مشابه، وشعرت أن أهدافك بعيدة المنال بسبب أمر خارج عن إرادتك؟ كيف كانت تلك التجربة بالنسبة لك؟
- ما الذي تعتقد أنه قد يساعد رامي على البقاء متحمزا والاستمرار في فعل ما يحبه رغم التحديات التي يواجهها؟

سيناريو 3 - الشغف مقابل الواقع

ميرا طالبة تبلغ من العمر 17 عاماً، تحمل دائماً دفتر الرسم في حقيبتها. تملأ دفاترها برسومات دقيقة لوجوه ومدن.

كثيراً ما يطلب منها زملاؤها أن ترسم لهم، وتقول إن حلمها أن تصبح مصممة غرافيك.

لكن في المنزل، لدى والديها توقعات مختلفة. يطلبان منها التركيز على مواد مثل الرياضيات والعلوم، ويذكرانها دائماً بالتضحيات التي قدمتها لتأمين تعليمها. والدها يقول لها كثيراً: "الفن هواية جميلة، لكنه لا يؤمن لقمة العيش"، ويشجعها على اختيار تخصص عملي يوفر لها مستقبلاً مستقراً.

في الفترة الأخيرة، بدأت ميرا ترسم بشكل أقل. ما زالت تنهي واجباتها، لكن دون نفس الحماس، ولم تعد تحضر دفتر رسوماتها إلى المدرسة. يصفها أساتذتها بأنها "موهوبة بهدوء"، لكنهم يشعرون بالقلق من أنها بدأت تفقد ثقتها بموهبتها.

أسئلة للنقاش:

- ما الذي تعتقد أن ميرا قد تشعر به عندما تضطر لترك شيء تحبه؟
- هل سبق أن واجهت موقفاً لم يكن شعفك يتماشى مع ما يتوقعه الآخرون منك؟ هل يمكنك أن تخبرني عن ذلك؟
- ما نوع الدعم الذي تعتقد أن ميرا بحاجة إليه لتستمر في ملاحقة حلمها الفني؟

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