

**Bridging the Gap Between Secondary and Tertiary Education for Students with Refugee Backgrounds
with Bourdieu: A Case Study from Malaysia**

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Abstract

Although progress has been made in increasing access to primary and secondary education, only 1 percent of youth with refugee backgrounds are enrolled in tertiary education compared to 36 percent of youth globally. This article uses Bourdieu's theory of capital, habitus and field to explore the impact of a short-term, intensive bridging program that aims to help youth with refugee backgrounds access to higher education in Malaysia. The research used survey data and interviews with students 1-3 years after they had completed the program. It is argued the program helped students navigate access to higher education by developing social and cultural capital within the field of access to higher education in Malaysia so their skills could be identified in more recognisable ways. Aspiration and resilience are also seen as important forms of capital in facilitating access. It is recommended that the program is extended to reach more students through different forms of delivery, for example online and knowledge sharing with refugee communities.

Keywords: refugee, asylum seeker, higher education, access to education, Bourdieu, Malaysia

Introduction

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With 65.6 million displaced people globally, access to education at all levels for students in refugee communities is vital to the success of our global society. Gladwell and colleagues identify four reasons to prioritise higher education for refugees: access to it is a human right, it provides an incentive to complete primary and secondary education, it can help deflect the influence of violent or sectarian ideologies, and it can accelerate the recovery of countries ravaged by conflict (2016, p. 14). For the purpose of this article, *higher education* is taken to mean any postsecondary program, including TVET, university foundation programs and ISCED level 5 and above courses. Where policies have been favourable towards students with refugee backgrounds, access to educational opportunities is an important means for restoring dignity, security and hope (Lenette, 2016). Outside countries of final resettlement, tertiary education for students with refugee backgrounds is often not prioritised or is even seen as a luxury (Kamyab, 2017; Wright & Plasterer, 2010). In these contexts, basic remedial assistance is usually prioritised under the assumption that those seeking asylum will only stay temporarily before being resettled or returning to their home countries. However, with temporary crises becoming increasingly protracted, Collier and Betts (2017) suggest rethinking the focus of refugee policies so that refugees are not only sustained but have the opportunity to move towards autonomy.

Despite the benefits of access to higher education, currently only 1 percent of youth with refugee backgrounds are enrolled in higher education compared to 36 percent of youth globally (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2017). Recent crises have seen a rise in the number of displaced youths who are university ready or have had to abandon partially completed university degrees. For example, of the half a million university-aged Syrians who have claimed asylum abroad, the Institute of International Education (IIE) estimates 150,000 are qualified for university admission (Kiwani, 2017). This shifting demographic of youth with refugee backgrounds places greater urgency on the need to address improving access to higher education.

Across contexts, students with refugee backgrounds face several common barriers to accessing higher education. These include a lack of scholarships to make studying affordable, inadequate language support, limited access to certified exams for secondary school and a lack of recognition of prior secondary qualifications (Fricke, 2016). Some researchers have also noted that a lack of knowledge and advice about tertiary application processes creates a challenge to refugees in Europe (European Students' Union (ESU), 2017) and Turkey (Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2017), especially since tertiary education is de-centralised (Kamyab, 2017). There are additional barriers in countries like Malaysia that are not signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention. These contexts are described as 'protracted refugee situations', which generally refers to situations in which individuals with refugee backgrounds are subject to only two of UNHCR's "durable solutions" (see UNHCR, 2009, p. preamble); resettlement or repatriation, and not integration, and have remained in exile for more than 5 years. Implementation of longer-term assistance, such as education, is therefore not a priority for these host nations and access to public services is more restrictive.

There are a number of approaches to reducing the barriers refugees face in accessing higher education with the most commonly recommended ones including scholarships, online learning and recognition of prior qualifications (e.g. Bengtsson & Naylor, 2016; UNHCR, 2016). Other approaches include accelerated learning, bridge courses and support services, including advice and mentoring (Gladwell, et al., 2016). In Malaysia, the places available to students from refugee backgrounds are not being fully taken advantage of, suggesting the barriers they face to accessing higher education are not being addressed by current efforts. There is clearly a need to investigate and address this shortcoming (unfortunately, since the initial writing of this paper, due to local and global conditions, some of the already limited opportunities available have been reduced). In this paper we will focus on the impact of one approach to engaging with barriers to accessing higher education, namely the CERTE (Connecting and Equipping Refugees for Tertiary Education) Bridge Course, which seeks to bridge the skill and information gap between secondary and higher education for youth with refugee backgrounds. First, we will outline

in more detail the context of education for students with refugee backgrounds in Malaysia and the how the CERTE Bridge Course aims to overcome the barriers presented.

Education for Students with Refugee Backgrounds in Malaysia

Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees or the 1967 protocol (UN General Assembly, 1951, 1967). Refugees are therefore considered illegal immigrants, which can leave them vulnerable to harassment, arrest and deportation (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Despite this, the Government of Malaysia does offer some protection to those who have satisfied the requirements of refugee status and hold an official UNHCR Identity Card or a letter that explains their claim for refugee status is in progress. Despite being allowed limited access to public services, refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia are not able to attend public education institutions or sit public examinations. Most refugee students of school age are educated in community learning centres (CLCs) that have been established by local NGOs, religious organisations or community groups (Diaz Sanmartin, 2017; UNHCR, 2018a). Although around 125 such centres exist in Malaysia, across all refugee communities there is a low rate of enrolment in primary school (44 percent) and secondary school (16 percent) compared to refugees globally (UNHCR, 2018b). Consequently, few students complete the secondary education required for access to higher education and those that do tend to have completed before arriving in Malaysia. Accurate figures of refugee enrolments in higher education are not available for Malaysia, but in 2016 UNHCR was aware of at least 48 refugees who were enrolled in tertiary education (Tan, 2016).

To help remove some administrative obstacles for youth with refugee backgrounds seeking access to higher education, UNHCR Malaysia signed Memorandums of Understanding with four private universities, one TVET college and one university college since 2015. These higher education providers offer places for refugees on certificate programs, foundation programs (pre-university courses with a pathway to degrees), bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. There are no scholarships for refugees per se, but some private higher education providers waive fees for refugees and asylum seekers and offer free

accommodation. Some also require less stringent proof of English proficiency and secondary qualifications. In addition, the UNHCR Education Unit operates an email list to approximately 1000 refugees and asylum seekers who are interested in higher education to spread information about opportunities for higher education in Malaysia. Even with these efforts to provide pathways into higher education for students with refugee backgrounds, partnering universities and colleges have still been struggling to fill places they have made available, prompting further investigation into barriers to access.

The CERTE Bridge Course emerged from discussions held to improve access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds at the 3C Forum, which was hosted in partnership between UNHCR and Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR) in Kuala Lumpur on 5-6 August 2016 (Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR), 2016). In light of these discussions, the programme has two key objectives:

1. To improve knowledge transfer from higher education providers to potential applicants and CLCs about existing opportunities for higher education, their application processes, and the requirements for admission.
2. Improving participants' soft skills to equip them to apply for and be accepted into higher education programs, in particular interview skills, writing applications and research skills.

These objectives are met by using elements of accelerated learning, knowledge transfer and mentoring. The CERTE Bridge Course offers curriculum in a short, intensive manner, with volunteer professionals teaching the content and then mentoring participants, and ongoing learning through educational workshops after the course is completed.

In this paper, we explore what impact the CERTE Bridge Course has had for youth from refugee backgrounds 1-3 years after completion. Feedback from CERTE alumni is considered using a Bourdieusian analytical framework in an attempt to understand how the knowledge and skills acquired by participants have been utilised since completing the course. First, we will outline the theoretical model that will be used to analyse the data collected. Methods of data collection and their justification will then be

presented followed by results split into three thematic areas that emerged during the analysis. Finally, these results will be discussed in light of Bourdieu's theories and recommendations for ongoing policy and practice will be suggested based on the conclusions drawn.

Theoretical Considerations

Bourdieu developed his social theory of habitus, capital and field to provide a conceptual toolbox to explore how groups and individuals interact within social worlds to reproduce and transform patterns of inequality. According to Bourdieu, social agents are located within a field, which is defined by a set of mutually understood rules, or doxa, that give social meaning to interactions and behaviour (Bourdieu, 1984). Within these fields, people draw on tangible and intangible resources, known as capital, to gain an advantage and perpetuate their interests (Bourdieu, 1991). Using recognisable forms of capital in a field allows social agents to simply "exist" within a field rather than being considered a "negligible quantity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Capital comes in various forms, such as economic, social and cultural, but only gains value when it is used within a field to exert power and influence. A consequence of this framing of capital is that different forms of capital are not recognised as being equally legitimate across different fields.

Cultural capital, which is often seen as bridging between the various types of capital, "refers to legitimised sets of knowledge and social dispositions that are transmitted through processes of socialisation, parental education, social and family networks, and other connections to privilege" (Harvey & Mallman, 2019, p. 659). Cultural capital works in tandem with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, which describes a set of dispositions, such as style of dress, way of speaking or ways of viewing the world, that identifies individuals as holding a particular place within the hierarchy of a social field. Habitus is the product of a history of socialisation within a field and is constantly being restructured as we encounter new situations within our world (Di Maggio, 1979). It describes agents as being not only bodies in the social world, but also as a way in which agents themselves embody the social world (Bourdieu, 1977).

Additionally, habitus is a complex interplay between individual and group histories as we seek belonging to identifiable social categories, and also between our past and present as we draw on prior socialisation and express agency in social decisions in the present (Reay, 2004).

Habitus has been criticised for being too deterministic in its focus on reproduction (Albright, 2007). However, Bourdieu and Wacquant dismiss this criticism and describe habitus as being “durable but not eternal!” (1992, p. 133). This assertion is unpacked by Reay in their exploration of the way agency is expressed through habitus (2004). They argue that rather than prescribing a certain outcome in social situations, habitus can be understood as predisposing us to a variety of possible actions that are constrained by what we view as legitimate. Consequently, “the most improbable practices are rejected as unthinkable, but, concomitantly, only a limited range of practices are possible” (*ibid.*, 2004, 433). The way in which capital is used by theorists has also been viewed as problematic. Harvey and Mallman (2019) note that dominant notions of cultural and social capital often assume a deficit view of marginalised groups by positioning their forms of capital as subordinate. With reference to students of colour, for example, Yosso identifies several additional forms of capital that are under-represented in research but are important to this group, namely resistant, aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, and familial (2005, pp. 78–80).

Habitus mostly acts at the unconscious level and so is not something that we notice in our day-to-day lives (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). Approaching social phenomena using habitus and its associated concepts is therefore a way to make the “taken-for-granted problematic” (Reay, 1995, p. 369). Our habitus can move to the conscious level when we experience something unexpected and become self-reflexive, for example entering a new and unfamiliar field in which our habitus and capital do not produce the same kinds of social outcomes we have come to expect from prior socialisation (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu refers to this mismatch between habitus and field as the *hysteresis effect* (Bourdieu, 1977). This idea has been used widely in research related to the experience of immigrant groups in their host countries (Kleanthous,

2014). For example, Dryden-Petersen and Giles (2010) apply the concept to understand the difficulties students with refugee backgrounds experience in accessing education. They note that habitus is particularly suited to understanding this phenomenon because “it describes processes of socialization that align aspirations with the conditions in which refugee young people find themselves and adapt what they see as possible to the logic of their surroundings” (*ibid.*, 2010, 4).

A growing body of research has applied Bourdieu’s theories specifically to access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds. Dumenden (2011) follows the learning trajectory of an individual learner in Australia and notes the strategies used by this learner to acquire the capital necessary to access higher education. Rather than taking the view that the learner is lacking, Dumenden uses Bourdieu’s approach to frame the student as having agency in their educational pathway by taking control of becoming a particular kind of learner. Morrice (2009) investigates the trajectories of students in the UK three years after attending a higher education access programme for students with refugee backgrounds. A key outcome here was the importance of the course as a forum for students to explore the cultural context of higher education and job market in the UK. In addition, Morrice claims that viewing higher education and employment as social fields allowed the focus to shift from what students lack to the ways in which these fields were failing to recognise the student’s potential to contribute valuable capital.

Kanno and Varghese (2010) used a Bourdieusian framework to demonstrate that structural barriers to higher education, such as financial constraints and a tendency to self-eliminate, were more significant in limiting access than lack of linguistic capital. Self-elimination, in particular, stemmed from the students feeling a lack of legitimacy as full members of the university community, which was then constructed as part of their habitus. Park (2019) expands on this work to explore the difficulties faced by North Korean defectors in compulsory English classes that form part of their higher education curriculum in South Korea. They found that a focus on acquiring linguistic capital through additional language classes

was not sufficient to ensure students could participate equally with their South Korean peers. Rather, a better alignment of instructional strategy and assessment with students' habitus was required.

These are just some examples of how Bourdieu's theories have been applied to understand the experiences of students with refugee backgrounds in accessing higher education. In each, using the complementary concepts of field, capital and habitus has allowed a deeper understanding of the sociological context of access and how this affects students beyond remedial support with course content. Exploring capital allows us to interrogate not only where students lack legitimately recognisable forms of capital to access higher education but also to question what forms of capital they do have that are not being adequately recognised. Moreover, exploring students' habitus gives an insight into the embodied social worlds of students with refugee backgrounds and how these shape the ways they navigate the field of access to higher education in Malaysia.

Using Bourdieu's theory in this research we therefore seek to understand how the students who have completed the CERTE programme then go on to navigate the potential barriers to higher education in Malaysia. By viewing access to Malaysian higher education as a Bourdieusian field we hope to understand both what capital assets the CERTE alumni feel they have usefully gained from the programme, but also the ways in which they feel their capital is not being recognised. Also, we seek to understand how this social context is potentially at odds with or shapes students' habitus and the impact this has on their access. It is worth noting that all of the research reviewed here was conducted in countries of final resettlement. As noted in the introduction, the urban refugee population in Malaysia are in a protracted refugee crisis and therefore experience more formalised barriers to enrolling in higher education through local policies that are unfavourable to access. This research will therefore contribute to the ongoing debate around access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds by applying Bourdieu's theory to the protracted setting.

The research questions posed for this research are:

1. How have the CERTE programme alumni developed their capital in relation to accessing higher education in Malaysia and with what outcomes?
2. In what ways has engaging with the field of access to education shaped the habitus of CERTE alumni and with what outcomes for access to higher education?
3. In what ways has Bourdieu's theory of field, capital and habitus illuminated the experience of access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds in a protracted refugee setting?

Methods

This research aims to understand how the forms of capital acquired and the development of student's habitus through participation in the CERTE programme helped participants in navigating the field of higher education in Malaysia. To explore these ideas, students from the first 4 cohorts of the CERTE programme were invited to complete a survey with open-ended questions related to how they felt they had been affected by the outcomes of the programme since its completion. Following this, they were given the opportunity to participate in a semi-structured interview to discuss their survey responses in more depth. These earlier cohorts were selected because at least a year had passed since each of these students had completed the programme, allowing them at least one full application cycle to apply the skills and knowledge they had acquired and give meaningful feedback on their experience. Overall, 13 students from a range of countries of origin completed the survey and 5 agreed to a further interview (see Table 1). Given the sensitive nature of the research context, each selected a pseudonym to protect their anonymity and the names of institutions and individuals involved in the application process have been changed.

An open-ended survey design was chosen for the first step because some of the students did not have regular access to Skype or were busy with work, study and family commitments, so could not participate in an interview. Students could therefore provide responses through the survey in their own time so they could contribute to the research even if they couldn't commit to an interview. This allowed for broader coverage across the cohorts so more extensive data could be considered about different students' experiences (Check & Schutt, 2012). The semi-structured interview data then allowed for more intensive coverage of several students' experience for more detailed data analysis (Kendall, 2008). The survey and interview data were analysed by coding each individual case, then the emerging themes were categorised in an iterative fashion as cases were considered together (Elliott, 2018).

Although in-depth interviews with all the students would have provided much richer insights, reviewing the interviews in conjunction with the survey data allowed for triangulation between results to support the validity and universality of emerging themes within the group. When using survey and interview data together in this way, Harris and Brown warn that the research instruments should be "tightly aligned", the focus of the research should be presented in a "simple, concrete, and highly contextualised manner" and there should be a minimal gap between the survey and interview data collection (2010, p. 1). These conditions were met by focusing the questions around the outcomes of the CERTE programme as they pertain to access to higher education and these responses served to structure any subsequent interview. The data was collected within a time period of one month or less where possible. In the following section the themes that emerged will be presented and are discussed in relation to Bourdieu's theory in the subsequent discussion.

Table 1

Summary of Research Participants

Pseudonym	Region of Origin	CERTE Cohort	Study in Malaysia before programme	Currently enrolled in Higher education?	Interviewed?
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Hanan	South Asia	4	Language Programme	No	Yes
Stephanie	South Asia	3	No	Yes	Yes
Benjamin	Middle East	1	CLC	Yes	No
BlackOwl	South Asia	4	CLC	Yes	Yes
Jerry	South Asia	4	CLC	Yes	Yes
Eva	South East Asia	4	CLC	Yes	No
Jasmine	East Africa	4	International School	Yes	No
Ryan	East Africa	2	CLC	No	No
Jackson	South Asia	1	No	Yes	No
Fitch	Middle East	1	International School	Yes	No
Mani	South Asia	2	No	Yes	Yes
Benny	South East Asia	1	CLC	Yes	No
Sara	Middle East	1	No	Yes	No

Results

Building a Network for Access to Higher Education

One of the key benefits of the CERTE programme reported by students was the chance to meet and get information from representatives of colleges and universities that accepted applications from students with refugee backgrounds. As Stephanie noted,

I didn't know who should I contact to get admission in A levels...Without CERTE Course I don't think that I have had found out who should I send my admission application to. Since we cannot send our application to college directly therefore CERTE made it possible for me to know the person in charge in [the college] and get admission.

The programme was therefore useful for Stephanie to help them locate a provider to pursue a specific course of interest. However, for students who were less certain about which path to pursue, like Jerry, “CERTE helped me at least to acknowledge what opportunities were available for refugees at that time.” This gave them a catalogue of options so they could consider which would best match what they wanted to achieve from higher education.

BlackOwl felt it was important to discuss the opportunities available to students with refugee backgrounds because the information was not widely available online. They also felt that the speakers from tertiary institutions were prepared with the information that would be relevant for specific programmes that the CERTE course organisers might not know as they didn’t know the administrative requirements for all the universities. In addition, they thought discussing these options as a group was particularly valuable because other students raised useful questions they hadn’t considered. These group discussions with university representatives were also motivational for the students, as is reflected in Hanan’s comment, “When I got to know about different universities by CERTE bridge course I felt really lucky that now I can continue my education.”

The students’ responses also suggested that they felt that participation in CERTE gave them an advantage. For Mani this was mainly due to the information they received as part of the course as they acknowledge “many other refugee students [are] willing to complete their education but they don't know about opportunities.” Benjamin also commented,

Refugees are not welcome in the University without any official reference. We meet and greet the officials via CERTE [and] come to know about their courses, tuition fee, other facilities offer to students.

It is therefore not just a simple transfer of information that was lacking but also the validation of their suitability for higher education by being associated with CERTE. Eva’s thoughts on this were much more explicit. They comment:

If it's not for the CERTE, the [university] wouldn't accept us since there were other kids not from the CERTE came and applied for the scholarship and they didn't get it...they clearly mentioned that they will only take the kids from CERTE.

It therefore seems that some of the students feel that participation in CERTE gave them privileged access to higher education opportunities. This is an idea that, for them, is supported by anecdotal evidence from their experience of navigating access to higher education after CERTE.

Soft Skills and Preparedness

The students attributed a variety of soft skills they developed during CERTE to helping them both secure places in higher education programmes and in their studies and campus life after enrolling on their courses. For example, Benny shared, "what I learned from the course, like time management [and] research skills, are very helpful in my studies." For Jackson, CERTE helped them to develop "interpersonal skills". Similarly, Stephanie felt they had an opportunity to improve their "communication skills". In each case, this skill development helped the students to build rapport during the interview and when navigating social interactions in their institution. This feedback was also reflected by Mai, who shared that CERTE "has help[ed] me in various parts of life like public speaking, applications submitting and interviewing skills, being friendly to others and many other things".

Developing communicative competence extended beyond the explicit skills sessions via opportunities to put these skills into practice through interacting with students from different backgrounds. For example, Mani explained,

In CERTE, all of the students were from a different home country, so it was a practically good thing to meet with someone from other countries from there, being friend with them. Without CERTE, it might have been difficult making friends at college.

Although referred to using different terms, it seems the most useful kinds of soft skills that the students developed throughout the programme relate to the ways they interact and communicate with others.

This is both in the context of higher education and how they present themselves to others in a multi-cultural environment. Developing their communication skills also helped them to make their understanding of these expectations clear during the admissions process. In a similar vein, Jasmine felt that CERTE had “changed my outlook on pursuing higher education by making feel me supported as though I belong in a community where others like me can get a chance to...fulfil my dreams.” The programme therefore was more than just a personal development but also about being part of a community to support and motivate them through the application process.

In addition to these skills in interacting with others, several of the students saw CERTE as an opportunity to understand the expectations of higher education in Malaysia. For example, Jackson commented, “[CERTE] provides [an] opportunity to understand the expectations of universities for tertiary education”, while Fitch felt the programme “raise[d] my awareness on what would be expected from a university student...it was more of an exposure to what I should be ready to face soon”. Understanding what was expected of these students if they were to enter the university helped them to prepare strong responses to interview questions and craft personal statements. Having an opportunity to rehearse aspects of the university admissions procedure, such as practicing interviews and preparing personal statements with their mentor, also helped the students to feel more prepared and confident about making an application. The students felt that their mentors were well placed to assist them in this aspect as they had already gone through a university application experience successfully themselves. For example, Jerry’s mentor “really helped me [understand] what are [their] expectations if [they] was supposed to be my interviewer.”

Perceived Barriers to Access

Throughout the interviews and survey responses it was clear that the students felt that they were academically capable of being successful in a higher education programme. For some, like Jasmine above, CERTE gave them the support they needed to pursue an application. However, the students perceived the

major barriers to accessing higher education as being external and largely beyond their control. First are the administrative barriers associated with their identification documents. In some cases, even though students show they can take agency in the process of applying to higher education they can't get over this initial hurdle. For example, Hanan stated that, "when I went [to the university] for more information they said we accept visa only". The type of identity document that students have is also problematic for universities that have MOUs with the UNHCR. Many will only accept those who have been issued full refugee status by UNHCR and have a passport. Eva shared how this requirement almost led to them not being able to take up a place despite being accepted:

They wanted us to have the passport which is not possible for me and it was as almost that I lost my chance of continuing my studies. God have mercy on me that things were going okay eventually and I'm in my third semester now.

BlackOwl also felt that applying after a case file has been sent to a third country for resettlement was a barrier to gaining access despite having refugee status. They reported that some admissions staff informed them that it wasn't worth giving them a scholarship place if they were going to abandon it before completing due to resettlement. It was fairly unanimous that students felt universities should be able to offer them student visas if they are accepted onto a course. Jackson asserts that this would not only overcome some of the access issues related to their stage in the asylum process but also offer piece of mind while studying: "I think if the universities offer student visas at the time of admission it'll help students to complete their courses without any hassle of documentation."

An additional administrative barrier perceived by the students was recognition of prior learning, particularly secondary level qualifications. Benny suggested there should be an affordable entry exam "instead of requiring the transcript of our secondary as we don't have a proper transcript as a refugee". Related to this was the feeling among some students that they weren't able to pursue the right kinds of secondary level courses to prepare them for the demands of their tertiary programme. For example,

Benjamin shared that, “I think I had a bit of difficulty in beginning in adjusting in pure mathematics lectures because in high school I didn't have the opportunity to take additional maths”. Access to the right kinds of resources to prepare for tertiary courses was also a problem, for example Eva stated:

For me personally, the challenges (I would say) I faced were soft skills which related to computer. I do not have a laptop or computer at home and not really familiar with the usages. The only gadget I have and rely on is my mobile phone. So, it was quite hard for me to catch up with the course like Information and Communication Technology in the university.

The final barrier was finance. Many of the students identified tuition fees as a major obstacle to pursuing higher education. Very few universities offer a full scholarship or a scholarship with stipend and many of the places available to students with refugee backgrounds require students to contribute between 30-70 percent of the course fee. Where they were able to secure financial support, the auxiliary costs of attending university were prohibitive, for example, Jerry stated, “The only problem that I faced was money that I had to save for my travelling cost in order to reach to these universities after CERTE was ended”. Sara also felt that no matter what they could do they would not be able to get a full scholarship because “full scholarships are not available for non-locals no matter what grades so it becomes difficult for those unprivileged”. The challenge of seeking out financial support was either an arduous task or put considerable strain on the students’ families. Consequently, they felt CERTE should provide more assistance to connect them with scholarships and grants.

Discussion and Conclusions

These results present several avenues for understanding access to higher education using Bourdieu’s social theory. In this section the results will be explored in relation to the broad categories of capital, habitus and field whilst acknowledging how each of these concepts intersects with the others. We will then make some suggestions for developing policy and practice to further improve access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds.

The opportunity for students to interact with university officials not only demonstrates knowledge transfer but it is also an important example of developing social capital through the CERTE programme. These conversations allow students to meet the people who will handle their application, which facilitates building rapport with key stakeholders in the field of access to higher education. In addition to understanding the requirements for accessing a particular course, they also have a point of contact they can connect with to discuss their application further. Connection to the CERTE programme lends legitimacy to exploiting this relationship while also employing the soft skills in communication developed through the programme to manage the relationship. This was especially evident in Eva's case of negotiating access after potentially losing their place due to issues with their identity documents. Similar to the access programme discussed by Morrice in the UK (2009), these conversations also provided an opportunity to explore the social context of the field as a group with key knowledge bearers, extending their social capital by gaining a fuller understanding of the "rules of the game" (Bathmaker, 2015, p. 61).

The more concrete barriers to access demonstrate areas of the field from which students with refugee backgrounds are essentially excluded. Passports and formal refugee status are manifestations or artefacts of social capital that allow certain students access to these areas. Without the correct documents there are certain opportunities or even entire higher education institutions that cannot be accessed. This presents a difficulty for a programme that is structured like CERTE as it doesn't have a role in advocacy to improve policy. Students with refugee backgrounds are limited by the barriers set by policy makers. Even in examples where students demonstrate agency in approaching potential universities there are no ways to negotiate these barriers. Similarly, CERTE doesn't play a role in helping students to develop their financial capital to fund university programmes, however this could be incorporated in a number of ways, as will be discussed at the end of this article.

The CERTE programme facilitates development of cultural capital with regards to the expectations of higher education in Malaysia. This understanding ran deeper than basic knowledge of institutional and

course requirements but was also realised through the dispositions the students had towards higher education. The communication skills that they developed helped them to present themselves as the types of students who are capable and worthy of taking up a place in a higher education programme. Employing cultural capital in this way also demonstrates how capital and habitus work together to position social agents in certain ways. As was highlighted in the results section, students felt they had the skills to succeed but didn't feel that these could be seen by higher education institutions. This reflects the hysteresis effect that was discussed by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) that is manifest as a gap between the skills that students feel they have and the recognition of these skills in the field. Employing cultural capital developed through CERTE therefore allows students to better align their habitus with expectations and increase their chance of success in access.

The results also reveal less recognisable forms of capital that were discussed by Harvey and Mallman (2019). Throughout their time in Malaysia each student has taken purposeful steps to access higher education and reached out through the UNHCR and various higher education institutions to explore options. Applying for the CERTE programme and taking the time to pursue a 9-day programme over 3-4 weeks demonstrates a commitment to this course of action. This is demonstrative of aspirational capital that drives students to pursue their dreams and goals. CERTE therefore functions as a site within the field where aspirational capital can be exchanged for improved prospects for access to higher education. The students also demonstrated resilience in the face of repeated failures and setbacks in pursuit of their study goals. The CERTE programme recognised and nurtured these forms of capital through the creation of a supportive community of like-minded individuals who were previously geographically dispersed through the field.

This last point also demonstrates how the students' existing habitus has been reinforced through participation in CERTE. Contrary to the context explored by Kanno and Varghese (2010), the students in this research didn't demonstrate a tendency to self-eliminate but were rather proactive in their pursuit of

higher education. Being tenacious is important for gaining access to higher education when coming from a disadvantaged position. However, as was noted above, the students developed their habitus in a way that allowed this tenacity to be translated into a form that could be understood within the field. This observation demonstrates the potential elasticity of habitus in support of assertions in previous research (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Reay 2004). Given the right tools and support the students could draw on their existing habitus and adapt it in ways that put them in a stronger position in the field. However, it is important to note that within the protracted refugee context students are only able to exploit their newly developed capital because higher education institutions have taken steps to allow students with refugee backgrounds to legitimately embody these types of habitus. Without these opportunities, the students face an uphill battle in trying to be recognised as viable candidates for higher education.

Using Bourdieu's social theory has allowed us to reach beyond a simple programmatic analysis of the CERTE Bridge Course to understand the impact of the programme as they are realised in the specific social context of access to higher education in a protracted refugee situation. Conceptualising this context as a social field has exposed a specific landscape in which students with refugee backgrounds move and encounter barriers that may or may not be possible to overcome by exploiting their capital. Understanding where these barriers lie helps us to understand the ways in which CERTE has assisted students in navigating this field as well as highlighting points of tension in which the programme currently doesn't have any reach. The theory has also exposed the types of capital that students have developed that help them navigate the field and understand how success can be achieved through understanding habitus as an elastic rather than deterministic entity, constantly under development. Work still needs to be done to advocate for wider access to higher education opportunities for students from refugee backgrounds. However, together with the opportunities available, the CERTE Bridge Course helps students to develop capital required and understand the workings of the field so they have a strategy to transfer aspiration for higher education into concrete success in access.

This study engaged with only a few of the almost 1000 students with refugee backgrounds in Malaysia that have stated an aspiration to pursue higher education. However, from these results we can suggest several areas in which policy and practice could be developed as a starting point for improving access to higher education. Work needs to be done to broaden the opportunities available. This doesn't necessarily have to fall within the remit of the CERTE Bridge Course, but it seems to be an important limiting factor to success. With more options for higher education more students who have successfully completed the programme will be able to cash in on their aspirational capital using their new understanding of the *rules of the game*. During the writing of this article, a white paper entitled 'Towards Inclusion of Refugees in Higher Education in Malaysia' was presented to the Education Ministry, Foreign Ministry and Prime Minister's Office of the Government of Malaysia (Sani, 2020). A key suggestion in this paper was to formally allow UNHCR identity cards for enrolment on courses in private education institutions. This proposal could help to reduce the administrative barriers for some groups, however, still leaves those with no formal identity documents, such as the large stateless Rohingya population, with limited access.

It should be noted that the CERTE Bridge Course in some ways creates a small, privileged group with knowledge of access to higher education. Therefore, if opportunities to study are expanded then there should also be an increase in the opportunities to access the benefits provided by the programme. Broadening opportunities might also change how such a bridging programme is delivered. There could be increased reach with a greater number of cohorts, online delivery of some content or a knowledge transfer to refugee communities. This latter point could allow a movement towards autonomy of refugee communities in assisting their youth to access higher education, consistent with the suggestion of Betts and Collier (2017). However, when taking this approach opportunities should still be available to interact across different refugee communities to aid in the development of communicative competence in preparation for ethnically diverse university and college campuses.

Programmes should focus on helping students to understand the opportunities available to them and how they can fit these with their ambitions to have a satisfactory experience of higher education. The mentorship aspect of the CERTE programme seemed instrumental to some students to the process of fitting their interests with the courses available, suggesting that longer term follow up after the initial course in some capacity is important for this personal negotiation of options. Related to this is ensuring that there is continued opportunities to liaise with university admissions (building social capital) through the site visits and face-to-face meetings. In addition to learning about the programmes available, this helps students to imagine themselves as students on the campus and familiarize themselves with admissions procedures.

Finally, students could benefit from some financial literacy training and additional sources of funding to help with financial barriers. Again, this may not fall under the remit of the CERTE Bridge Course, but partnerships with organisations that offer or collate information about funding available could help students to manage the financial burden of higher education. The ability of students to liaise with key figures in the funding pool in a similar way to meetings with higher education providers could also help them to understand this additional area in the field of access to higher education.

Author Note

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