JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE & INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Philosophy for JCIHE

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1) Submit a research article of 4,500 - 7, 500 words. All articles will undergo a blind-review peer-editing process.

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The style and format of the *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* follows the APA style (7th Edition). Only endnotes are allowed. USA spelling (e.g., center, color, organize) and punctuation are preferred (single quotations within double if needed), and requires a short paragraph of bibliographical details for all contributors.

JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE & INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

JCIHE: Winter 2020: Special Issue

Introduction and State of the Field 2020

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Dear Readers -

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic have been strong and unforgiving. The human toll has been staggering and the long-term economic effects will be felt for years to come. Throughout the world higher educational institutions and those who conduct research on comparative and international higher education have had to swiftly make changes to their teaching styles, research processes, and collaborative relationships. The pandemic created a moment in time that, like other disasters, offers a chance to rethink current practices and to create reimagined ways in which higher education can be stronger and be more responsive to their communities. JCIHE will continue to explore these new possibilities in future issues.

In celebration of the research done during 2020, I welcome you to the *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE) Winter Special Issue 2020 on *Refugee Students in Higher Education*. The Winter 2020 issue also includes a Research Article by Christine Cress and Thomas Van Cleave and a Comparative Analysis Essay by Shelbee Nguyen Voges. The JCIHE Winter 2020 Supplemental Issue will include the annual JCIHE Annual Graduate Student Work-in-Progress that celebrates the academic interests of students studying in a Master's or Doctoral program.

The article by Christine Cress and Thomas Van Cleave examines international service-learning as a means to assist the formation of global consciousness. The focus of the article is to show that experiences that are not framed through critical academic lens cannot provide adequate insight to social problems that exist within the geographic areas where learning is to occur. Cress and Van Cleave propose that international student service-learning programs need to purposefully address power and privilege inherent in one's persona and positionality in the world and in so doing should intentionally address xenophobia and cultural humility. The Comparative Analysis Essay by Shelbee Nguyen Voges is a timely one that examines inequities of completion of higher education on time. The Comparative Analysis provides examples from university first-year policy that intentionally uses defined pathway programs to build student success in the United States and abroad.

Winter 2020 Special Issue

The JCIHE Winter 2020 Special Issue is entitled *Thriving in the Face of Adversity: Mapping Experiences of Refugee Students in Higher Education* edited by Dr. Belma Sadikovic, Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Minnesota State University, and co-founded the Boise State Refugee Alliance (BSRA). The topic of the special issue examines one of the critical issues of our time, that of access and equity for refugee students. Refugees face numerous obstacles entering higher education in a new country and then learning how to maneuver within a new educational context to be able to complete their education to earn a college degree. For these students, institutional policies, and inadequate student services often truncate successful learning which in turn, further marginalizes these students. Yet, as many of the articles share, many refugee students bring with them to their new learning environments prior tertiary educational experiences, existing social capitals, and defined community cultural wealth that allows them to successful navigate new institutional pathways. In so doing, these students demonstrate a counter-barrier narrative in which they use their experiences to build capabilities that lead them to success in higher education. The articles in the Winter 2020 Special Issue explore the academic and social integration of refugee

students at the host institution and within the host community. In the cases profiled in this special issue, higher education in another country provides for refugees' positive experiences that help them not only succeed, but, for some, help them to re-build their lives. These articles provide insight into how integration becomes the means to foster social support, provide a welcoming campus climate, institutionalize support services, encourage curricular inclusion, and build multicultural socialization practices that link the refugee student to the higher educational institution and to the local community.

The articles in the JCIHE 2020 Winter Special issue include a focus on refugee students in Canada, in Malaysia, and in United States. Birtwell, Duncan, & Carson explore factors that support and impede the transition of refugee students in Malaysia from secondary to tertiary education. They find that lack of information about existing opportunities, poor knowledge of the application process, and insufficient soft skills imped access. A case study of CERTE Bridge Course shows that purposeful and targeted intervention is making a difference and, in particular, is allowing students to develop cultural capital skills that are needed to negotiate access and that allows them to presenting existing skills in ways recognized by higher education in Malaysia. Svinjar focuses on refugee girls residing in different countries and explores the obstacles that they experience at primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels. These girls have lower enrollment rates and greater likelihood to drop out. Yet, when intervention is given, many are able to overcome adversities and in particular are enabled to use their capabilities and strengths to lead to higher educational success. Obradović-Ratković, Woloshyn, and Sethi examine changing voices that individuals have as they move through graduate higher education. Using Reflexive Ethnography, the authors share and deconstruct their own individual and familial experiences as displaced persons, graduate students, instructors, and mentors. The purpose of the article is to build personal and pedagogical narratives of migration and resilience as related to learning, teaching, and mentoring in graduate education. MacIsaac, Martin, Kubwayo, Wah and Nanyenga focus on a counter-deficit narrative to see how refugee experiences demonstrate multiple capabilities that lead to success. The focus of the article is on the existing

academic agency of refugee-background individuals who resettled to the U.S. and how educational institutions need to value the background of refugees as knowledge creators as a key component in advancing success. Peralta uses Critical Race Theory as a framework to explore how refugee students conform to and persist schooling. The article also uses the strength of community cultural wealth to assuage the negative didactic experiences that these students experienced. Finally, Hoff also uses a counter-deficit narrative to focus on refugees who settled in the United States in 2008 of whom, 37% arrived with college degrees. The article explores their narratives to understand how institutional barriers, such as lack of information and institutional racism that devalues these individuals, as well as personal barriers, such as competing priorities and language barriers do contribute to a lack of success.

JCIHE State of the Field: 2020

During 2020, the Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education (JCIHE) showed a commitment to publishing comparative and international articles that provided critical and insightful scholarship. JCIHE publishes three types of manuscripts – full-length research articles, comparative analysis essays, and graduate student work-in-progress articles. All submissions undergo double-blinded peer reviews. JCIHE will be adding invited book reviews that will begin to appear in the 2021 issues.

The *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE) is currently listed in Cabells Scholarly Analytics, CiteFactor, EBSCOhost, ERIC. GoogleScholar rankings index examine articles published in the last 5 years. The calculation is based on the largest number h such that h articles published in 2015-2019 have at least h citations each. The h5-median is the number of citations for the articles that make up its h5-index and measures the distribution of citations to the articles in the h-core. The h-core is a set of top cited h articles from the publication and are the articles that the h-index is based on (GoogleScholar, n.d.). The JCIHE Google Scholars h5-index is 4

and the h5-median is 7. The top downloaded articles for 2019 and 2020 are shown in Table 1. For a

newer journal these are decent numbers.

Table 1: Top Downloaded Articles for 2019 and 2020

Author	Title	Vol/Year	Abstract Views	PDF Download
Ritter	Singapore's Search for National Identity: Building a Nation through Education	11(Spring) 2019	17	73
Bilas	A Packaged Deal: Effective Support Systems for International Student Spouses	12(Fall) 2020	56	25
Heuser et al.	Internationalizing a Broader View of Scholarship: An Exploratory Study of Faculty Publication Productivity in Boyer's Four Domains of Scholarship in English-speaking Universities	12(Fall) 2020	41	14
Sperduti	Internationalization as Westernization in Higher Education	11(Spring) 2019	19	35
Ballo et al.	Applying Student Development Theories: Enhancing International Student Academic Success and Integration	11(Winter) 2019	31	15

Nwokedi	Thriving in the face of adversity: Mapping experiences of international students in a South African higher education institution.	12(Spring) 2020	32	13
Karkour et al.	International Students on U.S. College Campuses: Building Up or Tearing Down Cultural Walls?	12(Fall) 2020	24	12
Pei et al.	The Rising Cost of Being Foreign: Impact of Differential Tuition on International Students	11(Winter-S) 2019	4	30
Ahmed	#RhodesMustFall: Decolonization, Praxis and Disruption	11(Fall) 2019	9	24
Yamada	Japanese Higher Education Reform Trends in Response to Globalization and STEM Demand	11(Fall) 2019	8	24
Ghazarian	A Shared Vision? Understanding Barriers to Internationalization	12(Fall) 2020	20	11
Kwasi-Agyeman et al.	Higher Education Funding and Student Access in the Global South	12(Fall) 2020	15	15
Buckner	The Role of Higher Education in the Arab State and Society: Historical Legacies and Recent Reform Patterns	11(Spring) 2019	3	27

Maravillas	Filipino and American Teachers: Their Differences in Psychological Needs, Performance, and Culture	11(Winter-S) 2019	17	12
Kang et al.	Living and Learning Between Canada and Korea: The Academic Experiences and Cultural Challenges of Undergraduate International Exchange Students	11(Fall) 2019	27	2
GÜLEN et al.	Use of fun book in science education; sample application	12(Fall) 2020	19	9
Nilsson	The Buddy Programme - Integration and social support for international students	11(Winter) 2019	19	8
Shchepetylnykova et al.	Contribution of International Development Activities to Comprehensive Internationalization of U.S. Public Universities	12(Spring) 2020	22	3
Mussawy	The Challenges of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Afghanistan: A Policy Implementation Analysis	11(Winter-S) 2019	15	8

Statistics for 2020

In 2020, JCIHE received 29 submissions, of which, 13 were accepted. Combined, for the Spring 2000, Fall 2000, and Winter Special 2000 issues, JCIHE authors were represented by 14 men and 26 women. Being a journal that is international in scope and purpose, JCIHE is pleased to share that in 2020, authors were affiliated with institutions in Australia (1); Botswana (2); Canada (11); Malaysia

(1); South Africa (7); Turkey (2); Ukraine (1); United Kingdom (4); United States (19). Graphs 1 and 2 show the author country affiliation comparing submissions from 2018, 2019, and 2020. Graph 1 shows information on the top eight receiving countries, while Graph 2 shows the remainder of the author institutional affiliations worldwide.

The 2020 *Graduate Student Winter Supplemental issue* received 35 submissions, of which at the time of this publication, 19 were accepted and 6 are pending. This issue will be published in January 2021. Of the accepted submissions, Winter 2020 Graduate Student authors were represented by 9 men and 15 women. These authors were affiliated with institutions in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, South Africa, United States, and Viet Nam.

Graph 1: Author Country Affiliations: Part 1
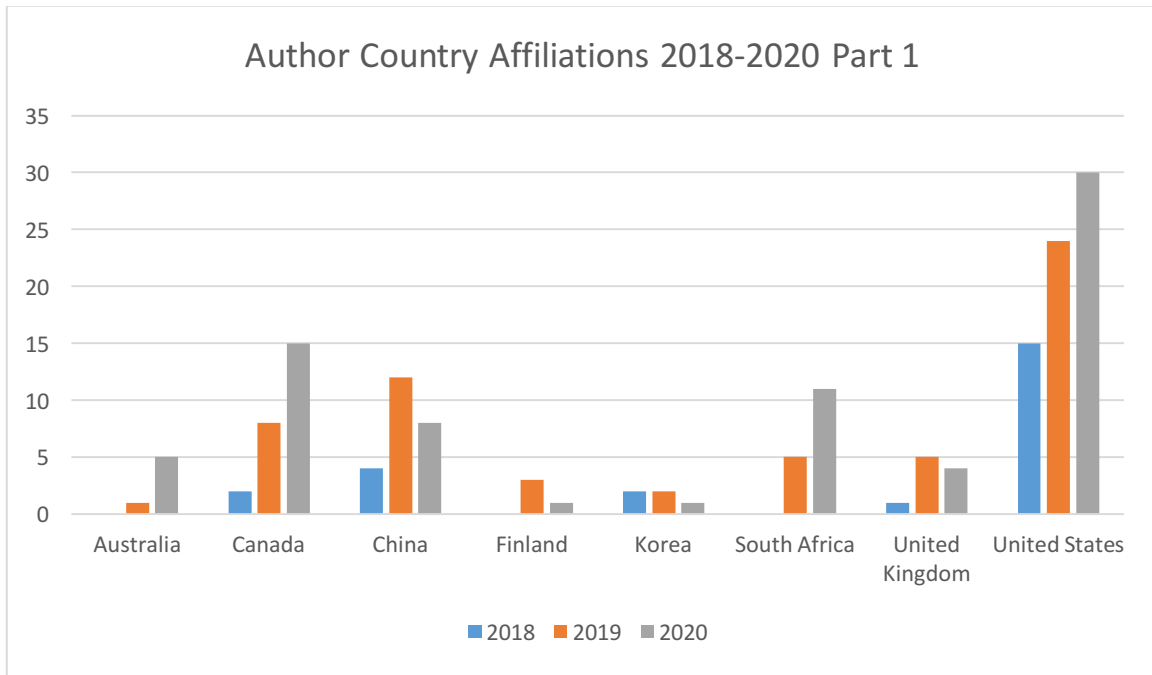
Graph 2: Author country Affiliations: Part 2
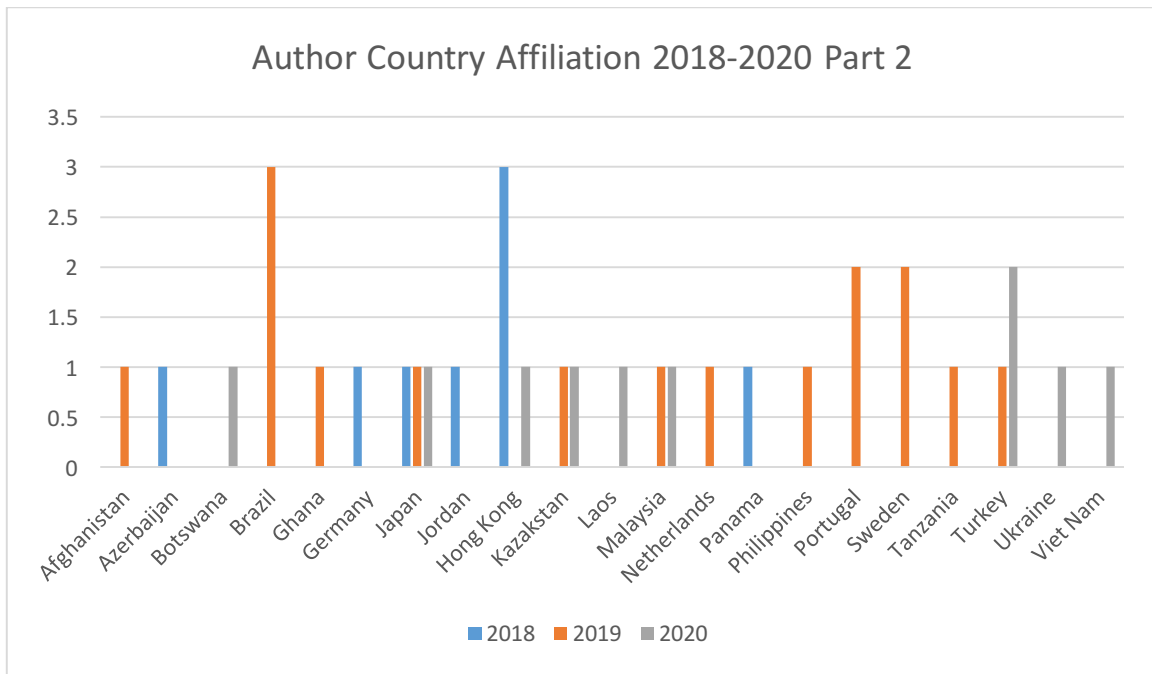
JCIHE strives to review and publish research and scholarship in a timely manner. While some decisions take longer for various reasons, time from submission to first decision is generally 75 -90 days. Our success depends on expert reviewers who generously give their time and expertise without compensation. In 2020, the JCIHE benefitted from over 150 volunteer reviewers, many of which provided feedback on multiple revisions.

The editorial staff of JCIHE is please to help support the CIES Higher Education SIG in advancing comparative and international higher education. JCIHE is a professional forum that supports development, analysis, and dissemination of theory-, policy-, and practice-related issues that influence higher education. JCIHE is proud to be part of the STAR network.

I especially want to thank the JCIHE Executive Editors Pilar Mendoza and Anatoly Oleksiyenko who also serve as the co-chairs of the CIES HE-SIG. I want to well welcome the new JCIHE Managing Editor Nian Ruan and the new JCIHE Production Editor, Jade Liu. The 2020 issues would not have been published in such a timely manner without these wonderful editors. I want to extend my sincerest thanks to the current JCIHE Managing Editor, Hei-hang Hayes Tang who has supported the journal in improving quality and focus. Dr. Tang transitions to the new JCIHE Associate Editor position. Finally, below is the list of the 2020 JCIHE peer reviewers and copy-editors. It is their dedication that helps keep the standards and integrity for the journal.

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The Role of Emotional Entropy and Ethnocentric Paradigms in International Service-Learning: A New Pedagogical Model for Global Agency Development

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Abstract

Cognitive dissonance, culture shock, and emotional entropy can stymie international service-learning and these issues are especially salient in American student encounters in India. Based upon three program years of qualitative data from student assignments, teaching evaluations, and faculty reflection journals, a new pedagogical model for international service-learning is purported for dismantling ethnocentric paradigms and supporting students' development of culturally-contextualized global agency development.

Keywords: international service-learning, transformational learning, global agency, emotional entropy, culture shock

Intersections of International Education, Emotions, and Learning

The global landscape of higher education is different than just twenty years ago due to increased mobility of students and scholars and the proliferation of international programs (Lee, et al., 2017). Indeed, internationalization has been deemed instrumental for educating students in order to problem-solve global challenges (Teichler, 2010). Moreover, international and intercultural contact with difference, virtual or physical, is "binding each of us into an interconnected world community" (Murphy,

2011, p. 1) and being able to function effectively cross-culturally is a necessary skill in the global

workforce (Cobo, 2013; DeGioia, 2011).

However, as Stein (2017) warns, internationalization of higher education practices offers not

only learning opportunities, but generates paradoxes, dilemmas, and contradictions in terms of political

and ethical issues for individuals, communities, and organizations. The danger is that globalization

efforts can serve to reinforce historical inequities across geo-political, imperialistic, and neo-colonial

contexts (Blanco Ramirez 2014; Connell 2007; Shahjahan 2013). Therefore, higher education institutions

have a critical responsibility in framing and initiating international engagement that deconstructs

assumptions of normative paradigms for learning and community change (Shahjahan & Kezar 2013; Van

Cleave & Cartwright 2017).

To that end, a relatively new form of pedagogy—international service-learning—has become a

popular strategy for exposing students to issues that transcend national boundaries and that assist the

formation of global consciousness (Bringle & Hatcher 2011; Van Cleave, 2013). Short-term faculty-led

service-learning experiences involve international travel to communities and engage students in

community service activities while combining academic readings, research, and reflection in order to

promote intellectual insight, human compassion, and intercultural competence (Cress, et al., 2013).

But issues like culture shock and improperly planned programs can stymie insight into social

problems like religious divides, gender roles, and economic class hierarchies. Furthermore, disciplinary

connections and professional knowledge development are likely to be weak if not adequately framed

through critical academic lenses (Cress & Donahue 2011). Likewise, programs claiming to increase

students' concepts of global citizenship and global agency must unmask the power and privilege

inherent in one's persona and positionality in the world (Stein, 2017). Indeed, Mudiamu (2020) asserts

that global consciousness cannot be effectively taught without intentionally addressing xenophobia and

cultural humility.

As such, international service-learning program components must be informed by the epistemological processes of learning; that is, how are students making meaning of their intercultural experiences (Blessenger & Kovbasyuk 2013; Lee, et al. 2013)? Specifically, when student encounters with the self and the other are intensively fraught with psychological and emotional dissonance (as is often the case in international education) retreat and regression to universalistic notions of values, behaviors, and attitudes can supersede insights into injustices and inhibit discernment of culturally-contextualized conceptualizations of global consciousness.

In other words, faculty must challenge students' traditional ethnocentric notions about people, places, and the self in relationship to those elements even as students' feelings of stress, discomfort, and anxiety may be heightened by the international experience. Thus, strategically anticipating and grabbling with extreme culturally-triggered feelings is a pedagogical and epistemological imperative if faculty are to help students realize the educational benefits of international service-learning and effectively conduct community service that is culturally and locally-relevant.

Driven by the over-arching research enquiry: How can students' experiences in international service-learning lead to increased "global consciousness"; an operational definition of global agency is first explicated. Second, the concept of emotional entropy and its role in global agency formation is explored in the context of learning theory. Third, a pedagogical and epistemological model for mediating emotional entropy and facilitating global agency development is proposed and explicated as the teaching context for the authors' construction of course syllabi, program elements, and international service-learning activities. Finally, international service-learning qualitative data is analyzed in light of the global agency development pedagogical model and its associated student learning outcomes.

Theoretical Perspectives and Operational Definitions

Global Agency

The concepts of "global consciousness" and global citizenship education have been evolving in the scholarly literature (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2011; Braskamp, 2008; Brustein, 2007; Jacoby & Brown, 2009; Tarrant, 2010) and in college mission statements (Stearns, 2009). While there is not yet a singular definition for the outcome of such efforts, there are some regularly agreed upon themes which include "the ideas of [global] awareness, responsibility, and participation" (Schattle, 2009, p. 17). Similarly, McIntosh (2005) contends that the true markers of global citizenship should emphasize respect, care, and concern for the well-being of others. To that end, Ogden (2010) developed a tripartite description of global citizenship more inclusive of affective and experiential dimensions: social responsibility, global competency, and global civic engagement.

Based on Ogden's (2010) definition, a previous research investigation by one of the authors (Van Cleave, 2013) found that faculty who teach international service-learning courses at seven higher education institutions were reactive to the term "global citizenship" considering it "classist" and "unrealistic". Van Cleave's (2013) study revealed that faculty motivations and hoped for learning outcomes of international service-learning were not global citizenship, but coalesced instead in the data into five independent and interrelated competency dimensions described below. Namely the dimensions of: *Academic*, *Professional*, *Interpersonal*, *Intrapersonal*, and *Intercultural* (see table 1).

Table 1

Faculty Conceptual Dimensions of Student Outcomes in International Service-Learning

Academic – Students are able to apply academic principles to community-identified needs in ways that honor host-country cultural perspectives and ways of knowing.
Professional – Students are able to recognize how their own professional skills can contribute to addressing community-identified needs in ways that honor host-country cultural perspectives and ways of knowing, both during the experience and long after returning to the students' home country.

Interpersonal – Students develop solidarity with and are able to work with diverse groups of people in order to meet community-identified needs in ways that honor host-country cultural perspectives and ways of knowing.
Intrapersonal – Students are able to identify how their own cultural identities and perspectives impact the ways in which they approach meeting local or global community-identified needs.
Intercultural – Students are able to identify how cultural perspectives impact the ways in which individuals and groups approach meeting local or global community-identified needs and view cultural differences as value-neutral.

Noticeably, the first two faculty conceptualized dimensions of student learning in international service-learning courses*, academic* and *professional*, are those cognitive outcomes that have been historically associated with traditional educational endeavors. The later three learning dimensions, *interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, and *intercultural*, are affective outcomes that are more likely to be taught in experiential, service-learning, and community-based learning courses. Interestingly, the international service-learning faculty did not view intercultural competence as the primary outcome for students' experiences. Instead, faculty placed equal value on *intercultural* competence development in conjunction with *academic*, *professional*, *interpersonal*, and *intrapersonal* skills. And, emerging from the dynamic intersection of these five dimensions was a new culminating learning outcome*, global agency* (see diagram 1).

Diagram 1

Interactive Learning Dimensions of Global Agency in International Service-Learning

(Van Cleave, 2013)

As depicted in the diagram above, student's global agency is defined as an outgrowth of development in culturally-contextualized cognitive, affective, and behavioral skill areas across the five competency dimensions (*academic*, *professional*, *interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, and *intercultural; see Table 1 above*). While the salience of the term global agency has yet to be tested and is beyond the scope of this paper, global agency is a form of transformational learning; learning that transforms students' existing perceptions of the world into new forms of consciousness (*academic* and *professional*) and critically-informed action (*interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, and *intercultural*).

But the development of global agency requires openness and adaptability in the midst of differences in people, events, and situations. And, perceptions of extreme differences may cause students to retreat to ethnocentric positions (defensiveness about their own culture) rather than toward ethnorelative ones (respect for other cultures) (Reitenauer, et al., 2013). Such internalized psychological retreat is best understood as emotional entropy; a withdrawal to the familiar when confronted by unfamiliarity. If we want students to expand and transform their understanding of themselves in the world, we must better understand the role of emotional entropy in affecting global agency development.

Emotional Entropy and Epistemological Processes

The first and second laws of thermodynamics assert that in a closed system, energy tends towards increasing states of disorder and randomness. Energy is not lost, but it becomes more and more diluted and ineffective. This law is called the law of *entropy*. Entropy is measured as the degree to which energy has lost the capacity to perform useful work. In other words, entropy is the lack of order or predictability; a gradual decline into disorder.

Learning theory, how we come to make meaning of and understand new information (*i.e.*, epistemology), is premised upon the ability to control (or appropriately reduce) emotional entropy as a form of anxious uncertainty (Belkavin, 2001). While the role of emotions is critical to cognition, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence (Damasio, 1999; Goleman, 2006; LeDoux, 1996) the level of intensity of the emotional experience (and whether the emotions are positive or negative) can enable or disable one's ability to integrate new information.

Indeed, the origin of the term, entropy, comes from the English "en" meaning inside and the Greek, "tropē" meaning transformation. If emotions are too extreme, neurons in the brain's amygdala trigger a "fight or flight" response that is disconnected from the neocortex responsible for critical thinking and decision making. However, appropriate amounts of emotional arousal are actually central to reflective judgment and integration of learning through transformed insights (Belkavin, 2001; Damasio, 1999).

While our coining of the term *emotional entropy* has not been used before in the service-learning literature, we offer it as a heuristic phrase for expressing intense emotional upheavals that students can encounter as an aspect of cognitive dissonance. Emotional entropy seems an apt description for when one's mental universe descends into the void of cognitive chaos due to overwhelming emotions. In this situation, emotional energy has lost its capacity for being useful in learning and, in the pervasiveness of emotional entropy, nothing makes sense anymore.

According to Mezirow (2000), this is the theoretical assertion of transformational learning; that transformational global insight (in this case, global agency development) requires dismantling existing paradigms of the self (Robertson, 1988) through experiences that create disorienting dilemmas (Cuban, 2001; Mezirow, 2000) especially those requiring close encounters and interactions with others different than ourselves (Vygotski, 1978)—such as in international service-learning. In addressing these issues, the authors queried—could the construction of a new pedagogical model upon which international service-learning is framed attend to emotional entropy issues and facilitate the development of global agency?

Methodological Approach

The inquiry focused on how American students who participated in a short-term, intensive international service-learning program in India encountered and attempted to resolve emotional dissonance in ways that affected views of the self and the world along their developmental journey toward global agency development. Student data (using pseudonyms; n=24) from three separate program years (2013, 2015, & 2017; note that the program is only offered alternate years) and adapted narrative illustrations from students' actual written assignments, submitted reflective journals, and group interactions (instructor ethnographic journal notes), trace students' emotional and psychological reconciliations as part of their formation of global agency.

While Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval was obtained for utilization of the student data, this is not a traditional research inquiry. Qualitative data were not strictly condensed and codified into discrete thematic categories for analytical purposes. Nor is the paper intended to serve as an exemplar of evidence-based theory testing. Rather, as a comprehensive scholarly paper, the purpose is to conjoin multiple research and conceptual paradigms that align with specific ethnographic and phenomenological experiences for a particular program.

Indeed, the methodological and epistemological point is to break free from traditional positivist boundaries of research in order to identify innovative, but evidence-based frameworks for community engagement. This approach is concurrent with self-identified "community engagement practitioner scholars" who utilize various research, conceptual, and theoretical approaches in crafting their courses and programs for marked differences in learning, leadership, and community impact (Dostilio, 2017; Militello, et al., 2017; Post, et al., 2016).

A brief international service-learning programmatic description provides context for the inquiry. Following, a new pedagogical model for global agency development (based on Van Cleave, 2013) is explicated upon which the program teaching and learning elements were constructed by the authors. Finally, program qualitative data trace students' global agency development and are highlighted as case studies in the pedagogical model dimensions of *praxis* and *progression*.

Intercultural Encounters: Americans in India

Program Setting

India, as a truly unique cultural landscape that is largely unfamiliar to Americans, provided the setting for students to engage in the dissonance of transformational learning and global agency development. In this particular university program taught by the two authors, students spent 3 weeks in Southern India working in collaboration with a local college to provide service-learning to a variety of NGOs including women's shelters, orphanages, schools, and human rights organizations. Given the intensity of associated issues including gender-related violence, female infanticide, class/caste oppression, poverty, and pollution, the pedagogical task for the faculty was to craft the course and program experiences in such a way that students' emotional entropy was dissuaded from retreat to ethnocentric paradigms and could serve as a catalyst for promoting global agency rather than as a kind of biochemical inhibitor stunting potential cognitive and affective growth.

Pedagogical and Epistemological Model for Global Agency Development

Undoubtedly, all types of service-learning require appropriate preparation and processing of the experience since crossing any boundary—new environments, new people, new issues—can be a culturally foreign experience for students engaged in local service-learning. But the logistics of service and the demands of learning increase exponentially in international courses. Kiely (2005) notes that there are four important elements of context that affect students' transformational learning before, during, and after their participation in international programs: personal, structural, historical, and programmatic elements. Drawing from this work, constructivist learning theory further explained below, and student qualitative program data, a parsimonious pedagogical and epistemological engagement model is described for planning, facilitating, and assessing international service-learning for global agency development (see Diagram 2).

As explicated and illustrated, the primary scholastic dimensions of *Preparation* (pre-departure planning), *Praxis* (strategies for applying course content to real-life situations), and *Progression* (making meaning of the learning and impact) demonstrate pedagogical and epistemological structures for managing students' emotional entropy and facilitating global agency.

Diagram 2

Pedagogical and Epistemological Model for Global Agency Development
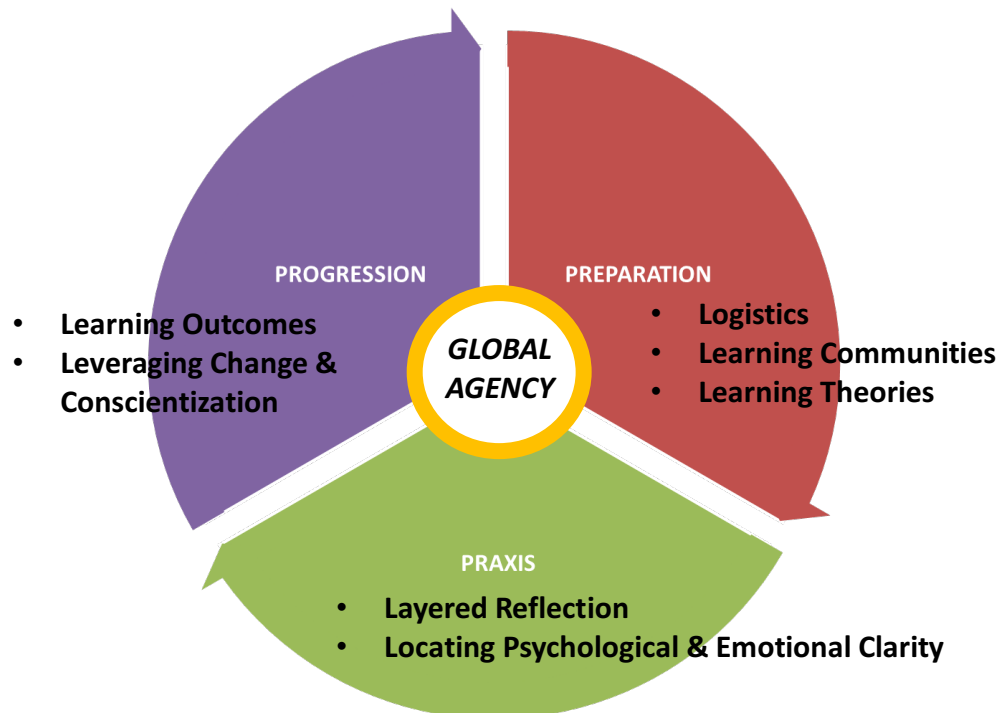
Global Agency: the cumulative development of culturally-contextualized cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills across academic, professional, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intercultural competencies.

Preparation

Preparation encompasses the pre-departure activities of student recruitment, student selection, and student community development prior to leaving the country. While the myriad of details of preparing an international service-learning will not be described here, three components of preparation are explicated in terms of their associated pedagogical and epistemology relevance to emotional entropy and global agency: 1) Logistics; 2) Learning Goals and Learning Communities; and 3) Learning Theories.

Logistics

The importance of logistics and safeguards for student travel and housing cannot be under-estimated (Van Cleave, 2013). At most colleges, international service-learning courses are jointly offered through Study Abroad offices where expertise resides in terms of travel documents, health immunizations and insurance, and the legal contracts of international partnership memorandums of understanding (MOUs).

While some international service-learning programs pay third-party providers to arrange itineraries and in-country logistics, in this particular case the course program utilized a long-standing educational community (i.e., college) as their base of service-learning operations. As such, information concerning housing, food, and learning and serving activities were well-detailed in the syllabus and discussed with students during pre-departure class sessions.

Still, students' foremost concern in early weeks were: "what are the rooms like where we sleep?"; "will there be bugs?"; "where do we eat?"; "is the food spicy"? The angst inherent in these questions are consistent with Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs. According to Maslow, before experiences can be meaningfully reflected upon and understood, one's basic survival needs such as shelter and food must be met.

Additionally, Maslow (1954) asserted that before higher cognitive levels of *self-actualization* (e.g., transformed insights about the self in relationship others) can be achieved, basic human needs for connection, relationship, and affiliation must be met (see Diagram 3). Known as the *Hierarchy of Needs,* the model asserts that life essentials are foundational to learning and must precede community bonding; which in turn is essential to reflection which leads to insight and learning.

Diagram 3

Learning and Hierarchy of Needs (Adapted from Maslow, 1954)

Why might this pyramid of physiological and psychological priorities be important?

Quite simply, and as the students rightly anticipated, most of us in new cultural settings do not eat and

sleep well and, consequently, we may lose patience with our companions. If that happens, then it is

quite difficult to stay engaged in learning as our emotional and cognitive energies are taxed by the

circumstances. And, then more than likely, our ability to provide appropriate and culturally-

contextualized community interaction and service becomes compromised; opportunities for learning,

impact, and insight are diminished.

Maslow's (1954) model served both as a course program design framework (e.g., making sure

that logistics were fully detailed to dispel anxiety) and as a course content component in discussing

contrasts and comparisons of the cultural concepts of individualism (independence) and collectivism

(group cohesion) across U.S. American and Indian contexts. The model also provided a structure for

considering how to create a learning community within our program and how to connect our learning

community with those of the Indian college and communities with respect to faculty goals, individual

student goals, and communally defined program goals.

Learning Goals and Learning Communities

Drawing from Van Cleave's (2013) Global Agency Development Model, course objectives were outlined in the syllabi under the larger outcome term of *Global Agency* according to the interconnected learning dimensions of *Academic*, *Professional*, *Interpersonal*, *Intrapersonal*, and *Intercultural*. As well, Bloom's (1956) taxonomy informed faculty development of student learning outcomes for the program that were inclusive of the domains of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills and progressed from relatively simplistic to more complex categories; increases in sophistication of emotional management and knowledge and skill development that were expected to be demonstrated over time in the course.

For example, the course syllabus listed under *Academic Learning*:

- Articulate some of the social and economic challenges of India.

- Analyze the political and economic relationships that exist today.

- Evaluate and demonstrate understanding of the above issues within the context of the community service site.

Under *Intercultural Learning*:

- Develop an awareness of diverse peoples, cultures, and ideas, and appreciate the importance of engaging in ongoing interdisciplinary learning.

Under *Interpersonal* and *Intrapersonal Learning*:

- Interact effectively and respectfully with diverse classmates and community members toward common goals that address human needs.

- Apply reflective, analytical, and evaluative skills to understand one's own cultural perspective, past experiences, and individual identity.

- Examine race, class, and gender as they relate to service-learning and social justice.

Under *Professional Learning* outcomes:

- Critique global citizenship and charity models of international service-learning.

- Identify challenges and evaluate solutions related to establishing and maintaining international service-learning partnerships.

Moreover, each program year the courses included multiple readings (e.g., journal articles, book chapters) and resources (e.g., films, online videos) on India and international service-learning. Students in-class and on-line responded to the queries:

- What would Gandhi think about developing global citizenship through international service-learning?

- Rather than reinforcing neo-colonial globalization, how can our trip contribute to responsible global leadership and sustainable development?

- How to you define the development of global agency with respect to the Van Cleave's (2013) dimensions?

Importantly, faculty (*i.e.,* the authors) intentionally facilitated discussions and activities to form a learning community as students identified class intention "rules" for handling sensitive topics, controversy with civility, and managing interactions when emotions were more pervasive than thinking (see also, Cress, et al. 2013). Students discussed responses to questions such as: What are the expectations for performing service? What should happen if someone is not doing their share? What are the expectations for participating in reflection sessions? And, what if someone doesn't listen and speak with respectfulness?

Further, students participated in role play activities based on case study scenarios of dilemmas in service-learning including cultural boundary crossing and facing personally conflictive situations like being a vegetarian and being served meat at a host family dinner. (More case study examples are readily available: Cress, et al. 2013). The role plays introduced students to the anxiety and emotional turmoil

that can arise when there is cognitive dissonance and affective uncertainty about what is "right" to do in a given cultural situation.

Students were also informed about intercultural skills specific to India (such as handling food with the right hand only), and were exposed to the concepts of *cultural surprise* (small differences such as food), *cultural stress* (anxieties resulting from uncertainties about appropriate social interactions) and *cultural shock* (extreme negative reactions that can become debilitating) (Yamashita & Schwartz, 2012). Recognizing these responses is an initial step in reducing emotional entropy and promoting higher cognitive functioning as a part of laying the foundation for surviving and thriving in international service-learning.

Learning Theories for Effective Service-Learning

Both faculty (the authors) had previously led international service-learning courses and traveled extensively. As such, they had professionally and personally experienced the deleterious effects of emotional entropy on individual and group intercultural interactions. Thus, as pedagogical anticipatory measures, students reviewed and discussed a variety of psychological and conceptual models such as Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and their potential relevance to emotional entropy and transformational learning during international service-learning.

Similarly relevant to individual and collective learning, Dirkx (2001) asserts that negotiating the fluid boundaries of *I* and *We* is a constant dilemma whether within the context of family, friends, work groups, or class communities. The challenge is how to maintain the integrity of the self (*I*) while connecting authentically with others (*We*). Given that the quintessential task of global agency is to connect the self to others across vast personal, social, and cultural domains, two additional pedagogical conceptual models were included in pre-departure class meetings: Jones and McEwen's (2000) conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity and Kolb's (1984) Learning Styles model.

Jones and McEwen (2000) describe individual identity as encompassing a core sense of self that is constructed from aspects of identity that interact with our social environments (see diagram 4).

Diagram 4

Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Adapted from Jones & McEwen 2000)
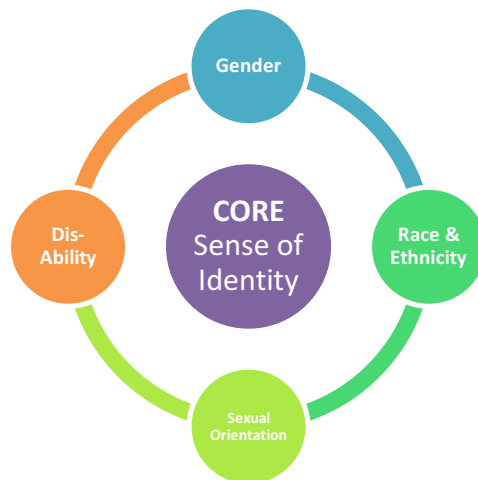
While our core sense of self is usually quite resilient, individual aspects of our identity are affirmed or experience dissonance depending on the relative amount of congruence between our self and that present in the social environment at that moment. So, for example, a student of color in a primarily white class may feel a heightened sense of his race/ethnicity. A female student in a primarily male engineering class may feel a heightened sense of her gender.

The higher the dissonance between dimensions of the self and our social surroundings, the higher become the emotional and psychological demands for maintaining one's core self. Thus, "foreign" sociocultural traditions, like arranged marriages in India, may challenge not only American students' social constructions of family, but may challenge their own notions of gender roles and gender-related choices as a part of the core self.

Finally, during pre-trip class sessions, students identified their preferred learning styles based on Kolb's (1984) Learning Styles model (i.e., concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) and the students discussed aspects of learning

community leadership on the upcoming trips (such as who would help the group negotiate airport connections or direct the planning of service site activities) best undertaken depending on one's learning style proclivity for "feeling", "observing", "thinking", or "doing".

In sum, *Preparation* content, interactions, and activities were constructed to "support and challenge" (Sanford 1966; 1967) students' cognitive and affective domains for optimal learning prior to, during, and after the international experience. The goal was to amplify students' understanding of themselves, concepts of international service-learning, fundamentals of historical and contemporary issues in India, and community complexities inherent in community engagement. Faculty aspirations for student global agency development were premised upon revisiting these pedagogical and epistemological foundations while in-country (*praxis*) and upon return (*progression* of learning).

Praxis

The term *praxis* means applying ideas to real-life situations; or, the application of theoretical research and conceptual models in problem-solving community conditions. After all, that is the purpose of learning through international serving--doing short-term good while gaining insight into issues to which academic skills can be applied toward longer term solutions.

This is the unique feature of faculty-led international service-learning (as compared to other types of volunteer service activities), *praxis* is facilitated reflection that utilizes academic knowledge in developing larger learning outcomes such as global agency. Pedagogical *praxis* helps to ensure that the international experience is truly educative, not just exotic.

At the beginning of any international service-learning experience students' ability to engage in *praxis* is usually limited. Rather, acclimation to new sights and sounds tends to take precedence (recall Maslow's *hierarchy of needs*); overcoming jet lag and adjusting to early cultural surprises and stress is taxing. Yet, a critical characteristic of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence is that how one feels does not have to dictate how one acts (Cress, Emil, & Yamashita 2013). To promote such

learning and *praxis*, the faculty engaged students in group discussions and individual writing activities as layered reflection.

Layered Reflection

In service-learning, the four multilayered epistemological principles of reflection are that it be: continuous, connected, challenging, and contextualized (Eyler, et al., 1996). Specifically, a pedagogical tool for integrating layered reflection is referred to as the DEAL Model of Critical Reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2009). DEAL is an acronym for *Describing, Examining,* and *Articulating Learning.* Based on the assumption that critical thinking is a developmental progression, the model starts with asking students to "describe" what is happening. The descriptive level is highly sensory oriented: what do students see, hear, smell, and feel?

The second stage, "examining", asks students to view the situation from different academic angles. The examining level guides students toward new perspectives: how might their views and reactions be re-reframed from multiple standpoints? Finally, in the last stage, students ponder how they can "articulate their learning" through deeper insights and possible actions for leveraging positive community change.

The DEAL model is also useful if conflict or miscommunication occurs at the service site. Since serving is emotionally, psychologically, and interpersonally "messy" (Donahue, 2011), using a framework like DEAL can help in understanding causes and possible solutions. As well, leveraging critical incidents in teaching from discord and dissonance into lessons of discernment is a pedagogical art and science.

Indeed, faculty in this case turned to the DEAL model during times of students' emotional entropy as a tool for dealing with intense feelings and in attempting to progress students' perspectives from self-referenced towards those more inclusive of global agency development. As noted earlier, student qualitative data (journal reflections, course assignments, and group discussion notes; n=24), were captured across three program years (2013, 2015, and 2017). The data were utilized as an iterative

process for developing the global agency development model and its associated pedagogical and service-learning elements. The faculty authors attempted to epistemically address students' dissonance between the American self and Indian culture that often resulted in affective outbursts and cognitive confusion of students.

Described below are two angst-provoking situations that occurred while in India. The depictions are offered as case study examples of emotional entropy dynamically interacting with students' culturally-contextualized cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies. In other words, students' ethnocentric paradigms were fully encountering interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intercultural dissonance resulting in students' longing for emotional and psychological clarity. Utilizing direct student quotes (pseudonyms), the narratives of group interactions are adapted from instructors' journal notes to illustrate the concept of emotional entropy, its role in global agency development, and application of theories and concepts from the pedagogical model.

Locating Psychological Clarity: *Scared Out of My Mind*

Emotional entropy is the accumulative effect of overwhelming feelings brought about by acute intercultural dilemmas that create extreme cognitive dissonance. It is a state of emotional and psychological chaos where notions of the self within the context of social situations no longer make sense and that are likely to be manifested as verbal resistance, retreat, and regression rather than as reflection (see also Perry 1970 concerning issues of development versus impairment).

On their 5th day in India, emotional entropy seemed to have hold of the students collectively. It had been their initial day of direct service experiences. While the class had exhaustively reviewed the websites and initially visited the community sites to learn about the organizational missions, clients served, and service task roles they would undertake, students' actual engagement experiences with orphaned children and children with mental disabilities overpowered their preparation, expectations, and perspectives.

In the evening group discussion, when queried by faculty, "can you describe how you feel about your first service day?" Rebecca immediately stated, "It was horrible. The children fought over the toys we brought them and they screamed clinging to us when it was time to leave. I feel like we did more harm than good. I don't want to go back." She began crying and asked, "I don't have an academic background in child development; so can I go to the men's site instead? I'm too distraught to think about tomorrow."

Paul responded, "I'd love to trade with you. But seeing as they won't let us serve at the orphanage because men are considered potential 'child abusers' I have no choice." His voice raised in anger, "Talk about gender discrimination and stereotypes!"

Melinda retorted, "Well, it's a gender stereotype to think that I'm good with kids just because I'm a woman. I don't know anything about kids and I feel pressured to act like I do."

"At least you can fake it with the little kids," asserted Jeff. "The teacher put me immediately in charge of an English grammar lesson. I have no professional experience with how to communicate to mentally challenged high school students who only speak Tamil! I'm scared out of my mind."

"Scared out of my mind is precisely how I feel too," said Sarah. "I'm emotionally saturated."

Paul added, "My whole being feels assaulted. I can't work at the orphanage because I'm a man. People keep asking about my 'squishy eyes'--'what are you?'. And, I'm completely closeted here [as a gay man]. It's like the core parts of who I am don't exist."

Emily spoke up quietly, "My feelings and thinking are overloaded. I don't want to be interculturally appropriate any more. I just want to curl up on the bed and not feel and not think."

Jonathan stated simply, "I'm too steeped in emotions to cognitively analyze anything."

Silent nods of agreement were shared amongst the group.

At moments like these, when thoughtfully crafted class elements seem to go awry in the midst of prevailing emotions, instructors have little recourse but to carefully honor what students are feeling.

Still, students look to faculty to guide them in making sense of their experiences so that emotional entropy does not completely debilitate learning. The pedagogical challenge is how to balance the importance of students sharing and "describing" their experiences while offering cognitive structures for "examining", analyzing, and "articulating their learning" (recall the DEAL model).

In this instance, faculty tried a pedagogical intervention in attempting to make an academic connection to the students' emotive distress. One faculty stated, "It seems that while more academic or professional preparation might be helpful, at the core of what you're feeling is extreme dissonance between intrapersonal elements of the self, interpersonal interactions, and intercultural situations.

A U.S. educator, Ronald Takaki (1994), used a mirror metaphor in a book called, *In a Different Mirror*. He asks in the book, 'what happens when you look into a societal mirror…and you are not reflected in it?'

Takaki was writing about the college curriculum and how students of color in the U.S. often don't see their own lives and experiences mirrored in education. For college students of color, education is a 'foreign' experience that doesn't reflect who they are or want to become.

Similarly, as you're all expressing, and especially Paul as a gay, Japanese American man, it's not just culture shock or your own discomfort with the service experiences that are upsetting, but that the societal mirror of India doesn't reflect you as a 'foreigner'.

Takaki actually borrowed his mirror metaphor from the lesbian poet, Adrienne Rich (1986), who in commenting upon 'compulsory heterosexuality and gender conformity', wrote that when your likeness in society isn't explicitly evident, such incidents are 'disorienting' and create 'a moment of disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing'.

The irony is that you are seeing, hearing, smelling, and experiencing so much that your hearts and minds can't yet organize and structure these into a coherent image of India or of your own role as an American in that image."

Melinda nodded in agreement and piped in, "You're right. It's not just cultural shock or discomfort in feeling academically or professionally inadequate. I long to connect myself to the people here, but at times the situations are so foreign that I don't know how to connect 'me to them' which overwhelms me. This reminds me of the Jones and McEwen model of identity we studied. While we think that our energy is going toward external events, we are actually expending it internally to keep dimensions of our self intact as we try to connect the self to others."

Jeff offered the group, "I agree with Melinda about parts of the self. I didn't travel across the globe just to see the same image of myself. I want India to show me different reflections of myself. But I think that for me it is more like the emotional pressures regress us to our preferred learning style in Kolb's (Kolb, 1984) model. I'm an abstract conceptualizer. And, he added with a smile that brought humorous relief to the whole group, "I just want all the abstract emotional, interpersonal, and intercultural encounters neatly categorized into clear academic components that are easy to understand and digest."

The two conceptual models, dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and learning styles (Kolb, 1984) were conversationally embraced by the students the rest of the reflection session. The models became important pedagogical *praxis* ladders for students in stepping above their emotional entropy and into higher levels of cognitive analysis. And, throughout the India experience, the models continued to provide new language platforms for students in describing how the foreign and the familiar were reflected on their academic, professional, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intercultural journeys toward global agency.

Locating Emotional Clarity: *The Dissonance of Arranged Affection*

Each evening the class had discussion sessions to reflect upon the day's events, to "describe" what had been seen, heard, smelled, and to try to use academic frameworks to put into a larger context what could be "examined" analytically and then "articulated" as insights and potential action steps. By

sharing experiences, events and views of ourselves in those events are differently reflected through the mirrored language of others in our yearning for insight. According to Mezirow (2000), insight and "personal transformation leads to alliances with others of like mind to work toward effecting necessary changes in relationships, organizations, and systems, each of which requires a different mode of praxis" (252). For praxis to be realized, affective and cognitive domains must be in connection and the self and community must find components of commonality. In this case, the setting of dissonance was student witness of a traditional Hindu wedding in which the bride did not meet the groom until the moment of the ceremony at the temple.

Sarah expressed: "As a feminist, my head and heart were exploding for that poor woman! She was so beautiful and gracious, but the patriarchy determined her destiny without any regard for her as an individual. I wanted to yell 'stop!"; 'run away'."

Erik chimed in: "But don't forget that the groom was 'stuck" too. He probably had very little choice in the matter and was freaking out too."

Katya offered a counter perspective: "Because we are uncomfortable with arranged marriage, we're assuming that they were not happy and were just going along with it. We're imposing our Western thoughts and emotions on these individuals with truly different traditions and truly different feelings and thoughts about those traditions."

Steven concurred: "I think we can thoughtfully critique systems that have the potential for exacerbating gender inequities. But, we need to claim our positionality in that critique and realize that we don't understand the thoughts, feelings, or dynamics of those involved. As a Westerner, I question a system that can 'force' rather than 'arrange' love and happiness. But I have to open myself to possibilities that 'arranged affections' can grow into love over time; like my cousin who adopted a little boy from China. She loved him initially because she was responsible for him and then her real love for him grew organically over time."

Sarah responded: "Wow, Steven, your example just shifted my consciousness. I literally feel the synapse in my mind connecting. I honestly never thought about arranged marriage as liken to adoption. This is a different way of thinking about and feeling the situation. And you might just be right; maybe they will both come to love each other like often happens in adoption. In fact, it must actually happen a lot or people all over India would be unhappy and ultimately reject the system."

During preceding evening reflection sessions, students became more adept at recognizing their own ethnocentric reactions and emotions and how entropic emotional regression could limit alternative perspectives and ethnorelative insights. Indeed, over time, the potency of emotions receded allowing students to consider intercultural, interpersonal, and intercultural events as key reference points in analyzing and 'examining' larger political, economic, and health care issues. As well, students also began to 'articulate" and express the weight of their new responsibility for creating global consciousness awareness and change for the sake of all humanity. They also voiced concern about how to adequately engage in such efforts upon their return.

"I'm scared about how to answer people when they ask, 'so how was your trip?' How am I even supposed to begin answering that? I know that people are going to want a clear and concise answer for what I experienced and what I learned, but that is not something I can do yet."

Progression

The concept of the progression of learning is fundamentally about making meaning of the experience—how are things, including individuals, different or not? If things or people did change, why? And, what types of action can facilitate differential outcomes—what needs to happen to realize positive change? In other words, what was learned? And, what was leveraged as effective impact?

Learning Outcomes

Progression of learning is essential in the formation of global agency; to identify what skills and knowledge were developed or enhanced as part of the experience. So too, such continued reflection

and processing should lead to important iterative revisions in curriculum and program design for

increased efficacy and effectiveness (Stokamer, 2011). Finally, progression elements, such as data

collection, can also set the stage for faculty engaged scholarship (Cress & Donahue 2011).

Certainly, in the case of re-entry from an international experience back to the U.S., students

need the opportunity before leaving the host country to consider what changes they have experienced

and what progressions of change might they anticipate upon their return. In-country discussions should

explore how students might best negotiate experiences of re-entry culture shock, any associated

emotional entropy, and return to their "normal" lives.

Leveraging Change and Conscientization

As well, evaluation of impact on community is best begun in conversational review with

community partner sites. Determining the impact of project-based service is often easier than

determining the impact of community-based service because of the existence of a tangible product (a

new website for the community partner) or object (a new house for a family).

Having a reference point such as, "I built that brick wall", or "I dug that water well" helps

students to feel that their contributions are durable. In contrast, service tasks like playing with children

in an orphanage are harder to quantify and can leave students struggling with how to assess meaningful

impact. Hopefully, community partners or other cultural experts can help with interpreting the relative

effects.

Moreover, post trip group reflection sessions can assist students with extending psychological,

cognitive, academic, and professional learning as students compare their "foreign" experiences with

their re-entry to the familiar. Whether in writing or as a part of group discussions, the DEAL model can

be instructive in processing. For example, *describe* what it looks and feels like to once again see yourself

in the mirror of U.S. American culture? Next, *examine* how this description informs your understanding

of the concept of global agency? Finally, *articulate* how such insights will transform your ways of interacting with local and global communities in the future?

Daloz Parks (2000) describes this examination of individual consciousness as a distinctive mode of meaning making where students "become critically aware of one's own composing of reality" (6). In composing one's self-identity within the context of and in connection to community, students become cognizant of their self-authorship capacities in constructing local and global communities (Rendón, 2009).

Freire (1970) defined this type of transformational learning as *conscientization;* individuals who come to understand their contributory roles in shaping local and global realities. Indeed, *conscientization,* or consciousness commitment to positive action, is a critical quality of global agency.

As a summative progression experience in the program, the faculty authors required students to complete a final reflective paper that included first person narrative analysis in relationship to the literature and commentary on student's own conscious development of global agency.

One student reflected:

Bennett (2008) describes how teachable moments can emerge from emotional dissonance and cognitive disequilibrium. The key to a teachable moment is facilitated reflection and group processing to turn our instances of emotional anguish into cultural and cognitive insight. Our daily conversations unpacked confusion, acknowledged cultural filters, and explored alternative perspectives. Yet, our deepest learning was not borne out of cognitive intellectual roots, but rather by honoring the emotional intensity of the experience in a new-found sense of empathy and caring for ourselves and others.

Another student commented:

It is difficult to point to a particular experience and definitively say *this* was the moment when I

experienced growth in *that* cognitive, affective or academic outcome. But the course models did

help me understand how personal identity shapes your experiences in an international setting.

It was important for me reflect on my own identity as an upper-middle class White European

male. Multiple aspects of my identity played a large role in my interactions, perceptions, and

ability to connect with the culture and community. In Indian culture, being male put me in a

higher social standing and garnered more attention in many circumstances, but was not without

its disadvantages, such as the concern of my potential for child perversion due to my gender.

The duality of gender advantages and disadvantages were far more evident to me in India than

in America ultimately prompting new consciousness about gender and its dynamic interplay in

intercultural and interpersonal situations.

Finally, one student's clear statement plainly exemplifies her global agency development: "My time in

India reaffirmed for me the real need to promote gender equity everywhere."

Conclusion

Dewey (1910) noted that in the "suspense of uncertainty" and fear we tend to retreat to familiar

psychological localities unless and until we find the courage to engage in critical reflection. Emotional

entropy, especially during international service-learning programs, has the potential for arresting

developmental growth and transformational learning since it dissuades reflective praxis. As such,

pedagogical preparation, praxis, and progression strategies and instructional elements can offer

students epistemological methods for empathetic introspection of the self and others. Specifically,

utilization of the global agency development model can serve as an educational foundation for helping

students overcome emotional entropy in "foreign" situations and move toward holistic growth in global

agency. Moreover, the model offers an opportunity for scholars to test the pedagogical dimensions and

learning outcomes in alternate international settings. A final student reflective comment sums up future opportunities:

> I have only begun to unpack and reflect on my own personal experiences and transformation from the trip, but it is obvious at this point that without deliberate teachings and critical reflection in the pre, during, and post phases of the trip, I would not have walked away from the immersion in India with nearly the same impact and lessons learned. This deep impact and transformation are a direct result of a deliberate teaching approach to valuing not only the experience of international travel and becoming a global citizen, but also the connection and guided understanding of relationship to community, intercultural sensitivity, and global competence.

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'I'll be there for you'– Comparative Insights on First-Year Experience (FYE) Policies of Belonging in the

21st Century

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Abstract

Increased pressure placed on first-year experience (FYE) policy to carve strategic pathways for navigating higher education internationally is how institutions grapple with challenges of retaining and graduating students (Nutt & Calderon, 2009). However globally, higher education is somewhat divided on an equitable, inclusive understanding of completion, and the corresponding approaches prioritizing social adjustment and belonging over academic adjustment. In this article, the author brings forth novel discussion about the need for prioritizing social adjustment over the historically celebrated and more tangible academic adjustment. Further, the discussion extends by including 21st century considerations about social justice and their relationship to social adjustment which ultimately serves as the primer for building academic skills. Finally, the author offers a synthesis of international perspectives that illustrate how first-year programming around the globe practices the prioritization of social adjustment to mitigate challenges in academic adjustment as well as implications and broader conclusions from the field.

Keywords: belonging, 21st century international education, narrative, student success, first-year experience

Introduction

Globally, the demand for higher education continues to increase with the number of students more than doubling from 2000-2014 (UNESO, 2014). Yet, in the US not even 50% of students are completing two- & four-year degrees on time (Complete College America (CCA), 2019). Comparatively,

in the wider global snapshot, UNESCO authors also note "a defining characteristic of most higher education systems are the large disparities in access and completion, especially by income and wealth" as well as race/ethnicity and gender (CCA 2019; UNESCO, 2014). The increased pressure placed on the first-year experience (FYE) policy to carve strategic pathways for navigating higher education internationally is how institutions in the 21st century grapple with challenges of retaining and graduating their students (Nutt & Calderon, 2009). The availability of scholarship and pervasiveness of FYE policy initiatives, or a multiplex of "intentional academic and co-curricular efforts within and across postsecondary institutions" to emphasize academic and social adjustment (Koch, 2007, p. 23) is robust and expansive in the United States (US) and abroad. However, higher education around the globe is somewhat divided on an equitable, inclusive understanding of completion, and the corresponding approaches which prioritize social adjustment and belonging over academic adjustment for long-term student success.

Historically—Academic Adjustment > Social Adjustment

The rise in FYE policy began in the US in the 90s as campuses and has since grown globally in the 21st century as everchanging diverse student populations were wrestling with a fit, insufficient peer support as well as navigating academic choices in a more complex higher education system (Rubin, 2019). The National Resource Center (NRC) for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, the leading repository informing FYE policy globally, found nearly 52% of American colleges articulate FYE policy including programming, initiatives, or extended orientation models (Koch, 2007) while nearly 90% of those attach course credit (U.S. Department of Education (DOE) 2016). In a contemporary 21st century frame, universities in the US & internationally are experiencing diversity on their campuses like never before, yet there is not wide agreement about how FYE policy should be prioritizing *social* adjustment over *academic* success strategies to alleviate access, persistence, and ultimately completion challenges.

The collective conversation concerned with FYE policy scholarship in the US and abroad underscores academic success strategies rather than *social* when it comes to institutional wide policy and practice (Dorsett, 2017; Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2007). *Academic* success strategies and adjustment can include but are not limited to, skills in critical thinking, time management, academic mapping, career planning whereas *social* adjustment encourages engagement to campus emphasizing belonging and helping students to identify spaces of social and cultural capital (Koch & Gardner, 2014). Of the institutions which offer course credit, 80% of these institutional objectives reflect the prioritization of policy in *academic* success strategies, not just in the US, but also internationally (Dorsett, 2017; Kinzie, 2013; Koch & Gardner, 2014). Some studies concerned with participation in FYEs suggest a positive impact on progression to graduation (U.S.DOE, 2016) regardless of demographic details like race, class, gender, or residential status (Nutt & Calderon 2009; UNESCO, 2014). However, historical and recent data show evidence to the contrary when it comes to equity in completion. This is especially true when considering minority and/or underserved student populations in the US, Europe, Asia, & South America, including low-income students and first-generation college students, around the globe continue to be surpassed by their wealthy and majority counterparts in college completion across the full range of institutional types (CCA, 2019; UNESCO, 2017; U.S.DOE, 2016).

Historically, institutions have looked to utility skill sets and create FYE policy which reflects remediation and considerations which place academic adjustment and the corresponding skills as priority aims (Harvey et al., 2007). However, considerations for placing more importance on social adjustment, and the long-term impact on student success both in the US and internationally should be reconsidered in light of the ever-changing and transformed 21st century learning environment (Jia & Molone, 2014; Kerpen, 2017; Koch & Gardner, 2014; Yeager et al., 2014). In responding to demand to graduate more of its students, higher education around the globe has been tasked to ask and answer the question --what makes the biggest difference in completion for the student?

When it comes to implementing FYE policy which positively and personally impacts degree completion, prioritizing remediation of academic skills and adjustment may not be the answer (Kerpen, 2017; Koch & Gardner, 2014; & Yeager et al., 2014). Far more impactful are FYE policies that reflect intentionally designed efforts which underscore social adjustment as the priority. Implementation of FYE policy reflecting prioritization of social adjustment creates space for a learner to explore their sense of intrinsic motivation to the context of learning and in connecting with others, peer belonging, and the alignment to self-concept in relation to their identity (Jia & Molone 2014; Kerpen, 2017; UNESCO, 2017; Yeager et al., 2014). Fundamentally, a learner must feel like higher education is a place where they belong, where they are capable of doing well, where others like them have succeeded in the past, and where they can connect with others when they encounter obstacles (Yeager et al., 2014). Recently, scholars concerned with addressing the disparities incompletion in the 21st - century are beginning to realize that the script must be flipped and the FYE policies that make the biggest difference for students in the US and around the globe has everything to do with who a student connects and very little to do with what the student is learning.

More recent FYE scholarship in the US, the UK, Europe & Australia has begun to underscore sociocultural dimensions impacting completion suggesting, further, that students experience a sense of purpose, feelings of fit, and belonging within higher education contexts at varying degrees (Dorsett, 2017; Ferreyra, Avitabile, Botero, Álvarez, Paz, & Urzúa, 2017; Nutt & Calderon, 2017; & Yeager et al., 2014). The narrative of who attends college—affluent and traditionally aged students 18-20, what major they should choose –influenced by social constructions, and their perceptions of ability to academically perform in a variety of disciplines plays an impactful role in persistence to graduation (Kerpen, 2017) not just in the US, but around the globe (Dorsett, 2017; Ferreyra et al., 2017; Nutt & Calderon, 2017; Yeager et al., 2014).

International Perspectives: Strategies of Social Adjustment

In Nutt and Calderon's (2009) collection of international perspectives on the FYE, the most comprehensive publication on international FYE policy around the globe to date, Australia, Canada, England, Japan, Morocco, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Wales, & the UAE are showcased as case studies to illustrate recurring trends which prioritize social adjustment practices. Authors, here, demonstrate the impact of prioritizing social adjustment and how these practices uniquely manifest via interventions of peer support, peer learning, and peer assistance/mentorship. Interventions place special importance on social adjustment and how social adjustment can even serve as a powerful primer to academic adjustment. The analysis of individual cases around the globe is meant to offer comparative value illustrating ways social adjustment functions as a prequel to academic adjustment. Further, these illustrations serve as an additional warrant for changing how FYE policy is developed to emphasize social adjustment and ways that future research might operationalize social adjustment efforts to measure their ultimate impact on the diversity of learners' experiences within 21st century educative contexts internationally.

Australian universities are not unlike US universities in the ways that they experience obstacles to completion and in how they develop FYE policy to mitigate these obstacles. Of the biggest challenges is critical thinking and "intellectual stimulation across all learners –including those most able" (O'Shea in Nutt & Calderon's, 2009, p. 26). Critical thinking serves as a core aim in Australian FYE policy and remedies to bridge the learning divide between traditionally-aged learners, and those who are not so nontraditional in a modern learning context. Australian FYEs employ "Transition to Study" peer-led workshops to build familiarity with the campus and academic skills like critical thinking which are needed to be successful. Learners share connecting with peers and comparing feelings about starting Uni and how these influence feelings of fit, belonging, and perceived ability relative to certain disciplines (O'Shea in Nutt & Calderon's 2009, p. 29). Further, worth noting is that FYEs are critical spaces where a student beginning to unpack their perceived ability and areas of competency. They are engaged in

forecasting their plans and integrating how their academic plans align with their perceived ability across

a range of disciplinary topics. However, a student's perception of their aptitude in any domain can

outweigh their historical and actual aptitude in that performance area (Tough, 2014). This ultimately

suggests that a student's perception of their ability to do well, how they reconcile that aptitude with

peers and other individuals within the context of an FYE, can far exceed their actual ability when it

comes to long term success, and ultimately, completion. Yet, like the US, actual institutional aims in FYE

policy across 39 public Australian campuses targets academic adjustment, and the assessment of those

efforts (Koch & Garnder 2014; Nutt & Calderon 2017).

A similar noteworthy strategy was employed in Portugal and Spain where learners read

narratives from fictional first-year college students who report their own academic experiences. "In both

samples, findings confirm the program efficacy to teach efficient learning strategies and to promote self-

regulation," but, more importantly, underscore that connecting with a perceived peer and utilizing a

narrative of experience (even when that narrative is fake) functions as an essential primer and serves as

the prequel to building academic adjustment skills (Rosário, González-Pienda, Valle, Ribeiro, &

Guimarães, 2010, p. 411). Japan is another case to echo how social adjustment primes learning geared

towards academic adjustment. At Kanasai University peer-supported communities of learning were

established as a strategy to address a lack of confidence and communication skill in first-year learners.

While commination skills sets are inherently crucial to academic adjustment, they are made more

accessible, more approachable, and more possible by prioritization of social adjustment strategies.

Inherent Challenges: Social Adjustment Policy

More recently, in the US, universities are making strides to assuage completion disparities using

narrative, or success stories of other students from similar demographic backgrounds, as a strategic

intervention to enhance belonging and academic performance (Tough, 2014). However, it is not so

simple as establishing a policy of friend-making, shared narratives, and storytelling to prioritize social

adjustment within the FYE for several reasons. One of the primary reasons is that while FYEs are a key

policy characteristic across higher education internationally, they are largely optional courses, self-

selected by those who have performed well academically in the past (Ferreyra et al., 2017), who

understand their function (Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Rubin, 2019; U.S.DOE, 2016). Secondly, FYEs are

consistently being eliminated from general education university requirements as a time to completion is

being universally trimmed down to cut costs in 21st - century education (Dorsett, 2017; Ferreyra, et al.,

2017; U.S.DOE 2016). Lastly, it is essential to also reconcile the sharp gap between historically

transactional styles of learning in K-12 environments and the interactive real-time vulnerability required

to critically think interrogate, and reflect on formative aspects of social identity, experiences driven by

race, socioeconomic status, and their collective impact on self-concept and academic ability (Yeagar et

al., 2014).

     Jia and Maloney (2014), of Auckland University of Technology (AUT) note shortcomings in

evidenced-based approaches to understanding and implementing social over academic FYE policy [and

that] "…the various reasons for non-completion behavior remains elusive, it has been widely recognized

that individual characteristics, student educational backgrounds, and institutional factors are the main

determinants of these outcomes." (p. 130). The authors underscore limited availability globally across

scholarship about FYE policy and gaps in understanding which target individualized experiences and

those variables impacting social adjustment (Jia & Molone, 2014). Further, scholars here, are keen

spotlight FYE policy emphasizing social adjustment over academic adjustment may hold higher potential

to bolster completion (Jia & Molone, 2014; Kerpen, 2017; Yeager et al., 2014). But, ultimately, social

adjustment policy implementation & understandings lag behind because evidence-based explorations

are stuck in a cycle which reflects and reproduces the less elusive and simpler to operationalize

academic adjustment policies and practices.

The nuanced challenges of understanding and implementing social adjustment in FYE policy research are also compounded by what informs FYE policy and scholarship globally. While popularity grows around the globe to implement FYE policy much of these are rooted in western cultural dimensions, western practices, and a western narrative of higher education (Dorsett, 2017; Koch & Gardner, 2014). FYE policy and best practices worldwide are informed by the NRC & FYE scholarship that is localized to American students, their experiences, with predominant attention to Caucasian learners (Dorsett, 2017; Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Kinzie, 2013) and the multiplex of sociocultural issues encountered relative to this demographic (Harvey et al., 2007). Globally, scholars take issue with the inherent shortcomings in research approaches that place importance on academic adjustment over social adjustment and how that is continues to be reflected and reproduced in the wider body of scholarship concerned with FYE policy. Further, scholarship concerned with social adjustment in FYE policy notes the counter-intuitive nature of conducting research by and for students who are already outperforming their minority counterparts (Dorsett, 2017; Tough, 2014; Yeager et al., 2014).

The current FYE policy offers limited applicability to the diverse demographic reflected in the 21st - century educational landscape. But, the age of transformation and the 21st century higher education context serves as a powerful mandate and renewed imperative to explore how social adjustment and belonging impact persistence, and completion. A renewed imperative in FYE policy and practice prioritizing individualized experiences reflecting social adjustment, over the more popular academic strategies, more directly reflect the diversity of contemporary learners and could serve as a turning point in the college completion conundrum.

Ultimately, changing institutional policy to focus on aspects of social adjustment, like belonging, means changing the conversation about what is shaping attrition across the US and globally. It also means flipping the script on the classic narrative about who gets to graduate and what it means to be a college student. If higher education policy can prioritize social adjustment by carving out new spaces for

inclusive communities that celebrate the diversity reflected on their campuses in meaningful ways, then they may find that students are more able to build and translate efforts made in social adjustment more readily into academic success skillsets when they inevitably encounter challenges across their academic journey.

Author Note

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Special Issue Introduction

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I owe a tremendous amount of appreciation to Dr. Bernhard Streitwieser, who introduced me to the *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* and for encouraging me to propose a special theme to the journal and my utmost admiration to the editor-in-Chief, Dr. Rosalind Latiner Raby, for accepting the topic on the plight of refugees and supporting my role as the guest-editor through the entire process. I am beyond thrilled to see a volume in an academic journal that captures the complex experiences of refugees across the globe in which sheds lights of their complex journeys from fleeing their war-torn countries to the overall integration into their new society. Moreover, this special topic examines the educational aspect of acclimation pertaining to formal education to explain the role of educational participation as a relevant factor in refugee integration, and self-sufficiency.

What compelled me to propose this topic is derived from my own account as a refugee who escaped her birth country of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a child in 1993. Waking up one morning to the sound of my mother's favorite radio station to waking up the next morning to the sound of sirens signaling the upcoming shelling on my city. On the night my mother and I fled, I was forced to leave behind everything I had known as a child. As a refugee, I experienced multiple gaps in education while on my many-year-long journey towards a permanent relocation in the United States. My journey toward obtaining an education is an account that shines light toward reaching for the American Dream for someone who is foreign to its new country. While I was able to succeed and achieve the American Dream, not many refugees do. Refugees across the world have a history of

being cast in a negative spotlight as ones who do not participate in the wellbeing of our society. However, based on my own story and the articles shared by the authors studying refugees in the United States as well as across the globe, it is to conclude that refugees are eager to contribute, only if they are given the opportunity to effectively integrate and become self-sufficient.

The Winter 2020 Special Issue is comprised of seven articles that examine the impact of refugee resettlement policies and immigration ideologies on refugee integration and academic success of refugee students across the globe. This issue specifically maps the complex experiences of refugee students in higher education and offers theoretical as well as evidence-based implications that enable individuals with a refugee background to thrive not only academically but in all aspects of life.

Two of the articles investigate the role of gender and its impact on refugee female students. Svinjar looks at refugee women from various parts of the world and describes the multilayers obstacles that refugee women must transcend on their quest to obtain an education and the responding initiatives some programs and countries have created in order to more effectively assist these women. Obtaining an education enables women to step into a position of a positive role model for their communities as well as their host community.

The other article by Obradovic-Ratkovic, Woloshyn and Sethi specifically focus on the multilayered experiences of the being a female refugee in higher education in the capacity of a graduate student and professor. Using reflexive ethnography, researchers discovered the importance to honor female refugee graduate students' strengths, the necessity to establish safe and inclusive scholarly communities, as well as delivering social justice mentoring.

With the rapidly growing number of refugees and the unrest across the world, Peralta's article focuses on the experiences of refugee students within the United States school system, during the Trump administration. Critical Race Theory as a framework along with semi-structured interviews with refugee student participants provided detailed examples of their lives and education

experiences in their journey to the United States, portraying refugees as a promise and an asset to the US rather than a burden and a threat.

MacIsaac, Martin, Kubwayo and Wah conducted a study, focusing on the refugee-background learners experiences in the United States higher education system. The study results highlight the use of multiple capacities of refugee students to succeed in college. Authors urge for responsibility of higher education to acknowledge and defy deficit thinking that devalues learners as unable to succeed due to their background or status as a refugee.

Hoff and Shreet, highlight that only 1% of refugees pursue higher education because of various obstacles on the path to college. Hoff and Shreet's article detail the findings from a qualitative case study aimed to understand ways a competency-based college program enables access to college for refugee students, stating that refugee students benefited from the combination of flexibility of the program and the intensive in-person academic support.

Britwell, Duncan, Carson, and Chapman studied a short-term, intensive bridging program in Malaysia which aimed to help refugee youth access higher education. Survey data and interviews with students 1-3 years after they had completed the program, along with Bourdieu's theory of capital, habitus and field as the framework the results demonstrated that the program helped students to navigate ways of accessing higher education.

Duri and Ibrahim, studied The Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER), a development project seeking to build the capacity of untrained refugee teachers in the Dadaab refugee camps by delivering online and face-to-face university-level courses that can build the capacity of future leaders in their communities. Ibrahim, a Somali refugee living in the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya offers an important perspective into refugee participation in education.

No Longer Out of Reach: Blended Competency-Based College Models for Accelerating

Higher Education for Refugee Students

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Abstract

Higher education offers a pathway to gain or recuperate professional credentials, particularly after experiencing forced displacement. Yet only 1% of refugees pursue postsecondary studies due, in part, to numerous obstacles on that path to college. The purpose of this study was to understand how a competency-based college program facilitates access to college for students from refugee backgrounds. This paper details the findings from a qualitative case study with refugee-background students enrolled in a college program that combines a competency-based model with in-person support. Using the ecological model of college readiness, we found that refugee students benefited from the flexibility of the program and the intensive in-person academic support.

Keywords: refugee, competency-based education, academic coaching, college readiness

Introduction

Narratives about refugees are too often portrayed in deficit terms (Uptin et al. 2016). In contrast to these narratives, among refugees resettling in the United States, 75% had a high school education and 28% arrived with college degrees (Capps & Fix, 2015). As these numbers show, refugees are arriving with years of educational and professional experience that are unseen and undervalued within the United States. Contrary to the claims by the U.S. Department of State (n.d.) that "most refugees will

move ahead professionally" (para. 7), Batalova et al. (2008) found that they did not return to a level of employment similar to their position before displacement, likely due to barriers in pursuing educational opportunities that could facilitate professional advancements.

Higher education offers a pathway to gain or recuperate professional credentials, particularly after experiencing forced displacement. Yet globally, only 1% of forcibly displaced individuals pursue postsecondary studies (UNHCR, 2016). Students from refugee backgrounds face numerous obstacles on that path to college including informational barriers (Bajwa et al., 2017), competing priorities (Crea, 2016), and language barriers (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). The educational outcomes of refugees in the United States diminish as age of arrival increases (Evans & Fitzgerald, 2017), meaning that those who resettle as adults face even greater barriers.

Long-standing deficit-framing of refugee-background students further exacerbate inequities. Common narratives around refugees are a product of underlying assumptions about refugees as illiterate, undereducated, and helpless while fueling policies that threaten to make these assumptions self-fulfilling by restricting access to educational opportunities (Zeus, 2011). Current policies in the United States are riddled with obstacles to pursuing a postsecondary education, which research indicates is crucial to achieving the overarching goal of preparing people to rebuild their home communities (UNHCR, 2016).

There is a clear need to understand how refugees can overcome these obstacles and yet very little research has focused on facilitating pathways into higher education, specifically for refugees who resettled as adults. Although there is a great deal of research on the educational needs of refugee children (see, for example, McBrien, 2005), adults face distinctly different obstacles in pursuing an education. The purpose of this study was to understand how a competency-based college program facilitates access to college for students from refugee backgrounds.

Literature Review

An Ecological Model of College Readiness

Access to, and success in, college programs often requires a particular set of pre-established

academic experiences, skills, and dispositions acquired through years of public schooling. For students

from refugee backgrounds, their past experiences can be quite diverse. To understand the role of the

competency-based program in facilitating access to college, we drew on Arnold and colleagues' (2012)

Ecological Model of College Readiness. Arnold proposed a model of college readiness with five key

elements that influence academic preparedness: academic skills and discipline, college knowledge, self-

efficacy, aspirations, and motivation. Academic skills and discipline refer to the mastery of key core

concepts and expected ways of thinking and behaving (Conley, 2010). College knowledge is an

understanding of what college is and how it works (Conley, 2005). Self-efficacy is the belief about one's

own abilities (Bandura, 1997). Aspirations refer to a student's desire to attend college (Arnold et al.,

2012). Finally, Arnold et al. (2012) defined motivation as one's "orientation toward engaging challenges"

(p. 20). In the ecological model of college readiness, each element is vital in developing college

readiness. Rather than viewing students as having or lacking in these key elements, the model posits

that adequate resources and support could help students develop the requisite skills to be successful.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework offers an expansion to this ecological model by

providing an asset-based lens that better captures the strengths of students from non-dominant

backgrounds. Yosso (2005) outlined six forms of cultural wealth, or capital, that frame the experience of

students in accessing college. Aspirational capital refers to the hopes and dreams held by the student

and the ability to maintain and pursue those goals. Linguistic capital includes various languages and

ways of communicating. Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge shared within families and

communities. Social capitals are social networks and community resources. Navigational capital includes

the knowledge, skills, and ability needed to navigate social institutions, including educational spaces.

This perspective frames college readiness as social and cultural whereas Arnold et al. (2012) frame

readiness in terms of individualized traits.

Pursuing Higher Education After Forced Migration

Research has examined barriers to college access (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011), but there has been

minimal focus on factors that lead to persistence. Complications resulting from forced migration and

restrictive resettlement policies make refugee-background students particularly susceptible to four

common barriers to persistence: sociocultural, economic, academic, and situational (Babineau, 2018).

Similar to first-generation students, refugees are less likely to have the social and cultural capital that

can help them navigate complex new educational spaces. Economically, the cost of higher education is

high overall. For refugees, who are simultaneously rebuilding lives and careers, these financial barriers

can be overwhelming and there is minimal financial aid directly targeting refugee-background students.

Economic barriers can compound with sociocultural barriers given the complexities of financial aid.

Academically, refugee-background students must adapt to new educational systems, often while

learning a new academic language. Time in American schools can help refugee-background students

navigate academic expectations (Hoff, 2020) but refugee-background students receive minimal support

in understanding new school systems (Morrice, 2013). The situational aspects engendered by forced

migration and resettlement can also complicate access and persistence. American resettlement policies

focus on immediate employment, which restricts access to postsecondary education (Perry & Mallozzi,

2011). Like nontraditional students more broadly, refugees are more likely to be balancing work and

school.

Deficit perspectives often focus on what refugee-background students lack academically, over what they

contribute to their new communities (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Refugees have rich linguistic

repertoires that are often devalued in American schools (Morrice, 2013). By framing academic literacies

as strategic rather than purely skills-based, Hoff (2020) illustrated the agentive ways that refugee-

background students navigate new academic contexts and expectations. For students pursuing higher education, there are many factors that could influence academic success. Unfortunately, refugee-background students have received very little attention in research, policy, or practice at the college level. New and innovative approaches are needed to help address the barriers to college access and persistence.

Competency-Based Learning

In recent years, the U.S. higher education system has been navigating several challenges pertaining to rising costs, under-preparedness of graduates, deficiencies of learning assessment, and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population (Laitinen, 2012). One of the major alternative models proposed and adopted to challenge the status quo is competency-based education (CBE, alternatively mastery, proficiency, or performance-based learning) (Laitinen, 2012). CBE has gained a resurgence of interest among U.S. higher education institutions as an alternative model, particularly upon the U.S. Department of Education's (2013) approval of using direct assessment of student learning in lieu of traditional credit hour measurements while remaining eligible for accreditation and Title IV funding. The U.S. Department of Education (2013) recognized the potential of CBE programs to offer innovative pathways for quality and affordable college degrees that can flexibly accelerate students' progress to accredited degrees.

CBE programs do not follow a prescriptive model, but Gervais (2016) attempted to construct a unifying operational definition explaining that, at its foundation, CBE is "an outcome-based approach to education that incorporates modes of instructional delivery and assessment efforts designed to evaluate mastery of learning by students through their demonstration of the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors required for the degree sought" (p. 99). CBE programs untether from the standard credit-hour provisions where they bring learning expectations to a fixed level and leave time spent in education settings to become the variable (Elam, 1971). Learning outcomes are embedded in

competencies, which stands for "the capacity to perform successfully in an academic, professional, or social environment" (Cañado, 2013, p. 4). Mastery of these competencies, being a fundamental requirement of program completion, promotes deep learning, and ensures graduates' readiness to tackle future education and employment challenges (Krauss, 2017).

Several implied elements of CBE programs theoretically position them to effectively address some of the reviewed systematic challenges refugees face in higher education. The personalized pacing of these programs may be particularly beneficial to refugee students who often have more diverse educational trajectories compared to traditional university students (Castaño Muñoz et al., 2018). With a transparent focus on outcomes, these programs provide enrollment flexibility by holding students accountable for exit performance and institutions accountable for learning and career-readiness (Elam, 1971). To facilitate learning and increase the self-pacing efficacy of CBE, programs often utilize project-based modularization of outcomes with adaptive and personalized feedback loops (Elam, 1971). Students access the needed learning resources and utilize prior knowledge to progress through projects and competencies at their own pace rather than a predetermined schedule (Hernen, 2016; Yang, 2012).

Given the innovative design, programs using CBE may offer a means of removing barriers that often impede the educational advancement of students from refugee backgrounds; however, there is limited research available on the use of CBE with students from these backgrounds. Working with refugees globally, Russell and Weaver (2019) argued that online-only learning models were not sufficient for refugee populations and promoted instead, a blended model that pairs in-person support with CBE. Russell and Weaver (2019) conducted a case study from the perspective of program administration. Our goal was to build on their work by examining the perspective of refugee students in a blended CBE program.

Methodology

To understand if a competency-based model helps eliminate obstacles for refugee students, we conducted a case study (Merriam, 1998) at the Pair program (Program and participant names are pseudonyms) that combines a competency-based college program with in-person support. Students in the program are enrolled in an online CBE model while receiving in-person, wrap-around support through academic coaching and weekly group meetings. Pair also provides a low-cost option for college because students can accelerate through credits more quickly. In contrast to traditional semester-based courses, students in Pair progress through competencies by completing projects. They can edit and resubmit projects until they are considered mastered—defined as A-level work. During data collection, the program had about 340 students enrolled, many of whom identified as arriving in the U.S. as migrants; the student population was diverse.

Participants

This paper focuses on three students from a larger case study—Tommy, Danny, and Yannick. These three participants were chosen because they represented a variety of experiences including country of origin, level of education prior to displacement, and experiences in U.S. schooling (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Tommy	Danny	Yannick
Country of Origin	Iraq	Bhutan	Burkina Faso
Level of education pre-displacement	Some college	Middle school	Bachelor's Degree
Experience in US schooling	English courses	High school and community college	One semester online college program
Approximate age of arrival	Adult	Adolescent	Adult

Tommy was originally from Iraq. When he left his country, his studies at a technological institute were disrupted. He aspired to earn a college degree in the United States but was busy running his own business. At the time of the study, Tommy had been in the program for about a year and had earned an associate degree. Danny was originally from Bhutan but left as an infant and spent much of his life in Nepal. He arrived in the U.S. with his family where he completed high school and some college coursework before dropping out to work full-time in order to support his parents. Danny had been at Pair for about four months. Yannick was from Burkina Faso where he had earned a bachelor's degree. When he arrived in the U.S., his academic credentials were not recognized by local employers. After taking classes online and running into financial barriers, Yannick joined Pair. At the time of the study, he had studied at Pair for about six months.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant was interviewed twice over a two-week period using semi-structured protocols that were adapted through an iterative process as data were collected (Merriam, 1998). The first interview focused on the participant's past experiences with education and the second interview focused on the participant's experiences in the CBE program (Seidman, 2013). In addition, the participants' two academic coaches were interviewed. Interviews ranged from 35 to 85 minutes and were audio-recorded. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim by the head researcher.

Group study sessions and staff meetings were observed over the two weeks. Observations provided an opportunity to learn more about the structure of the program, the goals, and the available supports. Observations ranged between 30 minutes to three hours. Finally, each participant wrote an entry letter describing why they wanted to be in the program, and these letters were collected and coded to provide more insight into each participant's experiences before the program and motivation for pursuing a college degree.

Data were coded through a combination of inductive and deductive processes (Saldaña, 2016).

First, the interviews, letters, and field notes were coded for references to barriers to education and

support received from the program. Using constant-comparative analysis, codes were consolidated into

common themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). After identifying and defining preliminary

codes, the data were revisited using emergent coding to identify any salient themes that had been

overlooked in the first coding cycle. Once a final list of codes was determined, we read through the data

sources again applying the finalized codes.

Findings

All three participants held aspirations to complete college and expressed gratitude for the

program in providing them a dream that they had felt was out of reach. Entering into the Pair program

gave them new hope in these aspirations and they all felt supported in their academic pursuits in

numerous ways. The most common forms of support were flexibility and academic coaching. For the

illustrations below, we used verbatim quotations, omitting vocal fillers and repetitions where necessary

for clarity.

Flexibility: "It Depends on Your Time."

One of the main benefits of the program was the flexible design. Participants shared that,

before entering Pair, they had felt constricted by conflicting priorities. For Tommy, this was owning his

own business. Both Danny and Yannick were working two full-time jobs to provide for their families.

Danny had taken some college courses previously, and after dropping out, found it increasingly difficult

to return to school. As responsibilities accumulated, Danny found the idea of returning to school nearly

impossible. As expectations grew, so did the responsibilities. Danny dropped out of college more than

once in order to work multiple jobs and provide for his extended family. For example, after living in

protracted situations for more than a decade, home ownerships represented stability and permanence.

This was an important dream for his parents, so Danny took on multiple jobs. However, with

homeownership, additional bills and responsibilities accrue. For all three participants, the flexibility within the Pair design made it easier to fit school back into their lives. The online format removed a significant obstacle to college—schedules. In the absence of a traditional classroom structure, it became easier to fit school in around other priorities. Danny explained:

> When you have responsibilities, you have stress. When you have stress, you can't focus on these studies. So once that thing is taken out and divided into parts, it relieves you and give you like lightening which will focus on the studies.

The online format of the program removed a structural barrier to college and, through that, renewed aspirations of getting a college degree.

Allowing students to work within their own timeframe also increased the motivation of participants. As Tommy explained, "My job, my family, schedules, it fit this program, cause in this program you do what you can do. There are no absences, nothing, whenever you have time there is a project you can work on." The project-based rather than time-based format further increased student motivation since they could see how they work translated directly into progress in the program. Yannick explained:

> When I mastered it, I was so happy and then I came, finished, to look on this one. Even sometimes I sit down with my computer. I open this one and I go back and the first one I learn everything I did. I'm so happy about this project. I love it.

Yannick's mastery on past projects served to motivate him as he continued through subsequent units. The design of the CBE program renewed both long-term aspirations to obtain a college degree, as well as short-term motivation to engage in the challenges presented in each project.

Academic Coaching: "They Support You Every Day."

Coupled with the online component of Pair, participants also had access to academic coaches who were an essential resource for all three participants. In fact, for Danny, the coaches were what set

Pair apart from other college programs: "You know and that's the important part of [Pair], they support you." The participants particularly appreciated the availability of the head coach, who had time to work with them on projects, even at late hours. Given the individualized nature of Pair, the additional, in-person support was essential in helping the participants navigate the academic expectations of the program.

Moreover, academic coaching helped students feel more connected overall. Danny explained: "Since I am in the program, the way this program supported me, I was encouraged by the support and the care of this group. This program gave it to me." For Danny, the support offered by the coaches surpassed merely academic by also encouraging him as he progressed through the competencies. Danny entered Pair with the belief that he could not complete the program, but in nurturing his growth through both support and care, the academic coaches and peers helped him develop greater self-efficacy.

Academic coaching was particularly successful in this study because the coaching went beyond academics. Coaching involved motivation, regular check-ins, and problem-solving with classwork but also with financial aid and registration. This helped alleviate common informational barriers. A prevalent barrier was financial aid. Yannick, for example, had been caught by surprise by an overly complicated aid system that left him in debt and without a college degree for several years: "I cannot go to school. I have to pay this [bill]. I have to finish paying this one. Ok, I'm going to go work two fulltime [jobs]." In contrast, Yannick worked with an academic coach from the time he decided to enroll. This allowed him to build trust in the program but also have help navigating common financial obstacles.

The participants also had to develop new ways of understanding how college worked (college knowledge), particularly within a new cultural setting and format. The support provided by the academic coaches was essential in developing this knowledge. Participants explained that towards the beginning of the program, they often met with coaches to understand assignments and feedback. Tommy

explained: "Sometimes when you have a problem and it's not exactly what they want, you waste all the time, a lot of time. Until you meet with [the coach], or you meet with someone else to explain to you." Understanding what the expectations were in the CBE context was essential to mastering projects, and the academic coaches helped acclimate students to the new college setting.

Finally, academic coaches helped the participants develop concrete academic skills such as grammar, writing styles, and citations as well as new ways of thinking. For example, Yannick learned how to make citations with the help of a coach: "[She] helps me a lot too, for the citations, everything." Tommy also struggled with inherent expectations about ways of thinking in college. It was not always language and writing skills, but rather learning how to think and write like an academic where Tommy struggle the most: "This is our level of education, this is how we understand it. But it's not exactly what they want." Again, academic coaches served as an important bridge between what academic skills and knowledge participants had when they entered, and what they would need to succeed in the CBE program.

Discussion

Findings from this case study showed how Pair was effective as a result of both the CBE model and the in-person wrap-around support provided. This supports previous research that has shown that the CBE model works best when used in a blended model that incorporates on-site support (Russell & Weaver, 2019). The flexibility, format, and context of the program strengthened the aspirations and motivations of the participants. Overall, the academic coaches provided the support to help participants be successful in college. Academic coaches supported students in developing their academic skills and habits through grammar and writing help, but also by explaining expectations. They provided college knowledge by helping students navigate the program.

Our findings support the ecological college readiness model within a CBE blended learning context. Although the format of Pair differed in many ways from traditional college programs,

participants in our study spoke of developing in ways that aligned with the key elements of academic preparedness proposed by Arnold et al. (2012). The design of the program, in particular, the academic support paired with the CBE model, helped participants develop several of the key elements of academic readiness within the ecological model of college readiness, including college knowledge, self-efficacy, and academic skills.

Although refugee-background students are often subsumed with linguistically diverse students for research and institutional policies (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015; Kanno & Varghese, 2010), our findings highlighted intersections with other student populations, including first-generation and nontraditional. The potential barriers to persistence expressed by the participants align with those for first-generation students (see Babineau, 2018). This suggests that the obstacles the refugee-background students face in pursuit of college credentials are multifaceted. Programs, policies, and research need to treat them as such. To do otherwise would fail to support refugee-background students in the more effective forms. A key reason that Pair was successful in supporting the participants was that the support of academic coaches transcended purely academic boundaries. Group sessions built community while the academic coaches developed supporting relationships with the participants, and in doing so, promoted self-efficacy. Furthermore, the CBE format helped each participant overcome common barriers to higher education. By offering a self-paced design, the participants in this study were better able to balance competing priorities with their studies. Furthermore, the self-paced design allowed students to more quickly complete competencies where they felt most confident and to focus on areas where they needed additional skills, knowledge, or language support. Finally, academic coaching, which began alongside enrollment, provided access to the needed information in order to overcome informational barriers.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all research, this study had limitations and delimitations. First, the study was limited to a small sample both by the case study design and the relatively new application of CBE with refugee-background students in the United States. Second, there was a larger enrollment of male students in the program. This made achieving gender parity difficult. Future research should expand the sample size, particularly by examining the experiences of female students who may experience distinct external pressures. Third, the study was conducted over two weeks, which limited the amounts and types of data that could be collected. Future research should look longitudinally at the professional and economic outcomes for students.

Although this study focused on refugee-background students, the findings suggest that the obstacles faced by this population share similarities with other student populations (first-generation, nontraditional, etc.). Future research is needed to understand the potential benefits of this program structure with other student populations.

Implications and Recommendations

Refugees often rebuild their lives in the US from a position of poverty that creates additional barriers to college, such as cost and conflicting priorities (Batalova et al., 2008). To meet the needs of refugee-background students, colleges need to develop flexible programs that combine a path to a degree with a combination of online learning, in-person support, and community building. Colleges should consider implementing competency-based programs that allow students to progress at their own pace with access to the resources and supports of the college. One of the strengths of Pair was that it made online learning a personal experience. Even though the coursework was online and asynchronous, participants had to build relationships with coaches and fellow students. The academic coaches were particularly valuable to the participants because of the flexibility they offered. In addition to scheduled meetings, academic coaches would meet with students throughout the week as needed and were also

available by phone or email at any time. For academic coaching to be most effective, it needs to be available when students are.

Conclusion

Pair is effectively addressing a need for innovative reform in the traditional higher education system to better accommodate the needs of refugees who often struggle to complete their degree on time, or at all, in the typical college settings. In doing so, Pair was successful in helping refugee-background students overcome common barriers to college. When barriers can be overcome, these participants demonstrated that they could not only be successful in college but thrive. All three participants were nearing the completion of an associate's degree with their sights set on the bachelor's program.

Although earning an accredited college degree was the participants' ultimate goal of enrolling at Pair, it is worthy to note a few additional observed advantages Pair provided. The project-based nature of the program meant that the participants had some first-hand experience with real-world situations, which could effectively prepare them to navigate professional challenges and avoid uncertainties. The mastery of competencies requirement by which students are required to submit A-level work is an assurance that there is no sacrificing academic rigor or compromising learning outcomes. Also, Pair is designed to charge enrollment tuition by time in the program, not per course or credit-hour. This additional feature helps refugees leverage their motivation to graduate more efficiently, as a result, save time and resources. The students who participated in the study have all graduated with no debt—a remarkable milestone more likely to set them up for further accomplishment. The success of these students demonstrates how deficit narratives are driven by structures, not students. When given the opportunity and support, all three participants were able to flourish in their college studies and reach a goal they had long seen as out of reach.

Author Note

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Reflections on Migration, Resilience, and Graduate Education: Supporting Female Students with Refugee Backgrounds

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Abstract

Graduate studies may be challenging for refugee women who experience inequities heightened through their multiple and intersecting social identities. However, limited research is available about the experiences of female graduate students and female professors with refugee backgrounds, including the complexities of being women in higher education. Through reflexive ethnography, a process in which researchers become the foci of their scholarship and participate in the construction of their data, we identified the importance of honoring female refugee graduate students' strengths, the urgency of creating safe and inclusive scholarly communities, and the promise of providing a social justice mentoring. In the era of heightened economic and political uncertainty, global environmental crises, and the worldwide forced displacement of people, educators must adopt commitments to social justice. As institutions of higher education, universities are well-positioned to play a leadership role in supporting students with refugee backgrounds through social justice and change-oriented mentoring interventions.

Keywords: female students with refugee backgrounds, access to higher education, social justice mentoring, inclusive scholarly communities

Introduction

In 2019, the number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people around the world reached a staggering 70.8 million (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020a), with women and girls making up 50 percent of any displaced population. The displaced girls and

women who are "unaccompanied, pregnant, heads of households, disabled, and elderly are especially

vulnerable" (UNHCR 2020b, para. 2) in the process of forced migration, education, and resettlement.

Worldwide, almost 6.5 million refugees are between 19-26 years of age (Slaven, 2018). Young

adulthood is a critical time for personal, social, and professional development (Baum et al., 2013).

Alarmingly only 3 percent of displaced young adults are involved in higher education (World Economic

Forum, 2019), with females 2.5 times more likely to be displaced from school than males (UNHCR, 2020c).

This number falls far below the global rate (38 percent) of youth enrollment in higher education (UNHCR,

2019a). Completion of higher education is associated with personal autonomy, economic independence,

civic engagement, and societal advancement (Baum et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2017). Fostering higher

education goals for youth with refugee backgrounds requires a shift in perception: "Higher education is

not a luxury – it is an essential investment for today and the future (UNHCR, 2019b, p. 44).

In response to the refugee crisis, the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) highlighted the

urgency to invest in and support refugee education, especially at the tertiary level, recognizing that

displacement often suspends and/or interrupts puts refugees' education and careers (WUSC, 2016). As

displaced individuals rebuild their life upon resettlement, education opportunities are vital to equip them

with the knowledge and skills needed to gain/regain meaningful employment. Education is invaluable in

restoring hope and financial stability and enables individuals that have experienced conflict, war, and

trauma to contribute to and promote family, community, and nation's economic growth (Mendenhall et

al., 2018; WUSC, 2016).

Higher education institutions are in unique positions to provide leadership in improving and

facilitating educational access and opportunities for women with refugee backgrounds by supporting

mentoring opportunities in partnership with local, national, and international communities that strive

towards the empowerment of women (WUSC, 2016). In 2018, Canada took in 28,100 of 92,400 refugees

who were resettled in 25 countries (UNHCR, 2019a). Since 1978, WUSC has enabled more than 1,900

young refugees from 39 countries to engage in postsecondary studies, with the majority enrolling in undergraduate studies (WUSC, 2018a), leaving the potential needs and experiences of graduate students with refugee backgrounds unknown and unexplored.

Graduate-level studies are essential for ongoing knowledge production and mobilization (Ratković & Woloshyn, 2017; Rose, 2013). Graduate studies may be especially challenging for refugee women who may experience inequities heightened through the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, and refugee status (Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Spark et al., 2013). Limited information is available about the experiences of female graduate students and female professors with refugee backgrounds, including the complexities of being women in higher education (Ramsay & Baker, 2019).

Literature Review

Barriers to and Challenges in Higher Education

The large enrollment gap between students with refugee backgrounds and those without such backgrounds, partially reflects the substantial barriers that individuals with refugee background experience. Refugees report encountering "informational barriers to navigating educational pathways, accessing professional supports, evaluating credentials, financing education, navigating immigration systems, using online resources, delaying their educational progress, and contributing to mental health distress" (Baywa et al., 2017, p. 56). These barriers can be broadly divided into 1) accessing higher education; 2) navigating higher education institutions, and 3) managing non-academic challenges.

Accessing Postsecondary Education

Many individuals with refugee backgrounds are denied access to higher education due to the lack of academic transcripts and other identity documents that are no longer accessible or lost during displacement. Additional challenges include difficulty with accessing applications and completing admission requirements such as lack of funds and lack of language skills required for engagement in higher education institutions within the host country. Western educational institutes often demonstrate

inflexibility in accommodating individuals who have experienced conflict and trauma, in part, by failing to recognize the human and social capital that refugees obtained in their country of origin (WUSC, 2016; UNHCR, 2019b).

Navigating Higher Education Institutions

Individuals who gain admission into higher education often experience additional challenges including lack of support services geared towards students with refugee backgrounds; difficulty in adapting to Western style of lectures, teaching, and academic expectations (Loo, 2017); and lack of financial support (Bajwa et al., 2017; Giles, 2018). In many cases, students with refugee backgrounds are required to repeat courses, and in some instances, entire programs of study as host universities do not provide them with credits for education obtained in their country of origin (WUSC, 2016) or adequate support systems while engaged in academic programs (Ernest et al., 2010).

Managing Non-Academic Challenges

Students from refugee backgrounds are also likely to experience multiple non-academic challenges that could inhibit their learning, such as acculturation challenges, separation from family members, discrimination, social exclusion, mental health challenges, and language barriers as well as informational barriers to accessing professional supports, navigating immigration systems, using online resources, and smoothing their educational progress (Bajwa et al., 2017; Lincoln et al., 2016). To this end, there are increasing calls for higher education institutions to provide supports and culturally informed services (WUSC, 2016).

Collectively, these barriers and challenges may be even greater for women with refugee backgrounds who are often subject to subordination, domestic abuse, and sexual and gender-based violence premigration. These experiences, in turn, make them vulnerable to physical, emotional, and psychological challenges post-migration (Forced Migration Research Network, 2017). Upon resettlement, women have complex needs (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Mangrio et al, 2019) that need to be taken into

consideration to foster their academic goals. According to UNHCR (2019), "the social and economic barriers that hold girls back at every stage are also a reality at the level of higher education and demand extra efforts if they are to be overcome" (UNHCR, 2019b, p. 44).

Mentoring Women in Higher Education

Student-professor mentoring and peer-to-peer mentoring for women with refugee backgrounds has the potential to create a sense of safety and belonging that may help them navigate and succeed in higher education. An effective way to support women's education from conservative communities (as is some cultures women are not permitted to be taught by men) is to be intentional in bridging the gender gap in enrollment concerning both students and instructors in postsecondary education (UNHCR, 2019b). Parents from some cultures are more likely to enroll female children in postsecondary education if they are taught by female professors. Considering the past traumas experienced by many women from refugee backgrounds, female students are likely to be receptive to being mentored by female professors and peers (UNHCR, 2019b).

Unfortunately, finding women mentors in higher education may be challenging. Despite the ongoing implementation of legislation, policies, and practices intended to promote equity, and despite considered advancement in the profession, women remain disproportionately underrepresented and underpaid among the professoriate ranks across many Western and North American countries including Canada. At the same time, more women tend to hold sessional and contract positions than their male colleagues, leaving them vulnerable to unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment. These inequities are especially pronounced for racialized and Indigenous women (CAUT, 2018), and collectively result in academia being a male-dominated and male-privileged environment for many women, refugees, immigrants and other marginalized individuals (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Perry & Mallozzi, 2016; Ramsay & Baker, 2019).

Female students and scholars often struggle to cope with tensions between their private and professional lives, especially in relation to balancing their family, home, and academic workloads (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). For instance, many women report navigating competing feelings of guilt associated with the beliefs that they need to work as much as possible within the institution to progress in their studies or keep their part-time positions, as well as assume primary roles as caregivers (child and/or elder-care), contribute to family income, and support partner employment (Fritsch, 2015; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2009). These challenges may be especially prevalent among female refugee, immigrant, and second-generation students and early career scholars who often must navigate high expectations for academic success (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2015). For example, in a recent study of Syrian refugee women enrolled in an Ontario university, Ghadban (2018) found that while all participants were committed to university education, they experienced social and emotional difficulties, discrimination, and "an unwelcoming community and cultural tensions resulting in stress and anxiety" (p. 68). This paper focuses on the experiences of women with migration backgrounds, who have forged the way into academia through safe and inclusive scholarly communities.

Creating Safe and Inclusive Scholarly Communities

While considered attention has been given to creating, sustaining, and promoting safe and inclusive elementary and secondary school classrooms for all learners, including students with refugee backgrounds (e.g., Chayder, 2019 in Denmark; Doyran, 2019 in Turkey; Fouskas, 2019 in Greece; Government of Republic of Serbia, 2019 in Serbia; Li et al., 2017; Ratković et al., 2017 in Canada), less attention has been focused on creating safe and inclusive communities within higher education. Students with refugee background are now increasingly moving into higher education. Of the limited work completed within this sector, most of scholarship has been directed in supporting the experiences of refugee students completing their first degrees (e.g., Naidoo et al., 2018). For instance, Wong and Yohani (2016) document the importance of membership in on-campus and off-campus support groups for

undergraduate students who enter Canadian universities directly from refugee camps. In Australia, researchers have explored undergraduate student challenges, needs, and aspirations (e.g., Naidoo et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2017); student levels of motivation and instructor support (e.g., Hirano, 2014); and the importance of agency, resilience, autonomy, and community support (e.g., Gateley, 2015). However, limited studies have explored ways in which to support and enhance the experiences of graduate-level students from refugee backgrounds. Graduate-level studies differ from undergraduate programming in several critical ways including the minimization of course work and in-class experiences with counter increases in independent learning and scholarship, faculty and peer mentorship, collegial relationships, and engagement in scholarly communities (Ratković & Woloshyn, 2017; Teeuwsen et al., 2012). In context of these pedagogical and learning differences, we argue that building supportive and inclusive communities beyond the classroom is imperative for success within graduate-level education.

Terry et al., (2016) call for a comprehensive analysis of refugee student experiences within the higher education sector in terms of location, gender, and community. Responding to this call, we engage with the literature in the field and our personal and professional narratives of migration, education, and scholarship. Researchers have further identified academic, self-advocacy, social-emotional connectedness (Fedynich et al., 2016), mentoring (Hu et al., 2008; Protivnak & Foss, 2009), caring relationships, academic accommodations, on-campus resources, and inclusive and safe classrooms (Woloshyn et al., 2019) as driving forces of graduate student success and well-being for individuals without refugee backgrounds. In this paper, we argue that these positive and supportive relationships, places, and spaces are equally as important when working with graduate-level students with refugee backgrounds. Furthermore, we argue that these forces can be enhanced by moving from classroom engagement to community building. Using a reflexive ethnography design, we participate in the collaborative exploration of how our individual critical transformative experiences have worked to shape our beliefs and practices as postsecondary educators. The following research question shapes the study

described here: How can the lived educational experiences of refugee, immigrant, and second-generation professors provide insights about supporting female graduate students from refugee backgrounds?

Method

We are three female instructors with refugee (Snežana), immigrant (Bharati), and second-generation immigrant (Vera) backgrounds. We explore our personal and pedagogical narratives of migration and resilience as they relate to learning, teaching, and mentoring in graduate education. With backgrounds in education (Snežana, Vera) and the helping professions (Vera, Bharati), we adopt a transdisciplinary pedagogical approach to explore how we may support learning and socialization of female graduate students with refugee backgrounds. We also acknowledge our individual experiences of privilege and/or marginalization. For instance, while Bharati has experienced multiple intersecting oppressions as an immigrant woman and scholar of colour, Vera and Snežana recognize their privileged position of being European-Canadian women. We are all aware that the complexity of our location in a "white capitalist patriarchy" (Deliovsky, 2010, p. 3) and academia must be understood through the intersections of class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and immigrant status.

Following the principles of reflexive ethnography, we first examined our experiences, beliefs, and cultural identities using semi-structured reflective processes to share and deconstruct our individual and familial experiences as displaced persons and scholars (Enfield & Stasz, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Defined as neither fully methodology or rhetoric, reflexive ethnography is a process in which researchers become the foci of their scholarship and participate in the construction of their data (Enfield & Stasz, 2011). With a focus on autoethnography and the examination of our experiences and identities as scholars as cultural phenomena, we acknowledge the reciprocal ways in which our research affects our contexts and sense of selves (Ellis, 2004, 2011). Through the process of reflective analysis, we generated personal and collective insights into the context and processes of our evolving experiences as refugee,

immigrant, and second-generation scholars. While we adhered to autoethnographic, reflexive processes, we did not strictly produce full narrative, ethnographic, and/or autobiographical products.

We believe that through the process of personal and collective inquiry, we come to offer important understandings and insights for supporting the aspirations of female graduate students with refugee backgrounds in higher education. By sharing critical and transformative instances, we identify the importance of honoring female refugee graduate students' gifts, talents, and strengths as related to their dreams for higher education and professional identity. We discuss creating safe and inclusive spaces for supporting the women's learning needs and desires. We acknowledge an unwavering belief in female graduate students' abilities and capacities, their knowledge and skills, and the urgencies for creating relevant and meaningful opportunities for their professional growth and academic success.

Reflections and Discussion

The Collaborative Research Center (Snežana and Vera)

We recognize that our memberships in inclusive communities were particularly formative and critical in shaping our knowledge, skills, and identities as female graduate students, instructors, and scholars. One of such community was a collaborative research center. The center was developed and managed by a diverse group of female faculty, staff, and students who differed in seniority, rank, and geo-political and socio-cultural backgrounds but were united in their commitment to supporting and mentoring each other as scholars and women within academia (Richards et al., 2001).

Membership in the collaborative research center also provided additional opportunities to engage in divergent research projects. Snežana's entry into the Canadian higher education context was marked by her participation in one such longitudinal research project. Engagement in the collaborative center and associated projects increased her sense of competence and scholarly identity. For instance, members of the center worked collaboratively to support each other's scholarly writing and production activities. Open invitations were extended to engage in research and publishing activities, with authorship

negotiated and shared across projects. For Snežana, these opportunities translated into critical vita-building opportunities, research skill development, and Canadian work experiences. Much of this work involved paid employment. These experiences differ from the more common, and less viable, voluntary and other unpaid positions available to students with refugee backgrounds (e.g., Murray, et al, 2014), promoting Snežana's sense of autonomy and her sense of belonging in the center, academia, and Canadian society.

> I am a refugee woman, a high school science teacher, a poet, and a migration scholar from the former Yugoslavia who immigrated to Ontario, Canada in 1998 after the war in the country. I arrived in Canada with my husband and two sons (four and 10 years old), leaving behind my family and all my social and professional networks. I did not speak English. My teaching credentials and work experiences were dismissed. I started my employment in Ontario cleaning motel rooms, delivering newspapers, and selling coffee and donuts. Remembering my roots, my parents' endless love for education, and my passion for teaching and lifelong learning, I enrolled in an Intensive English Language program in the fall of 1999, and then in a Bachelor of Science in Biotechnology program in 2000. These studies led to a research assistant position in a Faculty of Education.

> Those who I worked with during my research assistantships encouraged me to apply to the Master of Education degree program at the university. Given that I had started my master's degree in biochemistry back home, this felt a natural progression for me, and it was a way to preserve my connection with the teaching profession. Since my mark average was reduced [from 86 percent] to 70 percent, my application to the master's program was rejected. My knowledges were rendered as subjugated knowledges; "hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity" (Foucault, 2003, p. 7). Two colleagues from

our research team, however, found this rejection unjust and wrote recommendation letters for me. I subsequently was accepted into the graduate program. (Ratković, 2011, p. 200).

As a refugee woman, I recognize the importance of believing in talents, capacities, and resilience of female graduate students with refugee backgrounds. I embrace asset-based pedagogies and recognition theory principles (Honneth, 1995) in my teaching practice. As I moved from exile in 1998 to academia in 2000, I remained deeply indebted to my mentors, and I pay their support forward. I honor my students' pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences, knowledges, and identities. I supervise and mentor refugee, immigrant, and international students who are interested in migration issues or fail to find a supervisor, building a community of love, rights, and solidarity.

Snežana's refugee journey interrupted her life and professional identity. At her arrival in Canada, educational authorities in Ontario dismissed Snežana's teaching credentials and work experiences. She started her Canadian work experience as a chambermaid in an Ontario motel. In this context of deskilling, resume and vita-building opportunities within the collaborative research center were vital for Snežana's professional and personal growth. She felt that the center provided a safe forum for members to openly share their scholarship without fear of negative critique, evaluation, or judgment. In these ways, the center worked to honor all members' areas of expertise, skills, gifts, and talents, mentoring each other and building a community of love (emotional recognition), rights (legal recognition), and solidarity (shared values) (Honneth, 1995). Love, rights, and solidarity constitute the social conditions under which humans can develop self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, becoming autonomous and goal-oriented beings. Honneth (1995) emphasizes the importance of these three forms of recognition in building symmetrical (rather than hierarchical) esteem between individuals:

To esteem one another symmetrically means to view one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis. Relationships of this sort

can be said to be cases of "solidarity," because they inspire not just passive tolerance but felt concern for what is individual and particular about the other person. For only to the degree to which I actively care about the development of the other's characteristics (which seem foreign to me) can our shared goals be realized. (p. 129)

Mirroring Honneth's (1995) active care about the development of the other's characteristics, Snežana's center colleagues and research team members assisted her in obtaining, initially denied, access to graduate education while demonstrating the need for, and the value of, asset-based, flexible, and caring approaches to refugee student education. For students with refugee backgrounds, education is not only an academic journey but also a bridge to social and professional integration in the host society (e.g., Gordon, 2018). Moreover, "investing in the education of the highly talented and driven migrants and refugees can boost development and economic growth not only in host countries but also countries of origin" (UNESCO, 2019, p. 7). Only by a social group collective attempt to establish symmetrical esteem communities and reciprocal recognition within these communities, such as the collaborative research center described above, educators and scholars can shape institutional policies and practices and initiate "the normatively directional change of societies" (Honneth, 1995, p. 93), shifting the field of higher education towards solidarity, social justice, and equity.

Vera was provided with a unique opportunity to participate in a collaborative research center early in her scholarly career. Finding such an accepting space and place was especially important for Vera as a child of refugee parents whose early academic journey included multiple experiences of social-cultural and linguistic tensions and challenges.

I am an only child of older parents (now deceased) who immigrated to Canada from Europe after World War II as young adults. Like many other trauma survivors whose lives interrupted by war and political unrest, they engaged in protective closed-family behaviors, viewed the outside world

with caution, and perceived education as a vehicle for autonomy, safety, and a better future (Goodman, 2013; Stewart, 2012).

As a child and young adult, I was keenly aware that our family's behaviors differed from those of the dominant culture. My working parents' heavy accents were deemed problematic and seemingly well-intentioned educators deterred them from speaking their first languages and abandoning their cultural practices in order to preserve my potential for academic success. In these and other ways, I was acculturated to consider my cultural heritage as unsophisticated and crude, promoting feelings of stress, shame, and isolation (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2014).

As a young adult, I was left largely to my own devices to navigate and resolve social-cultural uncertainties and linguistic challenges that marked entry into the highly coveted realm of higher education. Like other first- and second-generation university students, I experienced performance anxiety accentuated with feelings of guilt (financial and other) (Bell & Santamaría, 2018). These feelings remained familiar companions throughout my graduate studies despite the presence of sympathetic and supportive mentors and peers, who while empathetic, had family experiences that were markedly different from my own.

These tensions and doubts remained as I accepted a faculty position in an unfamiliar institution. Through good fortune, I was embraced by other female colleagues who were committed to challenging institutional norms that often worked to marginalize women and other minorities through the creation of an inclusive, safe, and inviting space that promoted, supported, and encouraged diversity in scholarship. In this space and place, I could openly share my concerns about my abilities to succeed academically and unabashedly present my emerging scholarship for constructive feedback. I could lament about the competing demands associated with caring for a young family (and eventually aging parents) without fear of negative appraisals or repercussions.

I found strength in the courage of others, insights and inspiration in their experiences and successes, and comfort in the shared experience of being female scholars.

Refugee, immigrant, and second-generation students and scholars often face linguistic and socio-cultural barriers within higher education (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Perry & Mallozzi, 2016; Ramsay & Baker, 2019). Limited or restricted opportunities to engage in extended scholarly activities are especially detrimental to refugees, as well as first- and second-generation immigrant graduate students who typically enter the competitive North American job market without the benefits of extensive social networks or relevant prior experience. The professional experiences and credentials of refugees are often unrecognized, challenged, and even discredited within host countries (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2018; Ratković, 2011, 2013). Even when professional experiences and credentials are recognized, expectations for field-related work experiences within the host country serve as additional barriers to the attainment of meaningful employment (Colakoglu et al., 2018). Moreover, female immigrants are more likely to face unemployment or underemployment than male immigrants (Al Ariss, 2010; van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012).

Many North American scholars hold deficit-based beliefs about refugee, immigrant, and second-generation students' English-language and research-related capacities (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). These concerns, in turn, transfer into a general reluctance to mentor, supervise, and/or hire these individuals due to concerns related to time and effort to support their writing and scholarly contributions. Recognizing this reluctance, and building on our personal experiences and insights, we have embraced an asset-based, recognition approach to teaching and mentoring graduate students, especially those with refugee backgrounds. As insiders/outsiders to our graduate students' experiences, we nurture and model trust in our students' pre-migration knowledge, skills, and capacities by encouraging them to build their academic work on their migrant, cross-cultural experiences, knowledges, and aspirations. Moreover, we are committed to offering additional support and resources to students including multiple reviews of

course papers, frequent consultations, and research and scholarly opportunities (e.g., research assistantship, conference participation, and publication).

Social Justice Mentoring (Bharati)

My story is the story of a girl from a faraway land - India. It is a story of patriarchy. It is a story of violence. It is the story of trauma and survival. I am grateful to Canada for protecting me in her womb. Sadly, I also experienced multiple intersecting oppressions from those who could not bear to see my racialized immigrant body occupy space as an academic. And "when bodies take up spaces they are not intended to inhabit, something other than historical reproduction can happen, new and different literacies are performed and lived" (Hughes, 2016, p. 132).

Similar to Snežana and Vera, when I look back at my academic journey, I feel gratitude to the mentors along the way. Their torch of supportive mentoring helped me navigate through different socio-political power structures all through my undergraduate and graduate degrees and later to fulfill my tenured requirements. While my experiences in the academy have largely been positive, as a racialized immigrant woman in a predominantly white institution, I have also experienced racism, microaggressions, and othering from administration, faculty, and students. My experiences of marginalization are not unique. Racialized faculty and students routinely face structural barriers to career advancement (Childs & Johnson, 2018; Taskforce on Anti-Racism at Ryerson, 2010).

My lived experiences of oppressions have created within me an acute awareness of social justice issues that affect vulnerable populations and have sharpened my insights about the lives of immigrants and refugees, especially women. I use my lived experiences in India and Canada to further the cause of equity, diversity, and inclusion. In the past five years, I have had the opportunity to address diversity and inclusion at an Ontario college at the departmental level, campus level, and the larger community.

As a member of College's Equity and Diversity committees, I have observed that there has been a current push for post-secondary institutes to indigenize their institutions by diversifying their faculty and student body (Coburn, 2018). However, research from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT, 2018) suggests that universities are falling behind these expectations; postsecondary institutions are not representative of the increasingly culturally and racially diverse Canadian society. Due to their complex socio-economic/political context, education integration of students from refugee backgrounds require supports beyond access to quality education to ensure that their environment is safe and welcoming and that the students feel valued (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

A social justice mentoring lens that "emphasizes equal access to resources, dissolution of power hierarchies, and the empowerment and promotion of wellness among marginalized populations" (Albright et al., 2017, p. 364) would be effective in mentoring underrepresented students in the academy. Studies on mentoring suggest that social justice training is important for mentors to support mentees from a different cultural background "to facilitate the development of sociopolitical awareness, cultural sensitivity, and self-efficacy for race equity" (Anderson et al. 2017, p. 1104). Such training should include the mentor reflecting on self-biases, ideologies, and privileges, the role of systemic and structural factors in mentee's lives (such as power, oppression, inequality, and various isms) and discussions on race equity (Anderson et al. 2017).

In my teaching, research, and mentoring I focus on culture as fluid (rather than static), engage in self-reflection as a life-long learner, recognize and challenge the power imbalances that exist between a mentor-mentee relationship, and understand that individual and institutional accountability is necessary to create change at the individual, structural, and institutional level (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). While there were no formal or structured mentoring programs as I navigated my doctoral journey, the most inspirational support

that my mentor, a racialized woman with a refugee background, provided was a safe and engaging space that built trust between us. Her one-to-one informal mentoring was instrumental in enhancing my research efficacy, self-esteem, and independence, building leadership skills and promoting social connectedness. Her ongoing mentoring has positively influenced my career trajectory (Beech et al., 2013). Having a mentor who has similar racialized and gendered experiences can make the postsecondary experience easier for new students and can motivate them to complete their education and move on to graduate studies (Calabrese & Zoledziowski, 2018). Nevertheless, as a junior faculty, I have found it arduous to bear the emotional labor of supporting racialized students and addressing diversity issues in the academy. My mentor's fatigued body slumped on a chair at 7 p.m. with piles of papers on her desk that needed attention flashes before my eyes whenever another racialized student who is not even part of my department emails me for support.

It is my firm belief that mentoring is vital for enhancing the academic efficacy and

confidence of students. A unique role that I have recently assumed straddles both teaching and community service. In partnership with a community-based employment agency, I have created opportunities to mentor Internationally Trained Professionals and involved them in research projects, conference presentations, and grant applications.

Chan (2018) highlights the following mentor characteristics for nurturing trust within cross-cultural mentoring relationships: "listening, maintaining excellent communication, having a holistic understanding of the protégé, self-disclosing, using humor, being willing to discuss race and culture, acknowledging mistakes, and behaving with integrity" (p. 4). Racialized professors carry the extra load of mentoring other racialized students and addressing issues of race and racism due to the lack of racially representative faculty (Zoledziowski, 2018). Studies have documented the importance of institutional responsibility to develop formal mentoring programs that assign relationships (e.g., student-faculty and

junior faculty-senior faculty) and have "goals, schedules, training (for mentors and mentees) and evaluation" (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 876). Without formal mentoring programs, the informal mentoring of faculty and students can be viewed by the institution and other faculty as a distraction from teaching, publishing, and committee work. Beech et al. (2013) make a poignant statement: "Ultimately, these programs also affect the academic institutions (organizational level) because mentoring influences faculty satisfaction and retention" (p. 4).

Paying it Forward

For us, membership in collaborative centers and projects provided opportunities to obtain Canadian education, find meaningful employment within academia, and engage in vita- enhancing activities and experiences, which in turn, supported our career opportunities. Engagement in these inclusive and collaborative endeavors provided informal opportunities for the sharing of personal and professional struggles, coping strategies, and successes. These initiatives provided spaces in which to share our complex narratives including our often competing familial, financial, social, and emotional roles and responsibilities as shaped through our experiences and identities as scholars, mothers, partners, and caregivers. As part of these discussions, we gained invaluable knowledge about available resources within the institution and community-at-large. These experiences opened opportunities for increased networking and socialization furthering a broader sense of belonging within the community and host country.

The impacts of membership in these safe and inclusive collaborative communities in which we experienced unconditional regard and acceptance as competent individuals, scholars, and researchers have extended into our daily work as scholars, instructors, and graduate student supervisors within the institution. We are committed to our engagements in labor intensive, time-consuming, and rewarding (formal and informal) mentorship that afford academic coaching, skill training, and language support while facilitating students' sense of agency and socialization into academia and Canada. We recognize the

need to humanize our relationship with students by sharing our professional and personal struggles, coping strategies, and successes to create rapport, reciprocity, and community.

We have learned that safety, inclusion, and community building must extend beyond the classroom into institutional, local, national, and international settings and communities. This shift can be achieved by engaging female graduate students with refugee backgrounds and their supervisors and mentors in university research centers, university-wide initiatives, community-based local research and development projects, and national and international academic, scholarly, and professional initiatives. In this context, willingness to engage with female refugee graduate students over time, and on a regular basis, is critical. Such engagement may include formal mentoring programs where institutions can pair new students with their peers who have progressed further in their studies. Students can be paired with faculty and peers to help them navigate the university and Canadian culture. Similarly, new faculty can be teamed with experienced colleagues to provide peer support, guidance, and practice knowledge that will help mentees navigate the challenges of their new environment (Beech et al., 2013). To avoid the danger of viewing the informal (and formal) mentoring of faculty and students as a distraction from teaching, research, and service, creative mentoring approaches and processes—based on love, rights, and solidarity—must be developed and promoted. The development of safe and inclusive spaces can break traditional patterns of isolation and competition that are typical within higher education and that may be detrimental to the experiences of female graduate students and scholars with refugee backgrounds.

Our stories of higher education are intricately connected to our narratives about resettlement (Ghadban, 2018) and integration within Canadian social, political, and economic context. Snežana progressed from being a graduate student and research assistant to becoming a research officer, an instructor, and a scholar. Bharati achieved promotion and is a tenured professor. Vera continued with her progression through the ranks. We have gained considerable experiences as instructors, graduate student supervisors, and scholars.

In the era of heightened economic and political uncertainty, global environmental crises, and the worldwide forced displacement of people, we believe that there is an urgency to adopt local, national, and global commitments to social justice. As institutions of higher learning, universities are well-positioned to play a nurturing role in shining a torch to light the education path for students with refugee backgrounds through social justice and change-oriented mentoring interventions (Albright et al., 2017).

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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

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 (Kiwan, 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?

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

Jonathan Birtwell (University of Cambridge) – Jonathan is a PhD student exploring access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds in Malaysia. His current research employs theories about learner identity to understand how students develop aspirations for higher education in protracted refugee contexts and the impact this has on their learning trajectories. Prior to his PhD he worked as a teacher then Academic Coordinator at a refugee learning centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and was involved with the planning and design of the first CERTE Bridge Course in 2016. His research

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Refugee Women and the Integration into a New Society through Education

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Abstract

This paper addresses various impediments and obstacles that refugee girls must surpass to obtain an education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. It analyzes a variety of examples from across the world in order to portray the difficulties girls in these situations face on their quest to obtain higher education, and the responding initiatives certain programs and countries have implemented in order to better assist these women. This paper will further showcase how, worldwide, refugee girls and women are significantly disadvantaged in terms of access to education as shown by lower enrollment rates, and the statistical evidence indicating higher likelihoods to drop out. Nevertheless, this paper will address why, when presented with such statistics and probabilities, the women who overcome such adversity will become stronger-willed and resilient individuals whose capabilities and strengths can lead them to higher levels of success in life.

Keywords: refugee, women, international, education

Introduction

Picture a five-year-old refugee child sitting among her new classmates at a new school, in a new country, not understanding the language being spoken around her, reflecting on the hardships she has already witnessed at such a young age. Imagine the new world presented to her that she must try to comprehend moving forward. Unless one has personally experienced such obstacles, it is hard to imagine the daunting thoughts encapsulating this child's mind in those unfamiliar moments.

Now, imagine that very child decades later if she continues on the path towards obtaining a higher education. At this point, it is assumed that the woman has integrated herself into the culture of her new home country following decades and numerous opportunities for assimilation. Furthermore, it is also assumed that by this point, this woman's character has undergone tremendous growth, given her personal history, experiences endured, and obstacles overcome in those preceding decades. Depending on the circumstances presented in the female refugee's pathway to obtaining a higher education, the impediments in her path inevitably encountered will also present a priceless sensation that will benefit her for years to come: pride. In fact, women who exhibit pride in themselves, their education, and their work product give themselves the opportunities to propel themselves forward by incorporating their training and education to "understand their rights and develop more self-confidence" (Survivors, Protectors, 2011, p. 7). It is this very assertion that evidences that refugee women who obtain a higher education benefit not only themselves, but society as well.

This paper will examine refugee girls' paths in obtaining an education. Rather than assessing from an empirical perspective, this paper will consider various sources in the context of a public policy perspective. Considerations will be given in comparing statistics from numerous countries, examining the reasons refugee girls generally trail behind in obtaining an education, and further reviewing the overall impacts education has on refugee women as a whole.

Part I- The Numbers Speak for Themselves: Refugee Girls are Inherently Disadvantaged in Terms of Obtaining an Education when Compared with Their Male Counterparts

To understand the foregoing conclusions set forth in the introduction, one must understand the history relating to refugee children's education. Refugee children not only have to endure the challenges that come with assimilating into a new culture, language barriers, fiscally and mentally draining situations within their families, but they also face harrowing statistics that many would argue work against them. For instance, "only 61 percent of refugee children have access to primary education, compared to an

international average of 91 per cent. At secondary level, 23 percent of refugee adolescents go to school, compared to 84 percent globally" (United Nations, 2018, para. 15).

However, these statistics are even more troubling when discussing refugee girls' educations. In fact, "for refugee girls, it is even tougher to find – and keep – a place in the classroom. As they get older, refugee girls face more marginalization and the gender gap in secondary schools grows wider" (United Nations, 2018, para. 3). Furthermore, girls are much more likely to be significantly disadvantaged than boys not only when it comes to school enrollment, but also due to their higher likelihood to drop out after enrollment. Thus, "boys and men have a far greater chance of resuming their education once it has been interrupted by forced displacement than girls and women do, especially at the tertiary level" (Anderson, 2017, para. 4).

Why the disparity when comparing the two? Numerous considerations contribute to the gap between refugee boys and girls when it comes to their educations. Examples include economic obstacles facing families, and quite often, undervalued considerations for gender, with girls' challenges consistently being ignored or deemed an afterthought worldwide. This generally occurs due to the societal and cultural norms within various societies where a girl's place is believed to be in the home, rather than in a school. A larger problem contributing to the gap discussed is that many girls and women also encounter unsafe and unsupportive environments where they are more likely to be harassed or attacked. Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's 2018 Report showed that "girls and women were targets of attacks in educational settings or schools because of their gender in at least 18 of the 28 countries profiled" (Global Coalition, 2018, p. 28).

In considering the foregoing alarming statistics, one must assess the impact this has on refugee girls moving forward.

Part I(a): The Statistics, Explained

The impact that forced migration has on women and girls is quite blatant. In situations where a war breaks out and families are forced to flock to nearby countries for safety, aspirations for a bright future and of a higher education can appear rather bleak. In an interview conducted in the "CoHe Academic Heritage Project" a Syrian woman, resettled in Turkey and currently studying at Istanbul University, reflected upon her experiences, stating the following: "I had a wonderful life before the war broke out in my country. I was studying English literature at university. I got married in my first year. Then the war broke out; when that happened, our lives were ruined. I had to leave my family, my loved ones, my school and move out from my country, my homeland" (Komsuoğlu, 2019, para. 8). Nevertheless, this woman overcame the foregoing hurdles and is currently enrolled at a university and continuing with her education. Unfortunately, more often than not, experiences such as hers are rare.

Such an example is evident with the humanitarian and refugee crisis recently arising out of Syria. In Syria alone, 5.6 million people have fled the country since the official beginning of the Syrian War in March of 2011 (Syria Refugee, n.d.). Along with displacement, Syrian children, particularly young girls, are consequentially facing other challenges including, but not limited to, sexual violence, child labor, and child marriage. According to a 2014 Save the Children Report, forced marriage among young Syrian refugee girls in Jordan doubled since the beginning of the Syrian War (Harvey, 2014). In Lebanon, 41% of young displaced Syrian women were married before 18 (Malala Fund, n.d.).

Many countries are working to assist refugees from the Syrian crisis with obtaining a legal status by utilizing means such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, or through individualized Memorandums of Understanding with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereafter referred to as the "UNHCR"). The 1951 Refugee Convention is a multilateral treaty that not only sets forth the definition of a refugee, still utilized to this day, but also sets forth the rights of refugees and the responsibilities of host countries.

In looking at the countries that Syrian refugees migrated to and the statistics therein, Turkey is one statistic that provides an obvious example of the stark distinctions between the genders, as it relates to education. In Turkey alone, 65% of Syrian men are pursuing a bachelor' degree, compared to only 35% of Syrian women (Hohberger, 2018, p.16). In other countries, such as Lebanon, Syrian refugee women face similar fates.

This begs the question of how countries and organizations can overcome such dire statistics and assist refugee girls and women with their educations moving forward.

Part II: Overcoming the Statistics and Obstacles: The Path to Obtaining Higher Educations

The key is getting started. In enrolling the girls into school, the consequences forming thereafter are undeniable. In fact, according to the World Bank, "if all girls completed primary education then child marriage would fall by 14 percent, while finishing secondary education would see that figure fall by a massive 64 percent. Research shows that educated mothers are more likely to send their children – especially girls – to school, and that one additional year of education can boost a woman's earnings by up to a fifth" (United Nations, 2018, para. 7).

The problem is addressing how to go about getting started. While numerous countries and international organizations and agencies worldwide have taken steps to address the problems relating to refugee education, particularly, refugee girls' education, few country governments have taken steps toward remedying the existing problems evident today. This leaves the burden on specific organizations to attempt to discern the problems relating to the refugee educational crisis. As evidenced by their 2019 pledge, the UNHCR "pledged to help expand secondary education to at least one million refugees. Nongovernmental organizations such as the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, Education International, and Jesuit Refugee Service have also pledged support for secondary education" (Small, 2020, para. 5). However, these organizations cannot go it alone without assistance and cooperation from host governments.

In addition, problems lie with the educational programs themselves as it relates to assisting the refugee children with the overall transition. The disconnect with host country education systems and incoming refugee students arises from a limited understanding as it relates to the needs of refugee students, particularly female refugees (Education Integration, n.d.). Without the mutual cooperation and assistance of governments of countries hosting refugees, and associated agencies and departments, little can be effectuated.

Solutions can be implemented to assist refugee children with self-sufficiency as it pertains to their educational journeys. For example, a "cultural understanding when interpreting/evaluating transcripts is needed to institute better testing that will result in more accurate and appropriate placement" (Education Integration, n.d., para. 8). Better communication between local governments and schools, implementing guidance counseling to assist with the overall transition, and educating refugee families along with the children are all tactful approaches to help with refugee resettlement, and education transitions for refugee children, especially for refugee girls.

When such coordination is implemented and systems are effectuated that can home in on assisting refugee girls with their educations, both society and the girl reap the benefits.

Part III: Refugee Women's Higher Educations Improve Society and Consequently, Help the Women Themselves

Historically and statistically speaking, refugees have positively impacted the new countries they settle in by contributing "billions of dollars each year to the economy through consumer spending and business start-ups, resulting in a net positive fiscal impact", revitalizing otherwise dwindling areas into vibrant areas, nationwide, and benefiting the economy through the workforce (Immigrants as, 2018, para. 2). This is particularly prudent to reflect upon, especially when it comes to refugee women and the lessons and work ethics they bring with them.

Numerous sources show that "highly-educated female refugees have the potential to become leaders and role models both in their home and host communities. Furthermore, the key role of educated women in raising children is also undeniable" (Komsuoğlu, 2019, para. 3). Educated women are far more likely to send their children to school, advocate for the success of their children, and understand the significance a degree has nowadays, as well as the doors that very degree can open for their children.

In addition, the social benefits bestowed upon refugee girls who obtain an education are undeniable. According to a 2018 publication done by the World Bank, "universal secondary education for girls could increase the ability of women to engage in altruistic behaviours, and their ability to rely on friends when in need. It could also increase their ability to assess institutions and services" (Missed Opportunities, 2018, para. 9). Providing a young girl access to education early on inevitably benefits her in the social realm by allowing her to discover her interpersonal skills when interacting with peers and allowing her to develop a sense of identity around children who may or may not be like her. For example, a refugee girl that enters a classroom with other children, both refugees and non-refugees alike will immediately benefit from the diverse atmosphere she has entered into by learning about, and from, children that may or may not be like her. Even if the refugee girl is placed into a classroom with solely other refugee children, that particular child will still benefit from the social interactions in being around children who have similar backgrounds, but undeniably, different individual experiences.

However, aside from the social benefits discussed above, other benefits are also reaped when refugee girls obtain educations. Going to school provides a routine for these girls, and it provides "normality, purpose, and time away from the pressures and burdens of refugee life – important for all girls and boys but in some cases especially so for girls, who are vulnerable to exploitation and to sexual and gender-based violence" (Grandi, n.d., para. 9). In this perspective, school provides a solace for these girls, and a getaway from the troubles they, and their families, may be experiencing in assimilating and leaving their countries. Furthermore, not only does education present an opportunity to forget their past

and present troubles, if only for a moment, but it also "enables refugees, particularly women and girls, to gain the knowledge and skills that would allow them to engage in public spaces and paid employment, and thus to enhance their equality and independence" (El Jack, 2010, p. 23). When women who are generally accustomed to being deemed inferior to men are educated, they gain a sense of independence that they otherwise would not have had. This not only presents a feeling of individualism, but it serves as a motivating factor to the women in continuing their personal journey onward, with or without the assistance of a man.

In addition to the social benefits education provides, health and physical benefits are also reaped. A 2016 UNHCR education report emphasized such benefits even further, stating that education allows refugee children the ability to learn about "basic health care and hygiene, citizenship, human rights and where, how and from whom to get help. From the first lessons through to university, education helps refugees stand on their own feet, allowing them to prepare for the future, whether that is in a host country or in their own country upon their return" (United Nations, 2016, para. 10).

Delving even further in considering the health implications forced migration has on both girls and women, numerous sources have discussed the long-term impacts resettlement has on females. In particular, girls' and women's reproductive systems can be especially impacted due to the lack of health services available to these females (Johnson, 2011). If girls were enrolled in education systems from an earlier age, not only would they have a larger perception to some of the above-mentioned issues, but they would indisputably have access to more resources that could assist them during such distressing experiences.

The values discussed above are those that will be promptly reaped once the girl is enrolled in school. However, one must also consider the long-term benefits and impact an education will have on a refugee girl years later when she becomes an established woman that has long since assimilated into her host country.

Part III(a): Growing Up and Growing Out

Refugee women who have obtained higher educations in their host countries arguably have faced more adversity and overcome more challenges than many of their counterparts. As a result, not only are they able to take pride in the obstacles they have overcome to date, but they can take pride in the individual they have become as a result of the hardships they encountered.

Unfortunately, recent statistics evidence that those who obtain a college education appear to be the slim minority. According to a UNHCR Education Report conducted in 2016, "[t]o reach university education level, a young refugee has to overcome significant barriers and only one in 100 makes it. By comparison, just over one-third of young people of university age around the world are in tertiary education" (Aiming Higher, 2016, para. 1). In other words, non-refugees have 33 times more of a likelihood to obtain a higher education than their refugee peers. This gap is further widened when considering the likelihood that a refugee woman obtains a college degree. Nevertheless, in homing in on the women who do obtain a higher education, the results speak for themselves. These women are more confident, prideful, and resilient. They can appreciate their experiences, understand the value of their educations, and resonate with other refugees as a whole.

Take for example a 2018 article published in the Salt Lake Tribune which speaks of refugee women from various countries (including Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Kuwait, Somalia, India, Congo, and the Central African Republic) and their successes as refugees in the US (hereafter referred to as the "Salt Lake Article"). The Salt Lake Article discusses how each of the women being honored at the award ceremony were celebrated for individual accomplishments, including finishing high school and learning English. In turn, the women who completed their education flourished and remained persistent.

One such honoree, a 21-year-old at the awards ceremony had fled Sudan with her family. She came to the US, completed high school, currently takes classes at the local community college, works at a nursing home and aspires to become a dentist (Stack, 2018). Of course, the girls and women discussed in

this article also spoke of bearing witness to their families' struggles in their new country and the hardships and persistence they witnessed, which may factor into such motivations and success stories. Nevertheless, the education and training they received inevitably attributed to their success stories to date, and their successes that are to come. The aforementioned ceremony, established and organized by Women of the World, an organization dedicated to providing support and education to refugee women and their families, hosts such events every December, where they pay homage to refugee women within their communities and their individual paths to self-resilience (Developing Community, 2019). The examples they provided of the women being recognized, in relevant part, highlight the stories of such women:

- Ana- a young woman beginning college in 2020, dedicated to finding a career to helping others. In the meantime, she helps take care of her siblings.

- Kurdet- a woman who completed medical school in Turkey, fled her country, relocated to the US and passed three medical exams to obtain her license in Utah. Kurdet is heavily involved with her community in her new home of Utah.

- Luma- a woman from Iraq with a computer science degree who has focused on learning English to prepare for entry into college. She currently works as a teacher and is the caretaker for her young children.

- Mwamini- a young girl applying for scholarships to allow her the opportunity to go to college. Not only has she persistently worked on her English, but her past successes include starting an African American Association at her school and obtaining good grades in school (Developing Community, 2019).

The examples listed above show an unquestionable correlation to education and success. Each of the women identified has either obtained a level of high school education or higher, is actively pursuing a college degree, or has completed a form of graduate school. In the interim, they are focused on outside successes and productivity as well. They are concurrently raising their families, being involved in the

communities, and serving as inspirational sources for others who may have parallel stories and backgrounds. Not only have they showcased their resiliency through their accomplishments, but their pride in such resiliency is heartfelt when reading about their past successes, and their intended goals as well.

On the other hand, one must also consider the repercussions of not enrolling refugee women and girls in educational institutes in their new countries. As touched upon in the Salt Lake Article, the countries that many of the women hail from have a culture in which the woman is tasked with the job of being a nurturer, for both her husband and children. These women seldom, if at all, are able to leave the home without their husbands or another male companion. As a result, many of the women in these countries are not as educated as the men and accordingly, are not able to prosper in ways they otherwise would if they were formally educated. Interestingly, the Salt Lake Article also touches upon another intriguing facet that many fail to consider when discussing refugee women and their plight in obtaining a formal education. The Salt Lake Article brings up the point that if these women are forced to stay at home, not only are they isolated and disconnected from their new culture and language, but they are having to rely on their children, and the English the children are learning in their schools in order to get by (Stack, 2018).

Given the aforementioned examples, it is obvious that female refugees who are provided access to higher education can improve their lives, their family's overall wellbeing, and their surroundings and communities. In the future, they may even be able to assist their homelands and the people still residing there through outreach efforts.

Part IV: Conclusion

In sum, refugee girls and women who obtain higher levels of education reap immeasurable benefits from doing so. Additionally, they take pride in their journey and the individuals they have become because of said journey. This, in turn, benefits the women themselves, their communities, their host countries, and younger generations who can look to such women as sources of inspiration.

Author Note

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Stopped Listening: Experiences of Higher Education Refugee-Background Learners

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Abstract

This paper discusses the academic agency of refugee-background learners who have resettled to the United States of America and the responsibility of higher education to recognize and contest deficit thinking that devalues learners as unable to succeed due to their refugee background. This study explored how refugee-background learners' experiences demonstrate their multiple capacities to succeed in higher education. The research question was: what are refugee-background learners' lived experiences of U.S. higher education? The essence of these experiences is presented using self-reflexive collaborative speaking and writing inquiry. Three main themes drawn from the results are the capacities of refugee-background learners to adapt cultures, maintain multiple social connections, and exercise agency.

Keywords: refugee-background learners, academic agency, deficit thinking, higher education, first-person narratives

Introduction

"Once they hear my accent, they stop listening to what I have to say," is an experience familiar to refugee-background learners navigating challenging situations in higher education in the United States. This paper discusses access to and participation in higher education, specifically highlighting the academic agency of refugee-background learners who have resettled to the United States, and the responsibility of faculty to value refugee-background learners as both knowledge creators and academic researchers. This paper collaboratively draws upon the co-authors' varied relationships with higher education as refugee-background learners and/or educators. These retrospective accounts are catalysts to advocate for learners based on the theories of education and hope (Freire, 1968/1993; Vygotsky, 1978). The research question was: what are refugee-background learners' lived experiences of U.S. higher education? The purpose of this study was to contribute to the discourse on the advancement of higher education for refugee-background learners.

There has been very little research on the experiences of refugee-background learners in U.S. higher education (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2012; Felix, 2016; He et al., 2017; Shapiro, 2018). Researchers have identified the need for qualitative studies to understand the lived experiences of these learners as whole persons (Ferede, 2010; Sekalala, 2016; Student et al., 2017). Sekalala (2016) and Student et al. (2017) further advocate that refugee-background researchers conduct this research using first-person reflexive methods. Our research aligns with this gap. This article draws on firsthand experiences, links them to contemporary research, and articulates potential future actions to support meaningful participation in higher education by refugee-background learners living in the United States.

We situate our experiential research within three areas of published knowledge. The first area is the historic and contemporary global contexts for refugees. The second is literature leading to the development of the concept of academic agency. The third is the centuries-long history of deficit thinking within education. In turn, each of these will be explained in order to understand the lens

through which we view the firsthand lived experiences of U.S. higher education by refugee-background learners.

Historic and Contemporary Context

Each decade since the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950 has witnessed a staggering increase in the percentage of the global population who are persons of concern (UNHCR, 2018). These are individuals forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of violence, conflict, or persecution, including refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. At the end of 2018, the total population of persons of concern was 74.79 million, representing one in every 108 people globally (UNHCR, 2020). As USA for UNHCR (2020a) reported, "new displacement remains very high. One person becomes displaced every 2 seconds – less than the time it takes to read this sentence" (para. 3).

Currently, four out of every five refugees, totalling 25.9 million, live in temporary solutions in neighbouring host countries (UNHCR, 2019, p. 2). The three types of durable solutions for refugees are voluntary repatriation to their home country, local integration into the host country, and resettlement to a third country. Resettlement of refugees to third countries is the least likely option as the total population of resettled refugees in 2018 was only 92,400 (UNHCR, 2019, p. 3). For decades, the United States resettled more refugees annually than any other country (USA for UNHCR, 2020b) and between 1980 and 2017 resettled more refugees each year than the rest of the resettlement countries combined (Radford & Connor, 2019, para. 5). In 2018, the United States fell behind Canada as the top resettlement country (UNHCR, 2019, p. 32). Planning to resettle a maximum of 18,000 refugees in 2020, the United States set a limit to admit the "lowest number of refugees by the US in a single year since 1980, when Congress created the nation's refugee resettlement program" (Krogstad, 2019, para. 1). Our research focuses on the experiences of higher education learners who were refugees and have resettled in the United States.

Academic Agency

The term *academic agency* has been a phrase used but not defined in the literature (Matusov et al., 2016). The co-authors constructed a definition using the sociological definition of agency and applying it to an individual's choice to participate in academia as learner, educator, research subject, or researcher. The work of Trowler is often cited in discussions on agency in higher education. In 2011, Trowler wrote the following:

> Agency certainly is not supreme, individuals and groups are not free to decide their own futures and to 'construct' the world around them through the meanings they place on it. Clearly there are constraining forces, resource issues and forces which channel practices and meaning in particular directions while closing off other possibilities (p. 36).

The history of agency is intertwined with its relationship to structure. Reacting to this, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) articulated the independent concept of human agency as a "temporally embedded process of social engagement" (p. 963) and sought to distinguish it from concepts of structure. The co-authors define academic agency as one's capacity to freely set and pursue academic goals. Exercising one's academic agency may mean embracing intentional defiance. It is not uncommon for refugee-background learners to receive academic counseling advice to lower their expectations (Griffin 2018; Liou 2016). Intentional defiance helps one make sense of an academic path based on internal fortitude, aiming higher than what is expected.

Deficit Thinking

An educational system reflects its broader socio-economic and political milieu (Carr & Hartnett, 1996). Paulo Freire (1968/1993) wrote of the imbalance of power and oppression in education. One form of oppression in education is deficit thinking, which marginalizes learners based on the race or class of their families of origin (Ladson-Billing, 2006; Valencia, 1997, 2010). This marginalization assumes that a learner's socio-economic context is inadequate to support learning rather than evaluating the

failings of the educational system. Deficit thinking leads educators to set low expectations based on assumptions about the learners' motivation, ability, or family support (Liou, 2016; Milner, 2010). These actions are often unintentional, yet they create a significant social impact on individuals and society (He et al., 2017; Jimenez-Castellanos & Gonzalez, 2012). Researchers have identified the need to study deficit thinking applied to refugee-background learners (Hannah, 1999; Keddie, 2012; Student et al., 2017).

Valencia (2010) identified the racially discriminatory evolution of deficit thinking throughout the history of U.S. education as changing with the "intellectual and scholarly climate of the times" (p. 7). "Racialized opportunity structures lead to racialized academic achievement patterns" (p. 3). Research on refugee-background learners, in turn, has emphasized impediments to successfully navigating higher education (Felix, 2016; Feuerherm & Ramanathan, 2015; Sheikh et al., 2019).

This study elicited testimonies of refugee-background learners being advised to set low academic goals. These examples are provided to raise awareness (1) by those employed in the educational system to identify and reduce their deficit thinking practices and (2) by current and prospective learners to recognize and reject advice based on deficit thinking. The co-authors aim to contribute to a critical understanding of this multilayered problem.

In summary, this paper examines the contemporary experiences of refugee-background learners in U.S. higher education as it may impact being students, teaching assistants, research assistants, researchers, educators, co-authors, and authors. Education is often framed as a delivery of a service or product, and not as an opportunity for educators and learners to co-create new knowledge. Through co-creation, education can be reframed to be *with* students, rather than *for* students (Liou, 2016; Martin et al., 2018). Refugee-background learners are more likely to be subjects, not authors, of studies (Martin et al., 2018; Pittaway et al., 2010). When asked to participate in research, individuals with a refugee-background are often asked to *represent* a specific demographic. Individuals need not have their

academic pursuits defined by their identity. While there has been exciting research highlighting identity and amplifying marginalized voices to counter pseudoscience objectivist academic writing (Davies, 2012), this paper presents a different stance. The co-authors have varying rapports with higher education of refugee-background learners. Rather than continuing to constrain individuals to speak only of their individual experiences, the co-authors collaborated as co-creators, taking shared agency for this endeavour. This approach invited individuals to fully own the experience of communicating their ideas as co-creators, rather than as research-subject interviewees.

Methodology

Paradigm

The starting point for this research was the critical subjectivity of collaborative self-reflexive co-authorship. Our axiological position valued the authenticity of the various perspectives of the co-authors, while acknowledging the intrinsic restrictive biases. We adopted "a dialogic interactive process where research team members discuss, reflect on, and interpret their findings" (Acosta et al., 2015, p. 414). Student, Kendall, and Day employed a similar approach in their 2017 study, documenting the importance and rarity of collaborative first-person research in refugee higher education studies. They posited the strength of this method to contest dominant discourses about refugee-background learners (p. 585).

Participants

Co-authors were selectively invited to participate. They were all known professionally to one of the co-authors and were invited to collaborate because of experience as or with refugee-background learners. The focus of the research was collectively internal to the varied experiences of the co-authors regarding studying and teaching in higher education; academic research; and multilingualism. We partnered as co-researchers to deepen our knowledge of the research problem. Using collaborative speaking and writing inquiry (Speedy & Wyatt, 2014), we aimed to contribute to the complex

understandings of this phenomenon and the positive development of academic agency of refugee-background learners.

Data Collection

Data collection employed both spoken and written textual critical reflections by the co-authors. We met via a synchronous video-conferencing environment and captured reflections through audio-recording and written notes. These were transcribed and combined. Asynchronously, we set the priorities for further exploration of the topics. In the next phase, we engaged in a series of deeper reflective writings, composed individually with the collaborative guidance from one or more co-authors. These writings formed research observations from which major themes were inductively drawn. The essences of these experiences were written into cohesive narratives and collaboratively edited by all co-authors in an iterative process. As there is "no single convenient narrative of what it means to be a refugee in higher education" (Morrice, 2013, p. 654), we present multiple narratives.

Quality

Quality is illuminated through the research design choices and warrants consideration when interpreting the findings. A delimiter was that all but one of the co-authors are persons of color who taught or studied in the predominantly White U.S. city of Portland, Oregon that has "perfected neoliberal racism" (Semuels, 2016, para. 6); therefore, these testimonials do not reflect all educational experiences across the United States. Another delimiter was the choice of first-person reflections as data. Their narrowness in scope strengthened the validity of this study, as reflections can "raise consciousness and thus provoke political action to remedy problems of oppressed peoples" (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 325). The researchers' subjectivity was central to this research and the collaborative critical analyses added to the methodological integrity of this study.

Internally, the strength of analysis was predicated on interrogation of the data "that is done collectively and cooperatively within a team of researchers" (Acosta et al., 2015, p. 414). We followed a

research process that "deliberately and explicitly emphasizes collaboration at every point" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 16). Externally, we endeavoured to understand our research choices and to articulate them transparently to a wider public. Reason (2006) argued that this was fundamental to the free and open discourse of qualitative research (p. 190).

Ethics

There have been risks in publishing on this topic (Bowen, 2014; Hannah, 1999; Morrice, 2013). Student et al. (2017) described the imperative of researchers to balance the "desire to tell the 'whole story' with ethical concern for others who may not want their story to be told" (p. 587). The very act of publishing these stories could endanger not only refugee-background learners, but also their family members across the world. For these reasons, the testimonies were aggregated. To increase readability of our text, we have employed the use of italic block quotes to indicate first-person reflections from one or more co-authors without further citation to indicate the source. The co-authors' reasons to publish are explained below:

> *In refugee camps, we were taught to respect our elders and teachers. We were taught to be kind and support one another during hard times. We were taught to be positive and hope that one day things would be better. In the camp, I remembered being taught how to develop relationships and skills to survive.*
>
> *When I came to the United States, I built relationships with my teachers to get help with my studies. I watched my parents nurture a few friendships that ended up becoming like family. In return, these few friends have helped us tremendously. I am so thankful for everyone that helped me along the way. The main goal is to give back to the community. Our research is an act of giving back to various communities of support.*

The co-authors discussed whose story this is to tell. While our research developed, contemporary coverage of refugee stories was prevalent throughout social, popular, and journalistic

media. The journalist Rifaie Tammas (2019) wrote about being interviewed about U.S. airstrikes in Syria, a topic closely related to his PhD research. He was humiliated when the TV news segment featured him for only "a few seconds, half in tears and conspicuously traumatised while mentioning the loss of [his] brother and father. The clip then continued with a white Australian observer who gave his 'objective' and scholarly analysis of the situation" (para. 3). Tammas reflected that this exemplified how refugee stories were often reduced to serve an oversimplified implicit narrative logic as "objects or vehicles of inspiration and sympathy" (para. 7). Tammas encouraged researchers to explore "the challenges of young people adapting to a completely new education system" (para. 10). Our research purposefully serves this need while respecting the agency of the co-authors with refugee backgrounds to determine how and when to share their stories. Collectively, we present what we recognize and define as valued knowledge, with the aim of contributing to the readers' understanding of the complex personhood of refugee-background learners.

Findings

Three themes drawn from the results exemplify the unique relationship that refugee-background learners have with contemporary U.S. higher education. The first theme describes adapting to different cultures, with two sub-themes on being a refugee and resettling to the United States. The second theme explores maintaining multiple social connections, with four sub-themes on community, family, school, and extracurricular connections. The third theme speaks to refugee-background learners exercising agency, with three sub-themes on pursuing excellence, role modeling, and academic agency. Together, these provide insights into this phenomenon.

Adapting Cultures

Understanding the impact of past experiences of individuals with a refugee background is essential to developing an informed practice to work with them along their academic journey. The first sub-theme focuses on being a refugee; the second, on resettling to the United States.

I wish that people knew how hard it is to be a refugee. It doesn't matter who you were. Once you are a refugee, you start from scratch. You become jobless, houseless, friendless, countryless.... Just imagine losing everything you had. The hardest thing is that your education is most likely not acceptable, especially if you learned it in another language. Hard to believe! Imagine the stress, in addition to the trauma, that they carry on.

Being a refugee is never a choice. Many refugees live in camps. Refugees new to a camp often expect to return to their country within a couple of months. Yet, the UNHCR (2017) reported at the end of 2016 that two thirds of persons of concern were displaced for more than five years, 4.1 million for more than 20 years, and 2 million for more than 30 years (p. 22). Both refugees and humanitarian organizations have framed refugee camps as temporary solutions despite the reality of protracted displacement.

The living conditions in refugee camps are horrible. Our houses were made out of bamboo and leaves. Every year, during the rainy season, I watched houses be swept away in the flood, and often the school was destroyed as well. I had to walk to school for miles every single day even during the rainy season. It was very dangerous and risky to walk through the camp during the rainy reason. Being a refugee means relying on the UN to bring you food that was often not enough. Often, adults and children would have to go days without having anything to eat. There were no jobs in the camp that can help support families.

With long-term encampment, refugee identities change, as refugees often feel trapped, isolated, and forgotten (Martin, 2018). Critical despair settles in, as they perceive having no control of their lives (Martin, 2018). Many refugees find themselves in long-term encampment with no end in sight.

For many years, refugees have rated the United States as their intended resettlement destination (Blizzard & Batalova, 2019). Accepting refugees and other immigrants has changed the demography of the United States and, in turn, the conceptions of what it means to be an American (Tsai

et al., 2002, p. 258). Ethnic diversity has contributed to the preference to seek refuge in the United

States.

> *To a refugee, this country was the beacon of hope. I was too afraid of having this hope. Moving*
>
> *to the United States was a blessing. At first, I was shocked by the diversity of this country. Before*
>
> *moving here, I had lived around only people who looked like me. It was very interesting to walk*
>
> *into an American classroom that had so many different races. I was surprised but also loved it*
>
> *because I knew that I could learn a lot from others who weren't the same as me.*

Cultural diversity arises from the presence of differences. These can ignite various forms of

culture shock for refugee-background learners (Felix, 2016). Multicultural identities develop as the

refugees navigate from what they know and are, to a place of unknown.

> *Being a refugee means that I had to constantly adjust my identity, within a refugee camp, and*
>
> *again when resettling to the United States. Everything here was so different from the refugee*
>
> *camp that I had a hard time adjusting to it. For example, in my own country, we lived in an open*
>
> *society with my immediate family members and close neighbors taking care for each other. We*
>
> *had to adjust to living in the United States where we hardly knew our neighbors.*

Culture-clashes can negatively impact refugee-background learners' self-concept development (Shapiro,

2018, p. 3).

> *We try hard to fit in and put our struggles behind us. For many, the word refugee marks feeling*
>
> *defeated, lesser, or mistaken for terrorists. Refugee background learners come from different*
>
> *walks of life. Some are treated similar to their American peers, while others are completely left*
>
> *behind ignoring their intelligence. In school, we hated to be placed in a different category from*
>
> *other students. When asked to "represent" a group, we agree that we cannot speak for a whole*
>
> *community. Some of us are afraid of what others think about our accents. Most of the time it is*

> *because when we speak, all students in the classroom turn their attention to us. They stare at us*
>
> *with the "I'm sorry face."*

In educational settings, refugee-background learners have often been tasked with representing their community or all refugees. Outside formal education, these learners represent their parents and family in dealing with housing, work, medical, school, or legal matters. Together, these responsibilities can lead to untenable situations for learning, if learners are not recognized beyond being a refugee.

> *I believe every human being desires to not be seen as a stranger. I know this was and still is a big*
>
> *challenge for me. My accent, the way I act and live, and even the food I like makes me different.*
>
> *The United States is a safe haven for many refugees. Becoming a U.S. citizen gives one a place to*
>
> *call home.*

Many children of refugees tutor their parents in preparing for the U.S. citizenship test. Becoming a U.S. citizen is a significant step away from the status of refugee. This requires renouncing prior citizenship (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1952, para. 1). While not dual-citizens, refugee-background individuals develop multicultural identities, torn between cultures, often not identifying with any single culture.

Maintaining Social Connection

The collision of cultures between U.S. culture and one's culture of origin can be seen through the multiple social connections of refugee-background learners. This theme has four sub-themes addressing community, family, school, and extracurricular connections. The magnitude of these multiple commitments differentiates these learners from their school peers.

> *As a college student I was seen as a prominent member of the community; therefore, many*
>
> *people would rely on me to make sense of their legal matters.*

The personal obligations of refugee-background learners extend to their old and new communities (Sheikh et al., 2019). Bonds are strong to loved ones left behind in their country of origin or

the refugee camp. The learners often contribute financially to friends and relatives in their old and new communities. Members in a learner's new community might request help with a visa, booking a ticket to their home country, or legal matters. Refugee-background learners might be asked to advise on finding resources to deal with tragedies, such as mistreatment in the workplace, sexual assault, or death of a community member.

> *When we moved to the United States, none of my family spoke English. I see highly educated refugees emotionally struggle working entry-level jobs, because their overseas education and skills are not recognized or they have poor English skills. I knew that I had to learn English because my parents were depending on me. My siblings and I knew that it was our responsibility to take care of our parents, and we would never forget the sacrifices that they made to bring us to this country.*

> *I had more chores than my classmates. I cooked, cleaned, and took care of my three younger siblings. I was taught these since the age of 5 in the refugee camp. While working in paid and volunteer employment and pursuing my higher education, I managed family responsibilities, such as translating parent's medical appointments and mail, filling out applications, signing rental agreements, and helping with citizenship tests and application. I was distracted from my studies, worrying about how bills were being paid at home and thinking about giving up on college.*

The pressure of multiple responsibilities differentiates refugee-background learners from other higher education learners in the United States. Oznobishin and Kurman (2016) studied immigrant family obligations and noted the shift in instrumental and emotional roles, language and culture brokering, and perceived unfairness.

The third sub-theme, school, can be a cultural bridge or barrier (Sheikh et al., 2019). Language acquisition is pivotal to these processes (Browder, 2018). Success or failure in formal education parallels

the struggles in bridging multiple cultures. Failure can have poignant consequences, as one co-author reflected, "some kids end up in street life using drugs to alleviate the stressful school life that they could not handle."

Refugee-background parents can have unrealistic expectations of the higher education curriculum taught to their children. One result can be a parent defaulting knowledge acquisition to the child, even where queries are not the area of study of the child. One co-author reported frequently being asked in disbelief by a parent, "Didn't you learn this in college?" Another barrier may develop due to a difference in acculturation between parents and children. Parents can have an idealized conception of school as a safe haven, yet one co-author reflected feeling, "always behind, bullied by classmates, the need to shorten first names to make it easier for teachers, or not being understood because of accent." For some co-authors, enrollment in separate English as a Second Language classes fueled their desire to excel in English in order to be moved into classes with the regular learners. To a refugee-background learner with many non-academic responsibilities, the curriculum being taught can, at times, feel irrelevant.

Education is seen as a vehicle for social mobility, adding pressure on refugee-background learners to succeed (Li, 2018). Learners with extensive obligations of school, family, and work may see extra-curricular activities as leisure they cannot afford.

> *I wanted to go to college. But I wanted to go to college just like other boys in my varsity soccer team. I wanted to fit in, live in dorms, wear shorts in the fall, be just a college student full time, and be treated the same as everyone else.*

Hirano's (2018) research highlighted the importance of extracurricular activities to refugee-background learners' persistence in higher education by fostering a sense of belonging. Considering the intensive multiple responsibilities of these learners, many limit their choices to extracurricular activities that relate to their career paths. One co-author described this as feeling like "having missed out on being a

teen, who was just having fun and hanging out." Another co-author viewed extracurricular activities as a time to "try things out and dream."

Exercising Agency

> *In Swahili, they say, "njaa ufundisha kula." That translates as "when hungry you would know how to eat." This can mean that if you have struggled, you will look for a way to overcome it. This is how I see refugees. They have struggled enough. Failure is okay, because it demonstrates having tried. Refugees have gone through a lot of failure in their lives. Refugees learn from it and work hard to sustain their families. Losing everything as a refugee means starting from scratch. Since we don't have much to lose, we aren't afraid to reach for the stars.*

Refugee-background learners have rich histories of learning from struggles to inform action. The third theme has three sub-themes: pursuing excellence, role modeling, and academic agency. Sometimes the goal for a refugee-background learner is to continue educational studies that were interrupted by displacement. Sometimes it is to fulfill their parents' dream for them to be college educated in the United States. Other times it is to honor the sacrifices made by their families and give back to the community (Hannah, 1999) by being the best they can be. Higher education learning can be informed by the refugee struggle for survival.

> *We were told previous degree credits would not transfer; don't apply to university, try college instead; college was for other kids; college is too difficult; quit school and work to support the family.*

> *As a refugee, sometimes it's easy to give into being disregarded by the society, when people we respect such as counselors, teachers, or family friends undervalue our ability to perform and achieve. For me, I stopped listening. I wholeheartedly believed that I could handle college, and I wanted to be a top student. I believed setting the bar high for myself was going to*

bring winning results either way. I graduated as a valedictorian from my high school and got

over $50,000 in scholarships for a full ride at Portland State University.

Hannah's (1999) study similarly documented that the encouragement refugee-background learners received was negatively correlated to the prestige and popularity of the higher education institution (p. 159), meaning the more prestigious the institution, the less encouragement the institution gave.

Discussion

Central Contributions

The testimonies in this article serve two goals. One is for prospective learners to see themselves reflected in these stories and to recognize the strength and transferable skills of refugee-background learners to excel in American higher education. The other goal is to encourage educators to confront deficit thinking by undertaking a deep introspection; to incorporate multicultural responsive practices in their instruction, curriculum, and research; and to co-create spaces that allow learners to share on their own terms. Educators can co-develop academic spaces for refugee-background mentorship and advising (Hirano, 2018).

My parents are my heroes and my role models in life but when it comes to education, I had

nobody. My parents never had the opportunity to finish their schooling, so they didn't really

understand my struggles. I had to work extremely hard for every achievement. There is nothing

in life that I got for free, and that taught me a great lesson.

Since coming to the United States, I finished high school and two university degrees and

never had a teacher or professor from my background. I wonder what my experience could have

been if I had a professor who looked like me.

Without educational role models, successful learners have needed to adopt effective help-seeking behaviours. Self-advocacy was identified as a positive influence on the success of refugee-background learners in U.S. higher education (Felix, 2016, pp. 156-157). Locating responsibility for academic success

and failure as an individual, not institutional responsibility, can lead to higher education institutions blaming refuge-background learners for their academic setbacks (Keddie, 2012; Student et al., 2017).

Forcibly displaced individuals have experienced a lack of agency in accessing security, food, water, housing, education, employment, friends, family, their language, their culture, and their country. Deficit thinking applied to refugee-background learners further restricts their agency. We posit that refugee-background learners bring to the academy strengths and knowledge that differ from other U.S. learners.

> *I am always amazed by the problem solving that happens in the daily life of a refugee in a protracted context. I believe that resettled refugees often bring ingenuity and innovation with them in order to thrive, learn, and make a better situation for their family.*

The substance of each refugee's story differs. The types of transferable knowledge that stem from their survival often focus on conservation and collectivism, valuing elders' knowledge and community knowledge. These are innovative, realistic, and action-oriented. Resettled refugees are hardworking staff, resourceful managers, and inspired leaders. They exhibit perseverance and self-starting behaviors to overcome challenging circumstances.

Contemporary Milieu

Curriculum and instruction geared towards White normative values may exclude refugee-background learners. One co-author recounted an example of having no relationship to a university English assignment to write personally about events of September 11, 2001, due to not living in the United States at the time. An inability to fit into Whitewashed education can be perceived as performance or disciplinary problems. Felix (2016) identified that being a refugee-background learner "does shape navigation of the postsecondary environment" (p. 164). By partnering with refugee-background learners and their communities to understand the context of their lived experiences, education programs can be more culturally responsive, sensitive, and relevant.

In 2020, the gerund adulting continued to increase in use to mean youth doing mundane life tasks that adults usually do, in an era when youth were criticized for not being responsible (Fry, 2019). Refugee-background youth living in the United States take on responsibilities for their family, friends, and communities that exceed mundane adulting. After learning English, they transition between their cultures of origin and U.S. culture. They help their parents to study for citizenship tests, negotiate legal and medical communications, move to new states for better work, and buy homes. They are resilient, self-starting, self-advocating, multilingual, financially responsible individuals. Contrary to the deficit thinking that learners are unable to succeed due to their refugee background, we view their experiences as demonstrations of multiple capacities precisely suited to higher education.

Methodological Integrity

The rigor of this qualitative study is in the collaborative iterative analysis shared between the co-authors. The thick descriptions were intended to contribute to the critical discourse on U.S. higher education for refugee-background learners. The chosen method was appropriate for exploring the phenomenon by moving "beyond what is already known about the experiences of refugee students engaged in higher education" (Student et al., 2017, pp. 599-600). Our chosen methodology meant "giving authorial voice to marginalized and muted subjects. It has the potential to provide unique insider perspectives into structures and relationships that both oppress and empower them" (Student et al., 2017, pp. 584-585).

Conclusion: Knowledge is Spoken in Many Accents

I wish people would focus less on my accent and more on the knowledge that I have and want to share.

Keddie's (2012) research warned of the problematic impact of deficit thinking as the "re-inscription of disadvantage" of refugee-background learners (p. 1298). We acknowledge that refugees are a heterogeneous group with a multitude of demographics, experiences, and capacities that exceed

the scope of a single article. The findings of this study are intended to challenge deficit thinking about refugee-background learners in U.S. higher education, in order to recognize the learners' capacity to freely set and pursue academic goals.

Future Research

As academic agency includes the decision whether or not to participate in academic pursuits, future research is warranted into the lived experiences of refugee-background individuals who did not pursue higher education. Sheikh et al. (2019) also identified this as a gap in current research. The incorporation of future study participants from racially diverse cities would broaden the understanding of this phenomenon. We present our research as positive examples of academic pathways. We encourage educators to reflect on their practices of inclusion and address any deficit thinking they have towards refugee-background learners. Further, we encourage refugee-background learners to embody intentional defiance when receiving deficit-thinking advice and to stop listening if it lowers learners' expectations of themselves.

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Staci B. Martin (https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5226-0603) is the practicum coordinator of the Child, Youth, and Family Studies program, as well as a faculty member, in the School of Social Work at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA. Her research focuses on critical hope and despair, refugee higher education, participants as co-researchers, and community-based action projects. Staci has lived and worked alongside vulnerable communities in over 20 countries. Her experiences include designing, implementing, and evaluating sustainable psychosocial peace-building educational programs in four countries: Dieplsoot Informal Settlement, South Africa; Vishwa Shanti Vihara Vishwa Monastery, Nepal; Jamaica; and Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. She has presented at over 20 conferences and authored seven papers. She received her EdD in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program: Curriculum and Instruction from Portland State University in 2018. She is the recipient of the 2018 Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Dissertation in Practice of the Year Award, the Louise M. Berman Fellows Award, and the Peace Rotary Fellowship.

Wilson Kubwayo (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1019-8466) is an adjunct instructor at Portland Community College and an entrepreneur. Originally from Burundi, Wilson lived in a Tanzanian refugee camp for over ten years. At age 13, Wilson and his family resettled to the United States as refugees. Growing up in the disempowered environment of extreme poverty, Wilson faced academic struggles as a teenager. He later discovered practices that influenced personal change and reconfigured his life trajectory. Today, Wilson runs his own consulting firm, Wilson Inspiration, and is a sought-after public speaker on change-management. Wilson helps organizations and schools overcome obstacles to reach full potential. Wilson's entrepreneurial passion has led him to become a real estate investor, the founder of Our Growth Project and co-founder of Simple X. Wilson is also a Portland Business Journal 2020 Forty Under 40 honoree.

Chablue Wah is a student at Portland State University majoring in Social Work. She was born in Myanmar but due to civil war fled to Thailand with her family. They lived in a Thai refugee camp for

seven years until they had an opportunity to live in the United States nine years ago. Because of

circumstances of the civil war neither of her parents were able to attend school, and she sees her own

academic pursuit as a fulfilment of their dreams. Starting at the age of sixteen Chablue has balanced

schoolwork with paid work to help with her family' finances. In high school, she did this while

maintaining a 4.0 GPA and earning some college credits. On the negative side, she felt that she missed

becoming a teen, and just having fun or hanging out like regular teenagers because her schedule was

always tight. She maintains that tight schedule during her university studies working as a shift lead at

Panda Express.

Salome Nanyenga (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9363-8462) has been working at The Immigrant

and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) for over a decade. She started as a case manager for

housing and stability for low-income families and now the Operations Manager for IRCO/ Africa House.

Salome, with her family, sought refuge in Zambia for seven years after fleeing the Democratic Republic

of Congo. After moving to the United States, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work degree from

Portland State University. Her personal academic persistence informs her work and activism for the

educational rights of refugees. That activism led to her receiving the New Portlander Leadership awards

in 2011 and 2013 for participatory democracy. Salome was one of the advocates who successfully stood

to fight for the passing of the Oregon State Bill HB2508: *Relating to refugees in Oregon; and declaring an

emergency*. Salome has been on the board of St. Philip Neri Parish since 2016 as well as a New

Portlander Policy Commissioner since November 2019.

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Online Higher Education: Female Refugee Scholars in the Making

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Abstract

Postsecondary education and the use of technology has become an important avenue through which men and women living in protracted refugee situations are empowered to acquire new skills and make important life choices. Education brings a sense of purpose and normalcy for refugees waiting for their next steps. It has allowed refugees to be critical, thoughtful scholars speaking about their educational experiences, on their own terms. BHER is a development project that seeks to build the capacity of untrained refugee teachers in the Dadaab refugee camps by delivering online and face-to-face university-level courses that can build the capacity of future leaders in their communities. Teaching and learning are offered through a blended model: online and face-to-face to accommodate the complex lived experiences of refugees. Security in the camps, mobility, travelling long distances and balancing household responsibilities are all factors that impact men and women's education differently. Dahabo Ibrahim, a Somali refugee living in the Dadaab refugee complex offers an important perspective into refugee participation in education in research as a graduate student at York University.

Keywords: higher education, refugee, Dadaab, Kenya, lived experience, agency, technology

Introduction

The Kenyan refugee camp complex located in Dadaab, Kenya has been operating for

approximately 29 years. Since its establishment in 1991, it has been a space of prolonged displacement

to Somali's fleeing the civil war, and environmental degradation (Abdi 2016; Giles 2018). Composed of 4

camps—Dagahaley, Hagadera, Ifo, Ifo II—it currently holds 217 511 refugees. The majority of the

refugee population originates from Somalia (53.7%) as well as South Sudanese (24.7%), Congolese (9%)

and Ethiopians (5.8%). Almost half of the refugees (44%) in Kenya are in the Dadaab camps. The almost

other half (40%) of refugees are located in the northwestern part of the Turkana County of Kenya in

Kakuma (UNHCR, 2020). Insecurity and violence are common characteristics of the region for several

reasons:

> retaliation by various militia groups in response to the Kenyan military's incursion across the
>
> nearby border with Somalia; the activities of the jihadist fundamentalist group Al Shabaab and
>
> other gangs in northeastern Kenya; the mix of foreigners and Kenyans who make up the refugee
>
> "industry" in Dadaab; and the extreme poverty not only of the displaced people but of the local
>
> and often marginalized Kenyans living in this very desolate part of the country. (Giles, 2018,
>
> p.168).

The majority of refugees today have been in exile, restricted to camps or urban areas for decades. They

are located in the world's poorest, war-affected regions and face many restrictions on their rights.

According to the UNHCR (1997), 'the consequences of having so many human beings in a static state

includes wasted lives, squandered resources and increased threats to security' (p.105). A refugee in this

kind of situation is restricted to a heavy dependence on external assistance by international

humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The literature on

humanitarianism speaks to this representation of refugees as passive victims of war needing saving from

international humanitarian actors (Harrell-Bond, 2002; Hyndman,2000; Hilhorst, 2018). Many of these

refugees have been forced to put a pause on their education and put their aspirations on hold due to

the precarity of being displaced or exiled from their home countries. The purpose of this paper is to

critically examine an important avenue through which men and women are empowered through online

higher education. Furthermore, it has allowed them to be critical, thoughtful scholars speaking about

their educational experiences, on their own terms. BHER is a development project that seeks to build the capacity of refugee teachers in the Dadaab refugee camps by delivering online and face-to-face university-level courses that can build the capacity of future leaders and teachers in their communities. Many of the graduates in our programs have ambitions to return to their home countries and give back in a meaningful way such as being university instructors, educators or policymakers. If they do not have the opportunity for return, then many take their newly gained skills and certifications to find jobs within the camp as formally trained teachers.

Education in emergency situations has been used as a humanitarian response by aid organizations and non-governmental organizations since the 1990s (Mackinnon, 2014; Retamal & Aedo-Richmond, 1998). The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 26, recognizes education as a human right (UN General Assembly, 1948). This right also extended to refugees as recognized by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 1951). Education as a humanitarian response in refugee contexts has thus been conceived as a short-term temporary solution. Due to the protracted and uncertain nature of refugee contexts, host states, donors and humanitarian organizations are reluctant to invest into university programs (Lutheran World Federation, 2015). Education efforts in humanitarian contexts only make up 2% of all humanitarian allocated aid (UNESCO, 2011). According to the Kenyan Ministry of Education only 5% of the teaching staff in Dadaab are deemd qualified. This is because teachers that are recruited to teach in the camps are recruited as 'incentive teachers' who "completed at least secondary school but with very low pass rates and are ineligible for admission to higher education institutions in Kenya" (Abdi, 2016, p.24). With inadequate resources and infrastructure for education, this not only impacts the quality of education that is provided for a population looking to rebuild their lives but also reinforces a generation of untrained, unqualified teachers. Many of the incentive teachers are refugees themselves who have taken up jobs as teachers

without the formal teacher training because of the large gap and need for teachers (Abdi, 2016; Giles, 2018).

The Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) Project teacher education program seeks to build the capacity of untrained refugee teachers in the Dadaab refugee camps by delivering university-level courses online. The courses are part of a 4-year Educational Studies degree that equips refugee teachers with the formal training so that they become competitive prospective teachers in the local job market in the refugee camp or their home countries, should they return. BHER is a development project comprised of two Canadian (York university and University of British Columbia) and two Kenyan universities (Moi University and Kenyatta University) to provide tuition-free, university-accredited courses towards a Bachelor of Educational Studies and a certificate in teacher's education. This type of educational programming, with the use of technology and social media, is important because it addresses the complex ways in which refugee teacher education takes place in camps. Teaching and learning are offered through a blended model: online and face-to-face (Giles, 2018). The BHER project has been designed to accommodate to the complex lived experiences of refugees. Furthermore, the context with which this project is offered must also be taken to account. Security and mobility within and between the camps are factors that impact men and women differently. However, the flexibility with which courses can be given using technology, bridges many of the potential barriers that female refugees face, including travelling far distances to learning centres and balancing studies with household responsibilities as many of our female students are mothers.

Online higher education has been a critical element in the lives of refugees trying to create a better future for their families and community. Bringing higher education opportunities through online platforms to a population that can be ousted from the host country at any moment, allows them to continue pursuing university courses from wherever they re-locate (Crea & McFarland, 2015; Giles, 2018; Kekwaletswe, 2007). BHER is a model example of a project that has inserted itself in the Kenyan

education system landscape by partnering with two Kenyan universities; Moi and Kenyatta to offer

courses through York University and University of British Columbia. If refugee students in these

programs are asked to relocate by the Kenyan government, students in Dadaab can rely on the Canadian

academic partners to continue their postsecondary education. Since 2013, the BHER project has had

students relocate to Somalia, Canada, United States and Australia, however they have still been able to

stay connected to their studies (Giles, 2018). Education programs in refugee and humanitarian contexts

have been inadequate for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of resources and poor infrastructure,

shortage of trained teachers, overcrowding of classrooms and lack of funding from national

governments and NGOs (Lutheran World Federation, 2015). In the last 10 years there has been an influx

of educational institutions and Northern-based universities partnering with development organizations

to provide online higher education to bridge the gaps in quality education (Kirk, 2006). Researchers have

spoken of the potential of higher education for refugees from the perspective of development

organizations (Avery & Said, 2017; Crea and McFarland 2015; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; Zeus,

2011). However, little has been said from the perspective of refugees themselves about their

educational experiences in their local contexts.

The findings shared in this article are from the direct experiences of Dahabo, one of the co-

authors and what she's observed as a student enrolled in an online university program. It will highlight

the unique experiences of women in Dadaab pursuing tertiary education, through their own lens and

the value of women authoring their own lives, and what is meaningful to them in a patriarchal society

and humanitarian aid industry. The authors' aims are to ultimately examine how female scholarship

shifts the way we think about refugee participation in education and research. Dahabo Ibrahim is a

Somali refugee living in the Dadaab refugee complex. She enrolled in York University's Teacher

Education certificate program in October 2014, as offered by the Borderless Higher Education project.

As of April 2019, she has graduated from the Bachelor of Arts in Educational Studies and is now a

Master's student, currently working on her Major Research Paper. As a young woman, the flexibility of a

blended teaching and learning model allows her to balance her schoolwork, employment commitments

and household duties. Hanan Duri is a third-year Canadian doctoral candidate at York University. She has

been a Course Director and Teaching Assistant with the BHER project since 2018. She has taught face-to-

face courses in Dadaab, Kenya at the BHER Learning Centre and taught online courses.

Socio-Technical Theory and Higher Education

In this paper, the authors draw on socio-technical theory to highlight the empowering potential

of technology on the lives of refugee women, particularly as it relates to their educational pursuits. A

socio-technical perspective illuminates the ways in which 'social practices and norms are informed by

the integration and use of technology (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 286). The adoption of various

technologies is influenced by cultural values and norms, as well as the social, political and economic

realities of the region (Sawyer & Jarrahi, 2014). Refugees in Dadaab already face restrictive policies that

limit their freedom of movement, preventing them from actively pursuing education beyond secondary

education. According to Horst and Nur (2016), 'mobility is imbued with power relations that enable

some and restrict others from moving' (p. 542). While Kenya's 2010 Constitution prescribes all refugees

with the freedom 'to enter, remain and reside anywhere in the country, national encampment policies

prohibits refugees from leaving the camps. This hinders their ability to access employment opportunities

and higher education. Encampment policies were legally recognized in 2014 and were ruled by the

Higher Court as being constitutional and not violating freedom of movement. The policies are not only

contradictory but they are selective in that only camp residents with movement passes can travel to

other parts of Kenya. Reasons for refugees to receive these passes are for travel required for 'medical

reasons, higher educational requirements or due to protection concerns in camps' (O'Callaghan &

Sturge, 2018, p.6). Access to technology like cellphones is available in the camp markets. Refugees buy

data bundles that gives them airtime to network and keep in touch with friends in the camps and family

members overseas (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017). Women are doubly restricted in their freedom of movement due to societal expectations to uphold the household and on-going sexual violence in the camps (Hyndman & Giles, 2011). Access to technology has filled the gap of the challenges related to being mobile. Thus, the use of technology in higher education has provided a pathway for women to participate with more ease and flexibility to overcome such barriers.

Naomi's Klein's (2013) work on technological choice is important here because it highlights the agency and 'degree of empowerment' that comes with the use of technology. An individual exercises agency through the resources that are available to them and in relation to other factors such as gender, ethnicity and age. Klein's choice framework operationalizes Amartya Sen's influential capability's approach by demonstrating how individuals can exercise their ability to make choices and lead 'the lives they have reason to value'. A person's ability to live a good life is defined by 'beings and doings' that they have access to (Sen, 2003). Traditionally used in economics, it's been used to explain human development and poverty as deprivations in capabilities. Klein's choice framework includes "degrees of empowerment pertaining to the existence of choices, sense of choice, use of choice and achievement of choice of an individual or community and development outcomes or achieved functionings within an ecological system" (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p.298). Klein views technology as part of an ecosystem supporting and also restricting development. Structural elements within society influence how resources like technology are organized and distributed within the community. For example, local computer access points and who has access to these services are determined by the way in which social, economic and political structures within society are established. Agency is exercised within these structures and in relation to their personal markers of identity such as race, gender and ethnicity. Agency and the capacity to make choices are significant in women's empowerment. Empowerment is broadly defined as the ability to make strategic life choices. One's ability for decision-making is connected to 3 key ingredients as explained by Kabeer (1999); access to social and material resources,

agency, and well-being outcomes. Having the opportunity to pursue online higher education gives

women the decision-making capability to juggle the complexities of camp life as a woman. In Dadaab, it

is the most important element to access education. 'Refugee women are burdened with social

expectations related to domestic labour and childcare, persistent inequalities that become heightened

in the face of armed conflict and forced migration (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson 2017, p.296) Social norms

are increasingly shifting with the availability of internet in refugee camp contexts because women can

obtain a degree and are able to contribute to the family income while maintain their responsibilities .

Social support structures through social media networks were also increasingly important for their

academic success (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017).

Technology and its role in the lives of refugees pursuing education is undoubted (Ally & Samaka,

2013; Dahya, 2016; Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017; Kleine et al., 2013). The use of technology in aid of

learning for displaced populations seeking opportunities is known (Dahya & Peterson, 2017; Giner &

Dankova, 2011; McFarland & Crea, 2015). Online social networks and mobile phones challenge

inequitable social and economic norms in Dadaab but also open opportunities for women to pursue

higher education within the camps. Kekwaletsewe's (2007) study of the role of online social networks

and mobile phones in South African higher education found that it can 'be that of an enabling

knowledge-sharing space' (p. 105). In the context of a refugee camp where there are no large economic

disparities because everyone is economically poor; access to mobile phones and networks are key

components to filling the gaps of social structures that open pathways to higher education in camps. The

gendered nature of technology use in Dadaab has resulted in cellphones being used as a tool to monitor

and control women's mobility (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017). Studies have demonstrated that there

is a masculine culture of technology that perceives information communication technology as a domain

for men and as a tool to control women (Iwilade, 2015; Masika & Bailur, 2015; Wajcman, 2004). This

kind of gendered positioning of technology use deprioritizes women's training and technology use

(Dahya, 2016). When mobile phones, tablets and internet connectivity is put directly into the hands of women, their use of these devices is put in their control, giving them more possibilities of access and privacy (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017).

Access to social networks while not inherently productive, provide information, resources and assistance to refugees through their networks that can be helpful in their day-to-day lives such as passing information about family members across Diaspora, information about business, money and goods, (Annan et al., 2015; Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017). Technology has also been identified as a crucial resource in refugee migration, settlement and survival (Horst, 2002, 2006). Horst (2002) identified the use of radio communication amongst Somali family members in Dadaab, in the urban areas of Nairobi and Garissa and across the borders of Somalia. Refugees have been communicating 'about their personal situation as well as to send and receive assistance' (p.245).

Opportunities for Refugee Women Online Education

Online higher education has given the opportunity for women to participate in programs without the added burden of neglecting their duties in the home with their families and community. Women are able to attend their lectures and tutorials in the comfort of their homes, while juggling their household duties and employment commitments. Distance also plays a factor in women's accessibility in education. Students have to travel long distances to attend their tutorials at the BHER Learning Centre and this can serve as a challenge for many, especially women. Mobility around the camps can be impacted for a variety of reasons such as weather conditions, security concerns, caring for sick family members, transportation costs, lack of prioritization of women's education (Dahya & Dryden Peterson, 2017). Many of Dahabo's peers have been able to continue participating via WhatsApp, tablet or laptop. As students enrolled in the university program, they are given a data bundle for their mobile devices that allows them to connect remotely.

Engaging in online higher education has helped the women in developing their reading comprehension and literacy skills. Every week, students must read articles that they can access online and submit weekly reflections via Moodle. Additionally, their weekly hour long video conferencing connects the students to their professors where they have discussions related to various topics. The female students are encouraged to share their opinions and ideas, gaining the confidence to speak publicly amongst their male peers. The women felt a sense of inclusion and unity being able to share their ideas with a culturally diverse classroom (Sarkar, 2012). The students in the BHER programs reflect the diverse ethnicities, tribes, and religions of the refugee camp population. Our students are from Somali, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Congo, and Sudan. Among other important skills has been the ability to think critically and problem-solve interpersonal and communal issues through cross-cultural communication. As a result, refugees have been 'agents of change through helping others in the community to understand situations, acting on opportunities and working with the available resources to solve issues and develop communities in the camp' (Crea & Sparnon, 2017, p. 11).

Like with most refugees, the hope of getting a university education is that one would gain employment opportunities and improve the economic status of their households, as Dahabo describes:

> Women who finished their degree online from BHER fully participated both to the social and economic development of their families and made stable financially like me and others who worked as national staff to our home country and send back to families…they can transform the community perspective on girl-child education. These [achievements] made us to be a role model to our community who has cultural stereotypes on higher education for women (2020).

This quote highlights that the value of higher education goes beyond the idea of a short-term, temporary humanitarian relief model, which is typically how responses to situations of displacement are approached in theory and practice. Rather, the women were able to return home to Somalia and find jobs to help their families. Furthermore, it challenges the victimizing narrative of refugees who are stuck

in precarity, empowering women to see themselves as role models for other women in their

community. The skills gained from the online university program also helped Dahabo and others gain job

opportunities in the camps with NGOs.

Having a university education has also enabled women like the author to envision return to her

home country and make valuable contributions in political affairs:

> The knowledge that I got from online higher education and estimation I made my home country
>
> tells me inner voice of my heart that one day I will be a Minister of Education or Minister of
>
> women and family affairs to advocate and look a solution the prolong challenges they have had
>
> and change in form of education in mindset and live sustainable life that prospers the whole
>
> country.

Not only is return to their country of origin desirable but the author feels that she can contribute

politically, in a sphere that is overwhelmingly dominated by men. According to Dryden-Peterson and

Giles (2018), 'post-secondary education has the potential of giving greater voice to displaced

populations. It can create an educated segment of society that can return and rebuild local, regional,

and national institutions' (p. 5). The sense of responsibility refugees feel to give back to their families

and home country has been a common theme among both women and men (Dryden-Peterson & Giles,

2010).

Female Scholars In-the-Making?

In the author's final semester, she participated in York University's first student research

conference in Dadaab, Kenya, where students used a culmination of the skills they have gained in the

program to inquire about an issue or topic that was significant in their communities. They collected their

own data, transcribed interviews, analyzed their data and presented their findings. This experience was

significant for Dahabo and her peers because they were given the agency to inquire about a topic or

issue that was meaningful to them. The outcome of the research conference was even more profound.

The women proposed potential solutions for the problems they see and experience everyday in their camps. It gave them a sense of empowerment that they could go out as student researchers and problem-solve, write about and present research findings. Some of the research topics included: female genital mutilation, school feeding programs, girl education, and shoe-shine boys/unaccompanied minors. Being situated in the context meant that they had the expertise on issues that have affected them and their community whereby they could devise local solutions and transmit the knowledge in a way that was meaningful to them. They were trained to do research: formulate questions, interview community members, transcribe their data, analyze the data and present it to their colleagues. In this way, they are experts of their lived experiences. Their insider lens, gave these women opportunities to become "experts" in the field when they have been very accustomed to benefitting outsiders with their research by playing the role of a research participant or informant. These kinds of opportunities are significant for many reasons. Refugees are traditionally represented and researched by Northern academics, institutions, development organizations as passive victims in need of educational salvation (El Jack, 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Zeus, 2010). They are treated as research 'subjects' and 'informants' of research (Harrel-Bond & Voutira, 2007), and are rarely invited to contribute their own experiences to research record. Meaningful experiences such as the one mentioned above are critical in shifting the way we conceptualize refugees as active change agents in their communities.

There is a politics of dissemination in the scholarship produced by refugees, whereby refugees from the Southern nations are not given the same opportunities to be heard and considered as refugees from their Northern counterpart (Chimni, 1998; Harrel-Bond & Voutira, 2007). Appadurai (2006) takes this further by recognizing a universal 'right to research'. Due to globalization, knowledge is more valuable than ever before. The only way vulnerable populations can make claims to citizenship rights is through the knowledge that one is equipped with. If one has the skills to do research on issues pertaining to one's rights and livelihoods, one can make critical life choices. The right to research is even

more critical in the contexts of refugees stuck in encampment as many of them don't even have claims for citizenships rights, let alone legal status. Research in this context is a means for empowerment, agency and voice. Research gives one 'the capacity to make strategic inquiries and gain strategic knowledge on a continuous basis' (Appadurai, 2016, p. 168). The quality and quantity of information that becomes accessible through higher education expands and enhances women's ability to make choices desirable to them (Kabeer, 1999). Add a sentence about your participants and the ways they were empowered through the online program and the research. Please clarify earlier how research was incorporated in the program**.**

Conclusion

Given the tendency to rely on development organizations like the UNHCR and other aid agencies to give temporary responses to internally displaced people's, online higher education presents a new avenue of support for refugees (Pigozzi, 1999; Sinclair, 2007). It equips them with long-term, on-going skills such as critical thinking. These skills empower refugees with the tools to make sense of their lives in encampment and make strategic plans towards their future aspirations (Crea & MacFarland, 2015; Crea & Sparnon, 2017; Giles, 2018). Furthermore, the ability to 'to do research' offers refugees the opportunity to participate and contribute knowledge as people with lived experience in the academy and dismantle existing scholarly discourses which have created barriers to access for those in the South. Only when we invite discourses of female refugee-centered research and lived experience can we truly democratize research cultures.

Giving refugees a space to have "voice" has been something that has been often neglected in theory and in practice. Fraser (2005) questions issues of representation where members of refugee communities are "excluded from membership in any political community…deprived of the possibility of authoring first-order claims, they become non-persons with respect to justice" (p.77). This is the case of the author and many others living in refugee camps who have to rely on the narrative set by the

humanitarian regime and global academia that rely on a narrative that victimizes refugees. Higher

education is a vehicle to build the capacity of refugees and make them self-sufficient. We argue that the

skills refugees are gaining through postsecondary education are critical in reversing such narratives.

They are their own change agents who can rebuild their lives and communities. Our findings

demonstrate the significance of technology in higher education, especially its transcendence of space,

time and global socio-economic disparities. It's also highlighted the need to amplify lived experiences of

refugees in international development and humanitarian research, policy-making and practice. Policies

need to consider the lived experiences of refugees, include them in discussions about durable solutions

rather than imposing solutions on them. This kind of work also contributes to a very undervalued space

in refugee studies that sees refugee women as active and independent agents of change. The way

forward is perfectly captured through famous slogan *"nothing about us, without us".*

Author's Note

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camp-Dadaab, Kenya.

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Navigating the College Experience: The Human Faces of Refugees Students

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Abstract

As the refugee population continues to increase, the Trump administration continues to slash resettlement admissions framing refugees as a security threat. Education is a fundamental human right, and it is the best avenue for self-reliance. This paper explores how refugee students conform to, and persist schooling. Using Critical Race Theory as a framework, evidence of "sticky mess" or racial inequalities (Espinoza and Harris, 1997) was shown to impact the lives of all participants. However, the strength of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) assuaged the negative didactic experiences. Analysis of the dialogic semi-structured interviews that compromised the data set focused on the refugees' lives and educational experiences in their journey to the U.S.

Keywords: refugee, higher education, community cultural wealth

Introduction

We must not believe the many, who say that free persons only ought to be educated, but we should rather believe the philosophers, who say that the educated only are free. (Epictetus, 2011, p. 51)

No country can ignore the worldwide displacement of individuals and families who are seeking a safe haven from violence that is often indiscriminate in its victims. The yearly Global Trends report (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019) confirms an unprecedented 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to leave their homes because of persecution, conflict, violence or

human rights violations at the end of 2019. Forced displacement affects more than one percent of the humanity or one in every 97 people. 26 million of displaced persons are refugees, and over half of these refugees are under the age of 18 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). Since 1975 the United States has welcomed about 3.2 million refugees. In 2016, the United States admitted 84,995 refugees, and in 2018, 22,491 were admitted, roughly half the 45,000 cap. In 2019 the number of received refugees matched the ceiling cap of 30,000. However, in 2020 only 11,841 were admitted with the annual ceiling of 18,000- the lowest level in record (Migration Policy Institute).

The economic, political and cultural issues that accompany this crisis are complex, but from a humanitarian perspective, not attending to them is not an option. Moreover, recognizing that providing access to education is a main concern for refugee communities, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) underlines that education is not only a basic right, but an essential component of rehabilitation an "enabling right, through which other rights are realized" (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 9).

In 2018 three percent of the world refugee population was enrolled in tertiary education (UNHCR, 2020), and a large part of them navigate invisibly the educational system. A strong understanding of how refugee students make sense of their educational experience is a priority. Examining the experiences of refugee students who are trying to reeducate or retool themselves in a new country, or are accessing post-secondary education for the first time, is critical in meeting their needs. Access to higher education may play a pivotal role in easing transitions for refugees by affording skills that increase social capital. Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as the accrued resources acquired by belonging to a network of social relationships and/or group memberships, and are transmissible to other contexts (Marar, 2011; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) that a person can utilize for advancement.

Recent literature on refugee students in school settings has focused mostly on young children or adolescents' adjustment (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; McBrien, 2005). Despite the small amount of research on young people experiences (18-24 years old) accessing higher education, studies suggest educational opportunities may cushion refugees from the negative aspects of forced migration. Refugees often experience a loss of dignity when their level of education or former position are no longer valued or recognized by the new community, which in consequence impacts their quality of life (Vries & Van Heck, 1994). Moreover, long-term displacement brings about a sense of helplessness, leading to low self-esteem (Horn, 2010). Thus, refugees view education as a way to increase their quality of life and widen their livelihood of opportunities (Crea and McFarland, 2015; Crondahl and Karlsson, 2012). Education is also perceived as a means of personal empowerment and efficacy (Gateley, 2011). Education may help refugees develop a "critical consciousness" by providing them with a voice, thus empowering them to create change (Dryden-Peterson and Giles, 2010).

For people who have lost all their other assets, education represents a primary survival strategy. Education is the key to adaptation in the new environment of exile. Education is the basis upon which to build a livelihood. For some, education will be the decisive factor for resettlement in a second (or third), normally richer country (Flukiger-Stockton, 1996).

Discussion: Questions we should ask

The current literature on refugee students attending higher education focuses on the role education plays in their lives, while highlighting the "cultural capital" refugees lack and how this impacts their college experience (Crea, 2016; Gateley, 2015; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Naidoo, 2015). Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as familiarity with the legitimate culture or high culture within society. While these studies bring a deeper understanding of how refugees can be academically supported, little research focuses on what refugee students bring to the college experience.

The objective of this paper is to evaluate what we know about refugee students' experiences in higher education through the application of Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, an underutilized framework within higher education. The paper presents implications of employing this theoretical framework, and offers new insights that extend how CCW is conceptualized. Guided by these tenets, the counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009) documented in this study responded to the following research questions:1) How did refugee students resist, conform to, and persist in their educational experiences? 2) What do these refugee students identify as useful capital, and what factors contributed to their success in navigating the educational system? It is important to point out that even though the author of this paper uses the term "refugee student", it is not intended "to reinforce their identities as singular subjectivities-victims-or to constitute them as powerless" (Ferfolja 2009, 397 as cited in Ferfolja & Vickers 2010, 159)

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Yosso's (2005) notion of CCW will be utilized to understand how refugee students navigate their educational experiences in higher education. While education in modern democratic societies is believed to play a role in reducing inequalities, critical race theory educational scholars argue that critical race theory advances a strategy to account for the role and racism in education. Critical race theory challenges the belief that the educational system is objective, color blind, and provides equal opportunity for all. The transmission of inequalities occurs because children from the dominant group possess cultural capital similar to that of the educational system, and minority groups do not.

Refugees possess cultural capital but it is incongruent with the symbolic and social expectations of the school system. CRT legitimatizes the experiences of People of Color by understanding, analyzing and teaching about the subordination experiences. Critical race research views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on their experiences to learn about issues of class, race, sexism, etc. In

other words, CRT "advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin." (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, 132).

In education, CRT has been defined as a "discourse of liberation" that can be used as a methodological tool as well as a greater ontological and epistemological understanding of how race and racism affect education and lives of racially disenfranchised (Parker & Lynn 2002, 7-8). It has also been defined as a "framework that can be used in theorizing about the ways in which educational structures, processes and discourses support and promote racial subordination" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2010, 314-315).

Yosso (2005) expands this view by introducing CCW and shifting the research lens away from a deficit view of Community of Colors, and focusing on the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed, and used to survive and resist the oppressions felt at the macro and micro level. She asserts that CCW comprises at least six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, familial, and resistant. This study will attempt to continue Yosso's work by identifying forms of "capital" students of color (specifically refugees) possess and accumulate while they are navigating college. Students within this study were successful in activating and utilizing linguistic and navigational capitals. In addition, the data revealed two other capitals used by the participants, which I termed: compassionate and educational community capitals.

Methodology

Data source, evidence and objects

A total of 11 participants from a metropolitan university in the Northwestern United States with little over 22,000 students took part in the study. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics for the participants as well as their education.

Table 1

Demographics

Gender	Pseudonym	Nationality	Countries resided before arriving to U.S.	Education/jobs prior to arriving to U.S.	Major/Field of study in U.S.	Date of arrival to U.S.
F	BB	Bosnian	Germany	Student: Middle School	Education	2000
F	RM	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Student: High School (Graduated)	Health Science and Respiratory Care	2007
M	NMM	Afghanistan	Pakistan Russia	Student: University (Engineering)	Engineering	2008
M	DN	Eritrea	Ethiopia refugee camp (6 yrs.)	B.A. Teacher: Junior High Subjects: Math & English	Computer Science	2012
M	MA	Iraq		Student: University (Engineering for 1 yr.)	Engineer	2012
M	LA	Iraq	Syria	Student: High School (Graduated)	Engineer	2009
M	FF	Iran	Turkey	Student: Photoshop Certificate	Journalism	2011
M	AA	Iraq		Student: College (English & Art Major) U.S. Interpreter: of English	Biochemistry	2012
M	DS	Bhutan	Nepal refugee camp (17 yrs.)	Student: College (Computer Science in Nepal)	Computer Science	2008
M	DM	Congo		B.A. Teacher: (High School) Subject: French	Political Science and International Relation	2012
M	KA	Congo	Botswana refugee camp (2 yrs.)	B.A.	MBA	2007

The university where the research was conducted does not have a way to identify refugee students, thus participants were recruited. Recruitment was done at intensive writing English classes at the university, at the local refugee conferences and community coordination meetings. After an initial verbal invitation to participate in the study the participants were formally invited via email or phone. Once participants agreed to be part of the study, they were interviewed.

All of the students participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 90 minutes (See Appendix A). The interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants and English was used as the main language. Interviews were transcribed fully, and qualitatively analyzed.

After reflecting on the data, I coded the transcripts and organized them into thematic "chunks" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). While analyzing the data, I became aware of the ways students responded to their experiences in higher education by drawing on hidden funds of knowledge (Martínez-Roldán & Fránquiz, 2008) present in their peers and communities. As I created common categories across transcriptions of the audio recordings, I found that the categories aligned well with Yosso's (2005) forms of community cultural capital as reflected in her CCW framework. The findings reported in this article advance Yosso's (2005) framework by illuminating how participants cultivated two new forms of cultural capital to move beyond oppressive structures in order to achieve positive educational outcomes. In the presentation of the findings I describe the CCW framework as explained by Yosso (2005). Second, I share examples from the data to demonstrate how the CCW framework provides an explanatory theory for interpreting the counter narratives voiced by the students. Additionally, the two forms of cultural capital identified in the data: Compassionate Capital and Community Capital are introduced. These two new cultural capitals extend the CCW framework.

Findings

The interviews demonstrated the resiliency of the students despite negative racial experiences. Specifically, language, culture, immigration status, and race inferences received. This played a role on how the students navigated the college experience and how they confronted and resisted the barriers faced along the way. I decided to use initials for all proper nouns instead of given them pseudonyms in order to respect their birth names.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital is defined by Yosso (2005) as the intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. The majority of the participants arrived in the U.S. knowing at least two languages. Even though the participants knew more than one language, they had on average an intermediate proficiency in English, and were academically proficient in their first language. Hence, language was one of the biggest issues in their education. The main problem was being understood by others, and understanding the professors. One of the participants shared, "Even though I was an English teacher in Eritrea, I am struggling with English because most of the time I can't understand what they [professors] are saying to me and sometimes they [other students] never understand what I am saying. Sometimes the pronunciation is hard to understand" DN. MA contributed by saying, "Language is hard. You have a counselor who helps you pick the classes but that is all. They do not help you as a refugee student. They do not care. Professors are not aware what it means to learn a new language." DN further elaborated about the difficulty understanding the instructor's response when requesting clarification because the professors do not get what he is asking and they do not give him the right response.

A layer identified to the language barrier was written language in relation to time. LA frustration about this was noticeable when he commented, "I knew the answers to the questions [in the test] but I run out of time and even though I requested a time extension the professor's response was, 'you have

to learn more English and [then] come back [to the University]'." He added: "Every class [content] is a new language, and they [professors] don't really care about you [us]." FF echoed this sentiment by declaring,

> You know, the biology [class] is truly my nightmare [every] Thursday night. Thursday nights I have a dream about tomorrow's quiz. It's painful. It's really painful. I'm the only non-American person in the class. The lecture has 150 to 200 people.

Even though FF felt exasperated, he questioned the underlying cultural norms that privilege native speakers' linguistic capital and ignore the language learners' multilingual competence. FF asked permission to use Google translate from his phone but this option was denied. The instructor suggested a dictionary instead. FF defended his request by explaining that using his phone to access Google translate was easier and faster for him than using a hard copy dictionary. Unfortunately, he was not informed by the professor he could instead use an electronic translator, a tool allowed and listed in the testing policies and procedures of the University. FF reflected on the fact that even though time was important for the professor, using a dictionary would slow him down even more, thus further affecting his score. He expounded that the quiz was designed to evaluate content knowledge, not his English language proficiency, hence allowing him to use the Google translate would simply aid him in demonstrating his knowledge of the content. Events like this brought about resentment that contributed to 'resisting' the course, and the professor. Unfortunately, FF became so enraged that he dropped the class.

Reflecting on the stories, it is evident that the instructors of the courses did not view students' bilingualism as an asset or bother to utilize the language and communication strengths of the students. On the contrary, the fact that they were bilinguals was viewed as a problem. Moreover, it was viewed as a students' problem. Thus, all of the responsibility and blame falls on the student without understanding students' success is a collective effort involving educators.

Navigational capital

Navigational capital refers to students' skills and abilities to navigate "social institutions," including educational spaces. Yosso (2005) further explains students' navigational capital empowers them to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments. Students experienced difficulty understanding and navigating the unfamiliar and complex educational system of the University.

Misunderstanding about the courses they needed to take was as a source of confusion and frustration. After FF dropped the biology course, he kept wondering how this would impact his GPA but understood that he just could not keep on guessing; he needed to be informed. He reached out to one of his friends, and then his advisor. This is what he shared,

[I talked to] one of my people, he is a refugee, but he came here ten years ago, he's an Iranian student. And, then [I talked] to my advisor…she told me that it is not harmful to withdraw Biology, [because] it is not part of my requirements.

However, FF research did not stop there, at one of the refugee alliance meetings he asked the guest speaker the impact of dropping a class and learned students can drop a class as many as four times before receiving the grade letter F.

Lack of familiarity with the technology platform used by the University was another source of confusion and stress. One of the participants revealed, "I was in class for four weeks before I figure out Blackboard was a site where you could look up the syllabus and professors' notes." He clearly remembers having a professor say, "ok, open up Blackboard" and feeling inadequate because he did not know what it was. Eventually, he asked his advisor and the response he received was "How can you not know [about Blackboard]?"

The U.S. teaching approach was noted as another point of struggle. An example of this is what a refugee 'heard' the professor said about the assigned textbook "you will read Chapter five and eight." He was shocked, he did not understand why one would start reading in the middle of a book. So, he did

not follow the instructor's instructions and started on Chapter one because, as he pointed out, "in my country we start [a book] in the beginning." And the next day he heard his professor said: "OK, the three chapters you read for today will be in the exam. Be ready!" At that moment, he realized he was way behind schedule.

It is evident students understood that 'navigating' the system meant disabling 'hidden' educational devices that weaken or negatively impacted their educational success. Reaching out to more knowledgeable peers and assigned educational counselors aided them in understanding how to cope with invisible mechanism. Furthermore, at times, they triangulated the responses evaluating the best plan of action.

Compassionate Capital

The word 'compassion' is derived from the Latin cum patior, meaning 'to suffer, undergo, and stand in solidarity with others' (Straub, 2000) or as defined by Chodron (2001), 'our ability to feel the pain that we share with others' (4). According to the Dalai Lama (2001), "one thing very specific to the contemplation of suffering is that it tends to be more powerful and effective if we focus on our own suffering and then extend that recognition to the suffering of others" (p. 93).

In the interviews, participants shared their experiences of exclusion, pain and suffering while trying to navigate the educational system. However, the refugees' educational experiences inspired them to help others. DS made it clear that when his friends from the community have questions about education, he helps them. He noted, "I am a senior here and now I know how education works. No one tells you to get an education, the refugee agencies don't push for education, so it is now my responsibility [emphasis]."

BB was in the wave of Bosnian´s who left in 1993 and arrived to the U.S. as a refugee in 2000. She is an only daughter and became the language broker for her parents. The fact she has native like proficiency in German, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and English lead her to become the language broker

for the Bosnian community. Being the language broker gave her access to the stories of what happened to the refugees during the war, which inspired her to become a role model and advocate for the next generations of refugees. "Every time, I see myself in them [refugees]. First it was us [the Bosnians], then the Middle Eastern, then the Sudanese, now the Nepalese, so you can see the sequence." She shared how painful it was to scape during a winter night, to say goodbye to her father and to leave behind "her childhood." She talked about the "terrible things" that happened to the refugees and how pursuing a doctoral degree will afford her the opportunity to support refugee college students by creating spaces to share their experiences. BB was also inspired to co-found the Student Refugee Alliance (SRA). She visits high school with high representation of refugee students describing the process of securing admission to college, and introducing them to professionals who can help them plan appropriately for college costs. She further shares "Maybe I want to be the role model to tell the younger generation or even generations my age or, maybe older generations like my husband, that you can go to school. I did it and you can do it too."

Another participant, DM, reflected on his first eight months of his life in the U.S. He commented that distances were enormous and every time he wanted to go somewhere, he simply had to resign to wait for the bus, he could not just go to the supermarket when he needed something. Today, he takes refugees to the supermarket and hospital or anywhere else they may need to go, because he remembers what it was like. He recalled how hard it is for new arrivals to go to the bank and understand the documents they sign. In his words "we need to help others. People helped me before, so now I have the [educational] means, I need to help others who need help." He continued by saying "if they do not know how to apply for school, I help them, if someone's car has broken down, I get a call. I got to help them." He wants to pursue a career that helps ladies and children become stable. A testament to his commitment is his 'sharing' of his wealth. Last year he bought four pairs of shoes for "those refugees who needed them." He understands what it feels to have little and to need support. He shared that

when escaping his country, he spent four days without food, not because he did not have money, but because there was no place to buy anything. He saw his friend's children die of hunger. He understands empathy, feeling someone else's pain. He has learned not to throw away food, and in a very commanding yet soft tone he said "we must learn and teach other how to prepare only [the food] we can eat. . . we cannot waste food."

The opportunity for education also provided the space and abilities to support the ones left behind. FF uses blogs to reach out to 'another world, to participate in their experiences' to understand their situation. One of his blogs is in English and the other in Persian. One focuses on human rights issues in Iran-through his religious lens. The other is a diary of what happened to him from the moment he left Iran. He has documented every step of his journey because he wants to help others going through the same experience. He wants Iranians who need to leave Iran to know about 'the process.' He recalled how difficult was to apply for refugee status because every time he inquired; he received a different response. Now, he "is helping the ones left behind." He also wrote about what it felt leaving Iran and what is like in the U.S. The recognition he received after producing a film in the Learning Service class-and the opportunity to be awarded the "People's Choice" by the class-fueled his confidence to pursue communication as his major. Undoubtedly, education has given FF the courage to reflect on the power of words and on the power of education.

He is adamantly committed to help make education a priority for all refugees. He understands the relationship between education and power so when a group of students were interviewing a director of a refugee center, he questioned why education was not ever mentioned to refugees when they arrived to the U.S. and why refugees were always pushed to find work as soon as possible. He continued by questioning the director why only eight months were allotted to find a job before the financial support ends and why, if education is chosen instead of a job, the financial support stops.

All of these stories provide a background of how education moved these refugees beyond empathy to help them stand in solidarity with other refugees. The opportunity to share their stories gave them voice. Helping refugees being heard has become a community goal.

Educational Community Capital

Refugees' experiences of personal growth also inspired participants to rethink the way they related with the members of their ethnic communities. Some participants shared during the interview that when applying for refugee status, they hidden the fact they had relatives in the U.S. These students believed that living away from their countrymen would give them the advantage of adjusting faster to the culture and the language of the host country. LA said: "I didn't want to bother my relatives and also I wanted to learn English." Another participant eloquently explained his reasoning,

> I just wanted to be away from the Iranian community, because if I just started [living] in a city
> without them I would work with Americans, study with Americans and live with Americans. I
> would learn the American culture. I wanted to adapt as soon as possible.

Other participants decided not to 'mingle' or become friends with other students who shared their same ethnic background. AH said, "I talk to other students from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China or any other country except Iraq to find out what classes I should take." He shared such mistrust was based on his experience working as translator for the U.S. military because he did not know how others would perceive him. However, as these refugees began inserting themselves in the university culture, they understood the importance of relying on their "own people' to navigate the educational system. FF reflects when withdrawing from the Biology class, he sought his Iranian friend who had been in the U.S. for ten years for advice.

Throughout their interviews they shared how achieving the dream of "studying in America," was the benefit of the whole community. As they spent more and more time in school, they realized their adaptation, and productivity would have long-term socio-economic implications for their entire refugee

community. It was not just a personal gain, but it was the gained of all and learning how to navigate the educational system was a community effort.

Lessons Learned

Findings suggest that despite the unsupportive educational environment, refugees are learning how to use their cultural wealth. Moreover, their unique experiences as refugees gained them access to two new capitals, compassionate and educational community. These capitals provided them the strength to navigate the educational experience while understanding their role as newcomers and what it means to belong to a larger global group of people who have left their home not by choice.

Since the time this data was collected and analyzed, the three executive orders signed in January 2019 (Center for Migration Studies, 2020) by the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump, have not only sent shockwaves through the vulnerable immigrant communities across the country, but to the thousands of educators who cherished and valued all community members. More than ever, it is important to equip educators and education leaders who are working closely with students who are touch by the repercussion of the executive orders to understand these students, most of all, want to succeed academically. As FF so eloquently shared when talking about education, "I don't know if you can feel my feelings but, just imagine you are a bird in a cage and they open the cage [the right to education] and you are FREE." Or as MB explained, "Going to school for myself [means] just to understand the world better."

The University where the study was conducted adopted the position that, once refugees became permanent residents or citizens, they had the same entitlements and would be treated as all other students. No attempt was therefore made to identify their special strengths. While this position may have some merit, it also results in the absence of any acknowledgement of how to best support their needs. In the words of one Iranian refugee "they ignore our needs and they treat as international students."

During interviews, it was commonly stated that the ignorance and insensitivity of the academic staff was a major problem for them. Even though, the institution in this study has a specific center dedicated to support faculty, no specific resources such as cultural and ethnic issues are offered. Some seminars are offered throughout the academic year, but there is not required participation. Additionally, the panelists are rarely representatives of the refugee experience. Furthermore, during the annual Refugee Conference organized by community agencies and the university, local refugee students are seldom invited as keynote speakers. Even though the university is located in a welcoming refugee city, little effort has been made to integrate the refugee students into the culture of the institution. The approach so far has been not to do anything unless an issue arises which often falls on the refugee students' shoulders.

In view of the increasingly multiethnic background of the student population, and the increasing priority of Universities in attracting international students, it would seem appropriate to turn more attention to raising the cultural and ethnic awareness and sensitivity of academic staff by utilizing the strengths refugees bring. The world is facing the largest migrant crisis in human history, more than 79.5 million people-almost one percent of the world's population are displaced because of conflict. The United Nations estimates that 34 percent of eligible youth are enrolled in tertiary degree programs, yet only two percent of displaced persons have access to higher education.

The private sector recognizes the human and economic capital lost for not engaging refugees. Several private sector companies understand the opportunities associated with the diverse skills and perspectives of refugees, many having deep knowledge of the foreign market and consumer demands (Hachigian, 2016). Thus, in an effort to create bridges between the private and local communities, some companies have created mentorship programs, established financial services, and developed innovative products that meet the needs of refugees. However, Hachigian (2016) argues that scaling innovative and successful programs will not be possible until many more investors focus on migrants. She refers to

"Migrant lens investing" as a possible solution to enhance traditional investments. "Migrant lens investing" is adopting a "migrant lens analysis" -a process- that incorporates migrant issues into responsible investment. Adopting a migrant lens could for example translate to investing in migrant-owned business, which are often innovative and have a high export potential consequently benefiting the investor and migrants. This type of solution has been adopted in Canada, and Europe by lending programs that wish to support newcomer entrepreneurs. Cities have a powerful function in that they create citizens "who can imagine themselves as members of a political and economic community" (Waters & Leblanc 2005, p. 129).

Some schools also understand the potential of the refugee population. Examples of this are Columbia University launching in 2016 the Columbia Scholarship Program for Displaced Persons, Illinois Institute of Technology and Monmouth College. Universities are creators, repositories and disseminators of knowledge, and are a strong resource for a country. University education is considered an absolute necessity for social and economic mobility and on a societal level for intellectual development of human capital. As graduates enter the work force, they often become leaders, innovators and creators generating productivity, which benefits the larger community as well as them personally.

I would propose that just as financers understands the eminence investing and helping migrants achieved their potential, education should too. Adopting a migrant education lens would mean educators and education leaders would tap into the wealth of the capitals refugees bring with them into the educational system using and integrating them into the curriculum to help others.

A recommendation would be to prepare faculty to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students. Just as in the state of California, all educators graduate with a Cross-Cultural and Language Academic Development (CLAD) certificate, professors should be required to obtain one. Or as FF recommended for the biology course, "I think it's better to have something like a cross cultural biology

on campus because we have a lot of, you know, international and refugees [students] here in campus. So, if we have a cross cultural biology, I think it would really help us."

Author Note

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

-Interviewee name

-Can you tell me about yourself?

-Where are you from?

-Can you share your experience living in your country, and/or a refugee camp? (Dates, places.)

-How is your community life in the U.S?

-What supports were you provided when arriving to XXX?

-What were some of the challenges you encountered in the community of XXX?

-Can you describe your educational experiences in your own country, and or refugee camp?

-Can you describe your educational experiences in the U.S.? OR

-What are your educational goals here in the U.S.?

-What were some of the educational challenges you encountered in the U.S?

-Can you describe the role your family/friends/local agencies played during your educational

experience?

-Can you describe the role school members played during your educational experience here in U.S.?