



Supporting Refugee Access and Participation in Higher Education in Uganda

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Introduction

- **89.3 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide** due to conflict, violence etc. (UNHCR, 2022)
- **Host nations** work towards repatriation and integration of refugees but this is saddled with attendant challenges e.g.:
 - competition for resources, job opportunities, burdening the health and education systems, etc.

Education as preparation for “Futures”

- Education for refugees can ease the processes of resettlement and integration and preparation for the possible futures
- Some milestones have been achieved, however refugees' access to and participation in higher education is still lacking

Refugees in Uganda

- **Uganda hosts 1.38 million refugees - the highest number in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2019)**
- From the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somalia and Burundi
- They are located in 12 districts whereas some are found within Kampala-Urban refugees
- **Despite efforts by government to integrate them, their meaningful participation in HE is still limited**

Our Study

We set out to:

- Establish the **meso-level institutional structures and practices** for supporting refugee access and participation in HE in Uganda
- Examine the **challenges refugee students** face when accessing and participating in HE in Uganda
- Examine the **existing partnerships for promoting refugee** access and participation in HE in Uganda

Methods and participants

- 5 private universities; 3 public universities; two refugee supporting organizations
- 25 structured interviews with key actors [vice chancellor; International Student office; refugee student representatives]
- Focus group discussions with refugee students in public and private universities.
- Refugee Students' Survey

Knowledge products

- **Najjuma**, R., Gallagher, M., & Nambi, R. (2022). The role of institutional practice, non-educational actors and social networks in shaping refugee student lifeworlds in Ugandan higher education. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 7, 12.
- Nambi, R.; Gallagher, M.; & Najjuma, R. (2022 In press). Integrating refugee students into Ugandan higher education: communicative action, othering, everyday enactments of participation. *Research in Comparative and International Education*.
- Gallagher, M.; Najjuma, R. & Nambi, R. (2022 In Review). Bidi Bidi kind of creativity: the liminality of digital inclusion for displaced populations in Uganda.
- Emerging Refugee HE Support Framework
- Keynote address at RLP Regional conference to
- Engagement with actors such as Refugee Engagement Forum, RLP, NGOs, OPM...etc.
- **We are open to a targeted dissemination and to develop a policy brief**

Masters' Student Progress

Name: NAKIMBUGWE CHRISTINE

Registration No.: 2019/HD04/21460U

Title: Improving Refugee Students' Communication Skills to support their classroom participation in Secondary Education in Uganda: a case study of Kampala High School

Progress: Graduated on Tuesday, 24th May 2022

Our findings

1: Universal categorisation/classification as international students –as a challenge to access and participation

2. The **needs of refugee students are complex and multifaceted requiring a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach** among educational institutions, families, communities and service agencies.

2: The critical role of non-higher education supporting organisations that focus on refugee support and education-Need for partnerships btm Non-HE actors and HEIs.

3. Need to develop refugee students agency- learning the language for wider communication, and creating a support network of social circles.

Finding 1

Categorizations as international students

- Many do not meet the criteria for being recognized as refugees
- The Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process is lengthy
- the burden of proof - clearly they are foreign students (hence the categorization as international students) but cannot prove that they are refugees
- Universities lack guiding policies for refugee students

Finding 1 (cont'd)

- The “existing institutional policies” governing international students are acutely driven by the hefty tuition
- **Refugee students’ invisibility in policy and practice**
- Reproducing complex institutional practices that limit access and participation
- Non-Higher Education Institutional (HEIs) actors provide a mechanism to fill this gap in some institutions

Finding 2

The critical role of non-higher education supporting organisations that focus on refugee support and education

- They place the HEI within the reach of some refugee students e.g.
 - equating/verification of their academic papers
 - payment of the registration, admission and tuition fees
 - provision of living expenses
 - orientation to the diverse university life before they report

Finding 2 (cont'd)

‘... [A]n international NGO visits refugee camps and provides information about available higher education opportunities for accessing and participating in higher education, courses, admissions and admission timelines and available funding for refugee students ...’

- Without the brokering of these non-higher education actors, access to university is fragmented and ultimately ‘disconnected from [the] local realities’ (Pradhan 2019:86) of these students

Finding 3

Refugee students agency- learning the language for wider communication, and creating a support network of friends

- Participation in students' social circles enables their accumulation of social capital and networks for information sharing and problem solving
- General belief in education to help them have a future either in the host country or country of origin
- Aspirations for future participation in the governance of their home countries

Takeaways and implications for HE

- Partnership approaches are required to collaboratively address refugee students access and participation challenges.
- Need for targeted Support on the development of refugee students' competences for navigating the complex institutional structures and practices.
- Collaborative institutional policy development and advocacy by Non-HEIs actors.
- Universities should work with Non-HEIs actors to provide intentional and targeted support for refugee students; reduce complexity

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