

Translanguaging as Resilience: Trauma-Informed and Culturally Sustaining Education for Venezuelan Indigenous Refugee Students in Brazil's Public Schools

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Received : 28 March 2025
Revised : 23 August 2025
Accepted : 7 March 2026
DOI : 10.26822/iejee.2026.429

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines how Café Sem Troco, a rural public school near Brasília in Brazil's Central West region, supported Warao Indigenous refugee students from Venezuela through translanguaging and trauma-informed, culturally sustaining pedagogy. Data were collected in 2024 and 2025 through five in-depth interviews with teachers, the school leader, and a Warao community leader; analysis of participant-generated photographs and short videos; and extensive participant follow-up. Guided by a critical, qualitative, and community-based research approach, we used thematic analysis to interpret interviews and visual artifacts. Findings identify three areas: educator responses to forced displacement; the schooling effects of poverty, food insecurity, and nutritional trauma; and acculturation pressures shaping students' self-esteem. Educators built a multilingual, relational classroom where Warao, Spanish, Portuguese, and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) coexisted. Translanguaging functioned as an emotional, cultural, and instructional foundation, as well as a social justice-based practice that affirmed students' and families' identities, reduced anxiety, and strengthened belonging. Daily practices such as community food gathering, oral storytelling, and collective care resisted assimilation and honored Warao epistemologies and funds of knowledge. This study advances scholarship on Indigenous education and educational responses to forced migration, trauma, and hunger. It provides recommendations for policies, practices, and processes in public education, and outlines directions for future research.

Keywords:

Translanguaging; Indigenous Education; Refugee Education; Trauma Informed Pedagogy; Culturally Sustaining Practice; Brazil; Libras; Hunger; Trauma; Community-Based Research



www.iejee.com
ISSN: 1307-9298

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Introduction

Venezuela's political and socioeconomic crises have triggered one of Latin America's largest forced migrations (IOM, 2020). Economic collapse, hunger, violence, and the breakdown of public services have displaced over 7.9 million people as of November 2024 (R4V, 2024). In response, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, and Uruguay have adopted policies offering legal pathways and humanitarian aid to Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

While scholarship on Venezuelan migration is extensive, much of it has focused on economic displacement, migration policy, and labor integration (Shamsuddin et al., 2021). A smaller but growing body of research addresses family dynamics and displacement, yet the experiences of Indigenous refugees remain severely underrepresented (Pitkänen, 2023; Yamada, 2019; da Frota Simões et al., 2018). Venezuelan refugees are often conceptualized as individual economic actors, with fewer studies examining how displacement reshapes families, communities, and educational pathways (Weitzman & Huss, 2024; Correa-Salazar et al., 2025; Summers et al., 2022). Research on Venezuelan Indigenous refugee children is still limited (Alocázar & Balarin, 2020; Yamada et al., 2019), particularly regarding schooling and the intersections of multilingualism, cultural identity, trauma (Bustamante et al., 2018), and inclusion (Kley & Garcia, 2019; Langfeldt, 2020). Few studies address how Venezuelan Indigenous children navigate education systems shaped by racialized, monolingual ideologies and systemic exclusion.

Although some scholarship examines refugee access to education more broadly (Silva & Pinto, 2024; Loyola, 2024; Watson, 2019), deeper engagement is still needed to understand the linguistic, cultural, and socioemotional inclusion of Indigenous communities such as the Warao.

This study addresses that gap by centering translanguaging as both the analytical and pedagogical lens. The Warao, Venezuelan Indigenous refugees in Brazil, often arrive having endured multiple forms of trauma - hunger, forced displacement, family separation, and loss of ancestral lands. These experiences shape how students engage with language, learning, and school life. In this context, translanguaging is not simply a linguistic practice but a trauma-informed, culturally sustaining approach that fosters belonging, resilience, and identity affirmation. As a social justice pedagogy, translanguaging disrupts monolingual, colonial language norms (Wei, 2022; García & Kleyn, 2016), validating students' linguistic repertoires and drawing on their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Despite its growing recognition in education, translanguaging remains underexamined in work with Indigenous refugee students in Latin America, particularly in Brazil. Its potential to address trauma while promoting linguistic and cultural sustainability is especially relevant for contexts like Café Sem Troco, a rural public school near Brasília (capital of Brazil) known for its innovative multilingual practices. This case study explores how educators and school leaders at Café Sem Troco respond to Warao students' lived realities by integrating translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014), trauma-informed pedagogies (Carello & Butler, 2014; Lê, 2024), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2017). Guided by this context, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How do educators at Café Sem Troco respond to the traumas of forced displacement and related stressors experienced by Warao refugee students and their families through trauma-informed and culturally sustaining practices?

RQ2. How do educators at Café Sem Troco integrate translanguaging to support Warao students' linguistic identities, emotional well being, and sense of belonging in school?

By centering translanguaging as a central pedagogical practice and situating it within the lived realities of Warao students, this study contributes to scholarship at the intersection of multilingual education, Indigenous refugee rights, and trauma informed practices.

Literature Review

Venezuelan Migration in Brazil and the Educational Crisis

Venezuela's political and socioeconomic crises have led to one of Latin America's largest forced migrations, displacing over 7.9 million people as of November 2024 (R4V, 2024). Brazil hosts approximately 626,900 Venezuelan migrants, including a significant number of children and adolescents facing educational vulnerabilities (Shamsuddin et al., 2021). Enrollment delays often stem from documentation issues, language barriers, and overcrowded classrooms, with only 45% of Venezuelan refugee children aged 6 -14 enrolled in school (Shamsuddin et al., 2021; Chaves-González et al., 2021; dos Santos & Mota, 2023). These challenges are compounded for Indigenous populations, where a lack of multilingual educators and culturally relevant curricula exacerbates exclusion (de Oliveira Carvalho, 2024; Loyola, 2024; Silva & Pinto, 2024).

Indigenous Venezuelan Refugees in Brazil: A Distinct and Overlooked Population

While Venezuelan migration research often focuses on economic and policy aspects (Shamsuddin et al.,

2021; da Frota Simões et al., 2018), the experiences of Indigenous refugees, such as the Warao, remain underrepresented (Pitkänen, 2023; Yamada et al., 2019; Alcázar & Balarin, 2020). As of 2024, Brazil registers 12,593 Indigenous Venezuelan refugees, primarily Warao, with over 5,643 children and adolescents (ACNUR, 2024). Systemic barriers, including limited school enrollment (e.g., 80% of Warao children in Maranhão unenrolled; DTM, 2020) and inadequate protections for unaccompanied minors, heighten risks of exploitation and psychological harm (Ramírez-Martínez et al., 2023; Roldão et al., 2021). Despite policies like Resolution No. 1 (2020) promoting intercultural education, implementation gaps persist, particularly in validating Indigenous languages and identities (Loyola, 2024; de Oliveira et al., 2024).

Intersectionality and Indigenous Refugees' Invisibility

Indigenous Venezuelan migrants face intersectional invisibility in Brazil, recognized neither fully as refugees nor as Indigenous Peoples, leading to exclusion from services like education and healthcare (Mezzanotti & Kvalvaag, 2022; Chaves-González et al., 2021). This dual marginalization, rooted in cross-border mobility and structural failures, erases their identities and limits access to rights (IOM, 2020; Silva & Pinto, 2024). In schools, this manifests as monolingual ideologies and deficit-oriented practices that neglect Indigenous epistemologies, perpetuating invisibility (Oliveira et al., 2024).

Structural Violence & Institutionalized Trauma in Forced Migration

Forced migration inflicts layered structural violence (Johan Galtung, 1969) and institutionalized trauma (Cohodes et al., 2021) on Venezuelan Indigenous refugees, including displacement, family separation, loss of ancestral lands, food insecurity, and cultural dislocation (Correa-Salazar et al., 2025; Weitzman & Huss, 2024; Bustamante et al., 2018). These experiences can manifest as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and cognitive challenges, impairing focus, memory, and engagement (Van der Kolk, 2014; Abelson et al., 2023; Teixeira et al., 2013; Muldoon et al., 2021). For Warao communities, life is closely connected to the Orinoco River, one of South America's largest waterways, and to the Buriti Palm, both of which stand as enduring symbols of their heritage (Wilbert, 1993; Sørhaug, 2017). Displacement severs these spiritual and generational ties, exacerbating cultural trauma (Alexander, 2004).

Nutritional trauma from chronic hunger and malnutrition further compounds these effects, altering brain development and academic outcomes (Georgieff, 2023; Pizzol et al., 2021; Bhat et al., 1973; Weinreb et al., 2002; Jepkemboi, 2018; Gorman, 1995). Food insecurity during migration links to language acquisition difficulties and emotional regulation

issues (Kaplan et al., 2016; Milán & Martens, 2023; Tuaza Castro, 2020; Gingell et al., 2022). Acculturation stressors, including culture shock and discrimination, erode self-esteem and create barriers to adaptation (Oberg, 1960; Berry, 2005; Oppedal et al., 2020). Educators supporting these students often experience emotional labor and compassion fatigue, highlighting the need for trauma-informed responses (Hochschild, 1983; Oberg et al., 2023).

Translanguaging, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), and Global Practices

Research in diverse contexts highlights how translanguaging supports refugee and migrant learners. In Roraima, Brazil, educators have used Portuguese–Spanish translanguaging in literacy courses for Venezuelan students so they can keep up Spanish literacy and learn Portuguese (de Oliveira Carvalho, 2024). Globally, Moroccan Arabic–Spanish translanguaging communities in Spanish primary schools have facilitated cross-cultural solidarity (Sanz, 2020), and in New York, translanguaging in dual language programs sustains Dominican and Mexican students' heritage languages as well as academic content knowledge (García & Kleyn, 2016). In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Capstick and Ateek (2024) showed that Arabic–Kurdish–English translanguaging spaces offered both academic scaffolding and psychosocial safety for refugee students. These global examples illustrate how, as enacted through a critical stance, translanguaging is simultaneously a tool of access, cultural affirmation, and socioemotional support.

Research has also shown how schools that adopt culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) resist assimilationist pressures. While culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) emphasizes academic success through cultural connections, and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) adapts curricula to students' lives, CSP goes further: it seeks to sustain and develop community languages and knowledges for the long term (Paris & Alim, 2017). In Brazilian schools serving Venezuelan migrants, Portuguese has often been positioned as obligatory adaptation, at times undermining heritage languages (Oliveira et al., 2024).

Building on these Brazilian and global experiences, we frame our study within translanguaging theory, integrating CSP, and trauma-informed practice to address the specific educational realities of Warao refugee students.

Theoretical Framework

This study centers translanguaging as a critical and decolonial practice that mobilizes full linguistic repertoires to resist monolingual norms and affirm

students' identity (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015; Wei, 2022; Flores & Rosa, 2015). In integrating CSP (Paris & Alim, 2017), it sustains Indigenous epistemologies and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), moving beyond additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975) to challenge raciolinguistic ideologies.

Trauma-informed practices (Carello & Butler, 2014; Lê, 2024) are woven into this framework, recognizing how displacement affects learning and how translanguaging can provide emotional safety and reduce cognitive load (Ateek, 2022; Midgette & González, 2023). We do not approach translanguaging as switching between independent languages but as the fluid and spontaneous mobilization of one's full linguistic repertoire, rooted in history, identity, and power dynamics (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015). For Warao students navigating displacement and exclusion, translanguaging represents not only a means of communication but also a pathway to belonging, resilience, and survival.

Translanguaging is also understood here as encompassing CSP. Rather than treating CSP as separate, we see it as fully integrated within translanguaging, guiding pedagogy toward the preservation and development of community languages and epistemologies. This perspective aligns with a decolonial and anti-assimilationist orientation, resisting the pressures that position dominant languages as the only path to participation (Paris & Alim, 2017).

We draw on critical and decolonial stances of translanguaging which emphasize how language use is tied to racialization, power, and colonial histories. This perspective guided our research design by shaping three key commitments: conducting interviews in Portuguese, Spanish, and Portuguese; co-authoring with a local teacher to resist extractive practices; and structuring our analysis to attend to the ways language practices intersect with power, identity, and healing.

Trauma-informed practice is likewise intimately tied to translanguaging. While displacement and loss can hinder learning, welcoming students' languages and cultural capital helps restore safety, agency, and trust (Van der Kolk, 2014; Ateek, 2022; Midgette & González, 2023). We therefore define translanguaging in this study as:

- A culturally sustaining practice that develops Warao, Spanish, Portuguese, and Libras.
- A trauma-informed practice that provides safety, reduces cognitive load, and affirms lived experience.
- A decolonial stance that interrupts raciolinguistic ideologies, resists assimilation, and centers Indigenous epistemologies.

Through this composite lens, translanguaging is positioned not simply as an instructional strategy but as a justice-oriented practice of healing, resilience, and sovereignty for Indigenous refugee students in Brazil and beyond affirming their languages, identities, and epistemologies in the midst of forced displacement.

Methodology

This critical qualitative case study examines how Café Sem Troco supports Warao Venezuelan Indigenous refugee students and their families. Case study methodology is suited to complex "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 1984; Butler et al., 2021), making it ideal for exploring translanguaging, trauma-informed pedagogy, and culturally sustaining education. Drawing on institutional strategies, multilingual pedagogical models, and inclusive leadership approaches, this study highlights how schools can build inclusive, equity-focused environments for Indigenous refugee students. This case contributes to broader conversations on refugee education, multilingualism, and educational justice.

Study Context

This case study is situated within a larger qualitative research project that spanned April 2024 to March 2025. Within this broader timeframe, data collection at Café Sem Troco occurred between August 2024 and February 2025, following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Data sources included virtual interviews, follow-up conversations, and participant-generated photographs. In addition, during interviews participants shared photographs taken over previous years, providing longitudinal insights that enriched the analysis.

Participants

The research team initiated recruitment through exploratory searches on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram), local Brazilian newspapers, and non-governmental organizations to identify public schools engaged in refugee education. Drawing on researcher positionality and connections to her hometown, Michelle identified Café Sem Troco, an elementary public school recognized for supporting Venezuelan Indigenous refugee students, particularly from the Warao community.

An initial online interview with Janerrandra, the school's literacy teacher, highlighted her central role in integrating Warao students through translanguaging and serving as a community connector. Through snowball sampling, she introduced the research team to additional educators and the school leader closely involved with Warao students and their families. Preliminary findings revealed strong commitments to translanguaging and trauma-informed, culturally

sustaining pedagogy, leading to the purposeful selection of Café Sem Troco for in-depth analysis.

Ultimately, five participants were recruited, all directly engaged in language teaching, leadership, or student welfare. Interviews were conducted virtually, primarily in Portuguese, with one interview conducted in Portunhol with Eduardo, a Warao cacique (Indigenous leader). Participants provided verbal informed consent and chose to use their real names as a way to honor their work with Warao students.

Data Sources and Collection

This study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted virtually during the 2024–2025 data collection period. Interviews lasted 45–90 minutes and were conducted in Portuguese and Portunhol. The interview protocol included open-ended questions exploring educators' use of translanguaging practices, challenges in teaching multilingual Indigenous refugee children, community engagement, and culturally sustaining pedagogies. For example, participants were asked: "How do you draw on translanguaging practices to support Warao students in daily classroom practices?"

In addition, participants volunteered to share photographs and videos documenting translanguaging activities, multilingual practices, and community events. A total of 40 photographs and 3 short videos were shared by participants and the research team via email and WhatsApp. These visual materials were analyzed thematically alongside interview transcripts using photo elicitation and artifact analysis. Visual data functioned as prompts for deeper reflection, enabling the research team to contextualize experiences, highlight cultural traditions, and capture the everyday realities of Warao students and their educators.

Community-Based Research Approach

As the research evolved, a community-based research (CBR) model was adopted to prioritize equity, reciprocity, and inclusivity. CBR incorporates members of a community into the planning, implementation,

or review of the research (Jason et al., 2004). Rather than position Janerrandra as only a participant, the research team invited her to co-author this study, an intentional approach grounded in ethics that uphold teamwork, shared voice, and democratic knowledge-making (Castleden et al., 2010; Fursova, 2023).

This decision emerged organically during a conversation in which Janerrandra expressed frustration that journalists and researchers often collected data at the school but rarely returned to share findings or include the community in outcomes. Her reflection highlighted a pattern of extractive research that overlooks the agency and expertise of local educators. As social justice-oriented scholars grounded in decolonial and critical perspectives, we reflected on our positionalities as Brazilian researchers and the responsibilities we carry when working with historically underrepresented communities (Villenas, 1996). Co-authorship was therefore not only an ethical act of reciprocity but also a methodological intervention aimed at disrupting Western epistemological hierarchies.

Collaborating with community members is increasingly recognized as a way to challenge Western-centric paradigms and foster equitable research relationships, especially with communities in the Global South (Su et al., 2018; Castleden et al., 2010). Involving Janerrandra in co-constructing the research honored her lived experiences, pedagogical knowledge, and scholarly insight, thereby enhancing the study's rigor, relevance, and authenticity. This partnership reflects a broader commitment to ethical, transnational collaboration between Latin America and the U.S. that recognizes educators as active knowledge producers, not passive subjects of inquiry.

Data Analysis

All virtual interviews were transcribed verbatim in Portuguese and Portunhol to preserve participants' linguistic authenticity. Initial analysis was conducted in Portuguese, with English translation occurring during final manuscript preparation to retain cultural and linguistic meaning. We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify, code, and organize

Table 2.
Research Participants and their roles at Café Sem Troco

Research Participant	Role	Responsibilities
Janerrandra	Literacy Teacher	Delivers Portuguese and Spanish instruction, develops inclusive curricula for Warao students.
Sheyla	School leader	Oversees school administration and coordinates refugee education initiatives.
Eduardo	Cacique (in Portuguese means Indigenous Community Leader)	Acts as a volunteer interpreter and cultural mediator between Warao students, families and the school
Irenice	Brazilian Sign Language Teacher (Libras)	Supports multilingual learning and addresses special education needs.
Ercilane	Teacher Assistant	Assists in language instruction and classroom activities alongside the Spanish teacher.

patterns aligned with our research questions. Coding was both inductive and deductive, informed by the data and our framework of translanguaging, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed practices.

As part of this analytic process, the research team met weekly via virtual platforms for close reading, coding, and reflexive dialogue. Drawing on Brazil's *roda de conversa* (circle conversations) methodological tradition (Moura & Lima, 2014; Oliveira & Gama, 2024), these sessions created a dialogic, egalitarian space despite geographic distance: Michelle and Karina were in the U.S., Cátia in southern Brazil, and Janerrandra in central-west Brazil. The *roda de conversa* approach emphasized collective reflection and co-interpretation, enabling the team to situate findings within broader social, cultural, and ethical contexts. These meetings were both analytical and transformative, fostering reflexivity on positionality, systemic injustice, and the ethics of knowledge production.

Follow-up conversations with research participants were also conducted via WhatsApp, where they clarified responses, shared insights, and sent additional photographs documenting classroom practices, multilingual materials, and community engagement. These visual and institutional artifacts were analyzed alongside interview transcripts to triangulate findings. These practices reflect our ongoing commitment to transparency, respect, and honoring the voices and lived experiences of educators supporting Warao refugee communities.

Setting the Scene: Café Sem Troco's Multilingual Model for Refugee Inclusion

Located near Brasília in Brazil's Central-West region, Café Sem Troco Public Elementary School was founded in 1992 as an *escola do campo* (rural school), serving families involved in subsistence and small-scale agriculture (Governo do Distrito Federal, 2022; Melo, 2011). Despite economic hardship and limited infrastructure, the school emerged as a key site for the educational and linguistic integration of Warao Indigenous refugee students, demonstrating how rural schools can bridge forced migration, language learning, and educational equity.

Amid the continuing impacts of COVID-19, which deepened social and economic vulnerabilities for migrant families, Warao families began arriving in 2022, many of whom had no prior formal schooling. In response to Brazilian law mandating school access for all children under 17, Sheyla (the school leader) worked alongside caciques (Warao community leaders) to enroll students and ensure access to Portuguese instruction. This process exposed systemic gaps, as Brasília's education system lacked formal procedures for enrolling refugee children. Nonetheless, the

school's administrators navigated these challenges, setting a regional precedent for inclusive, rights-based educational practices for Indigenous refugee students.

Cultural Continuity and Multigrade Inclusion

In collaboration with Warao families, the school adopted a multigrade (Recla & Potane, 2024), multiage (Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019) classroom model rooted in communal learning. At the request of Warao caciques, parents, and indigenous elders, all Warao students were grouped together, regardless of age or language proficiency, to uphold Indigenous values of shared knowledge, cultural continuity, and protection through unity. Older students supported younger peers, reflecting Warao traditions of intergenerational care and resilience. This trauma-informed model respected Indigenous epistemologies while helping students cope with displacement and trauma.

Translanguaging in Action: Building a Multilingual Classroom

With the arrival of 30 Warao students aged 4 to 17, the school fostered a multilingual, interdependent classroom despite limited funding and infrastructure. To accommodate the new students, the school converted its auditorium into a Warao-designated classroom, allowing them to remain together while integrating into the Brazilian education system. To address linguistic diversity, the school hired Janerrandra, a Spanish-speaking teacher whose resourcefulness proved essential. She grouped students by language proficiency: Spanish-fluent, Warao-only speakers, and those with emerging Portuguese, and taught primarily in Portuguese while using Spanish and Portunhol as a bridge.

The lack of additional staff fluent in Warao or Spanish posed challenges. In response, Eduardo, a Warao community leader, volunteered as a cultural and linguistic mediator, providing interpretation and ensuring that Warao-only speakers were not excluded. Rather than enforce monolingual instruction, the school embraced a translanguaging approach. Instruction followed the *Português como Língua de Acolhimento* (PLAc) model, with Spanish and Portunhol serving as bridges, and Eduardo providing Warao interpretation as needed. This dynamic, multilingual environment valued student identities and linguistic repertoires, centering Warao epistemologies (García & Lin., 2017).

Expanding Access and Inclusion: Integrating Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) as a Fourth Language

In 2023, the school expanded its multilingual model to address accessibility needs when a 16-year-old Warao student with a hearing disability, and

no prior exposure to Sign language, was enrolled. Although the school was not formally designated for special education, persistent advocacy from the school leader led the local Secretary of Education to assign a Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) instructor. Because Venezuelan Sign Language (VSL) was unavailable, the student began learning Libras, a language structurally different from VSL, while also adapting to a new country. Recognizing the importance of inclusion, the school extended Libras instruction to all Warao and Brazilian students. This approach fostered peer communication, classroom interaction, and a collective sense of belonging. Co-developed by educators and the school leader, the initiative reflected interdisciplinary collaboration where language, culture, accessibility, and educational justice converged (Skliar, 2003).

Figure 1:
Warao student practicing basic Libras gestures during a classroom activity

Figure 2.
Multilingual signage at Café Sem Troco featuring student's greetings in Portuguese, Spanish, Warao, and Libras



School-University Community Partnership

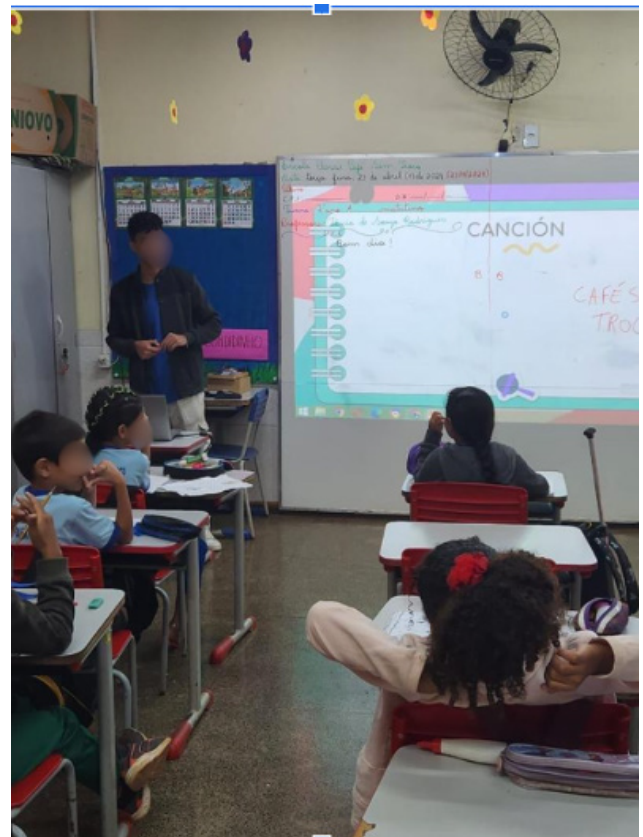
To strengthen linguistic inclusion and cultural integration, Café Sem Troco partnered with the University of Brasília's Department of Linguistics (UnB). The collaboration aimed to co-develop a multilingual education framework that responded to the urgent needs of students and educators. UnB offered free professional development on Warao history, oral traditions, linguistic practices, and inclusive pedagogies grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. These efforts supported culturally sustaining instruction (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Teachers themselves acknowledged that they had not been prepared to work with multilingual Indigenous or refugee students whose first language was not Portuguese, as their teacher preparation

programs had not included this focus. Even though they were required to follow a mandated curriculum set by local education authorities, they created space for translanguaging practices to address the linguistic needs of Warao students. The school - university partnership helped fill this gap by equipping educators with strategies to sustain multilingualism in the classroom. Building on this foundation, the partnership promoted translanguaging as a core strategy. Rather than impose "Portuguese-only" policies, teachers were encouraged to support the use of Warao, Spanish, and emerging Portuguese across the curriculum. This culturally and trauma-informed approach fostered a respectful transition to Portuguese literacy while honoring students' linguistic and cultural identities.

Importantly, UnB student volunteers also began offering Spanish classes to Brazilian students at the school, enabling them to communicate with Warao peers and further advancing multilingual education as a holistic, community-based approach.

Figure 3.
Spanish volunteer teacher leading a multilingual activity with Warao and Brazilian students.



Attending to Students' Needs: Translanguaging, Health, and Hygiene

During the resettlement process, Sheyla and Janerrandra identified urgent health concerns linked to the extreme poverty and years of forced migration

faced by Warao children and families. Understanding that linguistic and educational inclusion required holistic attention to well-being, the school partnered with public health providers to implement targeted interventions. Translanguaging served as a bridge for communication among students, families, teachers, and healthcare workers.

Figure 4.
Students participating in hygiene education through translanguaging practices



By addressing Warao families' health needs, the school fostered trust and reduced barriers to participation. Translanguaging was embedded in daily routines to navigate cultural and linguistic borders and to build relational inclusion through Portuguese, Warao, Spanish, Portunhol, and Libras.

A Culture of Care and Parental Engagement

Café Sem Troco cultivated a multilingual, community-centered space where a cultura de carinho (culture of care) was central to the schooling experience (Valenzuela, 1999). By addressing physical and cultural needs through a translanguaging-based framework, the school advanced a model of justice grounded in respect and relationality. Health, identity, and language were treated as interconnected aspects of learning.

A key pillar of this holistic model is the strong relationship between the school and Warao families.

The school functions as a welcoming space where Warao families feel respected and engaged in their children's multilingual education. Eduardo shared that the school provides space for Warao association meetings with government and nonprofit representatives. These gatherings give families a platform to voice priorities and influence decisions. Through multilingual communication and responsive practices, Café Sem Troco supported parents and elders to sustain leadership and exercise collective agency in educational decision-making.

Figure 5.
Warao parents and community members participating in a cultural school-based gathering at Café Sem Troco.



Table 2.
Translanguaging & Inclusion Strategies at Café Sem Troco

Domain	Strategy	Purpose
Enrollment	Partnered with Warao Indigenous leaders to register students	Ensure legal access, build community trust, and uphold Indigenous refugee rights
Classroom Structure	Implemented multigrade, multiage grouping of Warao students	Preserve Indigenous traditions, support multilingual trauma-informed inclusion, and foster cultural continuity
Peer Support and Mentorship	Older Warao students mentored younger peers; Warao leader actively engaged in classroom	Foster intergenerational knowledge-sharing, inclusion
Language Inclusion	Portuguese, Spanish, Portunhol, Warao, and Libras used together in the same classroom	Facilitate multilingual communication, affirm identities, and honor families' epistemologies and full linguistic repertoires
Cultural Sensitivity	Included Warao leadership in educational decision-making	Respect Indigenous elders and leaders, values, and community-defined priorities
Community Partnership	Collaboration with the University of Brasília's Department of Linguistics	Expand multilingual practices, provide teacher PD, offer Spanish classes for Brazilian peers, and support sustainability

Table 1 outlines the innovative strategies Café Sem Troco adopted to integrate translanguaging and inclusion into school practices, illustrating how the school bridged linguistic, cultural, and structural barriers.

Findings

Guided by our research questions and theoretical frameworks, interviews with educators and the school leader at Café Sem Troco highlight three interrelated domains of trauma and school responses among Warao Indigenous refugee students and their families. Across all domains, educators draw on translanguaging, culturally sustaining practices, and trauma-informed pedagogy as foundational strategies to affirm students' cultural and linguistic identities, promote well-being, and foster belonging (García & Kleyn, 2016; Wei, 2022; Paris & Alim, 2017; Toulouse, 2016). The three domains identified are: (1) Traumas of forced migration and educator response; (2) Extreme poverty, food insecurity, and nutritional trauma; (3) Culture shock, acculturation, and impacts on self-esteem

Together, these findings address RQ1 by specifying the traumas affecting Warao students and the ways educators at Café Sem Troco respond through trauma-informed and culturally sustaining pedagogies. They also address RQ2 by illustrating how translanguaging and culturally sustaining practices bolster linguistic identity, emotional well-being, and belonging. In the sections that follow, each domain is discussed in detail as it emerges in practice at Café Sem Troco.

Finding 1. Traumas of Forced Migration and Educator Responses

Warao students arriving at Café Sem Troco experienced layered traumas from forced displacement, family separation, loss of ancestral land, cultural disruption, and discrimination. These challenges affected trust, emotional well-being, and readiness to learn. Educators responded with trauma informed and culturally sustaining approaches. These included flexible enrollment, multilingual classrooms, land based learning, and heritage based art. Together, these practices addressed immediate needs while also supporting long term resilience.

Displacement, Homelessness, and Cultural Capital. Many families endured prolonged instability when they first arrived, often sleeping in bus stations, temporary shelters, or on the streets. During this time, children were not enrolled in school. After families settled near Café Sem Troco, school leaders and community members advocated for their right to education, in line with Brazil's policy that all students under 17 must attend school. The school responded by creating flexible enrollment procedures and coordinating with

municipal agencies to secure social services, which made consistent attendance possible.

During this transition, teachers observed visible distress. Some children were engaged in child labor, selling artesanato (traditional Warao handmade crafts) on the streets as a survival strategy to buy food. In their home communities, food is traditionally obtained from the land rather than purchased with money. Forced displacement and prolonged hunger required families to adapt to a capitalist system. They drew on their cultural strengths and ancestral knowledge to survive.

Selling artesanato illustrates what Yosso (2005) describes as community cultural wealth. Families relied on their assets, skills, and traditions not only to resist structural exclusion but also to meet their most basic need of eating. Importantly, it was through classroom assignments that Warao children began to share these survival experiences. Without these assignments, teachers would not have fully understood the children's realities or known how to respond. In turn, educators built on this resilience by integrating oral storytelling, art, and handcrafting, which are practices central to Warao culture. These activities became ways to process trauma, narrate memory, and affirm identity, while also challenging Western norms of communication and learning. Ercilane, a teacher assistant, shared:

Teve um dia que a professora de Libras entrou em prantos, porque eles estavam escrevendo sobre a vida deles, né! E a gente ia fazer as correções. Nossa (pausa para respirar)! Foi muita tristeza porque foram muitas as dificuldades que eles passaram. Fome... a questão de pedir e trabalhar na rua. Teve um mesmo que escreveu no texto dele que as pessoas xingavam eles de vagabundos e eles me perguntavam o que significa vagabundo.

[One day, the Libras teacher broke into tears because they were writing about their lives, you know! And we were going to make corrections. Wow (pause to breathe)! It was so heartbreaking because they had been through so many difficulties. Hunger... The issue of begging and working on the streets. One of them even wrote in their text that people called them 'vagabundo (bum, worthless)' and they asked me what 'vagabundo' means.]

These moments show how trauma surfaced in classroom activities. They also reveal the emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) that educators carried while teaching children affected by forced displacement, poverty, and discrimination.

Family Separation & the Loss of Maternal Support. Trauma extended into family life. Many lost close relatives, including mothers, during migration. Irenice shared: "Alguns tinham cinco irmãos, mas só ficaram eles. Os demais foram ficando pelo caminho." [Some had five siblings, but only they remained. The others were left behind along the way.] Janerrandra noted that maternal loss intensified distress because Warao

women are often both caregivers but also income earners to help the community survive (Fraternity Humanitarian Mission, 2020). Such losses are linked to PTSD, anxiety, depression, and learning difficulties (Abelson et al., 2023). As Janerrandra described: “Muitos alunos são muito quietos no início, não confiam facilmente. Dá para ver que passaram por muita coisa.” [Many students are very quiet at first; they do not trust easily. You can tell they have been through a lot.] This hesitation reflects trauma, fear, impacts of discrimination, and displacement (Teixeira et al., 2013), which hinder integration into school life.

Creating Space as an Act of Care and Belonging. Responding to limited space and to Warao leaders’ request to keep students together, school leader Sheyla transformed the school’s only auditorium into a multilingual classroom. Students of varying ages, language proficiency, and abilities learned together in Warao, Portuguese, Spanish, Portunhol, and Libras, honoring *confiança* and an Indigenous worldview of communal caregiving. As Ercilane explained “A comunidade Warao não queria que separasse os alunos [...] Eles são muito unidos. Eles fazem tudo juntos.” [The Indigenous community did not want the students to be separated. They are very united. They do everything together.] The school embedded culturally sustaining practices and rejected assimilationist approaches.

Janerrandra emphasized: “A escola se preparou para atender a comunidade Warao [...] A nossa intenção não é ‘matar’ a cultura deles.” [The school prepared itself to serve the Warao community. Our intention is not to ‘kill’ their culture.] By combining flexible policies, physical adaptations, and multilingual pedagogy, Café Sem Troco became a protective anchor where students rebuilt trust, identity, and belonging, and where multilingualism was treated as an asset.

Loss of Ancestral Land and Cultural Heritage. For the Warao, displacement is not only the loss of territory. It also severs ancestral continuity, spiritual identity, and generational traditions. Their name, derived from *Wa* (canoe) and *Arao* (people) (Wilbert, 1996; Sørhaug, 2016), reflects a deep connection to the river. The Orinoco Delta is both homeland and lifeline. The Buriti Palm provides food, shelter, and craft materials, and it symbolizes heritage, resistance, and resilience. Environmental degradation, political, and territorial violence have devastated these lands, forcing many families to flee.

Educators responded by integrating artistic projects that honored students’ ties to the Orinoco Delta and the Buriti Palm. Students painted canoes with the Venezuelan flag (Figures 7 - 8), symbolizing heritage, mobility, and belonging. These projects affirmed oral and artistic traditions and fostered pride, healing, and cultural continuity.

Figure 7 and 8 .

Warao students engaging in art to reconnect with land, memory, and identity



Disruption of Daily Practices and Cultural Continuity. Forced migration also disrupted routines tied to health and identity. Many students lost access to traditional foods and replaced them with cheap processed snacks such as soda and fried foods, which affected nutrition and cultural connection. In response, Café Sem Troco introduced multilingual health education, including a dental care activity (Figure 4). These small practices helped reestablish routines, care, and community trust.

Another important initiative was establishing a horta (school garden) as part of the curriculum. The horta revived agricultural traditions disrupted by displacement and offered students a communal space to reconnect with land and ancestry. At the same time, it created a translanguaging environment where students used language, cultural knowledge, and land-based practices to learn and interact (Figures 9 - 10). As García and Wei (2015) explain, translanguaging encompasses oral traditions, gestures, and lived experiences, not only shifts between traditional Western languages. Within the horta, students cultivated food while also cultivating linguistic agency and cultural identity through memory, movement, and connection to their ancestral lands.

Figure 9 and 10.

Students and educators in the school’s fresh garden, proudly harvesting vegetables and fruits.



Honoring Heritage through Art and Commemorations. Figure 11 shows students using translanguaging and photography to highlight Warao women, traditional foods, handcrafted goods, and the Buriti Palm. For April 19, Brazil's Day of Indigenous Peoples, students created pieces displayed in school hallways. Beyond pride, the artwork conveyed memory and belonging through storytelling, Portuguese, Spanish, and photography. These activities reflect a trauma informed and culturally affirming environment in which commemorations, cultural recognition, serve as acts of care.

Figure 11.

Students use translanguaging and photography to highlight the significance of Warao women, traditional foods, handcrafted goods, and the Buriti Palm in their culture.



Finding 2: Impacts of Extreme Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Nutritional Trauma. Nutritional trauma emerged as a central theme in this study because of its profound impact on Warao students. Educators described both immediate and lasting effects of food insecurity, experienced in Venezuela, during migration, and after resettlement, on students' learning, well-being, and classroom engagement. Janerrandra reflected:

"No início, eles iam para a escola para comer e não para aprender. Hoje não, a gente passou aquela segurança para eles que aqui na escola eles vão comer." [At first, they came to school to eat, not to learn. Today that has changed. We have assured them that they will always have food here.]

Her words show how hunger influences cognitive development, emotional regulation, and focus. For many children, school was the only place where meals were guaranteed, and it became a safe space where they knew they could find food. Café Sem Troco demonstrates that reliable and dignified access to food is not supplemental but foundational for students' well-being and academic engagement.

These observations align with scholarship linking migration and food insecurity. Studies of Venezuelan refugees in Ecuador report similar patterns (Milán &

Martens, 2023), and Tuaza Castro (2020) emphasizes Indigenous migrants' heightened vulnerability during crises such as COVID-19. Research also documents community agency, including children's participation in informal economies, such as selling handcrafts, to secure food. School leader Sheyla explained about the connection of food insecurity and learning development

Toda criança que tem um nível alimentar ruim e que vive na miséria... Toda criança desnutrida, ela se torna uma criança especial, porque o nível cognitivo de aprendizado se torna inferior... No caso dos nossos Venezuelanos, é como eles passaram pela extrema desnutrição, muitos deles viram pessoas da família deles sendo mortos por essa desnutrição.

[Every child who suffers from poor nutrition and lives in extreme poverty... Every malnourished child becomes a child with special needs because their cognitive learning process becomes lower... In the case of our Venezuelan students, many experienced extreme malnutrition, and some even witnessed family members die from starvation.]

Her use of "special needs" is not a judgment about students. It names the way extreme and prolonged malnutrition, driven by poverty, displacement, systemic discrimination, and neglect, can affect cognition and learning in ways that require additional support. This interpretation is consistent with research linking food insecurity to health and academic outcomes (Cohen et al., 2021; Wang & Fawzi, 2020; Weinreb et al., 2002; Jepkemboi, 2018; Gorman, 1995), hunger and displacement to challenges in language acquisition (Kaplan et al., 2016), and early malnutrition to changes in brain development (Georgieff, 2023; Pizzol et al., 2021; Bhat et al., 1973).

At Café Sem Troco, daily meals of rice, beans, protein, and snacks offered reliable access to food and a sense of safety. The school became a place of dignity and stability, where nourishment was inseparable from education. This finding highlights the limits of one-size-fits-all approaches in Western education. Responding to students who have endured poverty and hunger requires pedagogical flexibility, empathy, and teacher preparation grounded in an understanding of students' histories. This was possible through different pedagogical approaches that integrated care, culturally sustaining practices, and translanguaging.

Finding 3: Culture Shock, Acculturation, and the Impacts on Students Self-Steem

Educators highlighted the cultural shock described by Oberg (1960) that Indigenous refugee students experience in Brazilian public schools. Even everyday routines, such as food habits, can cause distress and affect mental health and self-esteem. This aligns with research on cultural discrimination, macro- and microaggressions (Williams et al., 2021), and acculturation pressures (Berry, 2005). Oppedal

et al. (2020) emphasize that developing cultural competence, including verbal and nonverbal communication and interpersonal skills, is essential for adaptation.

At Café Sem Troco, educators observed that while Brazilian and Western cultures typically use utensils such as spoons, forks, and knives, Warao families traditionally eat with their hands using a *cumbuquinha*, a small wooden bowl. Rather than impose mainstream norms, the school adopted a culturally sustaining approach (Paris & Alim, 2017) that treated foodways as integral to identity and belonging. As Gingell et al. (2022) remind us, food anchors home and cultural identity. At Café Sem Troco, mealtimes became spaces for dialogue and mutual learning, where students could honor Warao traditions while also learning to navigate Brazilian contexts.

Teachers recognized Indigenous foodways as sources of assets and cultural knowledge rather than problems to be corrected. They collaborated with students to affirm their community's traditions while also opening spaces for intercultural learning. In this context, Eduardo emphasized in Portunhol

Preservar a cultura. Nosotros siempre preservamos y lo ponemos en práctica. Siempre recordando os nossos antepassados... Isso não podemos perder. Y nosotros, que estamos aqui no Brasil, também temos que dar apoio a los nossos hermanos brasileiros. Aprender a cultura brasileira também é conhecer, e também para que eles conheçam a nossa cultura Warao. Nosotros con nuestra cultura, mas também com a cultura brasileira.

[Preserve the culture. We always preserve it and put it into practice. Always remembering our ancestors. This we cannot lose. And we, who are here in Brazil, also have to support our Brazilian brothers. Learning Brazilian culture is also about understanding, and also for them to know our Warao culture. We with our culture, but also with Brazilian culture. This would be very important.]

Eduardo's words illustrate the importance of cultural preservation while also valuing intercultural dialogue. In practice, this meant that educators did not enforce utensils as the only proper way to eat. Instead, they created opportunities to discuss diverse food customs, validating Indigenous practices, challenging Western norms, and affirming the equal value of all traditions. At the same time, teachers introduced practical skills such as using utensils, not to replace Warao habits but to build cultural flexibility and agency. Students could then choose when to adapt in restaurants or other public settings while preserving their cultural identity.

Figure 12 and 13.

Warao students engaged in culinary learning



Figures 12 and 13 show Warao students engaged in culinary learning. These activities created a space for cultural exchange, where students learned Brazilian cuisine while sharing Warao food traditions. Rather than one-sided assimilation, this approach encouraged mutual learning and built confidence and self-care. As Altoé and de Azevedo (2018) remind us, identities are hybrid and shaped through daily negotiations between cultural heritage and the realities of displacement. Reflecting on trauma, self-worth, and cultural shock, Janerrandra emphasized the challenges of intercultural transition

Essa interculturalidade também é um trauma, porque eles têm que deixar o eu deles e tudo o que eles aprenderam até o momento. A comida que eles comem na terra deles, eles vão lá e pegam. E aqui não! Aqui eles têm que ter dinheiro para comprar a comida. E isso acaba impactando a autoestima deles. Eles ficam com vergonha e, quando você tem autoestima baixa, isso interfere no aprendizado, na sala de aula. Interfere também na aprendizagem, na linguagem. Eles criam um certo bloqueio para falar porque ficam com vergonha, porque eles vão se diminuindo.

[This intercultural transition is also a trauma because they have to leave behind their sense of self and everything they have learned up to this point. In their homeland, they can gather food directly from nature, but here, they need money to buy it. This deeply impacts their self-esteem. They feel ashamed, and when self-esteem is low, it interferes with learning in the classroom. It affects their ability to communicate, their language development, and their willingness to participate. They create a psychological barrier, withdrawing because they feel smaller and less valued.]

Her words highlight how acculturation can generate shame and loss of autonomy. In their homeland, food was gathered directly from nature, but in their new home, it must be purchased, adding both financial and emotional strain. The result can be low self-esteem, withdrawal, and silence in the classroom.

This transition reveals how students lose not only cultural knowledge and traditional ways of living but also autonomy around food. Recognizing trauma

is not enough. Culturally sustaining practices are needed to restore dignity, agency, and voice. As Gingell et al. (2022) observe, food is closely tied to culture and identity, and for refugees, cultural foods are central to settlement during periods of stress and dislocation. Persistent comparison to dominant norms can produce internalized shame and reduced self-efficacy, creating barriers to expression and learning.

Transformative Educational Practices: Healing, Partnership, and Cultural Respect. The partnership between Café Sem Troco and the University of Brasília (UnB) expanded multilingual instruction, fostered trust, and challenged traditional models of refugee education. In a rural and underfunded context, this collaboration helped fill critical gaps while honoring students' cultural and linguistic rights. Ateek (2022) reminds us that refugee students experience trauma not only through displacement but also when schools require learning in languages and systems that marginalize their histories. Similarly, Capstick and Ateek (2024) argue that inclusive schools validate identity rather than pursue assimilation. At Café Sem Troco, this validation grew through partnership. University students and faculty joined as collaborators, not distant experts, and helped build a multilingual ecology where Spanish, Warao, Portuguese, Portuguese, and Brazilian Sign Language coexisted. These efforts were rooted in sustained relationships with students and families. Janerrandra reflected

A escola se preparou para atender a comunidade Warao. A gente trabalha com o pessoal da UnB na parte da linguística e eles fazem isso realmente de forma gratuita. Eles não ganham nada e fazem um estágio na escola. Eles vão para a escola ensinar Espanhol para todos os alunos, para que os estudantes possam se integrar e consigam conversar. Desde o início, falamos com eles (Warao students and parents) em espanhol.

[The school prepared itself to serve the Warao community. We work with the folks from UnB in the linguistics department, and they really do this free of charge. They do not get paid and they do an internship at the school. They teach Spanish to all students so that the students can integrate and be able to communicate. From the beginning, we spoke with them, the Warao students and parents, in Spanish.]

An essential dimension of this finding is the recognition that partnerships between schools and universities are not peripheral but central. Such collaborations support schools in preserving students' full linguistic and cultural repertoires and transform language instruction into a multilingual and multicultural bridge for empathy, mutual learning, and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Discussion

This study addressed two key questions: (1) How do educators at Café Sem Troco respond to the

traumas of forced displacement and related stressors experienced by Warao refugee students and their families through trauma-informed and culturally sustaining practices? (2) How do educators at Café Sem Troco integrate translanguaging to support Warao students' linguistic identities, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging in school? Findings show that these pedagogies shaped everyday teaching and school programs while also revealing systemic barriers that limit their long-term implementation.

To answer the first question, trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices were enacted through a holistic, justice-driven vision led by a principal committed to inclusion, accessibility, and equity. A trauma-informed approach was evident in the school's response to food insecurity, which directly shaped attendance, student engagement, and well-being. Teachers observed that many Warao students initially came to school primarily in search of meals. In response, the school ensured consistent food access and incorporated nourishment and agricultural practices into the curriculum through initiatives such as the community garden. These efforts addressed basic needs (Pizzol et al., 2023) while affirming ancestral knowledge, positioning food as both a foundation for learning and a culturally sustaining practice (Georgieff, 2023; Pizzol et al., 2021).

Culturally sustaining pedagogies were also prioritized. Lesson planning drew on Warao cultural activities, storytelling, painting, artesanato, and intercultural dialogue, which helped students express themselves and restore cultural pride. These practices directly countered the cultural trauma of students who expressed shame regarding their language, food, or clothing, and they repositioned Indigenous funds of knowledge as cultural capital (Paris & Alim, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

This approach was further strengthened through a partnership with the local public university, which expanded multilingual instruction, teacher training, and opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. These initiatives, however, unfolded within a broader context of limited infrastructure and structural barriers that affected refugee education more generally. Families often faced interruptions in enrollment and restricted access to essential services, while educators worked with limited resources and professional preparation in areas such as trauma-informed care, refugee rights, and Indigenous knowledge systems (Duden & Martins-Boges, 2022; Azevedo & Dantas, 2017). These conditions contributed to what Oberg et al. (2023) describe as compassion fatigue, as educators and the school leader extended themselves beyond capacity to ensure student well-being while navigating the constraints of under-resourced educational structures. Despite these challenges, the dedication of the school

community enabled the implementation of a model that was emotionally responsive, culturally affirming, and linguistically inclusive.

While the first question highlighted how educators responded to trauma and systemic barriers, the second question reveals how translanguaging became central to affirming identity and fostering belonging. Findings indicate that translanguaging was essential to validation, engagement, cultural preservation, and identity-building. Teachers created an environment where students drew freely on their full linguistic repertoires, including Warao, Spanish, Portuguese, Portunhol (Santos, 2017), and Brazilian Sign Language. This use of language enabled students to access materials, participate more independently, and engage across colonial linguistic boundaries. As Flores (2014) emphasizes, translanguaging is not only a pedagogical strategy but also a political act and a form of resistance to the imposition of a mandated monolingual curriculum.

Teachers encouraged students to use the languages in which they felt most comfortable, knowing that this flexibility reduced anxiety and improved self-esteem and well-being, particularly for recently displaced students. Translanguaging was used in storytelling, gardening, painting, cultural practices, and group projects that connected students' home knowledge with academic learning. Research supports this interpretation, acknowledging translanguaging as both a cognitive scaffold and a trauma-responsive practice for refugee and Indigenous students (Capstick & Ateek, 2024). Importantly, translanguaging was treated as a valid practice in its own right rather than a temporary bridge toward Portuguese monolingualism. Through translanguaging, students sustained and cherished their linguistic origins while actively participating in the intellectual and social life of the school.

These were not separate interventions but intertwined practices centered on care, justice, and cultural inclusion. Translanguaging functioned as both pedagogy and healing practice, enabling student participation while affirming linguistic and cultural belonging. Culturally responsive practices recentred Indigenous epistemologies, disrupted deficit thinking, and strengthened school-family relationships. These advances were made possible through visionary leadership and community collaborations, yet they were consistently challenged by systemic inequities and underinvestment.

Importantly, Café Sem Troco also ensured that Warao families and community members were active participants in school life. Educators invited parents into decision making, respected cultural traditions, and created opportunities for families to feel a sense of belonging within the school. These

practices reinforced trust between the school and the community and positioned the school as a shared space of care, cultural respect, and resilience.

As the number of Indigenous refugee students continues to grow across Latin America and worldwide, this case study offers timely lessons about how schools can adopt inclusive, justice-oriented pedagogy. It also highlights the critical need for sustained investment in teacher professional development, multilingual mental health services, and institutional partnerships that respect and uplift Indigenous and refugee funds of knowledge. Without such support, even the most dedicated educators will continue to face restrictions in meeting the complex needs of forcibly displaced learners and their families.

Implications

This case study demonstrates that even in under-resourced, rural areas, schools like Café Sem Troco can implement transformative practices to support Indigenous refugee students and their families. However, their initiatives cannot exist in isolation.

First, there is an urgent need for trauma-informed and culturally sustaining training across public schools so that educators understand how forced displacement, discrimination, and cultural loss affect students' learning and well-being. Teachers require preparation not only to recognize trauma but also to reflect critically on how their curriculum, actions, assumptions, or disciplinary measures may inadvertently harm refugee and Indigenous students.

Second, this study highlights the importance of integrating translanguaging practices into teacher education programs, enabling future educators to view students' diverse linguistic repertoires as assets rather than deficits. Third, advocacy from school leaders and educational systems is essential for adapting curricula and pedagogy to incorporate non-Western, community-based knowledge.

As migration continues to rise across Latin America, universities need to provide specialized coursework in refugee, migration, and multilingual education for teachers and school leaders. Sustained institutional investment is critical to ensure the continuity of this support. Finally, this case study highlights the value of school-university partnerships as catalysts for innovation, professional development, and equity-centered education. Equally important, schools can strengthen trust and belonging by engaging families as integral partners. Parent and caregiver participation in decision making, cultural activities, and school events affirms collective belonging and fosters community resilience.

Conclusion

This study examined how educators at Café Sem Troco implemented translanguaging, trauma-informed, and culturally sustaining pedagogies to support the linguistic, emotional, and cultural identities of Warao students and their families. Translanguaging emerged as both pedagogy and healing, affirming heritage while enabling students to navigate displacement. Classrooms became inclusive spaces where language and culture were validated through storytelling, food, and Indigenous epistemologies.

Teachers developed these approaches collaboratively, drawing on care, reflection, and support from the local public university. In the absence of systemic guidance, they created innovative practices rooted in community knowledge. These efforts reshaped peer dynamics, as Brazilian students increasingly participated in intercultural routines that fostered empathy and mutual respect.

At the same time, structural barriers such as inconsistent enrollment systems, under-resourced schools, and limited trauma-specific training threatened sustainability. Educators consistently extended their responsibilities, highlighting the urgency of broader institutional and policy support.

A key limitation of this study is the absence of direct input from Warao students and families. Future research should adopt participatory approaches that center refugee voices, explore long-term outcomes of inclusive pedagogies, and examine their application in urban schools. Further attention is also needed to the experiences of Indigenous refugee students with visible and invisible disabilities, which remain critically underexplored.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that inclusive, justice-oriented education for Indigenous refugees is achievable even in underfunded rural areas. Scaling and sustaining such practices requires investment in trauma-informed teacher preparation, multilingual mental health services, and curricula grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. Strengthening school–university–community partnerships and regional coordination can close persistent gaps and create support systems for volunteer workers, whose efforts were critical yet difficult to sustain in the absence of broader institutional resources. Lastly, refugee education needs to evolve from providing access to fostering belonging, where cultural and linguistic identities are preserved rather than censored and erased.

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to express their gratitude to the educators and school leader, cacique Eduardo,

of Café Sem Troco, as well as the Warao families who supported this study. We are also deeply thankful to Dr. Braustein for her support throughout the research process.

Disclosure

Portions of the manuscript benefited from digital writing assistance used for editing support, clarity and organization; all analysis and interpretation reflect the researcher's original work.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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