

Is there a Parallel Education System for Refugees in Malaysia? A Review

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ABSTRACT: *This purpose of this paper is to explore the educational opportunity available in Malaysia, a non-signatory to the Refugee Convention, and can it be called an informal education system.*

This empirical, exploratory study is based on field study observations and interviews to collect data and evidence to descriptive and explain the current educational arrangement for refugees. The findings indicate a significant educational support and arrangement for refugees but to call it a parallel system is misleading. This study shades new insight on educational opportunity available and especially where it lacks and what further needs to be done in the Malaysian context.

KEYWORDS: *Refugees, Refugee Education, Parallel Education, Malaysia*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The principle of Education for All (EFA) established in Article 22 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees binds all signatory states to “accord refugees’ same treatment as accorded to own nationals with respect to elementary education [and] treatment as favourable as possible with respect to education other than elementary education” (1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child). Yet conflict-affected school going children and youths remain out of school in large numbers for long period of time. Participation in schools in host countries is low for refugee children for primary school and very much lower for secondary school going youths.

An encompassing statistics may not be available on the number of people who may be affected by conflicts and disasters, due to the very complex nature of the problem and compounded by a lack of consensus on the definition, but the data by UNCHR points to the gravity of the issue. A trend observed since the 70s and more pronounced in the current period indicates a steady relative increase of refugees over the years and with spikes during periods of conflict (Migration Report, 2017). However, the absolute translation of the rate is mind-boggling, millions of displaced people and children and youths forced out of the education system.

Rohingya Refugee in Malaysia

Malaysia at receiving end is hosting a sizable number of refugees mainly from Myanmar for many years now but of late the number has increased significantly due to the unfavourable event in the home country. Malaysia is currently hosting about 90 thousand refugees with a significant 60 thousand seeking asylum here or may stay for a period of time. A survey by UN indicates a median stay for any refugee is around 4 years, that is half of them have spent four years or more in exile, half less (International Migration Report, 2017).

Educational Prospects for Refugee in Malaysia

Malaysia remains a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, thus creating no opportunity for refugee children, to enter into the formal education system. Statistics from UNHCR indicates that of the approximate 158,000 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, 33,000 are under the age of 18 and 22,000 of whom are school-age (3-17 years old). The enrolment rate in the institution of learning is low for these children, at the end of 2015 it was merely 10 per cent for early childhood education, 48 per cent for primary education and 21 per cent for secondary education (UNHCR, 2016a).

Mostly, the education is provided through community learning centres, supported by both local and international expat community both playing a significant role in sustaining the schools. Based on UNHCR report, six NGOs and 27 refugee communities have been providing education to refugee children at 127 community learning centres around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. A further 26 being located in other states. Significant support is rendered by UNHCR which provides textbooks and other material support, in addition to financial support including teachers’ compensation (UNHCR, 2016a).

The Problem Statement

A good education in place for refugee children and youths will go a long way to help in resettlement to other countries, absorption into the host country or helps in settlement upon return when the situation stabilizes. Refugees in Malaysia are expected to stay longer due to the nature of the current conflict. Their future security is inherently connected to skills, capacities, and knowledge that can be productively gained here but usable wherever they may settle eventually. A good modest education goes a long way toward helping these unfortunate people. Malaysia, although a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, provides a meaningful educational environment not only in the spirit of ASEAN but also as her contribution towards humanitarian aid. A marked improvement has been observed since the introduction of modular teacher training programmes by UNCHR and other NGOs.

But is the current arrangement sufficient, efficient and effective to be called a parallel education system for the refugees' education.

Therefore, the Aim of this article is to explore the educational arrangement in existence in Malaysia and the possibility of it been referred to as a parallel system.

Objectives of the Study

With the above Aim as the central theme, the following objectives will be undertaken.

- i. To review the types of schools providing education for refugees
- ii. To review the types of programs and skills training available for refugees
- iii. To investigate if there is a convergent of programs to be called a parallel system

Definition of Refugees

The very nature of the issue is complex and hard to comprehend and this is compounded by the problems of definition.

The 1951 Refugee Convention, (Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention, and modified by 1967 Protocol), defines a refugee as a person who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality (UNCHR, 2016b).

The Latin-American defines it as: "persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."

In their non-binding declaration in 1984, in their Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. And UNHCR in 2011, (in addition to the 1951 definition), recognizes persons as refugee...."who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order"

The European Union's uses the minimum standards of the UN 1951 Convention; nevertheless, by virtue of articles 2 (e) and 15 of their Directive, identify refugees as persons who have fled a war-caused generalized violence are, at certain conditions, eligible for a complementary form of protection, called subsidiary protection. The same form of protection is foreseen for displaced people who, without being refugees, are nevertheless exposed, if returned to their countries of origin, to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatments.

II. REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL PROSPECTS FOR REFUGEE IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia remains a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, thus creating no opportunity for refugee children, to enter into the formal education system. Statistics from UNHCR indicates that of the approximate 158,000 refugees and asylum-seekers are registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, 33,000 are under the age of 18 and 22,000 of whom are school-age (3-17 years old). The enrolment rate in the institution of learning at the end of 2015 was 10 per cent for early childhood education, 48 per cent for primary education and 21 per cent for secondary education (UNCHR, 2016a).

Education is provided through community learning centres, supported by both local and international expat community both playing a significant role in sustaining the schools with some even deemed illegal. Based on UNHCR report, six NGOs and 27 refugee communities have been providing education to refugee children at 127 community learning centres around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. A further 26 being located in other states. Significant support is rendered by UNHCR which provides textbooks and other material support, in addition to its financial support including teacher compensation (UNCHR, 2016a).

Malaysia Education System Overview

Education is a priority of the Federal Government of Malaysia. The national education system is divided into pre-tertiary and tertiary education. Pre-tertiary education (pre-school to secondary education and teacher education) is under the Ministry of Education (MOE) while tertiary education is under the Ministry of

Higher Education (MOHE) although this too had been marched into a single Ministry under the new government.

Education begins with the non-compulsory pre-school education at the age of four followed by 6-year compulsory primary education when the child reaches the age of six on the first day of January of the school year. A total of 11 years of free primary and secondary education is provided free by the government. The primary education can be in the vernacular schools, where Chinese and Tamil are the medium of instruction for most subjects except the English and Malay languages. The secondary schools include vocational schools.

Beyond 11 years of free education, further education takes diverse path reflecting individual's academic performance and financial position of family and can be either public institution of higher learning with cheaper fees or private colleges and universities or even technical and vocational institutions.

On the private education front, a parallel progression is in place that starts at kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, primary religious schools, secondary religious schools, independent Chinese schools, International schools, Expatriate schools, Special schools, tuition centres, Language institutions, Computers training centres and other non-contact postal/correspondence institutions all the way to degrees and postgraduate degrees at private universities (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Refugees Education

Although Malaysia has not signed the convention on refugees along with its protocol relating to refugees, nonetheless, in recent years, it had stepped up acceptance of refugees especially from Myanmar and supports schools especially for refugee children who are in dire need of some education and works related skills. There are currently more than 30,000 refugee children registered with UNHCR with a third of them have access to some sort of education. Since refugee children cannot attend public schools, they can only receive education through schools set up by partnerships between local NGOs and UNHCR or community-based schools run by the refugee community.

Currently, some 6,100 (29%) registered refugee children aged 3-17 years old are enrolled in early childhood, primary, and secondary level education at these learning centres (UNCHR, 2016a).

Review of Empirical Literature Evidence

Access to education is a fundamental human right, and no child or student should be denied education (Grandi, 2018). By giving a chance to the equal quality education, we produce an intelligent source, we embrace humanity and destroy the cultural barrier. According to Grandi, (2018) education nurtures critical thinking, which is the best rampart against the temptation of extremism. And refugees should be encouraged to participate fully in their education process (Everard & Morris, 1990: 31). The involvement of the parents can enhance the achievement of the desired transformation (Mosoge & van der Westhuizen, 1998:73) and involve them in decision making makes it more efficient and progressive (Ellis and Fischer, 1994). Some of other the key factors that require attention has been identified by Hart (1995:11) and Gultig & Butler, (1999:62-63) for a more effective and efficient educational dissemination include: -

- Principals should lead rather than instruct. Principals need to rely on the support of their staff in order to efficiently manage their institutions. Responsibility should be shared.
- Leadership is about empowering participants. Emphasis to be placed on the effectiveness of schools and not simply efficiency. The emphasis is now being placed on a commitment to constant and continuous improvement which involves everybody in the school.
- Creation of a culture of learning rather than of controlling behaviour.

Hart (1995:11) and Gultig & Butler, (1999:62-63) are of the view that education providers should lead and motivate their team of educators to have a cascading effect on students' motivation. Many studies have reported the importance of motivation of students. According to Anderson, (2010) students who are motivated to learn and interested in what they are doing will learn more. Lile, (2003) writes motivation as the key to all learning and highly motivated students will have better results and put a bigger effort into their endeavour than the lowly motivated students. Gardner and Lambert (1987) have investigated the impact of motivation among students towards learning the second language. Scholars like Rivers (2013) and Ngoc, et al., (2012) have identified influencing factors like the classroom environment, teaching method, teaching aids, reinforcement as important motivating factors should be emphasised and harnessed, whenever possible, to improve the quality of education in refugee schools. A good teaching environment and curriculum should incorporate the psychological need of the students. Based on (Collins 2014), who has investigated closely the challenges of the refugees in public institutions in the United States, mentioned that refugees deal with external factors that hinder their educational success, including being academically behind, learning a new culture that is different from their own, and violent, traumatic past experiences. These are issues that refugees bring into the classrooms with them and must be attended to for them to be able to adjust to "normalized" life.

Not only are they coming to a new country with its own unique, and foreign, set of cultures, but these

students have to filter this information to see where they fit in and how it connects to their home country and way of life. McBrien (2005) identified several things as essential to the psychosocial well-being of refugee students: a need for a sense of safety, a sense of self, and an adjustment to the cultural expectations of a new country while maintaining a connection to their heritage.

Unfortunately, children have a blurred understanding of what is going on around them and most of them experienced traumatic shock, which could be a great distraction for them. Majority of these kids do not have an idea of the discipline in the school or how to communicate with teachers. It takes a long process to get these kids adapted to the educational environment.

Prior Sheltered Instruction

Moving children immediately into vocational training, has an immediate benefit, engaging them mentally and physical immediately from their trauma but they should pass through a sheltered instruction. The benefits are great, a well-maintained group of children in small organized classes, with a familiar home-like environment and phobia removed, are highly motivated to perform well and unlikely to drop out of school later. The benefits are well documented in the legally accepted environment.

In Calgary, Alberta, the LEAD (Literacy, English and Academic Development) Program is offered in 11 locations, for students with limited formal schooling in grades 4-12. Students receive sheltered instruction for up to two years as they are gradually integrated into inclusive classrooms.

The Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School in New York City offer expanded learning opportunities for students ages 17 to 21. The school offers flexible scheduling and works in partnership with a community-based organization and psychological services.

In Boise, Idaho the Language Academy offers a newcomer program. The students take courses in core content and learn English through a sheltered content model. Additional supportive services such as counselling, physical education, and social work are available and use "youth mentor" who serves as a male role model for students and facilitates service learning projects (Teaching Refugees, 2018).

Overview of Successful Past Refugees Educational Management

Effective management of refugee education in the past include Sudan, Sierra Leon and Bhutan. The involvement of refugee communities in these countries has played a critical role in its success. In Uganda, the Jesuit Refugee Services refugee education programme had employed trainers to give vacation and term-time training to refugee teachers, as well as sponsoring some to participate in national teacher training programmes. In Sierra Leone and Liberia in Guinea, the education programme was undertaken by the International Rescue Committee with a separate teacher training division, which organised vacation courses, together with in-school training by mobile trainers and by teachers trained to mentor their colleagues. Teachers in the Bhutanese refugee schools in eastern Nepal receive vacation training as well as weekly training sessions and classroom mentoring by 'in-school resource teachers' (Brown, 2001). And in Tanzania, "the refugee communities have persuaded primary school teachers, social workers and other refugees working for different NGOs to give up some of their incentives in order to pay post-primary school teachers" (UNHCR, 2000). "The programme's history is an inspiring example of success, particularly through well-supported refugee community self-help efforts" (UNHCR/IRC, 2000: 1).

III. METHODOLOGY

This Qualitative approach field study seeks to understand and interpret the current issues of refugee education through an exploratory study to answer the question on how adequate is the "parallel" informal education goes along the line with formal education in Malaysia. The study seeks to explore the educational organisations' types providing refugee education, the programs they offer and its sufficiency to be called a parallel informal system. This empirical study is based on observations and interviews to descriptive and explains the current arrangement in Malaysia refugee educational environment using a cross-sectional data collection method.

The population of interest are all types of refugee educational providers in Malaysia with a representation of well maintained, sufficiently maintained and community based educational environment investigated and interviews with stakeholders. Purposeful sampling technique will be used to select institutions and subjects are selected for special reasons. The data collected are then analysed and explored for themes and patterns.

IV. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Analysis of a Sample of Educational centres/schools Well Managed and sponsored by UNHCR Dignity for Children Foundation

Started by a husband and wife team twenty years ago, this church-based organization have expanded into educational provision from myriads of its previous activities. It has moved from its humble beginning as

tuition classes provider into primary and secondary educational programs. **The primary objective is to break the cycle of poverty, where else refugees are also the spillover beneficiary.**

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

This well-organized religious based international organization, with branches throughout the country, believes in providing a complete and wholesome education in a loving environment to propagate the correct education philosophy. **The aim is to produce exemplary talented future generations, with good moral values, wholesome vision and noble character who are able to contribute to building a peaceful and harmonious global community.** It has a comprehensive education system from pre-school all the way to tertiary education where the refugees have also benefited.

Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI)

This is an NGO registered with the Registrar of Companies Malaysia and working with refugee and asylum-seeker communities from Middle Eastern, Central Asian and African regions; Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen that focuses on education, health, livelihood and emergency support. The education programme is for children from the age of 4 to teenagers 18 years of age with an inclusive vocational training.

MSRI has been providing full-time, 2 sessions (morning and afternoon) schooling to over 380 refugee and asylum seeker children aged 6 to 18 at the end of 2017. The MSRI Education Programme is managed by paid staff (depending on funding) and volunteers, many of whom are refugees or asylum seekers themselves. **The curriculum is designed as a transition into schooling system of countries where refugees may get resettled.**

MSRI also supports a homeschooling for those unable to enrol by providing textbooks and allowing them to sit the exams.

Muslim Aid Malaysia

Muslim Aid focuses on aid and development under Muslim Aid Asia (MAA), which in turn is part of the Muslim Aid International (MAI) network of non-governmental organisations working **towards the two-pronged goal of eradication poverty and educating underprivileged children worldwide** with a UK-based parent organisation. The Malaysia chapter has started an institution to help kids gain a basic education, a better life and to gain competitiveness. Their 'Back to School' program has given the opportunity to 300 – 500 kids throughout the country.

Soroptimist International Johor Bahru (SIJB) for Rohingya

A well-endowed Professional Women NGO which is very active in doing service to the community. Soroptimist Foundation Malaysia, with United Nation High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), AIESEC (University Technology of Malaysia Student International Exchange program) and Sponsorship from UNHCR formed the foundation for refugee education in 2007. Rohingya refugee children who are unable to attend State Schools and private institutions and schools that are deemed too expensive are provided with basic education. It educates Rohingya children and strongly **believes education can enable the refugee children to acquire knowledge and skills to develop economically and socially.**

Future Global Network Foundation (FGN) for Rohingya

An NGO that manages education centres to provide education for Rohingya refugee children in Penang and Selangor. A dedicated husband and wife team manages these centres since 2010. FGN opened its second school in Batu Belah, Klang, Selangor, in partnership with Pencerdasan Container Ummah Malaysia and funded by UNHCR in 2012. In April 2015, UNHCR invited FGN to manage a third school located in Bandar Indera Makhota, Kuantan, Pahang and funded by the Albukhary Foundation. Currently, Albukhary FGN has 680 students in the three centres. These schools are funded from three different sources of funds (UNHCR, Selangor Islamic religious council, Albukhary Foundation)

Main Activities under UNHCR in these Institutions

UNHCR operates in partnership with these institutions and is involved in the following activities.

Allocation of resources for the improvement of educational prospects for the refugees. The improvement of the facilities and teachers' resources began in September 2017, with some 700 teachers being compensated under the Teachers' Compensation Programme.

These educational organisations prepare students to enter formal secondary education, however, only exceptional cases may be successful. Early Childhood Development is further enhanced with the 'ToyBox' programme which is implemented at 12 learning centres.

Summary of Interviews/field observation with well-managed Schools

The better schools are professionally managed by an excellent team of management and dedicated teachers, however, the attrition rate among staff is high. Besides the uniformity of schools' pedagogical

approach and preparing for the specific examination, the schools are for refugees who can pay a minimum fee and have an ID card authorised by UNHCR. These schools have a constraint in terms of capacity and hence the number enrolled is kept to a manageable level.

Teachers are mostly volunteers, with minimum exposure to teaching and its pedagogy. They are given insufficient exposure and briefing on the trauma the children could have undergone. The initial euphoria diminishes, resulting in frustration and leaving the system. It was clear that most of the schools were severely underfunded with teachers receiving a pittance salary, there was no budget for supplies, and small private donations and some support from UNCHR barely covered monthly rent for the building. The classes are rather large with as much as 50 students of the various age groups in a class with a single teacher without the support of an assistance thus restricting interaction, and many students weren't staying on. Neither do the teachers, especially those teaching pre-schoolers, can speak the language, for initially interaction and confidence building. Students are asked to speak something that is totally alien to them, creating a sense of fear. The involvement of the wider refugee community engagement is lacking. In some of these centres, the refugees themselves have volunteered to teach and are engaged in improving the curriculum at the learning centre. These centres were initially started as projects by concerned locals, and NGOs, with their own initial funding, but sourced for wider funding, assets and teachers as they expanded.

Analysis of a Sample of Educational centres/schools Reasonably Managed and sponsored by UNHCR/donors

These moderately managed schools include

1. Peace Learning Centre

2. Pusat Tuisyen and **many other similar learning centres with identical structure and functions**

The centres cater mostly for Rohingya children with basic education and whose parents are illegally employed. Resources are basic and cover minimum standards. Generally, facilities and some qualified and experienced teachers provided, but dependent on the amount of funding received. The subjects taught include Bahasa Melayu, English, basic math, colouring, singing, drawing with discipline skewed towards religious study. The teachers do help craft curriculum and standards.

Summary of Interviews/field Observation with Reasonably Managed Schools

Teachers are mostly volunteers, with minimum exposure to teaching and its pedagogy. They are given insufficient exposure and briefing on the trauma the children could have undergone. The initial euphoria diminishes, resulting in frustration and leaving the system.

It was clear that most of the schools were severely underfunded with teachers receiving a pittance salary, there was no budget for supplies, and small private donations and some support from UNCHR barely covered monthly rent for the building.

The classes are rather large with as much as 50 students of the various age groups in a class with a single teacher without the support of an assistance thus restricting interaction, the older students weren't staying on, and the younger students weren't getting enough individual instruction.

Neither do the teachers, especially those teaching pre-schoolers, can speak the language, for initially interaction and confidence building. Students are asked to speak something that is totally alien to them, creating a sense of fear.

The involvement of the wider refugee community engagement is lacking. In some of these centres, the refugees themselves have volunteered to teach and are engaged in improving the curriculum at the learning centre.

These centres were initially started as projects by concerned locals, and NGOs, with their own initial funding, but sourced for wider funding, assets and teachers as they expanded.

Analysis of Educational centres Managed by Community Based Learning Centres

Organisations such as Chin Student Organisation, Fugee School, ULC (United Learning Center for Refugees), Rohingya School Cheras and Rotary Club educational organisations accept refugee children regardless of their official status as a refugee.

Community-based organisations sustain themselves via charity programs and donation. The facilities and materials are rather inadequate. With minimal resources, these organisations somewhat manage to prepare students for the secondary education beyond basic knowledge.

Interviews/field Observation on Community Based Learning Centres/schools.

The following interview was undertaken in January 2018. Kuala Lumpur Malaysia

The first and the most important step towards understanding the reality is to dive into the atmosphere to observe and clarify all the aspects of the situation. It was a great fortune to conduct the interview with one of the representatives of the Rotary Club, currently running a self-made educational system in one of the schools for Rohingya refugees. His views are expressed below: -

“..... people who come from Myanmar are currently in the territory of Malaysia without documents, certificates or any sort of identification cards, people with a lot of medical issues come here to seek hope. Their daily living is basically ‘survival’, stated the representative of the Rotary Club association. Basic needs as drinking water and simple facilities is a daily struggle for these people. Based on the interview these individuals are waiting for the deportation as this will be the only decision regarding them. However, they do not lose the hope and try to place their children in community-based schools.”

During the interview session, the representative of the Rotary Club mentioned that this place wouldn’t stay afloat and sooner or later it will be shut down, due to the reason that legal arrangement for Rohingya refugees in Malaysia is a complex issue, they must go back to their country of origin.

To the question of “What would happen to the children education wise?” the answer was that the highest percentage wouldn’t complete the formal education.

The conversation with the facilitator in one of the schools was also depressing. As it has been mentioned that it is not safe to run classes in schools like this, as the school is not officially registered, so as many other similar institutions. The overloading work is difficult to handle for only one teacher with diverse student groups. Newer students are added into the same class and exit of the students are not clearly defined. This compounds to the existing problems, hence, the results of such classes are miserable.

Therefore, the view of the parallel informal education system in place for this refugees is questionable.

Another interview with the representative of the UNHCR body who is currently placed in UNICEF stated that the population of concern falls on the ethnic groups of Rohingya, Rankins and Chins. Community-based organisations together with the collaboration of UN struggle to sustain these educational groups as the focus would be on a day to day survival and the education is a back burner. Myanmar organisations are tribal oriented, mostly self-supporting but the emphasis on a sort of formal education is practically non-existent. The children are more supporting their parents in earning without any intention to continue the studies. Without any legal documents, these misplaced individuals are vulnerable and more likely would become more victimised by the current society in Malaysia. Unfortunately, the image of refugees in the eyes of society is wrong and people prefer to stay aside and avoid whereas they are more needed to help and contribute.

To the question “What could be the possible solution?” the representative of the UNHCR body mentioned that if the government of Malaysia would fully recognise refugees as a part of the extended society in need of help, it would be a great step forward. As many refugees are living in Malaysia for a very long period of time, therefore, the possibility of the integration is there. On the other hand, to give basic job opportunities for them would be a wise decision rather than hiring manpower from abroad for the low cost. And better still trained in some skills which are not in competition with the locals. Considering the fact that these people inherent in the territory of Malaysia make them a part of the society, they shall not be ignored, to place them accordingly to the local institutions or give them a job in the farms and factories, would be the right decision according to the basic human rights. The most critical population of concern would be children, teenagers and young adults.

Summary of Interviews/field Observation on Community Based Learning Centres/schools.

As observers, we find the schools are more a place where kids could gather amongst the community but the education wise it is a failure. The lack of facilities and stationaries followed by constantly changing and unavailable minimally trained teachers means to say only a few volunteers would conduct the class out of willingness and dedication. Plastic chairs and no desks, a bookshelf without books all this gives a quite depressing impression. There is no specific curriculum or material, the teaching process is verbal with less assessment and more emphasis on the discipline. Surprisingly, children speak Bahasa Malaysia fluently and communicate freely with the teacher.

Analysis of a Sample of students enrolled in higher learning centres.

Another level of fleeing refugees in Malaysia fall on people from countries as Yemen, Iraq, Palestine and Syria, people with the strong awareness of the situation and specific problems due to traumatic past. These individuals are officially registered refugees, who have an ID from UNHCR for a long period of time. Interesting to mention, that the legal status of a refugee doesn’t help much. As far as education is a concern, the requirements prior entering the institution are the same, there is no consideration of the legal status, which creates a bigger problem for those, whose intention is to study in colleges and universities of Malaysia. The following interview will give a bigger picture of the specific problems.

Interview and Survey with the refugee students in Malaysia

Hundreds of refugees from Libya, Syria, Yemen and Iran arrive in Malaysia not only to seek peace but as well pursue the education. It was an essential duty to have an interview with some of them in order to

understand the main reason for them searching for educational opportunity. A sample of 33 students enrolled in the higher institution, who agreed to be interviewed gave the following answer.

The first question was “What has driven you to pursue higher education?”

Majority of the participants stated that they are dedicated to gain the knowledge in a specific field (54.5%). The further discussion gave some interesting results, students choose the specific direction in the studies as medicine, civil engineering and education. The primary intention of the students lays into rebuilding their own countries of origin. With the knowledge and appropriate education in this fields, there are high chances of restoring the core of intelligence and a possible new beginning for these countries.

The following question was “Why did you choose Malaysia as an educational destination?”

For some students, it was comparably cheaper rather than other countries and some came to Malaysia by recommendation and found this experience quite disappointing, for the reason of facing major challenges to apply for the program without certain documents and others felt discriminated in the educational environment. For some students, the cultural shock played a crucial role, the food and culture the unacceptance from the society made them feel frustrated. For people who have been fleeing war for many years and those who carry massive traumatic experience getting adapted to a new environment is becoming a big challenge, not every student attends a counselling session, which is mostly nonexistence here or manned by non-qualified staff. Neither do they share problems with their friends, some are going through the deep depression, bringing back the painful memories of losing their relatives and close friends. And if the educational environment doesn't motivate students, they develop anxiety towards learning. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants shared that they feel safe but not like home, so their main intention to return to their country of origin when the situation would be stabilised and invest their knowledge into rebuilding and raising up their countries all over again.

Based on the personal observation positive educational environment is essential for the students, awakening the motivation towards learning could be a possible solution. This problem requires a holistic approach and the paradigm shift in the form of education.

V. DISCUSSION ON THE INFORMAL PARALLEL SYSTEM ISSUES

One of the major challenges the refugee children face is a denial of formal public education, that means that public schools do not accept refugee children into the educational environment.

Another crucial factor is the lack of certification and access to public examinations. Tuition provided by the ‘alternative learning centres’ is not authorized by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and students are unable to take national exams or receive locally or internationally recognized qualifications.

Refugee education is generally of a very low quality, with ineffective indicators that measure inputs rather than outcomes. Teacher-pupil ratios average as high as 1:70 and, in many situations, teachers do not have even the ten days of training that would categorize them as “trained.”

There is no specific orientation towards government basic education, usually, teachers rely only on available resources.

Some religion-oriented funded schools emphasize on the Islamic education, therefore, the basic knowledge of science is absent. It creates one big problem, if the education is not sufficiently directed and oriented, students wouldn't be qualified for the public or private secondary education. It may cause major consequences in the form of high rates of dropout that may lead to criminal activities, which eventually can become a critical situation for the local society.

Security and safety issues are perennial problems that shunt the prospective students from seeking enrolment; an issue faced by students and teachers within and outside the school environment. Refugees are not protected by the law as far as Malaysia is a concern, therefore, the situation for them might be critical and UNHCR ID holders are considered to be protected by the organisation.

The aspect of psychological challenges is a common issue among refugee students. Majority of the refugees are coming from countries that are facing challenges including war, disease, famine, or another destabilizing conflict; as a result, educational opportunity is either not a priority or is non-existent. So when refugee students find themselves in a new foreign environment, they face a number of obstacles, which is quite important for us to acknowledge.

The Myth of the Parallel System

Regardless of the fact that there is a denial to the formal education for refugee children in Malaysia, the number of non-government organisation and community-based programs run “parallel” educational system in the frame of formal education.

However, based on the author's investigation. Such organisations are barely sustaining themselves in terms of teaching.

Firstly, there is no stable teaching staff available, since most of the teaching is voluntary.

Classes are conducted based on the availability of teachers.

Religious community organisations emphasise on religious education and lacking subjects as Math and Science.

There is no certifications and examination system in the run, and therefore no available data on the academic achievement of the students.

The schools are lacking proper safety system and other important classroom equipment, such as desks and school library.

Therefore, **the word "parallel" is inadequate and may mislead**, such schools are more likely to occupy students with activities and provide basic knowledge based on the available stuff. It is quite important to draw attention to such a situation and take an act of contribution to sustaining such organisations.

RECOMMENDATION

Schools with Proper Resources

Schools with proper resources should be allowed to run in the current form but ways need to be devised to **enlarge intake**. The author's field observation, saw the inclusion of far too many subjects and activities for the students, although this is commendable, it competes with scarce resources. This can be streamlined to increase space and capacity for more intake. Further, having these various sanctioned centers, with the curriculum of the owner, or preparing students for specific examination is not an efficient use of resources. In its place, CNCHR can develop common programs, sanctioned and invite NGOs to participate. The current practice of concerned group starting an institution, and once it gets some recognition then only the UNCHR gets involved need to be slowly discarded.

Current, concentration on the religious-based subject, hoping it will create good and morally right students need to be discarded and the focus should be on acceptance into any system if the situation arises sometimes in the future. Such practices can further release resources to take in more students.

Completed Secondary and Qualified for Academic Progression

Completed Secondary and qualified for academic progression, here too ways need to be devised to **enlarge intake into the higher institution of learning**.

Completed Secondary but not Qualified for Academic Progression

For example, Future Global Network Foundation (FGN) in Penang and Kuantan has an active programme targeted at Rohingya children who come to them at age 12 without any knowledge of how to read or write to be placed in formal education. Special education programmes that teach these children vocational skills like sewing, baking, and automotive training and working with the local business community for placement and training are in place at this center. This can be expanded by other centers but focused on both basic educational knowledge with a higher skill program.

Prior Sheltered Instruction

Moving children immediately into vocational training, has an immediate benefit, engaging them mentally and physical immediately from their trauma. But a system needs to be in place to filter students who are better integrated into some inclusive classrooms, a sort of accelerated learning environment with multiple teaching approach and flexibility. A sheltered instruction needs to be in place, for at least 6 months to identify those who can continue with academic environment and those identified for specific skills. The benefits are great, a well-maintained group of children in small organized classes, with a familiar home-like environment and phobia removed, are highly motivated to perform well and unlikely to drop out of school later.

Areas of Skills now and the Future

Although the current engagement like tailoring, cooking, and hand skills are good in engagement, the need to look beyond using basic cognitive skills and focus on skills. This will help in placement anywhere and remove living in a form of quasi-legal limbo and dependent on handouts from NHCR or NGOs. UNCHR should work with the government agencies for positive result sooner and remove the burden on society and a strain on public services.

Successful employment of refugees is beneficial as there will be fewer costs in providing social assistance while Malaysian society is more likely to be cohesive as refugees integrate.

Schools Without Resources and Proper Registration

But schools without resources and proper registration or have temporary refugees centers or even a room in their common congregation location can link centrally to a real-time class that can be maintained physically by UNCHR at its head office and through anchor schools, that are well maintained and networked.

VI. CONCLUSION

As we understand that the future of their world may be in these less than unprivileged classrooms. Each student deserves to have an access to education. Equity in education means equal opportunity for all children, especially those who are denied the right to education because of disability, poverty gender or location. Greater equity and inclusion in education cannot be achieved without better data and analysis about the most displaced populations. Yet, today many groups remain invisible in statistics at the national and global levels, and Malaysia is one of the critical locations in terms of lack of data. Being a small nation with a manageable refugee population, the issue of education can be overcome. The need to relook the current arrangement, and build a new approach specifically for the Malaysian environment is imperative following successfully managed specific models in some countries.

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