Full length article

"The schools try, but…": A holistic perspective on the social adaptation of Ukrainian refugee students in Czech schools

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A B S T R A C T

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Czech Republic faced an unprecedented influx of Ukrainian refugees. This study aims to examine the social adaptation of Ukrainian students in Czech schools from a holistic perspective, incorporating the viewpoints of refugee students and their parents, headteachers, and teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these actors from the six lower secondary schools that enrolled the largest influx of Ukrainian refugee students through the 2022/2023 academic year. The analysis included 58 interviews that were analyzed using grounded theory techniques. Following Berry's model of acculturation, the findings revealed tension between integration and separation among Ukrainian refugee students. Their social adaptation process was shaped by perceptions of the importance of ethnicity, the methods of acquiring the host country language and to what levels, and the approaches to interactions with Czech classmates. These elements combined to form three types of social adaptation: openness to friendship, utilitarian friendships, and (self-)isolation. Additionally, three teacher approaches (intervening, doubtful, and inattentive non-intervening) and their potential consequences for social adaptation were identified. Practical implications are discussed.

On February 24, 2022, Russia initiated an invasion of Ukraine, triggering a substantial refugee crisis in Europe, unrivaled since World War II. By September 2022, there were 7.5 million displaced Ukrainians, with 0.5 million seeking refuge in the Czech Republic. This influx positioned the Czech Republic as the host of the highest per capita number of Ukrainian refugees among all EU countries. Notably, nearly one-third of these refugees were children under the age of 18, necessitating their access to education (Operational Data Portal, 2023).

The Czech Republic was responsible for providing free compulsory education to all refugee children in public schools, as indicated in Act No. 67/2022 and Act No. 199/2022. A survey conducted by Prokop et al. (2023) revealed that 92% of the children from Ukrainian refugee families who arrived in the Czech Republic in the spring of 2022 started attending Czech schools. At the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year, the enrollment of Ukrainian refugee students in Czech lower secondary schools stood at 39,478, constituting 4% of the total student population. Consequently, within a remarkably brief span, numerous Ukrainian refugees with no prior knowledge of the Czech language were absorbed into Czech schools. This rapid influx made Ukrainian refugee students the most

numerous ethnic minority group within Czech educational institutions (MEYS, 2023).

1. Background

Ukrainian refugee students in the Czech Republic were at risk of facing many challenges stemming from their experiences of war and displacement. Most refugee children who have experienced war suffer from prolonged trauma and separation from family members (Genç, 2022). This was also observed in Ukrainian refugee children arriving in the Czech Republic (Preissová Krejčí et al., 2023). The Ukrainian children seeking refuge in the Czech Republic had often experienced separation from family members, as most of their fathers had to remain in the home country due to the imposed martial law. Another obstacle refugee children had to deal with was the loss of friends (Schwartz et al., 2021). Refugee children often experienced pressure and stress when attempting to adapt to a new, unfamiliar environment, as well as when trying to create new social roles and re-shape relationships within the family (Berry, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2021; Záleská, 2020). Many refugee children are susceptible to experiencing long-term psychological issues, such as psychosocial adjustment (McBrien, 2005), post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and emotional and behavioral problems (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011).

The relocation of refugee children to a host country is accompanied by an additional need: their adaptation to a new social environment (Preissová Krejčí et al., 2023; Schwartz et al., 2021). Refugee children need to adjust to a new education system and school culture (Cerna, 2019). Thus, school adaptation is the foremost adaptation that refugee children face. Drawing from Berry's theory of acculturation (Berry, 1997) and the conceptualization of school adjustment proposed by Perry and Weinstein (1998), school adaptation can be considered a three-dimensional construct including psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptation. Psychological adaptation refers to internal psychological outcomes, such as a sense of personal and cultural identity, a healthy mental state, and personal satisfaction within the new cultural environment (Berry, 1997). Socio-cultural adaptation refers to the individual's ability to "fit in" to a new cultural milieu (Ward, 2022). Therefore, socio-cultural adaptation entails adjusting to a different culture's values, norms, traditions, language, and social practices. Academic adaptation is the extent to which children successfully cope with educational requirements and their level of contentment with the educational setting (Yerken & Nguyen Luu, 2022). While all dimensions of school adaptation are interconnected, the concept of social adaptation within the school environment is primarily built upon psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. In this context, we define social adaptation as the overall adjustment in the behavior of a refugee student to effectively operate within a new school social environment (Peleg, 2012; Taft, 1973).

According to Berry's model of acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2009), home and host culture orientation are the two fundamental dimensions refugees use to meet the challenges of living in a new culture. After immigrating to a host country, refugee children may adopt four acculturation strategies based on various forms of prioritization or rejection of home and host cultures (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010): assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. As Berry (2007) noted, evidence suggests that the prevailing approach for individuals is integration, which involves valuing one's cultural background while actively engaging in the broader societal context of the host country. This stance is favored over assimilation, separation, or marginalization. Earlier research (Sam & Berry, 2010) indicated that individuals who integrate, engaging in both their home culture and the host society, typically exhibit better adaptation than those who acculturate through assimilation, separation, or marginalization, focusing on one culture only (assimilation and separation) or neither of the cultures (marginalization).

In this study, we consider the social adaptation of refugee children in Czech schools as a crucial arena for mitigating the negative consequences of their displacement. School is the central social background for children to develop social relations and improve their social competencies (Coleman, 1961; Steinberg, 2020). Schools have the potential to restore social and emotional healing and mitigate the psychosocial impacts of displacement on refugee children by providing safety, stability, a sense of normalcy, and structure (Eisenbruch, 1988; McBrien, 2005; O'Rourke, 2014; Thomas, 2016). Schools can further provide opportunities for refugee children to form identities in the new culture (Thomas et al., 2016). A supportive school climate and a sense of peer belonging improve refugee children's mental health (Emerson et al., 2022). Specifically, research has shown that peer acceptance, feelings of belonging, and school friendships facilitate the process of social integration into the host country and, for refugee children, are powerful sources of resilience (Schwartz et al., 2021). However, refugee children are more likely to face negative behaviors such as ostracization, social rejection or exclusion, and bullying by their peers upon transitioning to a new school environment in a host country (Hek, 2005; Verkuyten & Steenhuis, 2005), making it hard for them to achieve acceptance and build friendships (Guo et al., 2019; Lintner et al., 2023). This situation complicates the adaptation process for refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Difficulties in social adaptation may, in turn, manifest in low levels of well-being or in mental health issues (Fazel, 2015) and may even cause students to drop out of school (McBrien, 2005). Therefore, it appears essential to facilitate the social adaptation of refugee children in the school environment (Trueba et al., 1990).

Schooling itself, however, does not lead to successful social adaptation for refugee children. In addition to placing the refugee children in mainstream schools, their successful social adaptation requires effort from all actors. A review of studies on the social adaptation of refugee children in the United States revealed that refugees' inability to acquire the language of the majority, psychosocial problems, parental non-involvement, and school staff unwillingness or inability to provide the necessary support decrease the probability of successful social adaptation of refugees in school (McBrien, 2005). Furthermore, refugee children's lack of identification with the host culture (Sheikh & Anderson, 2018) and poor language skills (Smith et al., 2021) hinder their social adaptation in schools.

Previous research has suggested that establishing favorable conditions for refugees' successful social adaptation in schools can be highly challenging. In a comprehensive study of approaches to policy and provisions in refugee education in the United Kingdom, Arnot et al. (2013) called for a holistic support model. The holistic model acknowledges the various dimensions of refugee children's needs, including social, emotional, and psychological aspects. It emphasizes that everyone involved in the school life of refugee

children—headteachers, teachers, parents, classmates, and refugee children themselves—should collaborate to support their social adaptation (Arnot et al., 2013). In a review of interventions aimed at enhancing the resilience of refugee children, Pieloch et al. (2016) advocated for the holistic model as the most effective approach to supporting refugees' social adaptation.

However, for teachers, social adaptation is often limited to refugees' psychosocial well-being (McBrien, 2005), and schools are rarely ready to respond holistically to the needs of refugee children (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Hence, we believe that an essential realm of research is to identify and clarify the school practices for social adaptation and their impacts as perceived and interpreted by headteachers, teachers, Ukrainian students, and parents simultaneously.

2. Present study

The successful social adaptation of Ukrainian refugee students emerged as one of the most critical tasks within the Czech education system. This task was demanding, primarily due to the rapid influx of Ukrainian refugees into schools, catching institutions off guard in terms of both organizational readiness and resources (MEYS, 2023). In addition, before the invasion of Ukraine, Czech schools had only rarely educated refugee students (MEYS, 2022). Therefore, Czech teachers had not acquired the knowledge, skills, and competencies for educational work with this group of students.

While it might be possible to learn from a range of research on refugee school adaptation from countries with rich immigration experiences, this research has largely been conducted in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Scandinavia. Cultural conditions have a considerable impact on refugee school adaptation (Ward et al., 2001); therefore, the transferability of knowledge to non-Western European countries with little experience with refugees is limited.

Research is lacking on the social adaptation of refugees in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis of 2022, during which schools in host countries faced an unprecedented sharp influx of refugees. To our knowledge, with the exception of our studies (Lintner et al., 2023; Šeďová et al., 2024), no other Czech researchers have attempted to explore the social adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in host countries' schools. We investigated the perceptions of social adaptation among Ukrainian refugee students and their parents, and we examined the strategies employed by Czech schools receiving a high influx of these students. Research on the social adaptation of refugees with a comprehensive focus on all the actors involved has been rare. Since school adaptation is considered a complex (Berry, 1997) or triangular process comprising child, family, and school (Brizuela & García-Sellers, 1999), we conducted qualitative interviews with the involved actors: Ukrainian refugee students and their parents, headteachers, and teachers.

This study offers in-depth insights into the social adaptation phenomenon from a holistic view. As such, it provides an understanding of the underlying mechanisms of coping with social adaptation and presents knowledge about the social adaptation of refugee students in schools in a non-Western European country with limited experience in dealing with this group of students. We propose that the findings of the present study may be transferable to other non-Western countries, increasing applicability beyond the national context of the Czech education system. Moreover, our study focuses on the essence of the social adaptation of Ukrainian refugee students, and a holistic perspective provides insights into what social adaptation means for different actors and how they act.

We address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Ukrainian refugee students and their parents regarding social adaptation within schools?
2. What approaches do Czech headteachers and teachers employ, and what are the implications of these approaches for the social adaptation of Ukrainian refugee students?

3. Methods

In light of the research gap and research questions, we adopted a qualitative approach to capture the emic perspectives of participants regarding the social adaptation of Ukrainian refugee students into lower secondary schools in the Czech Republic.

3.1. Sampling and data collection

We gathered data from Ukrainian refugee students and their parents, headteachers, and teachers at six lower secondary schools (ISCED 2) in Brno, the second-largest city in the Czech Republic. We systematically analyzed administrative data to identify schools with a substantial influx of Ukrainian refugees. This assessment enabled us to identify the eight schools in Brno that admitted the highest numbers of Ukrainian refugee students during the 2022/2023 school year. We contacted the headteachers of the eight schools via email and included a formal invitation to participate in our research. Six of the schools demonstrated interest and a commitment to contribute to our study. Hence, our research encompassed six schools hosting 30 to 60 recently arrived Ukrainian refugee students.

First, an initial phase of the study entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with the headteachers ($n = 6$). The interviews were conducted within the confines of the school environment, ensuring a contextually relevant backdrop. The interviews lasted between 49 and 111 min ($M = 70$ min). We designed the interview protocol to encompass a spectrum of pertinent facets, including the recollection of Ukrainian refugee student integration, administrative procedures germane to this integration, leadership strategies, the conceptualization of adaptation mechanisms, the scope of received support mechanisms, and the identification of prevailing challenges.

Second, by leveraging the collaboration of the headteachers, we employed a targeted sampling approach to identify two teachers per school. The sampling criteria required that the teachers had a higher number of Ukrainian students in their classes and that they taught subjects with a high time commitment (such as languages or mathematics), ensuring intensive contact with these students.

Twelve teachers were then invited to participate, and all agreed. Consequently, we conducted individual interviews with the teachers ($n = 12$); the interviews were always held during their working hours and in the school setting. The interview duration ranged from 34 to 67 min ($M = 52$ min). Methodologically underpinned by a semi-structured questioning framework, we performed the interviews to encompass a spectrum of pertinent themes. These themes included the teachers' perceptions of Ukrainian refugee students, their conceptualizations of effective adaptation strategies, the techniques harnessed to facilitate adaptation, the spectrum of received support mechanisms, and the array of challenges evident in the adaptation process.

Third, the teachers invited Ukrainian refugee students from their class and their parents to participate. While selecting subjects who are willing to participate is considered legitimate within qualitative research design (Stake, 2006), we acknowledge that this approach could introduce bias by primarily including students who are comfortable in their new school environment. To address potential biases, we requested that the teachers also invite Ukrainian students who might be experiencing difficulties with their social adaptation. The teachers provided us with contact information for these students, with their consent. We successfully conducted 21 interviews with Ukrainian refugee students and 19 interviews with their parents. Two parents were unable to participate in the research due to time constraints. The interviews were conducted in school or university settings, with two members of the research team present as interviewers, one of whom was fluent in Ukrainian and Russian. The interviews with students were between 22 and 50 min ($M = 34$ min). The semi-structured interview protocol for students covered the following topics: transition from Ukrainian to Czech school, academic achievement, perceived support, language acquisition, peer relations, and educational aspirations. The interviews with parents ranged from 22 to 58 min ($M = 37$ min). They covered the transition from Ukrainian to Czech school as experienced by their children, the perceived support of their children by the school, parent-child academic and social support, general satisfaction with Czech schools, plans, and educational aspirations.

The entire data corpus was collected between October 2022 and February 2023 by five experienced and trained interviewers. In this study, we analyzed 58 interviews with a total duration of 2519 min. For participant details, see Table 1.

3.2. Analysis

We subjected the comprehensive dataset to a thorough analytical procedure borrowing the tenets of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014)—namely, close reading, coding, memoing, and categorizing. Initially, the researchers conducted open coding on the interviews from the entire dataset for each participant type. Through iterative discussions about the meanings of the generated codes, overlapping themes were identified, leading to the development of a unified coding tree of inductively generated codes. All of the researchers subsequently applied this coding tree consistently across the dataset. The interview transcripts, coded by the individual researchers, were then merged into a single project using Atlas.ti version 7, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the quotations that saturated the codes. The researchers exchanged analytical memos related to individual codes and synthesized them into overarching categories to structure the presentation of the findings. This approach enabled a more inductive identification of patterned regularities by continuously refining the findings through the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2007). The theoretical framework presented in this study serves more as a set of background ideas, shaping the inductively driven data collection and analysis. The findings presented in this study are primarily derived from richly saturated codes.

4. Findings

This section begins by examining the central phenomenon of this study: the perspectives of Ukrainian students regarding their

Table 1
Participants.

School	Headteacher	Teachers and Subjects Taught	Students	Parents
Blue	Beata	Beatrice (homeroom teacher, English, PE), Brigita (homeroom teacher, civics education)	Bogdan, Bettina, Boris, Borislav	Bozhena (mother of Bogdan), Barbara (mother of Bettina), Bronislava (mother of Borislav)
Green	Gustav	Gina (homeroom teacher, Czech), Gita (homeroom teacher, mathematics)	Georgina, Gertruda, Gorpina	Gelena (mother of Georgina), Gafia (mother of Gertruda), Greta (mother of Gorpina)
Orange	Oliver	Olivie (homeroom teacher, mathematics, art), Ornella (Czech)	Olga, Oleg, Omelia, Oksana	Orina (mother of Olga), Olesya (mother of Oleg), Olena (mother of Oksana)
Red	Radana	Rita (homeroom teacher, Czech), Roman (homeroom teacher, PE)	Regina, Rima, Rostislav, Rhuzena	Ruslana (mother of Regina), Rada (mother of Rima), Renata (mother of Rostislav), Ruslan (father of Ruzhena)
Violet	Valentin	Viktorie (Czech), Viola (homeroom teacher, Czech)	Vika, Vasilisa, Vita	Varvara (mother of Vika), Valentina (mother of Vasilisa), Vladislava (mother of Vita)
Yellow	Yanna	Yan (homeroom teacher, Czech), Yasmina (homeroom teacher, Czech)	Yaroslav, Yulia, Yehor	Yuri (father of Yaroslav), Yuliana (mother of Yulia), Yustina (mother of Yehor)

Note: All names are pseudonyms. The initial letters of headteachers, teachers, students, and parents are consistent with the initial letters of schools.

social adaptation in schools. We then explore the broader context involving schools and parents; this context serves as the background for the social adaptation of Ukrainian students. The final part focuses on the social adaptation through the lens of teachers, who play a crucial role in facilitating this process within their schools on a daily basis.

In presenting the results, we followed a structured approach: main finding (description)—quotation—interpretation (Patton, 2014). The participant quotes serve to illustrate how the findings emerged from the data. However, it is important to note that these quotes do not represent a comprehensive list for each code. The frequency of code appearances in the data is reported in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Table 2
Categories, codes and their incidence in the students' data.

Category (*f*)	Code (*f*)	Incidence in participants (*f*)	Description
Language in social adaptation process (45)	Language as a barrier to social adaptation (23)	Oksana (4), Rhuzena (4), Gorpina (3), Olga (2), Vasilisa (2), Vita (2), Yaroslav (2), Omelia (1), Rima (1), Yehor (1), Yulia (1)	Ukrainian students share experiences in which a lack of knowledge of Czech hindered their interactions within the Czech school environment
	Communication with classmates as a strategy of social adaptation (22)	Goprina (5), Vita (5), Olga (2), Regina (2), Rhuzena (2), Bettina (1), Bogdan (1), Oksana (1), Vika (1), Yaroslav (1), Yehor (1)	Ukrainian students try to communicate with their Czech classmates to learn Czech
Relations with classmates (94)	Make friends with everyone (28)	Bogdan (6), Vika (4), Bettina (3), Borislav (2), Omelia (2), Regina (2), Boris (1), Georgina (1), Gertruda (1), Gorpina (1), Rostislav (1), Ruzena (1),Vika (1), Vita (1), Yaaroslav (1)	Ukrainian students try to interact with all classmates regardless of their ethnicity
	Support from Czech classmates (17)	Oksana (3), Gertruda (2), Gorpina (2), Rima (2), Rhuzena (2), Vasilisa (2), Olga (1), Omelia (1), Vita (1), Yaroslav (1)	Ukrainian students feel supported mainly by Czech classmates
	Make friends with Ukrainian classmates (15)	Oleg (3), Vasilisa (3), Oksana (2), Rima (2), Yulia (2), Gertruda (1), Renata (1), Vita (1)	Ukrainian students interact mainly with other Ukrainian classmates
	What I like about my Czech classmates (15)	Olga (3), Vasilisa (3), Omelia (2), Georgina (1), Gertruda (1), Oksana (1), Rhuzena (1), Rostislav (1), Vita (1), Yaroslav (1)	Characteristics that Ukrainian students like about their Czech classmates
	Ethnicity as a subject of interest (10)	Bogdan (1), Boris (1), Borislav (1), Olga (1), Omelia (1), Regina (1), Rostislav (1), Vika (1), Yehor (1), Yulia (1)	Ukrainian students mention that their Czech classmates perceive their ethnic distinctiveness as a positive characteristic
	Strategies for increasing social capital (9)	Bettina (4), Rhuzena (2), Bogdan (1), Regina (1), Vita (1)	Strategies that Ukrainian students use to increase their popularity within the class collective
Conflicts with classmates (96)	Conflicts among Czech and Ukrainian classmates (28)	Rhuzena (9), Vasilisa (3), Bettina (2), Boris (2), Gertruda (2), Yehor (2), Borislav (1), Oksana (1),Oleg (1), Olga (1), Regina (1), Rima (1), Rostislav (1), Vita (1)	Ukrainian students mention different types of conflicts that arise in interactions with their Czech classmates
	Coping strategies during adaptation in classroom collective (21)	Rhuzena (11), Yulia (3), Yehor (2), Olga (2), Boris (1), Oleg (1), Yaroslav (1)	How Ukrainian students cope with conflicts and rejection from their Czech classmates
	"Us" versus "them" (21)	Yaroslav (8), Vita (4), Gorpina (3), Oleg (3), Gertruda (1), Olga (1), Vasilisa (1)	Ukrainian students mention the logic of dividing the world into "us" versus "them" when the most common dividing line is ethnicity; typically, they find themselves in a reactive position when this logic is involuntarily applied to them
	Ethnicized provocations (11)	Yaroslav (5), Rhuzena (3), Yehor (2), Yulia (1)	Ukrainian students mention provocations from their Czech classmates that are based on ethnic othering
	Distancing of Czech classmates (8)	Borislav (2), Olga (2), Bogdan (1), Oleg (1), Vita (1), Yaroslav (1)	Ukrainian students mention that their Czech classmates do not want to be friends with them
	Bullying (7)	Olga (3), Yaroslav (2), Oleg (1),Vita (1)	Ukrainian students mention conflict experiences with Czech classmates that involve long-term and systematic harm to their person
Transition to new environment (85)	Arrival at Czech school (35)	Borislav (3), Regina (3), Renata (3), Rhuzena (3), Bettina (2), Georgina (2), Gertruda (2), Rima (2), Vasilisa (2), Vika (2), Yehor (2), Bogdan (1), Boris (1), Oksana (1), Oleg (1), Olga (1), Omelia (1), Vita (1), Yaroslav (1), Yulia (1)	Ukrainian students recall their arrival at a Czech school
	Subjectively perceived ethnicity (21)	Olga (4), Omelia (2), Yaroslav (2), Yulia (2), Boris (1), Georgina (1), Gertruda (1), Gorpina (1), Oksana (1), Renata (1), Rhuzena (1), Rima (1), Rostislav (1), Vasilisa (1), Vita (1)	How Ukrainian students define their ethnicity
	Spending time outside of school (16)	Bettina (3), Georgina (2), Omelia (2), Yehor (2), Bogdan (1), Boris (1), Borislav (1), Regina (1), Rostislav (1), Rhuzena (1), Yaroslav (1)	How Ukrainian students spend their free time after school
	Differences among Czech and Ukrainian school in terms of social adaptation (13)	Rhuzena (3), Bogdan (1), Georgina (1), Oksana (1), Omelia (1), Rhuzena (1), Vasilia (1), Vita (1), Yaroslav (1), Yehor (1), Yulia (1)	Ukrainian students compare and contrast Czech and Ukrainian schools

Note: *f* – frequency of the codes. Each participant response could contain multiple codes. Codes are listed in order from most to least frequent.

4.1. Social adaptation through the lens of students

Table 2 summarizes the categories and codes related to social adaptation from the students' perspective. The students in our research regarded social adaptation as fitting into the school class and finding Czech friends. Despite mentioning in their interviews that they had friends among Ukrainian and Czech students, upon deeper exploration, their desire to strengthen ties with the Czech students became apparent, as they aimed for Czech students to include them more in their activities (code *Make friends with everyone*). When the student Bogdan from Blue School was asked what he wished for, he answered: *That we can all play together with the Czech kids.* A lower level of interactions with Czech students also manifested outside of school, where the Ukrainian students in our research tended to socialize more frequently with their Ukrainian classmates (codes *Spending time outside of school* and *Make friends with Ukrainian classmates*). The following quotation illustrates the experience of the student Rostislav; other students, including Bogdan, Boris, Georgina, Regina, Vita, and Yaroslav, responded in a similar manner.

> Interviewer: So, who do you usually chat with in class?
>
> Rostislav (Red School): Mostly with Ivan, Fedir, and Petro. They're Ukrainian kids. We always mess around together during free periods. One time, we still had some water left, so we kicked it around and played with it, and ended up being a bit late. It's fun hanging out with them.
>
> Interviewer: Do you guys only hang out at school or outside of school too?
>
> Rostislav: We hang out after school too. I often go out with Petro; we have scooters. Sometimes I go out with Ivan too.

From the students' perspective, the predominant goal of adaptation was associated with integration. However, achieving this goal was complicated by the significance of the category of ethnicity (code *Subjectively perceived ethnicity*). Although they perceived ethnicity as an important part of their identity, they were not able fully perform their ethnicity in their daily interactions with Czech students and teachers. We found that the Ukrainian students associated their ethnicity with the land of their birth (Gorpina, Omelia), the origins of their parents (Yaroslav), their national traditions (Oksana, Omelia), their native language (Oksana, Rima), and possibly with national cuisine (Boris).

Less commonly, ethnicity was associated with qualities that the students considered typical traits of Ukrainian identity, such as *being smart and strong (Student Vita, Violet School)* or *honesty, everyone helps each other (Student Yulia, Yellow School)*. Conversely, when students viewed ethnicity from the perspective of being foreigners in the Czech Republic, the theme of their differences emerged, as students felt like *strangers* or *weird* in the new environment *(Student Vasilia, Violet School)*. In their interviews, with the exception of the student Rhuzena, who identified as neither Ukrainian nor Czech, and the student Borislav, who identified as bi-cultural, the students all stated that they identified themselves as Ukrainians. The contrast of transitioning from a Ukrainian school to a Czech school led to their awareness of their dissimilarity; such awareness could interfere with efforts to integrate or result in a tendency to isolate (code *Differences among Czech and Ukrainian school in terms of social adaptation*).

We found that tensions evolved in various directions and influenced the form of social adaptation differently. In our interviews, we identified three main tendencies of social adaptation from the student's perspective: openness to friendship, utilitarian friendships, and (self-)isolation. While some students predominantly aligned with one type of adaptation, others exhibited characteristics of various adaptation types in a more balanced way. Nevertheless, each student ultimately exhibited a predominance of characteristics from one adaptation type; the students are accordingly categorized in the relevant section of the findings. These types of social adaptation can be understood specifically in relation to Ukrainian students and Czech classrooms but also more generally as phases in the development of social adaptation.

Table 3
Categories, codes and their incidence in the headteachers' data.

Category (*f*)	Code (*f*)	Incidence in participants (*f*)	Description
Headteacher approach toward teachers (18)	Shifting responsibility to teachers (10)	Oliver (4), Gustav (3), Yanna (2), Beata (1)	Targeted shift of responsibility for the adaptation of Ukrainian students to the teaching staff
	Passive approach toward teachers (8)	Oliver (4), Gustav (2), Yanna (2)	Leadership styles characterized by a lack of teacher support
Headteacher approach toward students (69)	Promoting well-being (29)	Oliver (9), Gustav (6), Radana (4), Yanna (4), Beata (3), Valentin (3)	Approaches and activities aimed at making Ukrainian students feel safe and psychologically unharmed in the school environment
	Providing a welcoming environment (25)	Yanna (7), Radana (6), Oliver (5), Beata (3), Valentin (3), Gustav (1)	A solidarity approach to incoming Ukrainian students and the goal of providing them with an environment in which they feel welcome
	Neglecting academic adaptation (15)	Gustav (6), Yanna (4), Oliver (2), Valentin (2), Beata (1)	Beliefs and approaches that lead to the neglect of academic adaptation
Headteacher understanding of the new experience (12)	Professional challenge (8)	Radana (3), Beata (2), Yanna (2), Oliver (1)	Perceiving the arrival of Ukrainian refugee students as a new unfamiliar situation that represents a professional challenge for both the headteacher and teachers
	New situation as a benefit for the school (4)	Orange (2), Blue (1), Violet (1)	Evaluating the arrival of Ukrainian students to the school as a benefit for Czech students and teachers and the school as a whole

Note: *f* – frequency of the codes. Each participant response could contain multiple codes. Codes are listed in order from most to least frequent.

4.1.1. Openness to friendship

Twelve students predominantly exhibited the characteristics of the openness to friendship adaptation type: Bettina, Bogdan, Gorpina, Olga, Omelia, Rostislav, Rhuzena, Rima, Regina, Vasilisa, Vika, and Yaroslav. Openness to friendship was identified when Ukrainian students perceived it in themselves and their Czech classmates (codes *Make friends with everyone* and *Support from Czech classmates*). Some Ukrainian students reported about the openness of Czech classmates and their interest in forming friendships with them. Similarly, Ukrainian students actively sought out these friendships. The Ukrainian students perceived their distinctiveness from their Czech classmates as an advantage for forming friendships (code *Ethnicity as a subject of interest*). As they expressed in interviews, they believed they could bring something interesting into class due to their distinctiveness. For example, the student Omelia shared that her arrival was perceived by Czech classmates *with interest. I think so, they asked about traditions, what we do, how to translate certain words (Student Omelia, Orange School).*

Interestingness then became an advantage for their integration into the new collective, as it was attractive and aroused curiosity among Czech students in the extraordinary elements in the class. The interestingness of Ukrainian students was primarily associated with different languages, which brought uniqueness and humor into the classroom (codes *Communication with classmates as a strategy of social adaptation* and *Ethnicity as a subject of interest*).

Humorous situations were primarily associated with words that sounded similar in Czech and Ukrainian but had entirely different meanings in each language:

> *Mainly to talk with them (with Czech students) because they are interested. They can repeat what we say with Masha. Well, when we say something in Ukrainian, they repeat it like parrots. We once said "podělat," which means "to understand" in Ukrainian (note: "podělat" means "to fuck something up" in Czech). So they keep going, and in the class, they repeat: "Podělat, podělat, podělat." (Student Bettina, Blue School).*

In openness to friendship, Ukrainian students talked about forming friendships with Czech classmates in and out of school (codes *Make friends with everyone* and *Spending time outside of school*). Leisure activities also contributed to fostering openness to friendship. For example, the student Bettina from Blue School participated in handball in her free time, providing further opportunities to form Czech friendships.

Table 4
Categories, codes and their incidence in the teachers' data.

Category (*f*)	Code (*f*)	Incidence in participants (*f*)	Description
Teacher practices (100)	Situation mapping (17)	Beatrice (4), Olivie (3), Rita (3), Ornella (2), Roman (2), Gina (1), Gita (1), Yan (1)	A systematic observation of the social adaptation situation of Ukrainian students in the school environment
	Providing a welcoming environment (13)	Gita (5), Beatrice (2), Rita (2), Viktorie (2), Gina (1), Yan (1)	A solidarity approach to incoming Ukrainian students and the goal of providing them with an environment in which they feel welcome
	Non-intervention (11)	Gita (2), Viola (2), Yasmina (2), Gina (1), Brigita (1), Olivie (1), Ornella (1), Viktorie (1)	Hesitancy to use or a lack of pedagogical interventions to address social adaptation issues of Ukrainian students
	Inattentiveness (9)	Gita (2), Yasmina (2), Viola (2), Gina (1), Brigita (1), Viktorie (1)	Unrecognized challenges and obstacles in the social adaptation of Ukrainian students
	Assimilation approach (8)	Yasmina (2), Gita (1), Gina (1), Beatrice (1), Yan (1), Viola (1), Rita (1)	Beliefs and pedagogical activities aimed at the assimilation of Ukrainian students
	Promoting well-being (8)	Rita (3), Gita (2), Beatrice (1), Olivie (1), Yan (1)	Pedagogical activities aimed at making Ukrainian students feel safe and psychologically unharmed in the school environment
	Thoughtfulness (8)	Roman (3), Beatrice (2), Rita (2), Olivie (1)	Systematic thinking about the social adaptation of Ukrainian students and considering pathways to support it
	Doubtfulness (7)	Ornella (5), Olivie (2)	Solving dilemmas and uncertainties about how to address social adaptation issues that Ukrainian students face
	Reliance on intuition (7)	Ornella (2), Gita (1), Olivie (1), Rita (1), Viola (1), Yasmina (1)	Taking an intuitive approach (not based on pedagogical knowledge or skills) to adaptation
	Intervention (6)	Roman (3), Olivie (2), Rita (1)	Targeted pedagogical interventions to address adaptation issues of Ukrainian students
	Prioritizing academic adaptation (6)	Gina (2), Gita (2), Viktorie (1), Viola (1)	Pedagogical activities aimed at prioritizing the academic adaptation of Ukrainian students
Teacher understanding of the new experience (38)	Thrown into the deep end (12)	Olivie (4), Yasmina (3), Gita (2), Rita (1), Viktorie (1), Yan (1)	Feelings of not receiving appropriate support from school leadership and authorities
	Uncertainty (10)	Olivie (4), Ornella (2), Yasmina (2), Viktorie (1), Viola (1)	Lack of awareness of how to pedagogically work with incoming Ukrainian refugee students and how to support their adaptation
	Lack of preparedness (8)	Olivie (3), Ornella (2), Rita (1), Yan (1), Yasmina (1)	Perceived professional unpreparedness and thus perceived lack of competence for dealing with refugee students
	Professional challenge (8)	Olivie (2), Beatrice (1), Gita (1), Ornella (1), Rita (1), Viktorie (1), Yasmina (1)	Perceiving the arrival of Ukrainian refugee students as a new unfamiliar situation that represents a professional challenge for teachers

Note: *f* – frequency of the codes. Each participant response could contain multiple codes. Codes are listed in order from most to least frequent.

Another factor contributing to openness to friendship was the prosocial orientation of the Ukrainian students (code *Strategies for increasing social capital*). From the statements of the students who reported friendships with Czechs and Ukrainians, it emerged that they often had many friends in Ukraine. It can thus be supposed that the students within this group were more socially oriented and possessed developed social skills. The social skills of Ukrainian students and the openness of their Czech classmates appeared to be significant factors in establishing friendships in which the Ukrainian students could maintain the distinctiveness associated with their ethnicity. Openness to friendship was associated with the aims of Ukrainian students to integrate. This was manifested by Ukrainian students maintaining friendships simultaneously with Czech and Ukrainian peers (code *Make friends with everyone*).

> *Interviewer: Is your best friend from the Czech Republic or Ukraine?*
>
> *Student Bettina (Blue School): She's from Ukraine. Sometimes, I can talk to her about stuff I can't talk about with Czechs.*
>
> *Interviewer: Like what, for instance?*
>
> *Student: Well, Ukrainian subjects or something, grades from Ukraine, and such. But I'm also really good friends with Czechs, too.*

We found that what Ukrainian students valued in their Czech classmates was *cheerfulness (Student Vika, Violet School)*. Openness to friendship enabled Ukrainian students to engage in collectives without the burden of war trauma. The ability of these Ukrainian students to form connections with classmates who had not experienced war can be seen as a protective factor, especially for those who carried traumatic experiences into their new cultural settings (codes *What I like about my Czech classmates* and *Arrival at Czech school*).

Our findings on openness to friendship suggest that this type of adaptation can serve as the initial phase of social adaptation and also as a form of advanced social adaptation. As the first phase of social adaptation, it mainly occurs in classrooms where the novelty of language is a prominent factor. As a form of advanced adaptation, it occurs when a student possesses developed social skills and spends time with their new classmates inside and outside school, including organized activities. Especially in the initial stages of entering class, distinctiveness may appear as an advantage; however, subsequent phases of friendships are characterized by acquiring the Czech language and transitioning to communication in Czech. Additionally, openness to friendship was identified when the Ukrainian students maintained friendships with their Czech and Ukrainian peers with whom they could share specific aspects of their identity. Their distinctiveness helped enliven the everyday routine of the school classroom and stimulated humorous situations, contributing to mutual interest in fostering friendships. It thus appears that openness to friendship ultimately leads to integration.

4.1.2. Utilitarian friendship

Three students predominantly exhibited the characteristics of the utilitarian friendship adaptation type: Oksana, Vita, and Yehor. The Ukrainian students in utilitarian friendships emphasized their distinctiveness, particularly as perceived through language (code *Communication with classmates as a strategy of social adaptation*). Language was regarded by the Ukrainian students as both a means and a goal of social adaptation. These students considered acquiring the Czech language as a way to help them function within Czech school communities. Communication and friendship with Czech students were often perceived in a utilitarian way, as a means to develop the language.

Table 5

Categories, codes and their incidence in the parents' data.

Language in social adaptation process (32)	Language as a barrier to social adaptation (32)	Rada (7), Yuri (4), Yustina (3), Olesya (3), Vladislava (3), Orina (2), Valentina (2), Yuliana (2), Barbara (1), Gafia (1), Olena (1), Renata (1), Ruslan (1), Ruslana (1)	Ukrainian parents share experiences in which a lack of knowledge of Czech hindered their children's interactions within the Czech school environment
Transition to new environment (121)	Communication between parents and school (44)	Renata (5), Ruslan (4), Vladislava (4), Olesya (3), Rada (3), Ruslana (3), Bozhena (2), Bronislava (2), Gafia (2), Gelena (2), Greta (2), Valentina (2), Varvara (2), Yuri (2), Yustina (2), Barbara (1), Olena (1), Orina (1), Yuliana (1)	Ukrainian parents share experiences with their communication with Czech teachers
	Arrival at Czech school (31)	Bozhena (5), Renata (4), Bronislava (3), Greta (2), Ruslan (2), Valentina (2), Yuliana (2), Yuri (2), Yustina (2), Gafia (1), Olena (1), Orina (1), Rada (1), Ruslana (1), Varvara (1), Vladislava (1)	Ukrainian parents recall their children's arrival at a Czech school
	Social adaptation of a child from parent perspective (22)	Olesya (2), Rada (2), Renata (2), Barbara (1), Bozhena (1), Bronislava (1), Gafia (1), Gelena (1), Greta (1), Ruslan (1), Olena (1), Orina (1), Ruslana (1), Valentina (1), Varvara (1), Vladislava (1), Yuliana (1), Yuri (1), Yustina (1)	Ukrainian parents mention how they perceive their children's social adaptation to Czech school
	Migration strategy (19)	Yuri (4), Gafia (2), Olena (2), Ruslan (2), Barbora (1), Gelena (1), Greta (1), Olesya (1), Orina (1), Rada (1), Valentina (1), Vladislava (1), Yuliana (1)	Ukrainian parents mention how they fled from war in their homeland
	Differences among Czech and Ukrainian school in terms of social adaptation (5)	Gafia (2), Rhuzena (2), Olesya (1)	Ukrainian parents compare and contrast Czech and Ukrainian schools

Note: *f* – frequency of the codes. Each participant response could contain multiple codes. Codes are listed in order from most to least frequent.

(...) How we're split into groups in class. The Czech kids say it's so the Ukrainians can stick together. But we don't get it. We want to be mixed into the Czech groups individually. Usually, there are four groups. We asked the teacher to put us three Ukrainians in those groups so we can understand and work with our Czech classmates.

(Student Yehor, Yellow School)

Simultaneously, students perceived that lacking proficiency in the language posed challenges to establishing friendships (code *Language as a barrier to social adaptation*):

Interviewer: How do you feel in the group of kids in your class?

Student Oksana (Orange School): Alright, but most kids don't want to communicate.

Interviewer: Why do you think that's the case?

Student: Because we don't know Czech, and they're not sure how to deal with us since we can't speak, so it's not very enjoyable for them.

The Ukrainian students' utilitarian approach does not mean that they abandoned their native language. They still considered it significant, but primarily utilized it to communicate with their Ukrainian classmates. *We communicate more with Ukrainians, and when necessary, we also communicate with Czechs (Student Vita, Violet School).*

Although this adaptation strategy has more utilitarian reasons, it is, like openness to friendship, associated with integration and practiced through language. Ukrainian students aimed to preserve their native language and used it selectively for communication with their compatriots. However, concerning their interactions with their Czech classmates, they recognized the importance of the Czech language. They aimed to acquire the Czech language to engage within Czech social circles and cultivate friendships effectively.

For the students in utilitarian friendships, there was a distinctive preference for assistance in fostering relationships with Czech classmates through diverse adaptation programs (code *Arrival at Czech school*). This distinguished them from the students in open friendships, where the Ukrainian students reported initiating contact with Czech classmates themselves.

Interviewer: Is there something that could be improved in how things are now?

Oksana (Orange School): It would be better if all the Czech students communicated with us and showed more interest.

Interviewer: Yeah, more communication and interest would help. Do you think there's anything that could be done about it?

Oksana: Maybe spending time together outside of class, just talking and playing together. That way, we could do more activities together, all of us as a group.

The findings on utilitarian friendship suggested that the Ukrainian students perceived their ethnicity as significant (code *Subjectively perceived ethnicity*), but not to the extent that it hindered their integration into Czech classes. Ukrainian students found themselves navigating between integration and assimilation. Integration was primarily characterized by the effort to preserve the Ukrainian language and identity; assimilation was a forced way of social functioning for the students. In Czech groups, the Ukrainian students tended to operate in a more assimilated manner as they perceived it as a necessity. However, within groups of their Ukrainian classmates, they continued in their native language and engaged in topics specific to their Ukrainian identity. Similarly to openness to friendship, students in utilitarian friendships perceived that Czech students were willing to interact with them. In the context of openness to friendship, Ukrainian students sought friendships with Czechs as an inherent value. In utilitarian friendship, they understood interactions with Czechs primarily as a necessary means to acquire the language and integrate into the school class.

4.1.3. (Self-)isolation

Six students predominantly exhibited the characteristics of the (self-)isolation adaptation type: Boris, Borislav, Georgina, Gertruda, Oleg, and Yulia. The Ukrainian students in (self-)isolation perceived the challenge of establishing friendships with Czechs as they entered established school groups as foreigners while simultaneously grappling with a language barrier (code *Arrival at Czech school*). The challenging life situation these students often found themselves in can also play a significant role. Ukrainian students may feel pressured to alter their habits and language and may find themselves in a social environment where they would rather not be. The sense of threat to their ethnicity emerged as a potential motivation for seeking social relationships with classmates from Ukraine (code *Make friends with Ukrainian classmates*), a choice that could consequently contribute to lower levels of integration in ethnically heterogeneous classes. (Self-)isolation can also be interpreted as an initial stage of social adaptation. Some students associated it with the early stages of their stay in school, a period of approximately three months.

Interviewer: Let's try to remember when you came to the Czech school. How did your classmates react to you?

Oleg (Orange School): They didn't really at all.

Interviewer: Did they react to you in any way? Were they interested, glad, or the opposite?

Oleg: They were completely indifferent.

However, some students intentionally distanced themselves from the class collective even beyond the early stage period of adaptation. This was because they viewed their situation at school as temporary, due to either their belief in returning to Ukraine or their impending transition to a higher level of education in the Czech Republic, which would change their social environment. *I don't*

really pay attention to it in general because I understand that these are not the people I want to keep hanging out with. I know I'll finish school soon and attend high school, where I'll study with different people. Maybe I'll have normal friends there. (Student Yulia, Yellow School).

On the one hand, the Ukrainian students in (self-)isolation demonstrated a lack of interest in forming deeper relationships with Czech classmates, often due to perceiving their situation in the new school as temporary and forced. On the other hand, these Ukrainian students also reported experiencing social isolation from their Czech classmates (code *Distancing of Czech classmates*). *They didn't react at all in the beginning (…). They treated us like we came and would leave in a month or two. (Student Gertruda, Green School).*

Our findings showed that Ukrainian students may adopt (self-)isolation in response to the behavior of their Czech classmates. (Self-)isolation can be perceived as a protective mechanism in the situations in which the Ukrainian students reported the social environment of the Czech school as hostile or conflicted (codes *Conflicts among Czech and Ukrainian classmates* and *Coping strategies during adaptation in classroom collective*). The Ukrainian students may have perceived their position in school as a conflict between "us" (Ukrainian students) and "them" (Czech students), which further reinforced their separation (code *"Us" versus "them"*). Typical examples of the "us" versus "them" conflict, as described by the Ukrainian students, were ethnicized provocations. These provocations often occurred ad hoc. For instance, a provocation could be triggered by differences in language (code *Ethnicized provocations*).

> *It's hard for me to speak Czech, and not because I don't know the language. I formulate a sentence or phrase in my head, but I'm afraid to say it because I know they will mock me and make inappropriate comments. It's not that they correct me. I actually wish they would correct me and tell me how to speak better. But they only make some comments.*
>
> *(Student Yulia, Yellow School)*

Another scenario involved alleged recurring provocations originating from a specific Czech student (code *Bullying*). Although classified as predominantly falling under the adaptation type of utilitarian friendship, the student Yehor shared an experience exhibiting characteristics of (self-)isolation. *There's this one classmate who tells me, "I love Putin." That makes me nervous. I don't like it. She says, "I love Russia." She does it on purpose to make me nervous. And then I end up having a conflict with her. (Student Yehor, Yellow School).*

Provocations may stem from a prevalent Czech societal narrative linking current social issues in the Czech Republic with the influx of Ukrainian refugees. In their interviews, students reported on the warm reception of Ukrainians by Czech society and Czech schools upon their arrival in the Czech Republic. However, as the conflict in Ukraine persists and social issues in Czech society escalate, a narrative has emerged among a segment of the population that simplistically and manipulatively links these phenomena. This narrative also manifests in Czech schools, where some students openly propagate it in relation to Ukrainian students (such as by declaring support for Russia) (code *Bullying*).

Some Ukrainian students reported coping strategies they employ in these situations (code *Coping strategies during adaptation in classroom collective*). Although they try to address problems themselves, denial and suppression are widespread mechanisms purportedly used to resolve the issue. *But sometimes, phrases like "Why did you come here? Go back to Ukraine" are heard from classmates. Especially hurtful are words and phrases like "Russia is better." And so on, and so forth. (…) And I've come to understand that reacting to such things doesn't make sense. (Yulia, Yellow School)* In rare instances, it was possible to identify an assertive approach in the data, as evidenced by the response to ethnic provocation by the student Yehor (Yellow School): *I'm nervous, and I say, "Love him [Putin] if you want, but don't tell me." I say, "Love whoever you want, but don't tell me." She tells me, "I love Putin." I say, "You don't have to tell me. If you love him, then love him. I don't care."*

In the interviews, there was a prevailing consensus regarding the passive approach of the Ukrainian students to conflicts at school (code *Conflicts among Czech and Ukrainian classmates*). Some students considered their situation temporary because they believed they would return to Ukraine, which is one of the probable reasons for their passive approach. Another reason for the passive approach could be the self-presentation through the label of (self-)isolation. Adopting the isolation label can be a defense mechanism in conflict situations. Some students reflected on their aggression triggered by conflict situations but tended to suppress this aggression. However, it is noteworthy that conflicts initiated by Ukrainian students toward Czech students were not observed in the data. It is important to acknowledge that our findings are presented from the perspective of Ukrainian students. Therefore, the data reflect the perceptions and interpretations of Ukrainian students rather than an objective account of what occurs in the classrooms.

(Self-)isolation may also be linked to traumatizing experiences associated with refugee status (code *Arrival at Czech school*). The data also indicated a lack of interest among some Ukrainian students in initiating any social contacts:

> *I generally like learning at school. It's interesting, but the atmosphere… It's just not possible. When I go there in the morning, I don't want to be there. I always wait for the last bell so I can go home. When I come home from school, I feel empty. I go to sleep. I wake up and don't know what, where, how, or actually who I am.*
>
> *(Student Yulia, Yellow School)*

For (self-)isolation, the Ukrainian students characteristically endeavored to spend as much time at home as possible. These students could be at risk of anxiety or depression due to forced migration; this may be indicated by a tendency to avoid social interactions.

Our findings suggest that the social adaptation of Ukrainian students may be beyond their capacities. The school and the home constitute crucial environments as they represent the primary social settings for these students. Within the school, Ukrainian students acquire proficiency in the Czech language and also build relationships with both Czech and Ukrainian peers, thereby facilitating their integration into the educational framework of the host country. Since parents provide both emotional and instrumental support, understanding their perspectives on the adaptation process occurring within the school is essential. Consequently, we shifted our focus to include a broader perspective on schools, incorporating the viewpoints of parents on the schools' approach and role in their children's social adaptation.

4.2. Social adaptation from the broader perspective of schools and families

The influx of Ukrainian students into Czech schools presented a new challenge for all the actors involved. It was a professional challenge for the majority of the headteachers and teachers (Table 3 and Table 4, code *Professional challenge*) in our research when refugee students from a different socio-cultural environment and education system, without knowledge of the Czech language, and often affected by the trauma they experienced from the war or from fleeing their home country, arrived at their schools in an unanticipated and uncoordinated manner. *So, like, one of my students has been totally traumatized, you know? He can't even say a word. Poor guy's from Lysychansk, where his house got bombed. (Teacher Gita, Green School)* Moreover, as headteachers Beata and Radana, and teachers Beatrice, Gita, and Viktorie highlighted in their interviews, this was the second challenge for the schools in a short time, since they had just recently needed to face the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. *It is a challenge, of course. Just when we thought the COVID-19 mess was over, bam! Here comes the Ukrainian student refugee situation. (Headteacher Radana, Red School).*

First, we look at the approach of the schools in our sample to the arrival of Ukrainian students. Interviews with headteachers revealed that at all the schools involved in the research, the influx of Ukrainian students was met with a strong sense of solidarity and a concerted effort to create a welcoming environment (Table 3 and Table 4, code *Promoting well-being*). *Let's warmly welcome them and chat about their culture, how things roll in Ukraine, and why they ended up here. (Headteacher Yanna, Yellow School)* The majority of headteachers agreed that the Czech students looked forward to the Ukrainian students. Together with their teachers, they tried to ensure that the new Ukrainian students were welcomed and integrated into their classes. Therefore, the headteachers viewed the arrival of Ukrainian refugee students as a positive opportunity for both Czech students and teachers (Table 3, code *New situation as a benefit for the school*).

The schools in our research were the first support environment for the Ukrainian students and became one of the main pillars of their adaptation to a new and culturally different social environment. Interviews with headteachers at the Blue, Green, Orange, Violet, and Yellow schools revealed that these five schools prioritized social adaptation over academic adaptation upon the arrival of Ukrainian students (Table 3, codes *Promoting well-being* and *Neglecting academic adaptation*). *(…) we're doing all we can to make sure their classmates welcome these kids [Ukrainian students] with open arms. (Headteacher Yanna, Yellow School)* Specifically, headteachers at these schools chose an indirect way to support the social adaptation of Ukrainian students by promoting their well-being (Table 3, codes *Promoting well-being* and *Providing a welcoming environment*). *Yeah, all they really need is peace and to shake off some of that trauma, you know? (Headteacher Oliver, Orange School)* Their approach was rooted in their belief that Ukrainian students needed to process the trauma of the war internally upon reaching the host country and that providing them with safety and peace at school would help them achieve this. Most teachers shared this opinion with the headteachers (Table 4, code *Promoting well-being*). *You don't even know what kind of emotional trauma those children are carrying. That's why I let them be. They're just safe here, hidden away. (…) I'm trying my best to make them feel at home here. (Teacher Beatrice, Blue School)* Schools were thus focused on providing Ukrainian students with an environment in which they felt safe and comfortable, with the aim of preventing emotional harm. In this view, they did not target social adaptation but rather psychological adaptation, although they referred to this as social adaptation. Headteachers at the Green, Orange, and Yellow schools worried that the practices to help Ukrainian students fit in with Czech students at school might inadvertently harm them. Because of this concern, those three headteachers chose to take a passive approach to the social adaptation of Ukrainian students. *Those kids are kinda just floating around here, and we'll see how things play out. (Headteacher Oliver, Orange School)* Specifically, they adopted the strategy of waiting to see whether the Ukrainian students would successfully adapt to their new environment naturally, without systematic intervention provided by the school (Table 3, codes *Passive approach toward teachers* and *Shifting responsibility to teachers*).

Table 5 provides a summary of the categories and codes related to social adaptation from the broader perspective of parents. While the experiences of parents from the schools in our study varied, most of them shared a common appreciation for the school's efforts to include their children in the new school environment. Parents consistently reported the helpfulness of headteachers and the support their children received from teachers and classmates upon their enrollment at the Czech school (code *Arrival at Czech school*).

> *Interviewer: How tough was it moving from a Ukrainian to a Czech school?*
>
> *Ruslan (Red School): Tough? It wasn't any harder than switching to another Ukrainian school. Didn't really notice any big hurdles. Everyone was accommodating and helped us in every way they could.*

Unlike transitions within their country's education system, this transition had a distinct linguistic and cultural context, posing challenges for students and teachers. The perception of a student's transition into the Czech educational system varied among parents depending on whether they prioritized the perspective of the school or the perspective of the child (code *Social adaptation of a child from parent perspective*). Parents acknowledged the school's efforts to integrate Ukrainian students into the educational framework and create favorable social and academic environments. Conversely, parents, including Bozhena, Gafia, Greta, Olena, Renata, Valentina, and Yuliana frequently highlighted the challenges their children faced upon entering Czech schools (code *Language as a barrier to social adaptation*).

> *Interviewer: How tough do you think the transition from the Ukrainian school to the Czech school has been for Gertruda? Such beginnings?*
>
> *Gafia (Green School): I'd say it's been a total disaster.*
>
> *Interviewer: A disaster?*

Parent: Yeah, she's really struggling. It's rough for her. She didn't understand Czech at all.

Whereas "the perspective of the school" captured how the schools strove to engage students (thus largely conveying a positive outlook), "the perspective of the child" also raised the challenges their children faced in the different linguistic and cultural educational environment. Despite this, parents such as Greta, Rada, Ruslan, Vladislava, and Yuliana stated that they planned to stay in the Czech Republic and intended for their children to continue education at a Czech secondary school (code *Migration strategy*). Relatedly, parents perceived the school as a setting in which their child would learn the Czech language, enabling them to adapt to Czech society. Therefore, parents endeavored to guide their children toward behaving well in school, as *they represent Ukrainians (Yuliana, Yellow School)*. From the perspective of parents, "behaving well" meant fitting into the Czech classroom environment.

Conformity with the Czech school system, as identified by the parents, may be attributed to particular cultural norms entrenched within Ukrainian schools, wherein the teacher is widely regarded as an authority figure, as reported in the interviews by both students and parents (code *Differences among Czech and Ukrainian school in terms of social adaptation*).

> *Rhuzena (Red School): For example, in Ukraine, when you make a mistake at the board, the teacher will say, "So, you don't know it, but it was the homework." Even if you were absent from school, they'll give you a failing grade and make you sit down. You try to explain that you weren't there, but they'll stick to their point.*
>
> *Interviewer: Okay. And what is the biggest difference [between Czech and Ukrainian schools]?*
>
> *Rhuzena: The teachers.*
>
> *Interviewer: What are the teachers like here?*
>
> *Rhuzena: The teachers here are very friendly. You can talk to them about anything. If you have problems, if people are mean to you, if you need help, or anything else. Well, you can, I don't know, suggest things to the teachers or argue with them. It happened to me that I argued with one of the assistants, and in the end, she admitted I was right. They admit their mistakes. Back in Ukraine, when I was there, nothing like that happened. You could argue your point, and they wouldn't care.*

Both students (Bogdan, Oksana, Omelia, Rhuzena, Vasilisa, Yaroslav, and Yehor) and parents (Barbara, Olesya, Orina, Rada, Renata, Ruslan, Ruslana, Valentina, Varvara, and Yuliana) appreciated the relaxed and friendly atmosphere in Czech schools (Table 2 and Table 5, code *Differences among Czech and Ukrainian school in terms of social adaptation*; and Table 5 code, *Communication between parents and school*). Rather exceptionally, parents like Gafia tended to criticize certain aspects of Czech schools, such as low discipline in classrooms, and viewed the Czech teachers as authority figures, similar to their experience in Ukraine (Table 2 and Table 5, code *Differences among Czech and Ukrainian school in terms of social adaptation*).

4.3. Social adaptation through the lens of teachers

Teachers engage in intensive and daily interactions with students during teaching and through extracurricular responsibilities such as class meetings and hallway monitoring. Consequently, their role appears pivotal for the successful social adaptation of Ukrainian students within the school environment.

Table 4 summarizes the categories and codes related to social adaptation through the lens of teachers. Six teachers (Gita, Olivie, Rita, Viktorie, Yan, and Yasmina) reported a lack of support and guidance from headteachers and authorities when Ukrainian refugee students were placed in their classes (code *Thrown into the deep end*). They expressed feeling as if they had been "thrown into the deep end." *We basically didn't get any instructions. (Teacher Yasmina, Yellow School)* As mentioned, Czech teachers had had limited exposure to working with refugee students (code *Lack of preparedness*). Thus, it is unsurprising that Olivie, Ornella, Rita, Yan, and Yasmina reported feeling unprepared for this new role. The perceived lack of support and preparedness manifested in confusion regarding their teaching duties and roles, as well as professional uncertainty. Teachers in our research often struggled with what steps to take to promote the social adaptation of newly arrived Ukrainian students into their classes (code *Uncertainty*). *You get a Ukrainian child in the class, (...) and now what am I supposed to do? What should I do? (Teacher Ornella, Orange School).* Teachers within the schools did not proceed uniformly when working with the Ukrainian students and applied various adaptation approaches (category *Teacher practices*).

4.3.1. Understandings of social adaptation and manifestation in teachers' goals

We believe that to ensure the successful social adaptation of Ukrainian students in school, teachers must understand the essence and purpose of this process. Additionally, their goals and approaches should be consistent within the school context. Considering the daily necessity for teachers to engage with students in instructional activities, it is understandable that certain teachers in the interviews emphasized the need for adaptation on the academic level (code *Prioritizing academic adaptation*). This pattern was typical for four teachers: Gina, Gita, Viktorie, and Viola. For these teachers, successful adaptation involves several key elements that conform to the definition of academic adaptation: intrinsic motivation for learning, active participation in instructional activities during lessons, mastery of academic requirements, and the capacity to adjust to the pace and level of Czech students.

In our sample, some teachers tended to rely on their own preconceptions regarding the social adaptation of Ukrainian students, and they approached the nature and methods of adaptation more intuitively (code *Reliance on intuition*). Specifically, we observed this approach in six teachers: Gita, Olivie, Ornella, Rita, Viola, and Yasmina. The following quotation from the interview with Rita suggests that the intuitive approach was particularly favored by teachers who experienced a lack of support and guidance. *I miss methodical support, to be honest. (...) Of course, doing it this way means it's all on the fly, relying on intuition. (Teacher Rita, Red School).*

Half of the teachers in our sample conceptualized social adaptation based on the principle of assimilation (code *Assimilation approach*). *For me, someone is well adapted when they blend in with the class after some time. (Teacher Gina, Green School)* From the perspectives of teachers, social adaptation entailed the incorporation of Ukrainian students with Czech students in the classroom, aiming to meet an unwritten but anticipated standard of being a "good Czech student." *Well-adapted to me means that I'll be dealing with the same issues and things with him like with the other students. Like I'm gonna deal with him maybe because he didn't wash the whiteboard when it was his duty. Like, he'll adapt to how the others behave. (Teacher Yasmina, Yellow School)* Implicit in this expectation was the acceptance of Czech school standards and cultural norms. In this regard, teachers differed from students' perceptions. Students tended to think about their social adaptation more in terms of involvement in the group and finding Czech friends. Given the significance of their ethnicity and their tendencies to establish friendship with Czech classmates, unlike teachers, students did not envision their social adaptation as a complete assimilation with Czech students.

Our findings suggest that the understanding of social adaptation also manifested in how teachers engaged with Ukrainian students within their everyday pedagogical practice.

4.3.2. Teachers' practices and their implications

Despite observing in their daily interactions that Ukrainian students struggled to integrate into the Czech peer group and some of them tended to form relationships primarily with other Ukrainian students, very few teachers intervened in this situation. Our research identified two groups of non-intervening teachers (code *Non-intervention*) based on the factors that influenced teachers to adopt this approach.

We labeled the first group "doubtful non-intervening teachers;" this group included two teachers: Olivie and Ornella (codes *Doubtfulness* and *Non-intervention*). The characteristics of a doubtful non-intervening teacher are illustrated by a quote from an interview with Ornella (Orange School). She observed on several occasions in front of her office that Czech students were not communicating with Ukrainian students and considered how to respond: *I was thinking about it (…), whether maybe then not to say to the kids [Czech students]: "So, like, you don't talk to them [Ukrainian students]?!" It's kind of like, I don't really know, if they don't talk to them.* The interviews revealed that the doubtful non-intervening teachers were aware of the adaptation issues faced by Ukrainian students, experienced dilemmas and uncertainties in addressing these concerns, but exhibited hesitancy in intervening and rectifying social relationships among their students. In Ornella's case, her doubts led to the decision not to purposefully interfere in the relationships between Czech and Ukrainian students.

The second group consisted of inattentive non-intervening teachers, and had six teachers: Brigita, Gina, Gita, Viola, Viktorie, and Yasmina (codes *Inattentiveness* and *Non-intervention*). These teachers failed to recognize the challenges in the social adaptation of Ukrainian students and thus did not perceive the necessity for interventions. *The cooperation [between Czech and Ukrainian students] was going smoothly as always (…). So, I think it's working out fine. (Teacher Viola, Violet School)* Inattentive non-intervening teachers were convinced that the social integration of Ukrainian students had taken place or was currently unfolding within the classroom community. As a result, they did not perceive the necessity of fostering the social adaptation of Ukrainian students through purposeful pedagogical interventions. *But (…) when someone comes and asks: "And what do you do with those Ukrainian students?" The same as with normal [Czech] students. (Teacher Yasmina, Yellow School).*

Inattentive non-intervening teachers typically allowed the Ukrainian students to choose their seating partners in class. During group work, they did not make efforts to encourage collaboration and communication between Czech and Ukrainian students, for example, by organizing them into heterogeneous working groups. Moreover, their teaching approach failed to fully address the particular needs of Ukrainian students (identified among openness to friendship, utilitarian friendship, and (self-)isolation) and attempted to approach them in a manner similar to Czech students.

The practices of doubtful and inattentive non-intervening teachers contributed to the low social adaptation of Ukrainian students, possibly leading to the clustering of Ukrainian students and the formation of "nests" within both the classroom and the school. This situation was illustrated by the teacher Ornella (Orange School) using the specific example of the student Olga: *But when it comes to taking breaks, Olga doesn't spend them in her classroom; all the Ukrainian students hang out together during breaks.*

In our sample, there were also intervening teachers, represented by three participants: Olivie, Rita, and Roman (code *Intervention*). Intervening teachers engaged deeply in contemplating the social adaptation of Ukrainian students in their classrooms, striving to support this adaptation through their pedagogical approaches and interventions. When they identified issues, they promptly sought avenues for rectification (code *Thoughtfulness*). The following quotes illustrate the approach of the intervening teachers:

> *It's a journey, not a sprint, gotta integrate them. Explain and repeat to Czech kids so they [the Ukrainian students] understand them. (…) I asked some more open-minded kids if they'd be willing to help. They were and still are.*
>
> *(Teacher Rita, Red School)*

> *Occasionally, someone comes to tell me that someone [among the Czech students] is targeting Ukrainian classmates and saying: "Oh, here we go again, all because of the Ukrainians, Ukrainians again." (…) I knew that three boys were doing this. So, I approached them and told them that I had heard something like this (…) and just like that, it stopped.*
>
> *(Teacher Roman, Red School)*

Intervening teachers map out and interpret the social adaptation situation of Ukrainian students (code *Situation mapping*). However, each teacher follows a different path toward resolution, influenced by their varying levels of experience and knowledge. Ukrainian students confirmed that intervening teachers were prepared to offer assistance when needed. For example, the student Rhuzena (Red School) had conflicts with two classmates (Table 2, code *Conflicts among Czech and Ukrainian classmates*). Although the details of the

intervention provided by the teacher Roman were not delineated in the interviews, there was a noticeable improvement in class relationships, leading to Rhuzena even forming a friendship with one of the previously conflicting classmates.

5. Discussion

Our study investigated the perceptions of social adaptation among Ukrainian refugee students who enrolled in Czech schools following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the perspectives of their parents. Additionally, we examined the approaches employed by headteachers and teachers in fostering social adaptation across six schools. We thereby contribute to the body of literature on the social adaptation of refugee students with findings from a non-Western European country and a holistic approach that integrates the perspective of key actors (Berry, 1997; Brizuela & García-Sellers, 1999).

Three main elements were identified as significant for the social adaptation of Ukrainian students: the perception of ethnicity, the learning of the Czech language, and the approach to friendship with Czech classmates. We found that different combinations of these elements resulted in three types of social adaptation, which we have labeled as openness to friendship, utilitarian friendship, and (self-) isolation. We have identified the main characteristics of each type, along with their possible causes and consequences.

Regarding openness to friendship, it is significant that Ukrainian refugee students make an effort to be part of their Czech classmates' group while maintaining a sense of their Ukrainian identity. From the perspective of Berry's acculturation model (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010), this represents a strategy of integration. The means employed to achieve this goal was acquiring the Czech language. However, proficiency in the host country's language was not considered only as an instrument for establishing friendships with Czech classmates: friendship was regarded as the primary objective.

Similarly, a sense of Ukrainian identity and proficiency in Czech are essential for utilitarian friendship. Nevertheless, these students primarily identified themselves as Ukrainians and friendship with Czech classmates was perceived instrumentally, as a way to acquire proficiency in the Czech language. In utilitarian friendships, students considered proficiency in the host country's language essential to continue residing and studying in the Czech Republic. This also represents the acculturation strategy called integration (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010); their approach enables the preservation of cultural integrity while actively participating as members of an ethnocultural group within the broader social network of school.

The (self-)isolation type is characterized by the fear of losing Ukrainian identity and by the perceived language barrier. This reflects the challenges some Ukrainian students face in adjusting to a new cultural and linguistic context. In this case, the defense mechanism involves withdrawing into oneself and making minimal effort to learn the Czech language. There is then intentional isolation from Czech classmates or exclusion of Ukrainian classmates by Czech peers from mutual interactions, aligning with the acculturation strategy referred to in Berry's acculturation model as separation (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010).

The consideration of the role of the Czech language among Ukrainian students in the context of their social adjustment to the school environment, as revealed in our research, is not surprising. First, refugee children commonly report language barriers as one of the significant stressors associated with arriving in a new culture (Betancourt et al., 2015). Second, language is perceived by refugee children as a critical indicator of their cultural differences, as we observed in our research across all three types of social adaptation (Udah & Singh, 2019). However, based on our research findings, we believe that the identified approach to language poses the most significant risk within the (self-)isolation type. (Self-)isolated students may perceive the necessity to acquire the Czech language as pressure to abandon their cultural identity (Aktan, 2022). This conviction, along with low language proficiency, can limit their opportunities to socialize with peers and exacerbate acculturation difficulties (Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, these students may become targets of ostracism or bullying due to social exclusion resulting from the language barrier (Edge et al., 2014); this was revealed in our research as a lived experience among (self-)isolated students. Our research suggests that only students in the openness to friendship and utilitarian friendship types appear to be sufficiently resilient to manage social adaptation even without interventions or teacher assistance. Nevertheless, support for social adaptation from the school is indispensable for some students in the utilitarian friendship type and for all students in the (self-)isolation type who are most endangered by absenteeism, which can foster school refusal behavior and school disengagement and increase the likelihood of dropout (Archambault et al., 2009).

Based on insights gained from interviews with headteachers, the schools included in our research can be categorized as prioritizing socio-cultural adaptation over academic adaptation (e.g., Kaukko et al., 2021; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017; Prentice, 2022). Each of the schools involved in our research demonstrated a willingness to help and support incoming Ukrainian students. Their strategies involved creating a welcoming, friendly, and caring school environment. In the beginning, schools adopted the approach of promoting the well-being of Ukrainian students. Previous research has also shown that the social adaptation of refugee students in schools is often limited to fostering their well-being (Prentice, 2022; Vrdoljak et al., 2024) and that it is a reasonably common positive adaptive practice (McBrien, 2005). Although promoting refugee students' well-being is more of an instrument of psychological adaptation (Birman et al., 2014; Pieloch et al., 2016), it can also be considered an essential requirement for successful social adaptation (Makarova & Birman, 2016).

An important finding of our research is that students and their parents perceived welcoming and well-being practices as beneficial for social adaptation. In general, providing a welcoming environment and meeting psycho-social needs are recognized as the dominant discourses in the literature on good practices (Dombinskaya, 2023; Rutter, 2006). When students feel welcomed, accepted, and safe at school, and when they have a sense of belonging, they are more likely to build relationships, interact with classmates and teachers, and participate in curricular and extracurricular activities (Hek, 2005). Since a supportive and nurturing school climate may lead to better mental health for students (Emerson et al., 2022), prioritizing well-being and fulfilling the psychosocial needs of Ukrainian students identified in our research may be considered an understandable approach in a situation when headteachers and teachers have seen the harsh effects of the war on the civilian population in the news and traumatized Ukrainian students were arriving into their school

(Preissová Krejčí et al., 2023; Rutter, 2006). However, in later stages, when the focus is solely on well-being, it can hinder students' social adaptation, as demonstrated by our research.

We obtained valuable insights from the perspective of teachers. The teachers in our research reported limited prior experience with refugee students and their social adaptation. This can be attributed to the specific characteristics of the Czech education system, in which refugee students have not been historically frequently educated (MEYS, 2022). An unfavorable finding of our research was that teachers reported not receiving systematic support from headteachers or authorities for their work with Ukrainian students, despite feeling that it was needed. Similarly, limited experience and insufficient teacher support have been identified as constraining factors in educational systems with little experience with refugee integration (Vrdoljak et al., 2024). The present findings highlight the need for systemic teacher support from school management and authorities; we discuss this issue in the practical implications.

The present study expanded on prior findings by revealing that, due to insufficient support, teachers may rely on intuition rather than knowledge in their approaches. Our research demonstrates that relying on intuition results in inconsistent teacher practices and may pose risks to the social adaptation of refugee students. Our study suggests that teachers who rely on intuition often lean toward adopting non-interventionist practices, which could potentially harm students characterized by (self-)isolation the most. In such cases, non-intervening teachers could contribute to exclusion from the classroom community, the development of bullying, and ultimately dropout, as these students tend to employ escape strategies and avoid school attendance.

On the other hand, it appears that intervening teachers have the potential to support social adaptation not only among (self-)isolating students, where issues in social adaptation are most severe, but also among students characterized by openness to friendship and utilitarian friendships. Intervening teachers are prepared to step in if Ukrainian students cease to be attractive to Czech students and relational issues arise. In utilitarian friendships, intervening teachers also play an indispensable role. Such students require support in integrating into the class; they can receive this support from intervening teachers.

5.1. Limitations, future directions, and practical implications

The present study results need to be considered in light of limitations that inform directions for future research. The first limitation relates to the sample composition. The schools that participated in our research were willing to accept Ukrainian refugee students, and their approach may differ from schools unwilling to admit these students. Furthermore, despite efforts to create a balanced sample by including students with varying levels of adaptation barriers, initial recruitment relied on teacher evaluations. Therefore, it is possible that the students who were selected were more motivated for research and potentially better adapted. Second, our analyses were based on the subjective perceptions of the involved actors. While insights from these subjective perspectives are valuable for understanding the lived experiences of individuals within educational settings, caution must be exercised in generalizing them as representations of objective reality in the classrooms. Therefore, future research should employ methodological approaches capable of capturing social adaptation in a more triangulated manner. This entails contrasting actors' perceptions with their actions and incorporating diverse data sources such as observations, teachers' diaries, questionnaires, and sociometric techniques. Third, the assessment of social adaptation in our research was conducted from the viewpoint of Ukrainian students, without considering the perspective of Czech students. However, our findings highlighted the significant role played by Czech students in shaping the context of social adaptation for Ukrainian students. Therefore, future research should include Czech students as participants to enhance the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Despite these limitations, the present study has several practical implications. In the complex process of social adaptation, it is necessary to support the psychological well-being of incoming refugee students and to support the students in their social integration efforts. Teachers' adaptation strategies can be differentiated, for example, according to the type and stage of students' social adaptation (i.e., openness to friendship, utilitarian friendship, and (self-)isolation). These strategies should be extended to encompass the entire class group because the adaptation processes are based on mutual interactions between Czech and Ukrainian students. For instance, this support may come through implementing various adaptation events and programs or by deliberately involving Ukrainian students in the Czech students' collective through curricular and extracurricular activities (Šeďová et al., 2024).

To identify and support students most at risk of social exclusion and separation (e.g., self-isolating Ukrainian students), teachers could utilize diagnostic tools to assess the extent of integration into the class and acceptance by classmates. Since applying such tools may require expertise beyond common pedagogical knowledge, teachers should receive support from colleagues in school counseling centers (e.g., school psychologists) or other counseling facilities. Implementing appropriate diagnostic procedures could provide insights into the social relationships of Ukrainian students in the classroom and identify those experiencing social isolation, facilitating necessary support and interventions. Methodological support for teachers at both the school and system levels is therefore essential (Özel & Erdur-Baker, 2023; Vrdoljak et al., 2024).

Relatedly, Ukrainian students require more opportunities to express their ethnic identities positively, as ethnicity appears to be a significant aspect of their self-perception after leaving their homeland. Previous research has suggested that a bicultural orientation is promising for both social and academic adaptation, while assimilationist pressures can hinder the successful integration of refugee students (Makarova & Birman, 2016; Schachner et al., 2018). Therefore, teachers should create opportunities for Ukrainian students to discuss, reflect upon, and express their ethnic identities in a safe school environment.

The present findings indicate that when working with refugee students, relying solely on the efforts of individual teachers, even when those efforts are well-intentioned, may be insufficient. Promoting the social adaptation of refugee students requires a schoolwide systemic approach (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) and the holistic involvement of various actors (Arnot et al., 2013; Pieloch et al., 2016). If schools are to assume a pivotal role in facilitating the social adaptation of refugee students, it is essential to implement a unified strategy, ensure coordination across the teaching staff (Lazarová et al., 2019), and foster strong leadership from headteachers (Ministry

of Education, 2000; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Equally important is encouraging enhanced sharing of knowledge and strategies among school actors to better cope with crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the refugee influx. Our findings indicated a deficiency in this regard in the schools under study.

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Ethical considerations

The study received approval from the Research Ethics Committees of Masaryk University (EKV-2022-091). The research procedures adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in the 1963 Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical standards set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA). Before the data collection, we gave participants an informed consent form. The form explicitly outlined the voluntary and uncompensated nature of participation, while ensuring the preservation of anonymity and the strict confidentiality of all shared information. The participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without the obligation to provide any justification.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Petr Hlado: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Kateřina Lojdová:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Jana Obrovská:** Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review & editing. **Klára Šeďová:** Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Tomáš Lintner:** Writing – original draft, Writing – Review & editing. **Martin Fico:** Investigation, Formal analysis. **Oksana Stupak:** Investigation.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on request. Transcribed interviews are available in Czech.

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