

Challenges for Refugees Access' to Tertiary Education: A case of Kakuma Camp in Kenya

Paul Ekitoe

Kibabii University, Bungoma, Kenya

ABSTRACT

This study analyses educational opportunity available for refugees in the camps in Kenya to enable them gain professional skills. It examines major constraints that refugees face and the failures of state Department of Refugee Education in Kenya, UNHCR and other organizations play in promoting access to college and university education for refugees. The study includes refugees at the camp that have attended or are pursuing tertiary education. The study used qualitative methods for collecting information through face-to-face interviews. The study highlighted the efforts made by UNHCR and other educational bodies to ensure refugees gain education beyond high school and have a chance to join mainstream tertiary institutions.

KEYWORDS: Access, Challenges, Refugees, Tertiary Education

How to cite this paper: Paul Ekitoe "Challenges for Refugees Access' to Tertiary Education: A case of Kakuma Camp in Kenya" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-6 | Issue-5, August 2022, pp.1314-1319, www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd50646.pdf



URL:

Copyright © 2022 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



1. INTRODUCTION

For the refugees in Kenya and other nations, the right to tertiary education and access to Labor market are key to becoming self-dependent, securing a dignified life and building one's life, as well as enabling the refugees to contribute to the development of host communities. According to Chanji (2013), host nations often require the evaluation of the potential for enabling refugee access to tertiary education and Labor markets. The 1951 Convention regarding the refugees' status accorded the refugees the freedom and right to access Labor markets; however, a number of host nations have been reluctant to permit the right. Such reluctance mirrors the divergent concerns regarding the distortion of the Labor market and restricted aptitude to effectively absorb the novel labor, the overcrowding in specific industries, availability and access to jobs by the citizens, wages reduction and decline in the extant work conditions. The host governments might additionally be swayed by the oppositions that exist towards the rights of refugees to access higher education and work, as well as by the various security concerns regarding the large-scale refugee populations residing and working

in the host nations. Out of the 145 parties that are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, nearly half have declared their reservations and even the nations that are known to accord the right to access tertiary education and Labor market have always imposed various conditions on the access to such opportunities. Similar restrictions have been observed to apply to a larger proportion of the 48 nations that are not signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Nevertheless, for the refugees, the aptitude and right to access tertiary education and Labor market opportunities is prerequisite to enabling them to attain sustainable livelihoods, which, in turn, reduces their susceptibility, improves their resilience and allows them to live dignified lives (Provost, & Hamaz, 2011).

In recognizing this, the various intergovernmental organisations that include the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UNHCR have commenced the promotion of access to work opportunities and tertiary education as some of the main elements of the development

leaning and sustainable refugee program, and particularly for the refugees residing in displacements that are protracted (Chanji, 2013). The desk-top research along with the comparative assessment carried out in the year 2016 focused on the roles and effects of the various global legal provisions that offer and safeguard the refugees' right to access education and the Labor markets opportunities. The research mainly covered 20 nations that included the low and middle income nations such as Kenya that have been acknowledged as hosting the largest proportions of the globe's refugees, as well as in the higher income nations. The study also included the nations that are signatories and the non-signatories to the Refugee Conventions. The plight of the refugee students remains a challenge. This is aptly captured by other scholars who have examined the subject. According to Alfredson (2002), the displacement of refugee students and the attendant removal and/or on the other hand partition of children from their folks, close families and additionally their recognizable condition heavily impacts on children and thus results in physical, emotional and socio-psychology anguish which makes life difficult in refugee camps. Furthermore, this emotional anguish may be as a result of guardians or essential parental figures that may have been executed or confined amid strife or who passed on from conditions or perils related with flight. The attendant anguish can only be healed using psychological counseling, a phenomenon missing in many refugee camps (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2012) Further, a study carried out by Mareng, (2010) disclosed that access to tertiary education and Labor market opportunities by refugees in the host nations is generally challenging for both the refugees and citizens of Kenya. Thus, refugees who qualify for university and college placements in Kenya are normally required and anticipated to pay high and limiting international learner's fees. Regardless of this, Kinzie, Sack, Angell, and Clarke, (2017) observes that there are some documented exceptions to such general rules even as there is often limited support from refugee rights agencies that include the UNHCR with regards to the provision and access to tertiary education by refugees graduating from high schools in the various refugee camps. A limited number of refugees have been offered scholarships to study in tertiary colleges on the basis of support offered by the UNHCR and the host nations' governments. Nevertheless, Kinzie, et al., (2017) has presented the argument that in case the host nation's governments are devoted to effective reduction of the refugee challenges in nations such as Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi, it should do so through provision of citizenship to the refugees. A good

example of how this can be attained regards the Tanzanian case in which the government opted to offer the long-term Burundian refugee's citizenships so as to enable them access the available opportunities in the country. Even as it formally holds the reservations towards the Refugee Convention of 1951, the Kenyan government seems to treat such reservations with increased flexibility. According to Provost, and Hamaz, (2011), in case the refugees residing in various camps in Kenya were permitted to access tertiary education just like other Kenyans, it would turn out to be the best decision towards resolution of the refugee crisis. The implication of such views entail the notion that unless the politicians are able to observe the various advantages associated with allowing the refugees to access higher education and the Labor market opportunities, they are highly unlikely to assist the refugees. The various challenges linked to resource allotments, the political will and issues related to policies have continuously affected the refugee rights and particularly the access to tertiary education and Labor market opportunities negatively.

1.1. Problem Statement

Access to education among refugee children has become a global concern in the recent past especially due to the increased number of refugees. Kenya, being among the top refugee hosting countries, has committed itself to achieve equitable and inclusive education for refugee children by 2020. Kenyan legal instruments provide a solid foundation for the inclusion of refugee learners in the national education system. The Kenyan Constitution (2010) and the Basic Education Act (2013) stipulate access to education as the right of every child in Kenya. In 2006, the government of Kenya enacted the Refugee Act No 13, which became operational in May 2007 and also states that refugees have a right to education. The Kenyan government is keen to provide a conducive environment for absorption of refugee children in the country's mainstream education system. However, this effort has been delayed by weak refugee policies and strategies, which are not aligned to the country's educational goals due to the cost implications the country may incur. Refugee and asylum-seeking learners in Kenya have excelled in the national primary examinations over the past five years. 2017 results demonstrated a pass rate of 93% across the locations. This was higher than national average of 76%, and refugee learners were among some of the top candidates at the county and national levels (UNHCR, 2018).

Transition to secondary education is a considerable challenge due to the limited number of secondary

schools in refugee hosting areas, and associated costs with delivering secondary education. In the camps, there are only 13 secondary schools against 48 primary schools and a very limited number of scholarships available to national and county schools for those achieving exceptional results at Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Therefore, admission to secondary schools in the refugee camps and settlement is not automatic and is dependent on available space in existing secondary schools, academic score in KCPE and gender balance. Furthermore, refugees that have finished their high school education have the desire of joining tertiary education to further their studies. However, the only opportunity to access tertiary education at the camp includes limited scholarships to the tertiary institutions, and vocational training conducted by some universities such as Strathmore and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Providing equitable access to tertiary learning education will provide a trained, knowledgeable and skilled youth to compete with the rest of the Kenyans for the job market and decision-making process that aims towards providing peace (Kanu, 2008).

The education system should be developed based on the unique challenges the refugees face in camps and considered mechanisms could include onsite and online courses well-coordinated by Kenyan government partners. More so, the courses must meet the Kenyan educational standards as well as the global standards to help learners have a fair chance of securing local and foreign employment. UNHCR is lobbying for the Kenyan government to include refugee students in mainstream education system. This study shall analyze ways to improve enrollment, retention, education completion and protection of the refugee learners and youths in Kenyan tertiary education institutions. It is important to look at the best initiatives aiming towards sensitization sessions in tertiary education across the country to help build capacity of refugee children and eliminate discriminations.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Challenges for refugees to access higher education

A. Funding

The key stakeholders of the Ministry of education interviewed for this project identified financial implication is the major foreseeable challenge. Because even financing education in Kenya is inadequate right now. The cost of tertiary education is high, and Kenya pays all Kenyan students joining to any tertiary education including universities, vocational, technical institutions through Higher

Education Loan Board (HELB) a government body. This covers tuition fees and welfare issues for students like accommodation, and learning materials. In a nutshell, financing refugee education will be a struggle. This is because Kenya is still struggling in implementation of the provision of free education to its learners of basic education. Therefore, the government cannot afford to pay refugee education unless the revised refugee education policy (draft) on inclusion of refugee to national education policy be launched and cost action plan be developed, that will enable the government work together, with the international partners, UN Agencies, UNHCR and other key intergovernmental agencies to finance the policy.

B. Recourses/learning environment

i. Overcrowded classrooms

As revealed in the literature review, and according to some of the respondents, overcrowding is a major factor in the refugee camps. The students report that the number of refugees in the camps is high compared to the facilities in place. This even applies to the classrooms and learning halls. This is a big barrier to the learner's ability to master academic lessons, hence succeed academically. This factor is very serious as it pertains to the very purpose of the schools and classroom role. The hindrance plays a big role on the advancement of refugees to better learning institutions.

ii. Lack of learning materials

Another major hindrance to refugee's access to education is the lack of learning materials. This includes exercise and text books, chalks and pens and other required materials. Again, this challenge adds to the situation of overcrowding, making learning very difficult or almost impossible. Such problems ought to have been resolved as the institutions advance to tackle issues like electricity setup. The students are willing to learn while they cannot access the necessary tools. In some cases, the leaning materials accessible are in wear and tear conditions as there lacks provision of these materials.

iii. Lack of teachers/lecturers

Apart from the poor infrastructure in the centers offering college education in the refugee camp, there is also the challenge of quality education and learning procedure; a thematic area that UNICEF (2000:13) has put attention and resources for decades. It includes the man power, the human resource and the teaching staff expected to facilitate learning. Most of the academic facilitators are unskilled teachers with limited training on knowledge insemination and additionally, they are exposed to severe working environments of managing many pupils and students,

hence may develop low self-esteem despite the fact that there is a large number of pupils. UNHCR and other NGOs are required to provide training and empower the available teachers to strengthen their ability to withstand the demands of managing many students. Some of the current policies do not focus to empower refugee education and addition of teaching staff to accommodate the academic demands. In the presence of available online teaching materials, low skills may continue to be another gap that may require state and NGO support to ensure education in the camp is improved. The geographical location and the cost of teaching materials and training staff will remain a big challenge that requires policy strategies to address them. Analysis shows that the remuneration and the wage scale for the academic staff from the UNHCR depends on the experience, the level of training, and the institutions they teach, which motivates them to work diligently. BHER has been on the forefront in training teachers and part trained teachers so as to improve the experiences of tertiary education in Kenya at large. The knock-on effect has been “the presence of teachers attracts more students to undertake tertiary education”.

iv. Lack of access to technologies

Issues relating to the absence of quality college and university education for the refugees in Kenya was mentioned in the interviews done within the MoE and also was emphasized by the refugee students. In attempt to react to the inquiries on the challenges facing higher education in Kenya MoE, Director General, (March 2019) explains that; ‘Access entails the lack of supplies and infrastructure, skilled manpower that is supposed to energize the performance of the tertiary institutions’. The Director also mentions the shortage of resources within academic institutions in the camp that has forced local administrations to rely on powered generators resulting from the disconnect of the refugee camps from the national grid, and the fact that the use of fuel is expensive and risky compared to the rest of Kenya. The main reason is due to the remoteness of the camps and their academic institutions. Communication facilities such as computers are limited in terms of supply and availability which makes internet access unreliable and costly for the majority of students, and denies them an opportunity to use online learning to compensate for the shortage of academic materials and the understanding computational packages such as word processor, Ms Excel, and Ms power-point.

“Even if technology is improved in the tertiary sector, it will still be a great challenge for the teachers to teach these students how to use a computer. These are skills that should be first introduced in primary and

secondary level so that the learners grasp the basic knowledge of technology at the grassroots.”

(Interview Student 1, September 2019)

Thus, five respondents also cited that the poor quality in the tertiary education in the camps results to a lack of participation of refugees in the Labor market. When asked if an improved in technology could lead to improved participation in the Labor market, one of the students stated: All the issues of access that relate to the ‘Quality learning environment’ in the UNICEF (2000:7), which explain that enough structures in the school as well as infrastructure, clean water supply, lavatories, furniture, enough space for learning has impact on academic performance. Within the immigrants’ camps in Kenya, the poor infrastructure greatly affects the size of the class and since the students do not have a conducive environment to learn, they do not feel supported in any way and are also not motivated and this leads to poor performance. One of the policy makers in the ministry of Education also suggested that there was need to improve access of tertiary education and this could be enhanced by portable schools which means that schools are brought to the students and this could greatly have a positive impact on the access of education because in most cases, factors such as climate, transportation and distance greatly affect attendance in the schools. This coincides with Williams suggestion in (2001:85) on improvement of education in the refugee camps and the fact that large investments of resources is not a necessity, but that creative solutions that are unique to all the individuals in the camp should be effective. There are however very few opportunities in the camps university and college students. For example, in the refugee zones in Kakuma, JRS normally allows the online study programme that is managed in collaboration with the University of South Africa and this cooperation and partnership has enables approximately 30 students annually to get financial support to study diploma courses including environmental and public health, community development, sociology, and among others degree courses. For instance, in June 2010, JRS was in position to form an additional partnership with the American Jesuit Universities thus providing distance learning opportunities for about 20 refugees’ students. Respondent 1, who is a representative of the government added that internet was unreliable and costly and this meant that very few students could be in position to access online programme at the convenient time, and in addition arrange of challenges govern access to key academic materials for effective learning.

A. Language of instruction

Another challenge for refugee access to tertiary education as described by the state officials in the MoE is the language of instruction. Most refugees could be going to school while aged enough with the language of instruction undermining learning processes. Historically most refugees arrive from their home countries with limited understanding of English. Their local vernacular makes it difficult for them to learn easily within the Kenyan institutions. First classes should involve teaching English language to make them take instruction as preferred in the Kenyan Institutions and Labor market.

B. Donor priorities and political will

It is also worth noting that most of the donors who jet into the country to spearhead tertiary education, invest more in inaugural classes than in actual tertiary education hence most of the students in the camps are enrolled in inaugural classes where they embark on the first part of a three-tiered set of courses. This includes courses that can improve skills in management, improve English comprehension and writing and master standard computer programmes. Additionally, applied courses such as tailoring, art and craft, and wood works are also provided for the students who upon completion are able to join universities across the country.

In addition, the Deputy Director in education said: *"The biggest obstacle that we face is being able to help the students' access tertiary education because the materials and infrastructure that are needed to be used by the students are not easy to access. Actually, over time most of us as key stakeholders have come to realize that in the refugee camp tertiary education is not a major priority. Most of the donors that come to fund the community mainly want to just provide health, water and food –to them those are the major priorities. Education is singled out and left to be the second priority. With time, I, personally, have come to the realization that education is a key priority that can be in a better position to facilitate the issues and address them accordingly."*

(Deputy Director of Education, May 2019)

Yet another stakeholder also stated that:

"The situation with the refugees is seen to being a temporary situation, so that's why there was no need to have very permanent programs as BHER and permanent structures because these can easily draw the learned refugees scholars to contribute to the development within the camps instead of opting to return to their home countries."

(UNHCR Education officer, October 2019)

The results show that financing education is the problem affecting many refugee camps in Kenya.

Even though the camps lack adequate colleges and limited access to tertiary education programs, the camps in Kakuma and Kalobeyei settlement have problems of managing human settlement which depends on international aid, rather than the education aspect.

I discovered that the programs being offered were mainly designed for survival of the target population and there is less concern on academic development within the refugee settlements; only because of the direct response to the issues faced in the refugee camps and the stakeholders provided the main direction.

I also realized that the NGO workers are in position to understand the shortfalls but are very much limited by the donor demands and the stakeholders. It is worth noting that access to tertiary education in the camps could have benefited from greater funding being provided to the sector as it would improve the infrastructure, the salaries of the teachers and the supplies.

C. Gender and community support

The inadequate access to funding as well as the lack of support from the community and from the parents was a major challenge faced in accessing tertiary education in Kenya in general. Four students who were interviewed explained that the few opportunities for tertiary education as well as the literacy programmes results in poor engagement in the Labor market despite attaining tertiary education. However, they also noted a great change in manner in which the perception of education has continued to change over time in the community. More and more parents have continued to wish their children access tertiary education because of the hope for a better future coupled with employment and social promotion. However, finding indicates two major issues – gender and culture- which greatly affect support from the parents and community. Student who was respondent 2 indicated that domestic duties, norms in terms of the culture and family responsibilities had taken a toll on her from being able to participate in NGO programmes despite being a tertiary education student. She also asserted that girls in the area are victims of early forced marriage, female genital mutilation and gender based violence.

Additionally, one of the respondents (interview student 2) also stated:

"Most girls feel that form four level of education is the final stage and ends up getting pregnant. In the community, most girls are supposed to be housewives because on reaching a certain age they are forced into relationship by parents and ends up getting in married and leave school. The girls act as a source of

income by our parents when they are married. However, some of us just intervene and even flee from our homes. The situation is starting to decrease because there is mobilization of the communities.” (Interview student 3, September 2019)

Six of the students commented that parent associations (PA), adult literacy programs and community outreach programmes were on the rise and had continued to be mobilized. The finding highlighted that the need for gender parity also has a significant impact on the education for girls.

The community was also able to use transitional networks to be able to obtain funding for books and supplies. SRP scholarship winners who are mainly graduates in the secondary schools must also wait for a year before being able to resettle in Canada and these students have also volunteered to be employed as teachers in the schools and the PAs providing accountability.

3. CONCLUSION

The study established that key challenges for refugees access to tertiary education in Kenya can be summed up as ‘language barriers, shortage of well trained teachers, harsh learning environments, low enrollment of the girl child, inadequate facilities and broken structures in the family where one is a student and also acts as the head of the family.’

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. The state department of Education should review some of the regulations and laws that govern refugee activities in Kenya, and ensure that such policies can be flexible enough to allow refugee access to tertiary to education.
- B. The government of Kenya and UNHCR should cooperate and build tertiary schools for the refugees to access tertiary education like the Nationals.

- C. Trained lecturers should be taken to the refugee camps to impart skills and knowledge to the refugees and the host community.
- D. Kenya government to consider refugee students to access equal opportunity with young Kenyans in getting scholarships.
- E. Government of Kenya and UNHCR should provide more scholarships (full) for the refugees

REFERENCES

- [1] BHER (Borderless Higher Education for Refugees). (2017). Borderless Higher Education for Refugees website. [<http://www.bher.org/>]
- [2] BHER (Borderless Tertiary Education for Refugees). (2017). Borderless Tertiary Education for Refugees website. [<http://www.bher.org/>]
- [3] Government of Kenya (2010). The Constitution of Kenya, 2010. Nairobi: National Council for Law Reporting. ([Act No. 13 of 2006, L.N. 64 of 2007, Act No. 19 of 2014, and Act No. 11 of 2017.])
- [4] UNHCR. (2017). Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/57d9d01d0>
- [5] UNHCR. (2018). Global resettlement projected Needs. The UN Refugee Agency. The 24th Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement
- [6] UNHCR. (2018). Kenya: Registered refugees and asylum-seekers (as of 31 July 2018). Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2/2018/06/Kenyanographics_May2018.pdf