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The Role of Social Capital in Refugees' Trajectories into Higher Education in a Host Country: Narratives of Six Refugees in Norway

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Abstract. Refugees, as group, are generally motivated to pursue higher education despite multiple challenges they face in host countries. To overcome these challenges refugees need someone to rely on to successfully navigate the higher education system in new environments. This article tries to explore what roles social capital plays in refugees' trajectories into higher education in Norway. The study employs qualitative inquiry where six refugees are interviewed using a narrative interview. Based on a qualitative narrative interview with six refugees, I argue that three forms of social capital — boning, bridging, and linking — play both overlapping and specific roles in refugees' access to higher education. Social capital in general helps refugees to get information on higher education and processes of getting documents recognised, motivation, and determination. Policymakers need to ensure that refugees access and utilise necessary resources such as relevant language courses without much reliance on good Samaritans.

Keywords: *bonding, bridging, linking, refugee higher education, social capital*

Introduction

Refugees, as group, are generally motivated to pursue higher education despite the challenges they face because they see higher education as a pathway to social upward mobility in their new countries (Crea and McFarland 2015; Stevensen and Willott 2007). Some of the constraints refugees face in accessing higher education include academic language acquisition, disrupted schooling, inaccessible or destroyed education credentials, lack of information on host countries' education systems, traumatic experiences, prolonged refugee status determination processes in host countries (Hanna 1999; Morrice 2009; Ott 2013). These challenges exacerbate the under-representation of refugees in higher education with dire consequences for their integration and overall well-being in their new countries (Shakya et al. 2011; Sladek and King 2016).

Most of the challenges refugees face in their trajectories into higher education imply that refugees may need support of their families, acquaintances, governmental and non-governmental organizations for various reasons (Deng and

Marlowe 2013). For instance, Hauck et al. (2014) indicate that settling refugees in areas where they can get contacts with families and friends leads to better integration outcomes. Little is known however what roles the relations refugees have with different parties, or lack thereof, play in their access to higher education in host countries. This article will partly fill this gap by addressing the following questions: What roles does social capital play in refugees' access to higher education in Norway? How do refugees experience their relationships with different parties in their journey into higher education in Norway?

Refugees in Norway

In Norway (and in this article), the term refugee refers to asylum seekers who have been granted protection or a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. It also includes "quota" refugees who have been settled in Norway in cooperation with the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees and family members of the above-mentioned groups (Østby 2013). Although some European refugees arrived in Norway just after the second world war, the political discourses on refugee integration came into the spotlight in the late 1970s partly due to arrival of refugees from Vietnam (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012). In recent times, the inflow of refugees from different countries such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria coupled with the expansion of the European Union in 2004 has led to more diversity in "a largely ethnically homogenous" Norway (Bubikova-Moan 2017: 56). As of January 1, 2019, refugees accounted for 30.6% of all immigrants in Norway and 4.4% of the total Norwegian population of just over five million (Strøm 2019).

Norway sets policies to foster equal opportunities for the increasingly diverse population of the country; and the introduction programme for new immigrants is a good example in this regard (Thorud et al. 2012). Introduction programme is a two to three years basic qualification program, which certain groups of immigrants, particularly refugees, should participate in to acquire the Norwegian language and attend social studies. During their participation in the programme, refugees are assigned contact persons to help them with issues related to language training, education, apprenticeship, housing, employment, health, and so on. Refugees in Norway are generally characterised by a weaker link to the labour market and lower educational attainment (Friberg and Midtbøen 2018).

Higher Education in Norway

The Norwegian higher education is regulated by the Universities and University Colleges Act (2000), amended in 2005. The government oversees the operation of the act through the Ministry of Education and Research. Public higher education institutions are state owned, but they are autonomous in their internal decisions including resource allocation and electing leaders (OECD 2013; Larsen 2010). The generous state subsidies to the Norwegian higher education means that students do not pay tuition fees for higher education except a small amount, which is paid every semester to student welfare organization (Opheim 2004). Students may take a not means-tested loan from the State Educational Loan Fund, some of which may be converted to a grant after successful completion of the studies (Ibid). This makes the direct cost of university students in Norway to be among the lowest compared with many other countries (OECD 2014). Thus, less participation in higher education in Norway is attributed more to social, cultural, or motivational barriers than to financial difficulty (Opheim 2004).

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) has developed special recognition procedures called Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure) with main focus on refugees and people in refugee-like situation who may not be able to document their previous qualifications. The procedure is however not easily accessible for some group of refugees. As a result, NOKUT recently developed an alternative method called Qualifications Passport for Refugees, which is a standardised document that includes information about a person's formal qualifications, language proficiency, and work experience (Pietkiewicz 2017).

Review of Literature

In recent times, refugee higher education "has increasingly come to the fore as the issue" in many host countries (Avery and Said 2017:114; Kendall and Day 2017). However, there is still a dearth of literature on the topic and further studies in the field are necessary (Ramsay and Baker 2019). Many countries provide generous refugee resettlement programmes, but they fail to incorporate explicit schemes on refugee higher education, which may result in exclusion of refugees from higher education (Ferede 2010). In some countries, higher education systems

welcome and cherish a group of migrants (such as international students) since they pay oversea fees while ignoring and disowning other group of migrants such as refugees, who are considered less desirable (Morrice 2013). These general challenges coupled with the specific barriers refugees face in accessing higher education result in underrepresentation of refugees in higher education systems in different countries (Lambrechts 2020).

A study from Canada (Bajwa et al. 2017: 62) reports that many refugees barely have familial or social support after arrival in a host country even though they are avid to have "a human connection" in order to access necessary information to make informed decision on what type of higher education to pursue. In fact, refugees may be subjected to "huge mental and emotional pressures" for leaving behind friends and families (Avery and Said 2017: 107). Another research from New Zealand sheds light on how refugees may be disadvantaged due to lack of "peers with university experience and adult role models" (O'Rourke 2011: 31). However, the existence of near relations is not always an enabler for refugees to access higher education, particularly if the refugees come from patriarchal cultures (El Jack 2012) or if the refugees are the only breadwinners of the family (Goastellec 2018a) and sometimes because "information [on]…how to write a personal statement for a university course…might not be available" from the families and friends (Morrice 2007:164). All this indicates that crossing boarders results in decline of social capital of refugees (Koyama 2013); and refugees' preflight social capital does not necessarily assist them in entering higher education (Morrice 2009).

In addition to family members, thus, refugees need also help from various organizations in the form of "guidance and encouragement to attend university" (Earnest et al. 2010: 169). A study from Australia (Wilkinson 2018) indicates that a range of assistance refugees receive from school is imperative in fostering their transition to a university and it recommends establishing a formal sustainable system which can secure refugees' access to essential support to make their transition into higher education easier. Similarly, Kontowski and Leitsberger (2017), based on research in Austria and Poland, highlight that helping refugees build a network of social connection is advantageous not only in preparing them for academia but also in contributing to their stable life. On the other hand, many institutions may act as gatekeepers to limit refugees' access to higher education (Perry and Mallozzi 2011). Moreover, it is often difficult for new refugees to establish social networks which lead to information or other resources (Harvey and Mallman 2019) deemed

necessary to successfully navigate new education systems in host countries (Naidoo 2018). For instance, Morrice (2009: 668) argues that refugees' "lack of the appropriate forms of …social capital ensured that they were disadvantaged and struggle to find their way around the unfamiliar systems". This corroborates an earlier study (Stevenson and Willott 2007). The constructive roles of non-governmental organizations or volunteers in supporting refugees to access to higher education is also documented in France (Goastellec 2018b).

Most of the countries presented above have different immigration and education contexts from Norway. However, it is possible to relate experiences of refugees in these countries to those in Norway as all the countries are State parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol; and all, as members of OECD, have some common trends in their higher education strategies (Abamosa et al. 2020). Having said this, in Norway, some studies stress the importance of providing education to refugees, mainly at lower levels, to forestall the possible negative consequences emanate from not doing so (Berg et al. 2016; Hilt 2015). However, little information is available on the role social capital plays in refugees' access to higher education in Norway, a gap this article tries to fill as mentioned above.

Theoretical Framework

> … "it is who you know" *as well as* "what you know" that make a difference in life and society. (Lin 2001: i, emphasis added)

I have adapted Nan Lin's (2001) social capital theory as the main guiding theoretical framework mainly because he clearly defines social capital in a way that best fits the research question this article will address. Social capital, in this article, refers to "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used" by refugees for admission to higher education institutions in Norway (Lin 2001: 25). Social networks, access to and utilization of resources to achieve definite goals are pillars of the definition (Lin 1999). Hence, the mere presence of resources has no benefit for refugees if they cannot mobilise the resources in ways that can help them achieve their goals (Miller 2014). *Access* to social capital refers to an individual's collection of potentially mobilisable social resources and the *use* of social capital refers to actions and mobilisation of the resources for benefits (Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005).

Operationalization of social capital

To operationalise social capital, I use three forms of social capital developed by Putnam (2000) and Woolcock (2002): *bonding*, *bridging, and linking* social capital. *Bonding* social capital refers to social networks between family members, ethnic groups, close friends and members of same religion (Cheung and Phillimore 2014; Knorringa and van Staveren 2007). This type of social capital enables members to access resources that are otherwise difficult to acquire (Green and Haines 2012). For instance, Putnam (2000) and Elliott and Yusuf (2014) indicate that close ethnic networks can provide vital psychological and social related support to newcomers. *Bridging* social capital refers to relations people have with "distant friends, associates, and colleagues", or "distant ties of like persons, such as loose friendships and workmates" (Woolcock 2001, as cited in Field 2008: 46). In this article, bridging social capital refers to informal social ties refugees have with different local non-governmental organizations through which they may get support and guidance in their journey to higher education in Norway (Leonard 2004; Granovetter 1973). *Linking* social capital refers to "relations between different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups" (OECD 2001: 42). Linking social capital helps people to leverage ideas, information, and other resources from institutions beyond their immediate community radius (Woolcock 2001). Linking social capital differs from the other forms in that the former is formal and vertical in nature in the sense that it connects people to key political and other resources as well as economic institutions across power differentials (Grootaert et al. 2004). Here, linking social capital may refer to formal social networks refugees have with officials at different public organizations through which they get necessary support to realise their goal of pursing higher education (Elliott and Yusuf 2014; Potocky-Tripodi 2008).

Methodology

The study employed an exploratory qualitative method, which is appropriate for studies dealing with under researched topics and for making meaning of refugees' experiences (Creswell 2003).

Participants Selection and Data Collection

I selected six refugees through purposive and snowball sampling methods. The refugees are named as: *Baredu* (female in her 30s, from Eritrea)*, Darartu* (female in her 30s, from Eritrea)*,* Murata (male in his 30s from Ethiopia)*, Jara (*male in his 30s, from Iraq*), Na'ol* (male in his 30s, from Somalia)*,* and *Kume* (female in her 20s, from Somalia). One refugee was recruited through my direct contact, four refugees were contacted through other refugees and the last one was recruited through contact details available on a public organization's website. While Baredu, Na'ol, and Kume were able to pursue higher education in Norway, Murata, Darartu, and Jara were not successful in realising their goals of enrolling in higher education institutions. At the time of the interview, the refugees had been in Norway for 7 years on average. The data was collected through narrative interviews conducted in March 2015. The narrative inquiry, as "a way of understanding experiences" of refugees (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 20), fits the purpose of the study. A narrative interview-guideline with questions on refugees' experiences on settlement process, language inquisition, and networks in Norway was used under the narrative interview. All interviews were conducted at the places convenient for the respondents.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis which is a part of narrative analysis was used to analyse the data. In a thematic narrative analysis, researchers consider perspectives and meanings of the participants through the process of storytelling; and thus the focus is on the content of a text i.e. on *what* is said more than *how* it is said (Riessman 2005). The interviews were first transcribed verbatim, and the transcribed interviews were printed out on A4 size papers with enough margins created on the left sides for coding purpose (Kawulich and Holland 2012). The transcripts were then checked for accuracy and completeness and, in some cases, I asked the respondents for clarification on some unclear points by sending them copies of the transcriptions. Then, I did read the transcriptions again to draw the *general* meanings embedded in each refugee's narratives (Braun and Clark 2006).

The transcripts, a field note, and a notebook were put in order before I began coding. I conducted coding manually on the transcription paper and the notebook (Bold 2012). A four-color BIC pen and a pencil were used to mark relevant sentences and paragraphs during the coding process. The pencil was particularly useful when I referred back to the original data to find new codes and modify the already identified

ones in iterative processes (Creswell 2003). The coding process began with open coding (Cohen et al. 2011). The sentences and paragraphs were identified according to the meaning they contained and their relevance to the research questions. The similarities and differences between each refuge's accounts were established through the coding process. I chose sentences and paragraphs (instead of words and terms) as units of analysis to create larger units of the narratives by avoiding the creation of disembodied text through fragmentation and decontextualization of texts (Cohen et al. 2011). Then I organised and reorganised the identified themes into broader categories through axial coding. At this stage, connections between categories and sub-categories were established. The study largely adopted an inductive approach where themes emerged from data instead of forcing the data into predefined themes (Kawulich and Holland 2012).

Finally, verbatim quotations from the narratives were used where necessary since they usually convey the point expressively without being altered or softened by academic language of the researchers (Cohen et al. 2011). It should be noted here that the quotations used in this article were edited for grammar; and I translated all Norwegian and other language words into English (as a part of data analysis). All the refugees were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity as per the ethical guidelines since none of the refugees were willing to be identified in their real names.

I followed ethical guidelines throughout the study. All informants consented to participate and received written information about the purpose of the study, they were informed about the possibility of withdrawing from the interview at any time including in the middle of the interview if they wanted (Cohen et al. 2011: 78).

Findings and Discussion

Social relations refugees have with others bear resources and thus can constitute social capital. The findings indicate all the participants have one or another form of social capital that plays various roles in their journey into higher education. In this section, I present and concurrently discuss the findings.

Determination and a plan to enroll in a university

The refugees' narratives converge on their determination and motivation to

pursue higher education. All the refugees except one have a plan to pursue higher education long before they come to Norway. For Baredu, earning a higher education degree is a means of securing her future. She has seen how higher education qualification can help people rebuild their life even in worst case scenarios. After her parents have been deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea due to a war between the two nations, her father manages to continue normal life due to his engineering degree. Moreover, she gets advice from her father on the importance of education,

> My father told me…Education is the best thing no one can take from you. Then I understood, afterward I always wanted to go to school. (Baredu)

Darartu sees education as part of her life and she is convinced that education helps her to be intellectual and that she should continue learning throughout her life.

> Education is my life, [so] I decided to go to school…My vision is just to be an educated person, and because of that I will not stop to learn, I will continue learning higher education as long as I live. (Darartu)

Murata, whose dreams are embedded in higher education, has had a plan of enrolling in a university since long time and one of his top priorities in Norway to earn a university degree. For Na'ol, higher education a way out of low-paying jobs, what he perceives as being a labourer.

> I was not interested in going to the labour market. I had something in my head and that was not to be a labourer but to do some certificate of higher education here [Norway]. (Na'ol)

Kume's determination to go to college has lived with her since her childhood when she gets inspiration from her mother who pays great attention to Kume's schooling.

> My mother was concerned for our education. She used to check whether we did homework...I grew up with the aim of studying in the future. That was why when I came to Europe, I decided to study and settle. Coming to Norway for me…was not only about peace but also, I wanted to finish school. (Kume)

These findings are in congruence with other studies that indicate refugees as groups are motivated to pursue higher education in host countries (Stevensen and Willott 2007). Refugees are not only motivated to earn a degree, but some of them see higher education as part of their life and a way out of low-paying labour market.

It is noteworthy that pre-flight experiences of refugees have not insignificant impact on the refugees' decision to enroll in a university later in their life. Hence, the low participation rates of refugees in higher education cannot necessarily be explained by lack of motivation of refugees to pursue higher education.

Poor quality Norwegian language courses

Refugees must document a Norwegian language proficiency at B2 level on European Language Framework (Council of Europe 2001) to get admission to a higher education institution in Norway. Most refugees participate in the introduction program to acquire the Norwegian language. However, virtually all refugees perceive the language teaching learning process as substandard which cannot enable them to achieve the necessary level of language proficiency for university admission. Kume experiences the language courses at an adult education as poor due to lack of qualified language teachers and less focus on provision of customised language courses to refugees who aspire to pursue higher education.

> I wanted to learn the language very fast…but it was not helpful. The teachers had no teaching background. They were teaching us like they teach illiterates. In the classroom, some had completed high school, some completed junior secondary school, and some people never went to school but…all of us in the same class. (Kume)

In the same vein, Murata perceives the language courses at an adult education centre as poor-quality. He observes that teachers do not care whether he learns the language properly or not However, he stays at the centre despite his dissatisfaction with courses out of fear of negative repercussions from the centre.

> If I had stopped going to school, they [officials at the camp] would have reported me as a lazy, not good person. So, I had to attend the language course because I was afraid of the negative consequences. (Murata).

Darartu too narrates that her husband, who is a highly educated refugee with a master's degree from his home country, has dropped out of the Norwegian language at an adult education centre because he is not satisfied with the language courses. Eventually, he manages to learn the language at a university where he has attended better Norwegian language classes that can prepare him for further studies.

All this indicates difficulty of accessing quality language courses is one of the challenges refugees face in Norway in their journey into higher education. Most importantly, refugees are conscious about the process of the language acquisition and they react in different ways in case they find the courses are not good enough to prepare them for higher education. It is worth noting here that the presence of the language courses free of cost by itself does not necessarily constitute successful language acquisition when it comes to refugees who aspire to purse higher education.

Help and assistance from others

The refugees express appreciation for the help and assistance they get from different parties in their trajectories into higher education. The help they get includes language tutorials, advice on study programmes at a university or college, and motivation or encouragement to pursue their studies. Baredu believes that she is lucky because she receives much help from her contact person — or advisor whom she describes as a very good person — at a refugee office.

> I always wanted to study but I didn't know what kind of education I had to take. At that time, my advisor was also a graduate student at a university. She asked me if I wanted to work with refugees [in the future] and then she told me to study social studies after she realised that I wanted to help people. (Baredu)

In a similar narrative, Kume gets help from her contact person and other personnel who work at a refugee office in a municipality. She describes her experiences with emotions, especially, when she talks about the motivational support she has got. The personnel motivate her to study at a university, which helps her to keep going to achieve her goal even after she has failed some Norwegian language tests.

> My contact person motivated me to finish the school; she helped me for long time…she told me, "You can be a social worker because you have a good personalities and you can understand things better." She always used to say, "…keep it up!" (Kume)

> They [the personnel] said, "Kume, continue, continue, continue…school, school, school, school!" When I failed the exam, they said to me, "Kume, never give up!" and I never gave up. (Kume)

Jara too receives help from his contact person in many forms during his preparation for higher education. Some of the help he gets from his contact person include information about the admission requirements to the higher education institutions, access to better Norwegian language courses, and guidance in getting his foreign qualifications recognised. He considers himself lucky, as Baredu does, because his contact person is a helpful person.

> My contact person asked me what I would like to do in Norway, to study or to work. I said, "I am an engineer and I want to study here like I did in Iraq." Then she told me, "To study here you have to have your certificate from Iraq". After I got my paper from Iraq, I gave it to my contact person, and she helped me with filling in some forms and sent the application to NOKUT…she helped me until the end. (Jara)

> When I began the Norwegian language course, my contact person said to me, "We will not put you in this class…with people who have low educational background…"we see that you are learning the language faster¨. (Jara)

These narratives are manifestations of the refugees' possession of linking social capital. The refugees receive critical supports through this type of social capital as the findings above indicate. It is expected that linking social capital is useful in accessing information on education system, on how to get the foreign qualification recognised, and a better language course since all these are included in the *formal* introduction programme that refugees participate in for some time during the early years of their arrival in Norway. In other words, contact persons are formally assigned to assist refugees in cases mentioned above. Thus, linking social capital has a capacity of advancing refugees in education system in host countries (Muir 2011). It is striking however that refugees receive encouragement and emotional and motivational support from the formal and vertical contacts (Grootaert et al. 2004) because these types of support are not clearly dictated in policy documents, such as the introduction act.

In addition to the contact persons, the refugees get different kinds of help from family members and near friends. The family members mentioned by the refugees include husband, brothers, sisters, parents, and children. Friends are usually people whom the refugee are acquainted with in Norway. Baredu gets help from an immediate family member, her brother, in the form of information, which she has used to make decision.

> First, I thought I would study some programme involving mathematics because our family was good in maths and physics. But…then my brother advised me to go to social studies if my goal was to help people. I found that advice very useful. (Baredu)

Jara receives encouragement, if not pressure, from his father to continue his study in Norway. He has taken his father's advice seriously and concentrates on pursuing higher education in Norway.

> My father insisted…all the time that I should continue to study here because he said to me… "To study engineering for fours is not simple so you have to complete your study in Norway". (Jara)

In another story, Darartu narrates that she gets motivational help from family members, particularly from her husband.

> My husband motivates me all the way through to learn the language and to apply to a higher education. He helps me with some materials which means a lot to me. He assists me also in looking after our children. He always wants to see me in a better position…There were a lot of highs and lows in the process of going to higher education and sometimes I felt like giving up because of difficult situations. I sometimes stuck but sometimes I get energy and motivation from my family and rise again. (Darartu)

The refugees narrate also that they receive help from their children in the form of motivation to go to universities. Notably, they do receive neither motivating words nor recognitions for their achievements from their children, but the very same existence of their children motivates the refugees to pursue higher education. Kume is a case in point in this regard. She tries to be a role model for her children by achieving something in life through higher education.

> My mother was strong that she used to help us with our education even though she did not get any education herself. I always want to go to a university because I am thinking for future of my children. I want to be a strong mother to them. (Kume)

In a similar story, Baredu wants to be a role model for her child and she is always positive towards higher education. In another converging story, Na'ol, too, decides to go to a university because he wants to create a good future for his children who should not see their father as labourer.

> If my children see me that I am just a cleaner and a labourer, they inherit it from me; they take it as an option for their life. But I am not that type of person, so I have to study whatever it takes. (Naol)

In addition to the family members, friends are also sources of critical help for some of the refugees. One of the interesting stories in this case is that of Kume's. She has repeatedly tried to pass Norwegian language tests to apply for a university place, but she is not able to make it. At the end, however, she receives help from her friend who informs Kume about a good school where there is a helpful Norwegian language teacher. Kume does not hesitate to change the school for the second time.

> After I had finished the language course at an adult education centre, I went to an upper secondary school where I failed in the Norwegian language tests. My friend told me the upper secondary school she went to was a better school. In my school, the teacher was speaking only Nynorsk [a rather not widely spoken version of Norwegian language]. I didn't understand anything. So, I went to my friend's school even though it was in another municipality. I was very happy there at the school. (Kume)

Likewise, Murata gets vital information from his friends on how the Red Cross Norway can help him to get a volunteer refugee guide. Darartu, too, relies much on her friends for more information on higher education. Whenever she wants to do or to read something about higher education, she asks her friends for (more) information.

It is clear from these findings that refugees have accumulated bonding social capital which plays different positive roles in their trajectories into higher education. Possessing bonding social capital may seem natural and trivial when one takes into consideration its sources: families and friends. However, it should be noted that refugees leave behind many of their friends and family members and, thus, it is quite advantageous to have friends in new host countries. Bonding social capital can last long and it can have a huge positive impact on refugees' decisions to pursue higher education. As it can be seen from the findings, some refugees have had a dream of pursuing higher education long before they come to Norway mainly due to the influence of their parents, for instance, in the form of advice. It is not so surprising that refugees from highly educated parents get the necessary information and advice on higher education. Schlechter and Milevsky (2010: 2) indicate that children of highly educated parents tend to follow their parent's footsteps in pursing higher education due to, amongst other things, "societal expectations". It is rather intriguing that, refugees with parents without, or with low, educational background are also determined to pursue higher education because of the motivational support they get from their parents. In some cases, psychological and emotional supports

which refugee receive through bonding social capital are crucial and may result in turning points for some refugees in their decision on pursuing higher education. One of the surprising findings in this study regarding bonding social capital is the motivation that refugees get from their small children. Some refugees decide to pursue in higher education in part because they want to be the role models to their children. The findings in this article challenge conclusions in a previously study (Cheung and Phillimore 2014) where the authors conclude that they do not know whether bonding social capital has a role in supporting refugees to access higher education.

Apart from the contact persons, family members, and friends, some of the participants receive help from non-governmental organizations. Murata uses an opportunity that is available at the Red Cross Norway through which he gets to know a Norwegian volunteer refugee-guide who encourages Murata to learn Norwegian.

> My guide used to give me moral support about the Norwegian language. One day, I said to him, "The Norwegian language is very difficult" after trying to speak with him, but he said, "No…Murata", there is no difficult thing. You have to believe, if you believe this, you can overcome all the problems. (Murata)

Similarly, Baredu receives help from the Red Cross Norway when she is participating in the introduction programme. The Red Cross Norway has assigned her a Norwegian refugee-guide who has informed Baredu much about higher education system in Norway. Furthermore, the guide has told Baredu about opportunities of studies in other countries.

These findings indicate refugees possess bridging social capital in the sense that refugees have vital ties with other people in a new environment. Furthermore, the findings suggest that local not-for-profit organizations can play pivotal roles in facilitating refugees' transition into higher education in host countries. As indicated above, the main types of support the refugees get through their bridging social capital are (informal) language tutorials to improve their Norwegian language and information about higher education. Volunteers of the not-for-profit organizations who work with refugees are doing so on their own initiatives and thus it is less likely they have negative attitudes towards refugees. In fact, they can be very useful in bridging the gap between the refugees and the host society. This is in line with another study (Lamba and Krahn 2003) which states that volunteers from host society can

help refugees to become familiar in a new environment.

Conclusions

It is important to acknowledge a couple of limitations of this article before wrapping it up with conclusions. First, it is difficult to generalise the findings since the data collection was limited to only two counties and six refugees in Norway. The snowball and judgmental sampling methods used to recruit the participants exacerbates this limitation. Second, the article could have been more complete had I included extensive policy analysis at national level on issues related to social capital particularly how the roles of people working with refugees are defined in policy documents.

The article tries to explore the roles social capital plays in refugees' trajectories into higher education and the experiences of refugees regarding their relationship with different parties in their way to higher education. The results and discussions above, regardless of the limitations, indicate that refugees can accumulate and benefit from different forms of social capital in host countries. Bonding social capital is unique in that its impact remains with refugees for a long period of time, particularly when parents are its mains sources. By implication, pre-immigration experiences of refugees have impacts on refugees' decision to pursue higher education in host countries. The roles different forms of social capital play in refugees' access to higher education overlap, making it challenging to clearly characterise the forms of social capital with specific roles they play. For instance, refugees may get encouragement, motivation, and information to pursue higher education through bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. In such cases, it is possible to conclude that social capital in general, as an umbrella, play critical roles in facilitating refugees' transition into higher education. However, there are some specific roles that can be ascribed to the particular forms of social capital as mentioned elsewhere in this article. One of the good indications in this case is access to relevant language courses and getting information on how to get foreign qualifications recognised. In both cases, linking social capital plays a significant role.

Refugees have positive attitude towards organizations which they think are helpful in realizing their dreams of pursing higher education. There is no difference between public or not-for-profit organizations in this regard. Refugees appreciate the help they get irrespective of which organization they get the help from. Equally

important, refugees show discontent when they perceive the actions of the organizations as hinderance to their goals. Most notably, the language acquisition places are where the refugees report to have negative experiences.

Policymakers in any host countries should consider that refugees are motivated to purse higher education. To facilitate the transition of refugees into higher education, policies on language training for refugees should clearly state the possibilities aspiring refugees have in accessing better language courses, including outside the adult education centres. In other words, refugees need not depend on the willingness of "good Samaritans" to acquire the Norwegian language for academic purposes. It is also important to have a well organised centre for refugee studies at national level which can help refugees in providing information on issues related to accessing and participating in higher education. My positive experience of collaborating with refugees in conducting this study highlights that access to relevant language course and information about higher education are what refugees need most to successfully access to, and perhaps succeed in higher education in Norway. Having said this, more comprehensive qualitative studies and policy analyses may be needed to further elaborate on the findings of this article.

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