



Immigrant Racial Identity Formation in Schools:

A Review of Literature on
Immigrant Students in Multiracial School Settings,
2011 to 2022

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AERA 2023



The purpose of this systematic review was to understand how scholars have been approaching research at the intersections of race, immigration, language, nationality, and education since 2014 at the beginning of the Black Lives Matter Movement, the election of Donald Trump, the COVID pandemic and the murder of George Floyd.

The questions that guided this review are:

1. How have researchers explored the intersection of race and immigrant education between 2011 and 2022 among the population of immigrant students in the United States?
2. What theoretical and conceptual frameworks have been used to better understand the racialized experiences of immigrant youth?
3. How are researchers examining interactions between students, their peers, and their teachers in multiracial, multinational, and mix-status settings?



We define immigrant education as:

- Set in traditional K-12 learning environments, like schools, as well as supplementary programs and community spaces
- Engaging with English language learning policies and programming (such as ESL/ESOL/ENL, bilingual, or multilingual education)
- Sending explicit or implicit messages surrounding citizenship or civic identity
- Including racialized learning in social interactions between peers, educators, and families



In sum, included studies met the following criteria:

- Data collection and publication between 2011 and 2022
- Took place in U.S K-12 schools or with immigrant student/family participants who talked about school
- Qualitative or mixed-methods were used
- Theoretical or conceptual framework explicitly or implicitly engages the concepts of race or racialization

Table #1 Search terms used in database searches 1 (ERIC via EbscoHost) and 2 (Web of Science)

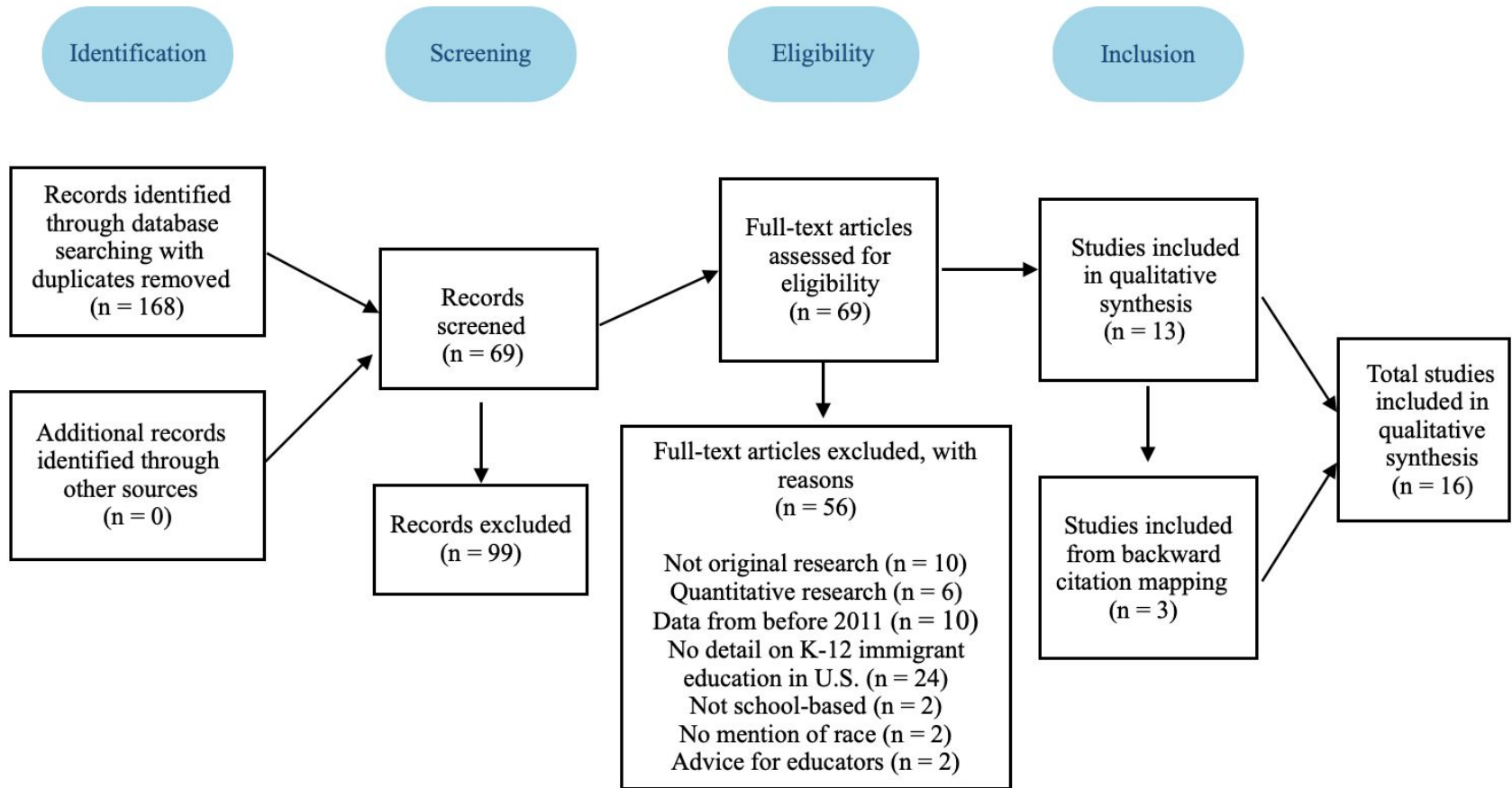
| | Racialization search terms | Operator | Immigrant /demographic search terms | Operator | Education search terms | Operator | Setting search terms |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Operator | rac* | AND | “immigrant education” | – | – | AND | “United States” |
| OR | rac* | AND | – | – | education | AND | “United States” |
| OR | rac* | AND | immigra* | AND | education | AND AND | “United States” multiracial |

Table #2 Search terms used in database search 3, using Web of Science

| Racialization search terms | Operator | Immigration search terms | Operator | Setting search terms | Operator | Education search terms | Operator | Relationships search terms |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| rac* | AND | immigra* | AND | “United States” | AND | school* | AND | relationship* |

* refers to a flexible citation search where * corresponds to any letters

Figure #1 PRISMA Diagram of our review process



- The literature identified a clear link between race and language in identity formation, self-perception, and peer interaction.
 - Many of the most recent studies use “raciolinguistics” as a framework to operationalize understandings of migrant youth’s experiences and subvert dominant notions of literacy in the field of education.
- Most articles focus on specific student identities related to geographic region
 - (West African, Somali, Sudanese, Congolese, Cameroonian, Ghanaian, Korean, Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian, Palestinian, and Moroccan migrant youth)
- In most studies that addressed racialization, researchers addressed and disrupted a Black/white binary lens.
- Very few articles focused on teachers’ interactions with their students. The three articles that did explored teachers’ role as mediators of students’ educational experiences, taking into account racial/ethnic identity, teaching philosophy, and classroom culture.

Implications for Future Research



- There has been a growing recognition of the need to examine the racialized experiences of immigrant youth's and the impact on social and academic wellbeing but will benefit from more theoretically informed empirical studies.
- The work being done to disrupt the Black/white binary is significant and should be continued; this can be expanded by thinking about what race and racialization mean outside of the U.S. and how pre-migration experiences impact how youth understand race in the U.S. after migration.
- More work needs to be done in multiracial school settings about relationships among ethno-racially diverse groups of students and teachers; there is a particular need to expand this research in rural settings.

