



Role Of Borderless Higher Education For Refugees Programme In Offering High Quality Teacher Education And Training For Refugees In Dadaab Settlement In Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to describe the role of Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) initiative in improving access, equity, and quality in professional training and education of refugee un-trained volunteer teachers in Dadaab refugee settlement schools in north eastern Kenya. The quality of refugee education across the world is wanting. Teacher quality for all in refugee camps/settlements is difficult to achieve in many countries that host refugees. Reason is because most international agencies that come to aid of the refugees are mostly concerned with basic humanitarian assistance like health, food and shelter. But teacher quality is a key determinant of students' participation rates and achievement levels. It also remains an important ingredient towards attainment of social justice in terms of equity in educational quality for students. One contributing factor to teacher quality is professional training and education though its availability and quality create inequity for many refugee teachers in their camps. A qualitative review of the role of BHER was focused in this perspective.

Keywords: Teachers training and education, BHER education Project.

INTRODUCTION

Quite a number of countries are already passed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) goal of Education for All (EFA) that was replaced by Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the last quarter of 2015. However, there is a struggle within the refugee circles to achieve 'teacher quality for all', in the refugee settlements in Kenya. Yet teacher quality is one of the key factors determining the participation rates of children in schooling and the quality of their education (Verspoor, 2004; OECD, 2005; Hanushek, 2005). Though indicators of teacher quality are contentious and the methodological problems in comparing their significance considerable (Vignoles, Levacic, Machin, Reynolds & Walker, 2000) there is broad consensus that it is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; UNESCO, 2006). It is also an important element in promoting social justice in terms of educational quality in rural and remote areas, where teachers tend to be less qualified than their urban peers and less well-resourced and supported. In recognition of its importance, support for teachers' quality education and training is receiving more attention in the discourse of international and national agencies, for example: Hammarberg (Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe) while addressing World Teachers Conference during World Teachers' Day, on 5th October 2006 said that in our fast-changing world, teachers must be engaged in life-long learning to be able to meet new

challenges. It is a grave political contradiction that so much emphasis is being given to the importance of education while so little is being done to give teachers status, support and reward that they require to propel their work to beneficial levels. The professional status of teachers should be recognised as one of the most important in society in enhancing the suitability of school graduates to the society. It is the responsibility of policy-makers and school management to support and empower the teachers in this important role, and to work toward raising their professional status.

Few would disagree with Hammarberg that teachers should be supported and empowered in their professional role though the means of achieving this generates diverse views. Providing an enabling environment (i.e., policy, resources, and support) where teachers have access to relevant professional training opportunities presents governments and planners with huge challenges. 'Training opportunity' here refers, not just to a training event, but to "an experience with an anticipated or inferred learning outcome. Such an experience may be carefully planned and purposefully structured, or it may occur naturally and informally" (Schwille, Dembélé, & Schubert 2007:29). In her review of international literature on teachers' professional development, Villegas-Reimers (2003) concludes that a career long approach to it "requires the transformation of processes and policies that support teachers, their education, their work and their growth in the profession" (p. 141). In other words, it requires system-wide policies and arrangements that are fair, inclusive (open to all teachers), good quality, and affordable.

In Kenya, there has been a tremendous expansion in the education sector in the recent past, thanks to policies like Free Primary Education (FPE) and Subsidised Secondary Education (SSE). The high enrolment rates in both primary and secondary schools have seen the government expand university education by increasing the number of public universities from a conservative figure of seven to current twenty two. The Kenya constitution of 2010 proposes that every county should have at least a public university. The World Bank yet again asserts that for every population of around 500,000 people, there should at least be established university. Based on these scenarios, most universities have expanded out of their traditional enclaves. Moi University expanded to the north eastern part of Kenya by establishing a university college at Garissa. Kenyatta University set up a campus at Dadaab refugee settlement. However, the impetus was halted when the hand of terrorism struck hard at Garissa University College claiming the lives of 142 students. This was a big blow to the families of the young intellectuals and the academic fraternity. Garissa University College remained closed for most part of 2015 until recently when low scale activities were reactivated by the national government. Dadaab Campus scaled down their operations and it under 24 hour security surveillance and even educators on BHER programme are given tight security escort to and fro the campus. This makes provision of education here a very expensive undertaking. Other security concerns here saw the giant teachers' unions (KNUT and KUPPET) in Kenya withdraw their members from this volatile region. This has left thousands of school going children unattended putting their future at stake. In fact some observers have said that as long as these refugee youths are left idle, they will always be kept busy by criminals out to expend their energies through radicalisation to terrorism.

To be able to overcome challenges where such disruption take place, OERs and ICT have the potential to support education policies as has been demonstrated in both developing and industrialised countries (Robinson & Latchem, 2003; Perraton, Robinson & Creed, 2007). Without OERs and ICT, some of the improvements so far achieved in teacher quality would not have been possible, especially in developing countries. The growth of ICT has added new options for teachers' training and professional development (Collis & Jung, 2003; Unwin 2005;

Leach, Ahmed, Makalima, & Power, 2006) as well as raised concerns about the inclusion of disadvantaged groups like refugees settled in north eastern Kenya.

The biggest challenge has been to equip the refugee teacher volunteers in Dadaab settlement who are teaching in schools run by international agencies. The scenario that has given an impetus to this desire for training of teachers is the recent expression by the Kenya government to return all refugees to their home countries following their perceived participation in terrorism activities that saw not only teachers unions withdrawing their staff but also several other workers both in the government and private sectors left the region paralysing essential services to the people of this region. Prof Don Dopp remarked that the training will make the returnees to be in charge of education and more curriculum development in their countries of origin when they go back. He said that it will be a big catastrophe to send back these people without these skills so that they are able to settle back well.

Because of the huge challenges of getting the necessary professional teacher educators who are willing to go and offer teaching services at this region, the big question is: how can the uses of OER and ICT support goals of social justice for refugees in teacher education among the refugees in Dadaab in north eastern Kenya? What kind of criteria should be used in judging the achievement of these refugee teachers?

From the above perspective, there was need to examine pertinent questions on BHER's programme in the context insecurity, financing acceptability and the effective professional development of the teacher currently working as volunteers in the many agency schools within Dadaab refugee settlement. It begins with a brief description of the project, and then examines the broader issue of refugee teachers' rights to professional training/development (i.e., the policy context in which any teacher education sits). There is a need to take a peek into what contributions Open educational Resources (OER) and Information Communication and Technology (ICT) play in meeting the programme's outcomes.

BHER programme at Dadaab's refugee settlement

Dadaab refugee camps lie in the north-eastern part of Kenya, in Garissa County, approximately 100 Kilometres south of the Kenya-Somali border. This is a settlement of some sorts and is made up of six different camps housing over half a million people. It was established in 1992 as a temporary camp for refugees who were fleeing Somalia after a war broke out following the toppling of Siad Barre as the president. The temporariness has become a permanent feature in Kenya's geo-political and social landscape.

In recent years, Dadaab has captured the attention of an innovative consortium of universities in Kenya and Canada. These universities are Moi University, Kenyatta University and African Virtual University from Kenya and York University and University of British Columbia (UBC) from Canada. The consortium created Borderless Higher Education for Refugees, known as BHER, whose aim is to provide formal training to the many of untrained volunteer teachers who already teach in the various schools in camp.

Despite the time-honoured presence of the encampment, Dadaab refugees have little opportunity for integration into Kenyan economies. With the exception of a few "incentive jobs" offered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), refugees are not allowed to work in Kenya and they rely on international aid for their basic needs. Dadaab

refugees are also not allowed to move beyond the camps without a permit, limiting their freedom of mobility and making them, in effect, prisoners within the camps. "Without access to higher education, the choice of occupations is very limited for refugee youth. The alternatives for young men and women are in very precarious forms of employment such as working for a militia, working for the pirates, drug running, working as a prostitute," says Professor Wenona Giles. Professor Giles and Professor Don Dippo, both from York University in Toronto (Canada) and Professor Too Jackson of Moi University, Kenya, lead the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER). Though still in its first phase (the first cohort of secondary school teachers have just been admitted), BHER is developing the world's first programme to provide innovative, equitable, and internationally accredited university education to encamped refugees.

The BHER team is comprised of a global consortium of NGOs and academic institutions committed to improving the quality and accessibility of education for refugees. At present, they administer education initiatives with refugees along the Thai-Burma border and are already running programmes within the Dadaab refugee camps (that comprise Hagadera, Dagahaley, Dadaab and Ifo). The impetus behind the Dadaab branch of BHER came from Dr Marangu Njogu of Windle Trust Kenya, the NGO responsible for running secondary schools in the Dadaab refugee camps. The founder was exasperated by the limited education in the camps. He therefore envisioned a new programme that would provide teacher training for primary and secondary school teachers in order to improve the overall quality of education in Dadaab. In 2008, pursuit of this vision led him to Philip Landon, African Director of the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), an organization best known for offering scholarships for refugees to study at various Canadian universities. As Giles shares, "WUSC was also interested in expanding what they could do beyond individual scholarships". Giles goes ahead to say that scholarships tend to be more of a drop in the sea, "there are not many for the number of refugees that need them most." So, in 2008, Landon and Njogu travelled to York University in Toronto, a WUSC partnership university with a specialized research centre focused on refugee issues. It was there they met with Professor Giles and Professor Dippo, both of the Centre for Refugee Studies.

Intended Recipients of the Programme

The programme targets various groups of all refugees. The majority of cases in the BHER programme now are refugees from Somalia. There are also those from Ethiopia, and South Sudan. Out of the overall amount of students attending the courses through BHER, 75% are refugees, while 25% are local students.

It is instructive to note that at the same time, the target group of this project are young women. This is a focus on gender equality because usually women do not even attend secondary schools and therefore hardly qualify for the higher education programme offered through BHER. This project aims at involving them. There was a projection of a 30% women enrolment in the first year group and 40% in the second phase.

Essential Enablers for the Programme

Besides the partners involved in the project, strong support is given by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). As well as others, they have provided computers and assisted in the construction of the Dadaab campus. The government (of Kenya) as well gives full support to the project, besides others by donating the land where the campus has been built. The government of Somalia has worked with Kenya and UNHCR on the situation.

Programme Challenges

The main challenge of the project is security. Throughout many meetings that the consortium had, there was always a threat of terror. These problems also caused a certain delay in the timeline of the project. To prevent these, police usually escort the partner members throughout their stay in the refugee camps.

Another challenge is gender imbalance. It is very hard to find women with the required score for admission at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) to secure enrolment to start this course. For one to qualify to train as a teacher for primary school, they are required to a score a mean grade of 'C' and above and any grade below this is not good enough to enter higher education, more so as a teacher.

Yet again, it is a big challenge to keep students in the programme. Currently, there are grants for students (scholarships) that work on the individual level ('who gets a scholarship is saved'). This is why this project is trying to work on the inclusivity, group work, teaching them on how to work with each other and how to help each other in the process.

Finally, taking into account the situation in the camps, one big problem is the fact that students do not usually have electricity at home. To work on this issue, the project also started a smaller initiative which works on collecting money (crowd funding) to buy solar lamps. Each student enrolled in the programme has benefitted from a solar lamp.

BHER PROGRAMME DESIGN

Phase 1 – Increased access and Skills for Tertiary Education (InSTEP)

Potential learners will initially enrol in a university preparation programme called the Increased access and Skills for Tertiary Education (InSTEP). Its purpose is to prepare prospective students for university education through courses in English Language for Academic Purposes, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Research Skills. It will run as a school based programme, i.e., when schools are not in session like in August, December and April. The programme accommodates a cohort of 200 students in any given year. Windle Trust Kenya and WUSC deliver this programme.

Phase 2-A – Completion Educational Studies (Elementary)

Students who elect to proceed with their studies (after InSTEP) will be admitted to the one year Certificate of Completion in Education Studies (CES). Courses will incorporate both current theory and local knowledge, and will be sensitive to and appropriate for the context within which the Certificate is being offered. Both participants and their instructors will be challenged to creatively find and develop resources that can be used to support teaching and learning in the camp context. The Certificate programme is offered by York University.

Phase 3-A – Teacher Education Diploma (Primary) (DTE-P)

Students who complete CES successfully may choose to undertake the Teacher Education Diploma (Primary) (DTE-P). The courses that make up the Diploma programme will be university unit courses that will be transferable to other degree programmes, are recognized by local education authorities, and will support untrained teachers in developing the knowledge, skills, abilities that will help them become effective educators at the primary school level. The DTE-P is offered by the School of Education at Kenyatta University.

Phase 2 & 3-B – Teacher Education Diploma (Secondary) (DTE-S)

As an alternative to the Teacher Education Diploma (Primary), students completing InSTEP may be admitted to a two year Diploma in Teacher Education (Secondary) (DTE-S). This programme is offered by Moi University in collaboration with the University of British Columbia.

Phase 4 – Degree Programmes

Upon successful completion of the DTE-P or DTE-S, students may elect to follow Bachelor degree programmes (currently under development) in the following areas to be offered by the BHER partner universities: Community Health Professional, Community Development and Extension Studies, Public Policy and Administration, Human Rights and Equity Studies and Liberal Arts.

It is also important to take into account that the students in Kenya are following these courses simultaneously with other students in Canada. That is the reason why ICT course offered at Phase 1 – InSTEP is very relevant because this course is more of Distance Learning.

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

Taking into account that this is an on-going project, the results are not possible to be measured. However, for now the project is working very well and one of the best indicators is the fact that the model used is being recognised as effective and for example UNHCR is monitoring it closely in order to take this model on board of their other activities.

Since the facilities are one of the main expenses, the system is sustainable following this initial period and should be able to run the full course. As soon as the bridging programme (Phase 1) was announced, BHER received 500 applications and admitted 187 students. Three-quarters of them are refugees from Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and Chad, and one-quarter are Kenyan nationals who are also living in the Daadab refugee camps (as teachers from the rest of the country or living close by the camps and want to take the opportunity given).

Students range in age from 18 to 50, with most in their 20s. Although the consortium is mandated to attract more women to the programme, at this point fewer than one in five is female. Modelled on university transition programmes, InStep aims to bring students up to university level by offering three components: English for academic purposes; research methods; and computer skills. Since refugee teachers cannot afford to give up the small wage they earn teaching at the camp, the courses are taught intensively during the school holiday months of August, April, and December, as mentioned earlier.

Professor Dopp of York University on observing the first batch of students said that students are finding the first month of bridging demanding and challenging, but they are pleased with the rigour. The first cohort started their bridging programme in August, 2014.

The university consortium, partnering with World University Service of Canada (WUSC), Windle Trust Kenya and other non-profit organizations, secured \$4.5 million in funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, as well as partnership development grants and additional support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. York and UBC are also foregoing tuition to offer the programmes on a cost-recovery basis.

Students who complete the bridging programme are eligible to take either an elementary teaching diploma offered by Kenyatta University in partnership with York or a high school

teaching programme offered by Moi University in partnership with UBC. The UBC-Moi programme started at the camps' campus in August 2015, with a first cohort of about 60 students. York's courses are offered to Dadaab and York students at the same time. "While a prof is teaching in Toronto it will be online in camp, and then he'll go to the camp and it will be online at Toronto," explained Dr. Giles. Students on these programmes in Dadaab and York University will interact through discussion boards and online video and lessons.

Both UBC and York have been sending professors to teach part of the courses in the camps, with long-established contingency plans to teach the courses online if the environment is unsafe. "We were already preparing courses that can be delivered online if need be," said Dr. Giles.

There has been decreased stability in the camps since September 2011, due to flooding in Somalia and political crises, but that such challenges provide even more reasons to offer initiatives that keep students and their teachers focussed on a positive future: "We do think that our BHER programmes offer a good alternative to joining militia groups like the Al-Shabaab" which, incidentally, means "youth" or "youth movement."

For WUSC, the BHER project was a natural fit with the organization's mandate to help vulnerable women and youth. WUSC recently celebrated 35 years of its programme to sponsor refugees to attend a year of university in Canada.

Women in refugee camps face complex barriers to complete an education, said Tom Tunney, WUSC's senior manager of youth and community engagement. "Girls, if they are able to attend school, are also responsible for household chores, so their only time to study is in the evening when there's no electricity." WUSC and other groups started raising funds for solar lamps to overcome that particular obstacle. But cohort progression rate is very low i.e. there are presently two women on DTE (S) at the Dadaab Campus.

These hardships are apparent on the ground, say BHER organizers who have visited the Dadaab camps. "You'll have five kids crammed at a desk looking at one very old and tattered, worn textbook," said Rita Irwin, associate dean of teacher education in UBC's faculty of education.

She and her UBC colleagues were impressed by the dedicated students learning without resources we take for granted. For example, high school physics students are asked to imagine what a Bunsen burner is. The first time they will use one is the day they are tested, performing an experiment on an instrument they had never seen.

But with certifications and perhaps university diplomas down the road, access to university-level instruction may give students an opening once they return to their home countries. The creators of BHER hope that Dadaab may be a model for similar programmes in other camps and countries. This is because "We see a direct connection between higher education and peace building," said Dr Giles. "Like our Kenyan partners and other Canadian partners, we think education is the basis for building better countries, for moving away from militarization to productive ways to earning a living." Prof. Dippro, "beyond secondary education, most refugees all around the world in refugee camps have practically no access to higher education." The inconsistency or unavailability of quality education for refugees stems largely from the fact that education is not prioritized within the array of emergency responses in refugee situations.

Funding from NGOs and international agencies tend to go toward the most basic survival needs like food rations, shelter, and emergency health care. This problem is exponentially compounded, however, by the increasing lengths of refugee situations.

Dadaab's Community Involvement

At the heart of BHER is the community involvement in the programme for them to own it. The programme used participatory approach model. The BHER team at Dadaab recruited refugees and local Kenyans to act as their watchdog on the ground. The recruited team worked through 2012 and they spoke extensively with individuals and focus groups. This provided a comprehensive picture of how the residents of Dadaab would like their education system to take shape. With this input, BHER then planned the Dadaab refugees' courses from partnership universities via a combination of internet, DVD, and on-site learning. The first cohort of BHER students are those already teaching in the primary and secondary schools in Dadaab, most of whom cannot afford lengthy periods of time off to upgrade their skills. Studying via BHER's flexible delivery framework allows the teachers to upgrade their skills without sacrificing their income. It also enabled them to apply the new materials that they are learning into their primary and secondary school classrooms. By this arrangement, BHER will improve the quality of education for the children and youth of Dadaab while opening the door for teachers to gain post-secondary qualification. The certificates will help them be licensed to teach in Kenya and more importantly get employment in their countries of origin when they repatriate. Community engagement by BHER has increased naturally as the programme matures. This engagement has helped to keep teaching methods relevant to the community-specific cultural and social needs, as well as provided more opportunities for people who live there to participate in the project in more important and meaningful ways.

Working toward Equity

BHER was intended to meet the educational needs of Dadaab's refugees but the programme is fully accessible to Kenyan nationals whether of Somali descent or other communities. This is important because while Dadaab's refugees and Kenyans live in similarly dire conditions of poverty, refugees are eligible to receive international aid in the form of food rations or healthcare, while the local Kenyan residents are not; a fact that has been an on-going point of contention in the community. "They are living in a situation that is structured in very glaring unfairnesses," points Professor Dippo. Given these inequities, Dippo was initially surprised at the ease with which the Dadaab locals and refugees worked together during BHER's two week community researcher training session in Nairobi. Giles offered an explanation of her own that the thing about education is that it brings people together.

Giles and Dippo admit, however, that while inter-group relations between Kenyan citizens and refugees is more amicable than they had anticipated, gender discrimination in the community is still severe and pervasive. For instance, UNHCR data from 2012 indicates that only 26.5% of school-age girls attend primary schools. At the secondary school level the percentage of school-age girls enrolled drops to only 3.7%. The dearth of education for girls aggravates their marginalization in the community as it limits their access to employment and scholarships for further schooling. This is a problem BHER hopes to redress. "You can't just declare you're getting equal participation and then get it. Even in order to begin to make the smallest shift in the gender dynamics, women are going to have an awful lot of challenges," says Dippo.

In an effort to move toward more equal representation, the BHER project plans to incrementally increase the proportion of women in their programme each year. By training more women teachers through the BHER programme, it will strengthen the role of women in

education and provide academic role models for younger girls in the primary and secondary schools. BHER stresses the need for innovation and flexibility in the delivery of education for women and girls. "It's a lot of navigation and a lot of listening," says Giles. As Dipppo shares, the education of girls has often been seen as a lesser priority than that of boys. Indeed, girls' education has often been constrained by domestic duties, early marriages, safe transportation, or even a lack of sanitary napkins. BHER will offer things like MP3 players for at-home study and buses for safe transport, while keeping student security a top priority. "Whatever it is that is offered as an explanation for why the participation rate of girls is low, we have to be prepared to shift what we're doing around in order to address it," says Dipppo. According to Giles, the community participation has been crucial in formulating different ways to optimize inclusivity in learning initiatives. For instance, the community's in the Dadaab context suggests that a women's only computer lab will help foster a safer, comfortable, and conducive learning environment.

The New Scholars Network (NSN) will also play an important role in providing support to women in the BHER programme through their online student mentoring programme. The NSN will be teaming up with BHER to provide one-on-one mentoring to students in the Dadaab camps, pairing them up with students and scholars from across the globe. Access to academic role models and peers is especially important for the young women of Dadaab, who face an uphill battle in accessing education. Dipppo is also quick to point out the reciprocity of the mentorship relationship, suggesting that, "Given the online modality that technologies like Skype offer, I think it could be very, very productive and very satisfying for both parties."

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED

- BHER –Borderless Higher Education for Refugees
- CNN – Cable News Network
- COL - Commonwealth of Learning
- DRM - Digital Rights Management
- DTE – P - Teacher Education Diploma - Primary
- DTE – S - Teacher Education Diploma - Secondary
- EFA – Education for All
- FPE – Free Primary Education
- InSTEP - Increased access and Skills for Tertiary Education
- KCSE – Kenya Certificate for Secondary Education
- KNUT – Kenya National Union of Teachers
- KUPPET – Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers
- MDG – Millennium Development Goals
- MIT - Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- NGOs – Non Governmental Organisations
- NSN - New Scholars Network
- SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
- SSE – Subsidised Secondary Education
- TESSA - Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa
- UBC – University of British Columbia
- UNESCO – United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- WUSC - World University Service of Canada