

The Role of Community Partnerships in the Support of Postsecondary Students From
Refugee Contexts

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Abstract

This qualitative study sought to identify how postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations can work together to best support the needs of students from refugee contexts, particularly at a time when global refugee migration is high (UNICEF, 2016). A review of literature revealed that refugee and international students may face many challenges when transitioning to a new country and educational environment, and that postsecondary institutions can take steps to help ensure such students' success. The study took place in two geographical areas in Southern Ontario in close proximity to one another. Fifteen individual interviews were conducted, each lasting an average of approximately 35 minutes, with staff and administrators from postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations to develop an understanding of the services they have in place to support the needs of students from refugee contexts and what they feel would help them better support this group. Findings indicate that although there is a lack of services specific to students from refugee contexts being offered in the postsecondary sector, many services are offered for newcomers more generally. It was found that there is some collaboration between postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations in support of newcomers, but there is also a desire for more. Participants in this study shared insights about how they can be supported in their goal to deliver effective programming to newcomers. The study concludes by offering a series of recommendations on how postsecondary institutions can work with non-profit organizations to better support students from refugee contexts.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A review of literature indicates that refugee students may face a variety of barriers and challenges in their educational endeavours (Ferede, 2010; Kong et al., 2016; Shakya et al., 2010). As will be highlighted below, this can include economic, cultural and familial, social, health, structural, and academic challenges. Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of research regarding refugee education, including in Canada (Ferede, 2010; Plasterer, 2010). At a time when global refugee migration is high (UNICEF, 2016), it is important that research be conducted to determine how to best support newcomers to Canada. This research study adds to the field of literature on refugee education by helping develop an understanding of the ways that institutions of higher learning and community organizations can work together to support the success of postsecondary students from refugee contexts.

This qualitative study takes the form of a case study, situated in two urban areas in Southern Ontario, Canada. The data in this research study were gathered in one-on-one interviews with administrators and staff from institutions of higher learning and community organizations in these areas. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the services that are offered by these organizations to support students from refugee contexts, or newcomer students more generally, and how personnel from higher education institutions work with community partners to do so. The study provides recommendations to organizations and institutions on how they can work together to ensure the successful transition of newcomer students, specifically those from refugee contexts. The goal of the study is to help institutions of higher learning improve service

delivery to students from refugee contexts, and to help fill a gap in research on refugee higher education in Canada.

Problem Statement

Canada has experienced an influx of refugees recently, many of whom are of school age, and thus research in refugee student success in higher education in Canada is both important and urgent. First, the research is very timely as “the world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II” (UNICEF, 2016, para. 2). As the world faces an urgent refugee crisis, research is needed to determine how to best support refugees in all facets of society. In Canada, as of January 29, 2017, approximately 40,000 Syrian refugees had been resettled since November 4, 2015 (Government of Canada, 2017). As of July 2016, 52% of the Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada were under the age of 18 (Gajewski, 2016). That being said, some of these individuals will be of elementary and secondary school age, with some potentially being of an age in which they would transition to higher education. As will be explored in the literature review for this study, refugees may experience unique challenges in their education related to academics (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Dryden-Peterson, 2010), mental health (Joyce, Earnest, De More, & Silvagni, 2010), economic circumstances (Kanu, 2008; Plaster, 2010; Shakya et al., 2010), and more, and could benefit from specialized interventions and forms of support. Thus, the large number of refugees entering Canada and the unique needs of refugee students combine to provide a strong rationale for research in this area.

Second, there is a lack of research and knowledge regarding refugee higher education in Canada (Ferede, 2010; Plasterer, 2010). Ferede (2010) mentions how “the dearth of research indicates the urgency for high-quality research that focuses on this

group's challenges, barriers, needs, opportunities, and experiences" (p. 84). Furthermore, this lack of research extends beyond universities to encompass refugee community organizations as well (Lacroix, Baffoe, & Liguori, 2014).

Third, the literature indicates that Canada may have an international imperative to support refugee students pursuing postsecondary education. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) states that "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017, Article 13, 2(c)). Therefore, it is important for the government of Canada and partners in the higher education sector to work together to provide supportive educational opportunities for students from refugee contexts.

Finally, with the potential for further large migrations of refugees in the future, it is important for the higher education sector to be prepared. One example of future potential refugee migrations relates to climate change, as Biermann and Boas (2010) mention how "climate change will fundamentally affect the lives of millions of people who will be forced over the next decades to leave their villages and cities to seek refuge in other areas" (p. 61). Furthermore, Biermann and Boas mention how "the available literature indicates that the climate refugee crisis will surpass all known refugee crises in terms of the number of people affected" (p. 61). Based on the assumption that some of these refugees will resettle in Canada, it is important for those in higher education, and all sectors, to work collectively to do everything they can to prepare for a potential increase in students from refugee contexts.

Overall, there is a strong rationale for research looking at supports for students from refugee contexts. It is important that institutions of higher learning develop strategies to ensure these students feel supported, and can fully participate in their education, and in society. By failing to take action, it could create further barriers for a population that already faces many unique challenges, as will be discussed in this paper.

Purpose

The worldwide population of refugees has drastically increased in recent years. Furthermore, the literature that will be highlighted below demonstrates the value and importance of a supportive educational environment for students from refugee contexts and the role this can play in their success. Despite the importance and urgency of this problem, the literature suggests that there is a deficiency in research looking at refugee education (Ferede, 2010; Plasterer, 2010) and refugee community organizations (Lacroix et al., 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to help fill this gap by exploring the role postsecondary institutions and community organizations can play in supporting refugee students' success.

More specifically, this research aimed to initially conduct an inventory of services offered to students from refugee contexts at the participating higher education institutions and community organizations, and to determine the services they offer in collaboration with community partners. Following this, the study sought to compare these services to the needs identified in the literature to determine gaps. However, after initial data collection, it was determined that although there were limited direct services offered to postsecondary students from refugee contexts, there was interest amongst those in this area to enhance service offerings to this demographic. Therefore the direction and

purpose of the study naturally shifted to have a greater focus on the extent to which staff at these organizations feel prepared to support refugee students in their current institutional context, and how they feel community partners could help them be more prepared to support these students. The goal of this research approach is to help inspire capacity building in this area for the future.

Research Questions

Initially, the study was based on two main research questions:

1. How are institutions of higher learning and community organizations in a large urban centre assisting refugee students in their transition to Canadian education?
2. In what ways do organizations and institutions in this area collaborate in the delivery of services to refugee students?

The focus of the study naturally shifted during the initial phases of data collection, and thus, two more questions emerged that helped guide this study:

3. How prepared do staff from institutions of higher learning and community organizations feel to support refugee-background students?
4. What do higher learning and community organizations feel would help them better support refugee students, and what role can community partnerships play in this?

The scope was also widened to include another urban area.

Importance of the Study

There are many reasons why this study is important in the current context of Canadian higher education. First, the research contributes to a limited literature base in refugee education. At the same time, a large portion of those migrating to Canada are

youth, and it is important for research to be available to community members assisting these individuals in their resettlement. Furthermore, it is important for institutions of higher learning to be prepared to provide an inclusive educational environment for a potential influx of new refugee students. This research aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations to these institutions.

Second, there are many stakeholders that stand to benefit from this research. This study can provide great value to the geographical region of focus by providing suggestions to the various organizations within the region. While the findings are not generalizable, it can provide insight to administrators and staff from institutions of higher learning and community organizations, beyond the participant institutions, as to how they can support refugee students. The hope is that this research will ultimately help community members implement services that meet the needs of refugee-background students as they transition to new educational environments. Overall, this study provides recommendations as to how these organizations can work together to be better prepared to meet the needs of this important and underserved group of students.

In the following chapters, this study will highlight existing literature related to refugee and international student education and settlement. It will then highlight the methodology that was used to guide this study and the data collection that took place. Following this it will look at the findings from interviews with 15 participants, focusing on key themes. Finally, the study will offer recommendations on how institutions of higher learning and community organizations can modify service offerings to ensure they are meeting the needs of individuals from refugee contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review for this study draws on literature from a variety of contexts that can help frame the experience of refugee students in higher education. Due to difficulties locating adequate research on refugee education, some of the research draws on the experiences of immigrants and international students more generally. However, this can still be useful as refugees and immigrants have many commonalities (McBrien, 2005). At the same time, however, the literature reviewed in this paper will demonstrate how the experiences of refugees are unique compared to immigrants as a whole. Furthermore, some of the literature looks at K-12 education and general refugee issues which helps deliver a more holistic view of their experiences. A search of literature was undertaken using the Brock University Super Search function and Google Scholar. Some of the keywords and terms used included: “refugee education,” “refugee higher education,” “refugee education in Canada,” “refugee higher education in Canada,” “refugee student challenges,” and “refugee student support.”

This literature review will focus on two key areas. First, it will look at some of the common issues and barriers experienced by refugees and international students while attending higher education, including economic, cultural, social, health, structural, and academic barriers. This will help outline the bigger picture of the experiences faced by refugee students and will help lay the foundation for this study. Second, it will explore some of the factors that help create a positive educational environment while encouraging refugee student success. These include the aspirations and resilience of students from refugee contexts, supportive relationships, and a culturally relevant approach to education and supports. This helped inform the framework for this study by establishing key areas

that institutions of higher learning should consider when implementing services for refugee students. Overall, these two areas in the literature helped form a basis for the recommendations made in this study. This review also identified some of the gaps that exist in the literature. This literature review will start by examining the challenges experienced by refugee students.

Barriers Experienced by Refugee Students

Refugees, and newcomer students more generally, may face many challenges when transitioning to a new home and a new educational environment. Although it is important to acknowledge that no set of experiences are identical, many key themes emerged from the literature. These themes have been categorized into six broader areas of economic, cultural and familial, social, health, structural, and academic challenges. It is important to note that many of these barriers may not be exclusive to refugee students and can affect students from various backgrounds. However, these barriers, collectively, can limit refugee students' access to and fulfillment of aspirations in higher education within a new country.

Economic Challenges for Newcomers

Many economic factors can impact the successful transition of refugee students to new countries and educational environments. First, refugees may face issues regarding employment. Ferede (2010) notes how refugees typically struggle in many economic indicators such as income and unemployment rates. Some of the issues faced by international and refugee students could include difficulties in registration and being underpaid (Calder et al., 2016), the deskilling of overseas experience and a lack of Canadian work experience (Plasterer, 2010), and working difficult hours that could

negatively impact their education (Joyce et al., 2010). The families of students could also be impacted, as Kanu (2008) explains how adults often have to turn to low-status jobs due to a lack of recognition of their previous experience.

Further, refugees may face financial hardship and struggle to balance life as a student with the need to earn an income. Given that government assistance may not be sufficient for their basic expenses (Shakya et al., 2010), refugee and international students may have to take on other employment. As shown by Kanu (2008), this can result in working very long hours in addition to school work, such as 4:00 p.m. until midnight or 11:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. work shifts. The students in this study had many reasons for these hectic schedules, which included supporting family abroad and helping family repay government loans (Kanu, 2008). This can obviously be very challenging for these individuals, as one student in the study simply stated: “I am always tired” (Kanu, 2008, p. 930).

Shakya et al. (2010) explain how some refugee youth may have to get jobs to support their family. Supporting family could include day-to-day needs (Kong et al., 2016) or sending money to family elsewhere in the world (Joyce et al., 2010). McWilliams and Bonet (2016) explain how “refugee youths’ educational experiences become increasingly central to not only their trajectories as adult learners but also their families’ trajectories as they are relied upon as income earners to support ageing parents and younger siblings” (p. 161).

International students may have to choose between their studies and making money (Calder et al., 2016) with the students in one study going so far as to say that financial barriers influenced other refugee students’ decision to drop out of school

(Plasterer, 2010). In one study, teachers perceived a relationship between hours spent working and academic performance for refugee students (Kanu, 2008). Financial hardship could also impact these individuals' ability to access university in the first place, as being from a low-income background can impact attendance at university (Ferede, 2010).

Third, due to financial hardships, some international and refugee students may face issues with housing, which could include difficulties finding affordable housing (Calder et. al, 2016) and getting “stuck” with government-subsidized housing in “rough” neighbourhoods (Kanu, 2008). Overall, the literature indicates that international and refugee students must balance numerous priorities and expenses that can impact their financial and educational success, and ultimately their livelihood.

Cultural and Familial Impact on Education Access

Many cultural and familial factors can impact the success of refugee and international students. First, family issues and obligations can play a role in the transition of refugee students. One source of these challenges could be differing familial customs. An interesting example of this can be seen in a study of African refugees in Manitoba where some refugee parents expressed frustration over the concept of children's rights that prevented them from disciplining their children in the ways they had done so back home (Kanu, 2008). Other factors that could affect refugee students are different perceptions on parental involvement by the parents of refugee students (McBrien, 2005), and having to balance and navigate multiple cultures as they experience differing expectations and values between their parents and ethnic cultures, and the host culture (Kong et al., 2016; McBrien, 2005).

Furthermore, some refugee youth and their families may also experience role-reversal with adult roles shifting to the youth (Shakya et al., 2010). In these new roles, youth can take on many responsibilities including but not limited to “translators, bill payers, wage earners, and navigators” (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016, p. 165) as well as acting as “interpreters, service navigators, and caretakers for their families” (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 70). Shakya et al. (2010) highlight some of the potential reasons for these increased responsibilities, including “a lower level of education, lower official language fluency, and poor health among parents and other family members” (p. 70).

Cultural norms and issues around gender could also act as a barrier for refugee students. For example, this could include marriage and childcare obligations (Anselme & Hands, 2010) and females having more demanding household roles to balance with their studies (Joyce et al., 2010). One participant from a study of Hmong refugees highlights these different expectations: “Bee contrasted how girls ‘can’t go out this late...have to do the dishes...get up at this certain time of the day to cook for everybody’ while boys ‘come home whenever they want, do whatever they want’” (Xiong & Lam, 2013, p. 138).

There may also be a gender gap in female refugee access to higher education in Canada. For example, regarding the Student Refugee Program through the World University Service of Canada, there was a large gender gap observed when considering the students sponsored between 1978 and 2000, with only 21% of them being female (Peterson, 2010). When considering the numbers from 1978–2008, the gap is slightly less but still very large with 25% of students being women (Plasterer, 2010, p. 67). Peterson (2010) argues that the gap is due to a larger structural problem of unequal opportunity, sharing the example of Dadaab refugee camp where substantially fewer females

participate in primary school and even fewer in secondary school. Peterson explains that there is often a drop off at secondary school that can be explained by expectations of females including household responsibilities and marriage which can result in a smaller pool of eligible female applicants than males. As a result, this can ultimately impact admission to higher education in Canada as well.

Finally, refugees from a Muslim background could also face challenges associated with their religion. These challenges could be related to stigmas and negative perceptions associated with Islam (McBrien, 2005). McBrien (2005) mentions how “this stigmatized part of their identity is conspicuous and likely to bring rejection and discrimination from many members of the host culture” (p. 336). In one study, it was found that female Muslim refugee students experienced bullying due to their headscarves (Mtthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015). The challenges can also be associated with a lack of appropriate spaces for these students as a male Muslim student in one study mentioned how “I still do not feel like I am part of this school. For example, where is the place for Moslem students to go for prayers in this school? Where are our own ethnic foods in the school cafeteria?” (Kanu, 2008, p. 932). It is particularly important to understand and further research these challenges in light of the current refugee crisis in Syria, as 87% of Syrians are Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Overall, culture can have a tremendous impact on the transition of refugees to their new homes and educational environments.

Difficulties With Social Integration

The transition to a new social environment can be very challenging for refugee and international students as there are many barriers they could face. Some of the

challenges refugee students may face are discrimination and racism. One setting where this can take place is in the classroom with teachers and other students (Shakya et al., 2010). Shakaya et al. (2010) share the stories of youth who “suffered quietly” as they faced discrimination from peers at school (p. 72). One study looking at bullying of refugee students found that they experienced verbal and physical bullying due to their race, language and accent, and clothing and religion (Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015). Racism and discrimination may have profound effects on refugee and international students, including “psychosocial stress leading to a damaged sense of self” (Kanu, 2008, p. 932), and impacts on adaptation, mental health, homesickness, and the development of friendships with locals (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Another challenge faced by international and refugee students is the development of social networks, which international students often have to redevelop in their new settings (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The development of positive and supportive relationships and social networks may be challenging for many reasons, including barriers related to culture and language (Joyce et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) and disinterest from domestic students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

In their study of ESL students, Kanno and Varghese (2010) mention the concept of “ESL Habitus,” or “the propensity for self-censorship because of one’s ESL status” (p. 321). They explain that this can impact the socialization of these students and use the example of poor involvement in student organization; ESL students’ lack of participation was due to both time and a reluctance to participate in “‘mainstream’ social networks” on campus (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p. 322). One participant in Kanno and Varghese’s study explained how “most of the ESL students are not participating to the any sports or

events like something like that ‘cause they have a hardship with speaking and like socializing. So they don’t tend to be involved in anything” (p. 322). Whatever the reasons, there are indications in the literature that international students and students from refugee contexts may struggle to develop relationships with locals. This is echoed in a study that found African refugee students typically interacted only with each other with the exception of pair and small group work, and that participants “often cited isolation, exclusion, and loneliness as sources of psychosocial stress” (Kanu, 2008, p. 932).

In the struggle to form relationships with locals, students may turn to coethnic peers as a backup (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). However, this could also impact their transition as Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) found that “those with a higher ratio of co-nationals in their friendship networks reported lower satisfaction and feelings of social connectedness” (p. 290). Overall, there are many struggles that international and refugee students may undergo as part of their socialization to the new host culture.

Refugees can also face challenges with the development of their identities. As mentioned above, families can play a big role in this as individuals attempt to balance their ethnic culture with the culture of their new environment. One study of adult immigrant and refugee students in Australia classified individuals into two groups in the development of their bicultural identities: biculturally exploring and committing (i.e., students who “were exploring and committing to both their heritage and Australian cultures”) and biculturally exploring without committing (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012, p. 76). It was found that those from the biculturally exploring and committing group made more positive comments regarding their feelings about school and their activities, and

were more likely to view school counsellors as helpers than those from the other group (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012).

Regarding the challenges these groups faced, the big challenges for those from the biculturally exploring and committing group were related to “money and school tasks, and small challenges of time management and to a less extent, culture,” whereas for the biculturally exploring without committing group it was “big challenges of English language and their own skills, and small challenges of discrimination, health and family” (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012, p. 78). Brooker and Lawrence’s (2012) study creates an interesting image of how identity development can impact education and transition. The authors mention how the differences of concerns may indicate that those from the committing group had already dealt with the issues of the not committing group, such as English and study skills, and that those from the non-committing group were disadvantaged by their reluctance to access outside help. Overall, Brooker and Lawrence do a good job of highlighting the power of identity development in shaping one’s educational experience.

Another facet of identity development facing students from refugee contexts corresponds to literacy levels. Regarding the concept of “ESL Habitus” noted above, Kanno and Varghese (2010) found that ESL students take on more of a reserved and less-involved identity that is shut-off in ways from the local community because of their literacy skills. Naidoo (2015) mentions how “language is not only a medium of communication but is also linked to refugee-background students’ identity” (p. 214).

Furthermore, there are also challenges around the label of “refugee” and one’s views of being labelled as such. Some may reject the label of refugee in part out of the

desire to create a new identity away from concepts of the “other” and the negativity that has become associated with the term (Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2016). Peterson (2010) explains how there are examples of both those who embrace their past as refugees and those who want to move past it. Peterson (2010) argues that “we need to recognize that forced ‘uprooting’ is a defining feature that sets refugees apart from other kinds of migrants” and that we also should “recognize that for refugees, as for other migrants, resettlement overseas can often be a catalyst and a means towards realizing a renewed cultural, emotional, social and political attachment to one’s roots, and therefore a powerful source of identity” (p. 118). Considering the negative stereotypes that could be associated with being a refugee, as mentioned above, it is not surprising that some would want to shed this label, while at the same time some could view it as a powerful component of their identity. Overall, international and refugee students may go through many processes and forms of identity development that can have impacts on their transition and success.

Mental and Physical Health Challenges

Refugees may face challenges and barriers related to health and wellness. First, refugees may experience issues related to their mental health. Naja, Aoun, El Khoury, Bou Abdallah, and Haddad (2016) found in a study on Syrian refugees in Lebanon that 43.9% of participants were depressed. Naja et al. also found a prevalence rate of 27.1% for past depression and 6.5% for prewar depression. Their study shows the large impact that war and forced migration can have on one’s mental health.

However, issues of mental illness can extend beyond forced migration for refugees. Joyce et al.’s (2010) study of refugee students at Australian universities found

that the burden of their past as refugees, in conjunction with frustrations about university, led some participants to experience anxiety and emotional stress while studying. This could have negative impacts on the studies of these individuals as some expressed that these past reflections could impact their concentration abilities (Joyce et al., 2010). Guruge and Butt (2015) explain how there are both pre- and post-migration determinants of mental health, with some of the post-migration determinants relating to family and discrimination, among other things.

Another factor to consider when looking at refugee mental health is acculturative stressors. Smith and Khawaja (2011) outline different types of acculturative stressors that may be encountered by international students, including language, educational stressors, sociocultural stressors, discrimination, and practical stressors. Smith and Khawaja highlight the importance of coping in dealing with acculturative stress and note that if these stressors are not overcome through appropriate coping, such as support from outside groups, then acculturative stress may occur. This is important as many studies have found a relationship between acculturative stress and depression amongst international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). One can imagine that it may be difficult to move forward from the mental health issues faced by refugee and international students, and Nourpanah (2010) mentions that “previous research on migration populations has shown that homesickness often persists along with an obdurate clinging to the past, thereby prohibiting successful adaptation to the present” (p. 58).

There also may not be resources in place to support refugee mental health needs. Naja et al. (2016) explain how psychiatric issues are a low priority when compared with other components of humanitarian burden such as nutrition and primary health care and

that most organizations, in the context of refugee camps, do not have the resources to provide the needed services for mental health issues. In a study of Syrian refugees in a camp in Jordan, only about a third of the participants who expressed a need for psychological support and treatment had received it (Basheti, Qunaibi, & Malas, 2015). This shows a gap in supply and demand for mental health services.

Beyond mental health issues, physical health issues can also act as a barrier for refugee students. Naja et al. (2016) mention that “according to Amel Association which looked after over 90,000 displaced Syrian patients, 47% of them suffered from skin diseases; 27% from digestive system diseases; 19% from respiratory diseases; 7% from malnutrition; and 2% from infectious diseases (measles, jaundice, and typhoid)” (p. 79). This shows the sheer scale of physical health concerns that these populations may have to deal with. A study of Syrian refugees at a camp in Jordan found that 79.5% of participants reported the presence of an illness with acute illnesses being close to half of them (Basheti et al., 2015). Of note from the latter study was that approximately 4% of participants in the camp reported experiencing the death of a family member due to “timely lack of medical attention” and close to 40% of participants felt that they were not receiving proper medical care (Basheti et al., 2015, p. 1697).

The issue of physical health can also intersect with other aspects of the refugee experience such as English language proficiency as refugees could struggle to communicate with medical professionals, which could delay medical treatment (Kong et al., 2016). Overall, both physical and mental health issues can have a tremendous impact on the lives of refugees.

Structural Barriers to Refugee Success

Barriers embedded in the systems and structures of government and higher education could impact the success of refugee students. First, this could include structures within immigration systems. One way in which this can be seen is in the broader philosophies and ideals of so-called Western states. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) mention how there are inconsistencies between stated ideals and realities regarding refugees in some liberal democratic regimes. Taylor and Sidhu note also that “while these countries provide formal access to citizenship by accepting a quota of refugees for resettlement, their settlement policies and practices create conditions for the marginalisation of refugees and in the worst-case scenarios, facilitate their slide into an underclass” (p. 41).

Structural barriers could also include restrictive immigration policies. Steel et al. (2011) studied mental health impacts based on the types of visas held by refugees and examined the differences between those who held temporary protection visas (TPVs), with which they were “obliged to prove their claim for further protection every 3 or 5 years” and permanent protection visas (PPV), “guaranteeing their long-term security or residency” and granting them “unrestricted access to all services and entitlements afforded to Australian citizens” (p. 1150). There were many restrictive aspects of TPVs including exclusion from federal benefits and services, and an inability to leave Australia or apply for family reunion, which impacted their contact with family, among other things (Steel et al., 2011, p. 1150). The study found that those with TPVs showed more issues related to mental health and general health in comparison to PPV holders, and even appeared to have more difficulties with English language proficiency whereas the PPV group showed improvements (Steel et al., 2011). One alarming finding was that TPV

holders seemed to have greater mental health issues compared to PPV holders in areas of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Steel et al., 2011). Steel et al. state that “there is mounting evidence from other studies of both TPVs and asylum seekers, that a range of ethnic groups manifest high levels of distress when they are faced with prolonged periods living in fear of forced repatriation” (p. 1154). Although this case takes place in Australia, and there has not been literature found that indicates similar problems in Canada, it is still important to look to Steel et al.’s study as an example of how uncertainty and anxiety around immigration policies and stability can impact refugee experiences.

Another possible barrier for refugee and international students may be the structure of information delivery systems within governments and institutions of higher education. This could include students having trouble navigating conflicting information and assessing reliable information (Calder et al., 2016), while some students may arrive in Canada with unrealistic expectations (Plasterer, 2010). Furthermore, Calder et al. (2016) mention how information may depend on students’ networks which, as mentioned above, many students may not have at that point.

One area in which these information delivery issues could impact students regards living expenses. For example, students could be confused into thinking that the visa requirement of \$10,000 is adequate for living when in reality it is not, and thus students may have an inaccurate understanding of living costs in Canada (Calder et al., 2016). Information issues can also impact access to services by international students. This could be due to confusion over the large amounts of information encountered during orientation and a lack of information in areas most accessible to international students

(Roberts & Dunworth, 2012), and students feeling like they “couldn’t find any information about the service when I needed it” (Roberts, Boldy, & Dunworth, 2015, p. 131).

Furthermore, information issues can also cause confusion and impact the educational path taken by refugee students in Canada (Shakya et al., 2010). Some youth in Shakya et al.’s (2010). study indicated that they would have taken a different path if it were not for these information barriers. The youth in Shakya et al.’s study offered advice on “the need for timely orientation and guidance for newcomer youth particularly as the education system in Canada is very different from back home, and that adjustment can be quite difficult and ‘shocking’” (p. 71). Information issues could also impact access to higher education, as one study found that some refugee students did not follow through on their intentions to attend college in the U.S. due to challenges navigating websites or understanding housing terms (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016).

Third, support structures that are in place at institutions of higher learning may not be best suited to support the needs of international students. One piece of evidence supporting this could be the limited access of counselling services by international students (Hwang, Bennett, & Beauchemin, 2014; Russell, Thomson, & Rosenthan, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Xiong & Lam, 2013). There are many factors that could impact access, including stigmas associated with mental health issues (Hwang et al., 2014); a lack of understanding of the benefits of counselling (Xiong & Lam, 2013); feeling like their problem was not important enough to warrant getting help, and issues around information on the services (Russell et al., 2008). Furthermore, “in some of the studies discussed in this section, the universities may have adopted an assimilation attitude,

expecting international students to utilise services that are culturally acceptable for domestic students, but may not be culturally appropriate for some international students” (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 706).

In a study looking more generally at student services, there were many possible factors that could impact international student views and use of service, including their perceived usefulness, a lack of awareness of services, and services not being available at desirable times for students, among other things (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). Overall, there are structures within governments and educational institutions that can act as barriers to the success of international and refugee students.

Academic and Literacy Challenges

Refugee and international students face many challenges related to the academic systems in place at institutions of higher learning. First, refugee students could face issues related to accreditation and admission to institutions of higher learning. This can be due to institutions not fully recognizing previous experiences and qualifications (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Gateley, 2015) or not having structures in place that are compatible with the context of refugee education such as disruption and attending a variety of different school settings (Anselme & Hands, 2010). In short, Anselme and Hands (2010) explain how “the inflexibility of placement procedures affects learners’ access, continuity, and progression in their new education system” (p. 93).

Furthermore, refugees may lack necessary documentation for applications to higher education institutions (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). In one study of newcomer youth in Toronto, the participants stressed the need for “a more sensitive and flexible system for

assessing diplomas and degrees from back home” which includes accommodating for a lack of documentation (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 71).

These issues of accreditation can occur prior to postsecondary education as well. One study of Bhutanese and Burmese youth found that complications with transcripts affected some students’ grade placements, which could impact their ability to finish high school or their preparedness for higher education (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). Furthermore, some of the youth affected by these placements also surpassed the maximum high school age before being able to complete high school or prepare for higher education. Beyond academic impacts, inappropriate placement could also be alienating to students placed in a younger class (Naidoo, 2013).

Educational gaps and interruptions experienced by refugees could impact their academic success. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016), only 50% and 22% of refugee children and youth attend primary and secondary school, respectively, while only 1% attend university. This is increasingly problematic, as Dryden-Peterson (2010) explains that “the nature of contemporary conflict means that refugee situations are increasingly protracted, such that refugees can spend their entire school-age years displaced” (p. 12). Missing education or gaps in education could have negative impacts. One study looking at refugee transitions to U.S. high schools found that these interruptions caused many students to have foundational gaps (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016), whereas a study of first-year college refugees in the U.S. shared the story of a refugee student who struggled with literacy, possibly due to the fact the student only had 6 years of prior schooling (Hirano, 2014).

Another academic barrier that could be faced by refugee students is literacy levels, with one study finding that refugee youth had lower fluency in official languages than other immigrant groups (Shakya et al., 2010). In a study of college refugee and international students, it was found that most linguistic challenges related to reading and writing (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). It is not surprising that students may struggle with this in an academic setting, as Naidoo (2013) mentions how “as researchers have noted it takes from five to seven years for one to acquire proficiency for academic learning in a second language” (p. 450). Linguistic barriers can make it more difficult to understand (Kong et al., 2016; Shakya et al., 2010) and speak up in or engage with the class (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kong et al., 2016; Shakya et al., 2010), which can cause students to fall behind (Shakya et al., 2010).

Refugee children may also fall behind in academic content due to the large amount of time spent learning their new languages and being placed in younger classrooms as a method for language learning (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Literacy issues can also impact access to higher education, as Naidoo (2015) found that proficiency in English can act as a “gatekeeper” for refugee students as a high level of sophistication in reading and writing is needed to transition to higher education (p. 214).

Refugee and international students may also experience difficulty adjusting to new academic and pedagogical environments. In countries of first-asylum, refugee students may be exposed to primarily teacher-centred pedagogy focused on lectures and limited student participation (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). After resettlement, teachers could interpret a lack of participation from these students as evidence that they have little to contribute, when they may just be following what they perceive to be appropriate

behaviour (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). In their review of literature, Smith and Khawaja (2011) highlight multiple studies that found international students may struggle with the change to new teaching styles such as those that focus on critical thinking. Overall, there are numerous academic barriers and challenges that refugee and international students face.

Importance of Understanding Challenges and Barriers

There are many reasons why literature on the challenges of refugee and international students more generally was examined. First, although some literature on international students was highlighted due to an overall lack of literature on refugee students, it is important to focus on the unique and diverse needs and challenges experienced by refugee students. The literature above indicates that although refugee students face some common challenges with international students, they may also face unique challenges that can impact their success in postsecondary education. Second, understanding the unique challenges faced by refugee students can provide context behind some of the success factors and services implemented by institutions of higher learning, which will be discussed next. Furthermore, as will be discussed later, previous studies indicate the importance of understanding the unique context of refugee students. Finally, understanding that refugee students face many unique challenges provides a strong rationale for further research on how to help refugee students overcome these barriers. Overall, the literature indicates that refugees face a diverse set of challenges and barriers. The next section of the literature review will explore some of the factors that can help refugee students overcome some of these challenges and support their success in higher education.

Refugee Student Success Factors

The review of literature revealed some factors that could help refugees succeed in an educational environment. These factors have been categorized into three main themes of (a) student aspirations and resilience, (b) supportive relationships and environment, and (c) culturally relevant approach. Some of these factors are internal to the students, whereas some are external factors supported by the institutions of higher learning or the students' networks.

Given the variety and scale of barriers faced by refugee students, as shown above, one can assume that it would be very difficult for these individuals to access and attain higher education without external support from institutions of higher learning. That being said, it is important to understand how these institutions can implement services that meet the needs of these students. Due to a lack of relevant research, it was difficult to quantify the impacts of university services on the success of refugee students in Canada; however, the literature highlighted below provides some valuable insight into the steps universities can take to support refugee students.

Impacts of Student Aspirations and Resilience

A consistent theme throughout the literature was the high level of aspiration and resilience displayed by refugee students. First, education can be a motivating factor for refugee students. In a study of refugee education in the U.K., the participants were highly motivated to study and viewed education as important in many aspects of their lives (Gateley, 2015). In Joyce et al.'s (2010) study of Australian refugees, the participants showed a high level of determination and motivation toward their studies and career goals and pride in becoming the first university graduates from their families. In a study

of African refugees in Canada, the participants “demonstrated optimism and remarkable faith in education as their socio-economic ladder” (Kanu, 2008, p. 934). In a study of newcomer refugee youth in Toronto, educational aspirations and the importance placed on education appeared to increase after resettling in Canada (Shakya et al., 2010). This could be explained by the participants’ contrasting educational experiences prior to migration and in Canada, the latter of which they viewed as being of higher quality and higher value (Shakya et al., 2010). Overall, Hirano (2014) sums it up well in explaining how “refugees tend to display strong motivation and drive to complete their education as they view their degree as a path towards a better life for themselves, their families, and, in many cases, the people who still live in the country they fled” (p. 49).

This leads nicely into the second point—that education can be a force of empowerment and enable students to give back to others. In a study of former refugee youth in Australia, some of them viewed schooling as “an important space for exerting agency, for constituting themselves as ‘students’ and ‘learners,’ despite the circumstances of their lives in refugee camps” (Uptin et al., 2016, p. 605). One study of refugee students in camps in Kenya and Malawi and an urban area in Jordan found that the participants felt empowered from their university experiences and felt that it enabled them to help their communities (Crea, 2016). Students in a study that investigated Hmong refugees appeared to be motivated by the view of education as a means to help their families and to give back to them (Xiong & Lam, 2013).

Overall, education has the potential to be a force of motivation and empowerment for refugee students, and refugee students appear to view education as a high aspiration and priority in their lives. Despite these aspirations, many refugees still face external

barriers and challenges, as shown above, that can impact their success. Furthermore, there appears to be a large gap between these aspirations and the realization of these aspirations, as according to the UNHCR (2016) only 1% of refugees under the UNHCR mandate attend university. Given this low rate of access, and the fact that there appears to be a lack of research on refugee higher education, this presents a strong rationale for future research on refugee access and success in higher education. As a next step for this literature review, it is important to examine the initiatives and services that external actors, such as institutions of higher learning, could offer to help refugee students achieve their aspirations.

Supportive Relationships and Inclusive Environments

An important factor in the success of refugee and international students is in regard to the relationships and support networks they develop and maintain. One theme highlighted in a review of literature by Hendrickson et al. (2011) was that friendship formation was an important factor in the success of international students across the globe. One study that looked at the transition of refugee youth to life in Melbourne, Australia, found a positive relationship between participant peer attachment and well-being (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010). The same study also found a relationship between well-being and social inclusion or exclusion (Correa-Velez et al., 2010).

Types of relationships can also impact student success. For example, a study of international students in Hawaii found that those with more local friends experienced greater satisfaction and less homesickness while those with more co-national friends experienced less satisfaction (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Hendrickson et al. (2011) hypothesize that international students “who reported varying friendship networks with

host nationals may have had access to social resources not afforded to others with more closed friendship groups” (p. 290). However, support from students from similar backgrounds can also have positive impacts, as Joyce et al. (2010) found that support from these individuals, whether it be in the form of information or encouragement, was an important factor in influencing the decisions of refugee students to attend university.

Family relationships and support networks are also important in the success of international and refugee students. A study of Hmong college students found that family was an important source of support for the students, which included “emotional support, advice, attendance at campus activities and events, tangible care, high value on higher education and respect for their decision to pursue college education” (Xiong & Lam, 2013, p. 139). One study of newcomer youth in Australia found a positive relationship between living with parents and well-being in regard to personal relationships and social support (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). One study of international students in Australia found a relationship between loneliness and lacking nearby family (Sawir, Marginson, Deumer, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Kanu’s (2008) study of refugee students in Manitoba found that family helped drive intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in students as those with involved family viewed school as valuable.

It is important to note that some of the research above focuses on international students, and that refugees could experience some unique challenges in regard to family and friend support. For example, one of these challenges could be missing family, as according to the UNHCR (n.d.) 43 of the 202 displaced children interviewed in Jordan and Lebanon indicated that they had immediate family who were dead, detained, or missing. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find statistics on missing family for refugee

youth. However, if one were to assume that this challenge also applies to youth as it does to children, then this presents a strong case for institutions of higher learning to provide a supportive environment and relationships for these individuals.

Overall, support networks can be an important factor in the success of refugee and international students. Joyce et al. (2010) sum up the important role of support systems nicely in stating that “despite encountering a large number of problems and having to learn new concepts and skills, with each issue they overcome and with each support network they develop, students gain confidence and feel closer to achieving their academic goals” (p. 94).

Beyond relationships and social networks, the literature demonstrated the important role of institutions of higher learning in developing inclusive and supportive environments. In a study of refugee students in Australia, the participants highlighted the importance of supportive relationships in school and that “a culture of warmth, concern and understanding contributed to their academic engagement and school performance” (Naidoo, 2015, p. 215). Hirano (2014) explores the case of a small college in the U.S. that admitted seven refugee students and despite the small number, put in place many resources and supports for these individuals. Hirano believed that the success of the seven students, with academic writing in particular, was partly due to the supportive environment created at the college.

Supportive school environments are important, as one study of international students in the U.S. found that perceived support from the school was associated with reduced acculturative stress for the students (Bai, 2016). Bai’s (2016) study used a tool called the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) that considered

seven areas, including “perceived discrimination (8 items), homesickness (4 items), perceived hate/rejection (5 items), fear (4 items), stress due to change/culture shock (3 items), guilt (2 items), and nonspecific items (10 items)” (p. 8). Bai explains how “support from school does not only refer to tangible support such as a culturally friendly environment and facilities, but also moral support from people whom international students interact with, such as classmates, faculty, and staff members” (p. 102). Furthermore, “with sufficient support from school, students can have positive acculturative experiences and lower levels of stress” (Bai, 2016, p. 102).

Overall, the literature indicates the importance of support networks and environments in the success of newcomer students. However, limited research was found in this area and some of the studies had small sample sizes. That being said, this is an area that would benefit from further research in the future. One way that institutions of higher learning could help implement these supportive relationships is by looking to community organizations.

Lacroix et al.’s (2014) study looking at Refugee Community Organizations (RCOs) demonstrated the success these organizations can have in assisting refugees in their transition to Winnipeg and Montreal in Canada. For example, the participants “pointed to the fact that the confidence and capacity-building they acquired in Canadian society stemmed from their participation in their community organizations” and that “some also saw their organizations as a training ground for leadership training” (Lacroix et al., 2014, p. 68). Initiatives such as these could provide institutions of higher learning with an opportunity for collaboration. However, there does appear to be a gap in research

looking at collaborations between institutions of higher learning and community organizations, and this remains an area for future research.

Taking a Culturally Relevant Approach

The literature highlights the importance of educators, administrators, and school systems working to better understand the unique context of refugee and international students. By understanding this context and implementing a culturally relevant approach to their education, institutions of higher learning could have an impact on the success of refugee students. Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016) explain how “a comparative lack of engagement with experiences of immigrant or refugee youth tends to obscure the complexity of some of these silenced experiences” (p. 157) and that research on immigrant youth from Africa and the Middle East has been sparse.

As shown above, refugees can face different forms of marginalization such as racial discrimination or structural barriers. Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016) explain how a lack of presence in research can be another means of marginalization for refugee youth. This leads well into the first point of this section—that it is important for educators to work towards better understanding the context and experiences of refugee and international students (McBrien, 2005; Naidoo, 2013, 2015). Naidoo (2013) explains the importance of avoiding “one size fits all” approaches for teachers of disadvantaged students and understanding the context of learners (p. 453). Naidoo (2015) also mentions how educators must work to understand the cultures of their students while also limiting the development of stereotyping in the process.

The development of understanding can go beyond just the learner. As Taylor and Sidhu (2012) mention, to provide good service to these students, educators should also

work to overcome “popular understandings and media constructions of ‘the refugee problem’” (p. 41). In a study of international students in Canada, the participants suggested that international students can help the university understand their context by providing information to them (Calder et al., 2016). Perhaps an increased awareness to university faculty and staff, who may be able to initiate change better than international students, could be important in driving support (Calder et al., 2016). Although the research indicates a need to understand refugee student contexts, there does not appear to be a lot of research elaborating on the means for doing so. Thus, this is an area that can benefit from further research.

Furthermore, Padlee and Reimers (2015) mention how it is important to further assess international student satisfaction at universities. One good example of understanding unique needs and moving away from a one-size fits all approach can be seen in a study on counselling services for aboriginal and international students in Canada (Robertson, Holleran, & Samuels, 2015). Robertson et al. (2015) examined the implementation of counselling services in a way that was more sensitive to the needs of the populations, and Robertson et al. attribute the success of their intervention to “the availability of services in familiar settings and the flexibility with which counsellors adapted their methods to the internalized individual cultures of varied clientele” (p. 131).

A great quote on the need to understand refugees is “the experience that refugee students have in schools is very much determined by the way that refugees are thought about, and represented in the public culture, and how these representations are up or contested in schools” (Hattam & Every, 2010, as cited in Uptin et al., 2016, p. 613). Taylor and Sidhu (2012) further mention that “along with targeting refugee populations

in policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities, schools must be resourced to respond holistically to the needs of refugee youth so as to prepare them to exercise their economic, social and cultural rights as citizens” (p. 49). Overall, the literature indicates the importance of understanding the needs of refugee and international students.

Although there are some steps that institutions of higher learning have taken and can take to support refugee students, it appears that refugees still face many barriers to their success as noted in the challenges section of the literature review. This indicates that there may be gap in the needs and challenges faced by refugee students, and the supports put in place by institutions of higher learning to address these challenges. This provides a rationale for exploring the delivery of support services for refugee students by institutions of higher learning, as will be the case in this research study.

Gaps in Literature

Overall, the literature provides helpful insights into some of the challenges faced by refugee youth, and some of the factors that can support refugee student success. From this literature review, there are multiple gaps that have been observed that this study will seek to address. First, there appears to be a dearth of studies looking at the perceptions of administrators on refugee student success, and how this may impact the implementation of services. Second, there are many studies that examine the barriers faced by refugee students, but there does not appear to be as many that look at gaps in service delivery for these students at institutions of higher learning. Third, there seems to be a lack of research on the establishment of community partnerships between institutions of higher learning, and community-based organizations. Finally, there appears to be a lack of research on refugee higher education in Southern Ontario and in Canada in general. This

study aimed to address these gaps in literature and contribute to the broader literature base on refugee higher education while also providing practical recommendations relevant to the geographical areas of focus. Furthermore, this study sought to examine the perceptions of student administrators and staff at community organizations towards refugee student success.

Conceptual Framework

The literature review focuses on the key themes of barriers faced by refugee students and success factors that can positively impact their educational experiences. Some of these challenges result from pre-settlement experiences such as those pertaining to mental health while others related to the structures in place in the communities of resettlement and institutions of higher learning. Some of the success factors can be internal—such as a high level of motivation and aspiration from refugee students—and external, such as supportive environments created by institutions of higher learning and taking a culturally relevant approach to education. Despite some institutions taking steps to support refugee-background students, in examining the literature it appears there may be a gap in the challenges faced by refugee students and the supports offered to help them overcome these challenges. In highlighting the challenges and success factors, it helps create a broader understanding of the gap in supports and services that exist and the steps that institutions of higher learning can take to fill this gap. This provides an important context for this study which aims to explore the services and supports implemented by organizations in Southern Ontario, and how institutions of higher learning and community organizations can work together to help fill this gap.

This study operates on the premise that higher education is a social good and an important part of a functional society. Therefore, it is important that all demographics have equitable access to higher education. However, the literature reviewed suggests this may not be the case for students from refugee contexts and international students more broadly as they experience unique challenges related to access. As such, it is important to understand how institutions of higher learning and community organizations are working together to develop services to help even the playing field for students from refugee contexts accessing higher education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter's literature review will guide the framework of this study by providing the foundation for a comparative analysis between the literature and the institutions of focus. The conceptual framework for this study was the starting point for the analysis, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention how

the framework for your study will draw upon the concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation.

This framework in turn will generate the “problem” of the study, specific research questions, data collection and analysis techniques, and how you will interpret your findings. (p. 86)

As will be explained in greater detail later, this study will explore some of the efforts and approaches being taken at institutions of higher learning and key community organizations in these urban areas and will compare them to the barriers and success factors outlined in the literature.

Methodology/Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention how “the overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 15). A key focus of this research is to truly understand the perspectives and interpretations of participants regarding support for students from refugee contexts.

This research study also used an interpretive methodology. Merriam and Tisdell

(2016) mention how “interpretive research ... assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (p. 9). Through interviews, the study will draw on the personal interpretations and perceptions of service delivery by the participants and will use them to create an interpretation of the context of service delivery for refugee students in these areas. The study used key informant interviews as the primary source of data collection. A case study design was selected for this study as it focuses on a specific phenomenon and a case study is an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention how case study is less of a methodological choice than “a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). The “what” is a bounded system (Smith, 1978), a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. You can “fence in” what you are going to study. The case, then, could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy. (p. 38)

In this case, the entity being studied is the phenomenon of support services available to students from refugee contexts. This study is interested in determining factors that impact support service delivery, such as partnerships between various community entities, resources, and the philosophies shared by participants and organizations. As such, the study sought to recruit participants from a variety of organizations. This works well with the framework of case studies as a “case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (Yin, 2014, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37).

Sample and Population/Site and Participant Selection

This study made use of purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling is useful for this study as it is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). That being said, this sample selected experts from multiple organizations and in a variety of positions, which helped provide relevant, high-quality information in their interviews. Due to time constraints, recruitment focused on a select group of organizations in the two communities of focus, and there was flexibility regarding the availability of potential participants, and thus convenience sampling was used as “you select a sample based on time, money location, availability of sites or respondents, and so on” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). In addition to the above techniques, the study made use of some snowball sampling, which “involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study” and “as you interview these early key participants, you ask each one to refer you to other participants” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). Some participants assisted with connecting the researcher with other participants.

This study drew from two primary populations: administrators at institutions of higher learning, and staff from community organizations. To a certain extent, this study used triangulation, which is “a powerful strategy for increasing the credibility or internal validity of your research” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain how “triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or

interview data collect from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (p. 245). Due to time limitations, follow-up interviews were not conducted for this study. Furthermore, for the purpose of this study, follow-up interviews were not necessary. However, participants from a variety of organizations and in different positions were recruited to ensure multiple perspectives and levels of experience were accounted for. These perspectives were compared and contrasted to ensure a more holistic view of the issues in question was considered.

The two areas of focus were two urban areas with populations over 100,000 each. Each of the urban areas is located in Southern Ontario, and they are in relatively close proximity to one another. Each of the urban areas also has two or more postsecondary institutions, and several non-profit organizations, which made them a good fit for this study.

Participant Background

One-on-one interviews were conducted with 15 participants. Each interview lasted an average of approximately 34.5 minutes. Participants were from two universities, one college, and four non-profit organizations. Those from the institutions of higher learning worked in various areas including international student services and programs (five participants), student housing (one participant), ESL services (one participant), and general student success (one participant). Those from the non-profit organizations also worked in various areas including settlement services (three participants), newcomer employment (one participant), youth services (one participant), refugee housing (one participant), and with a national organization that assists with the sponsorship of refugee-background postsecondary students (1 participant). Having individuals from a variety of

work areas and organizations allowed for a diversity of perspectives to be captured in the interviews. There were two reasons that recruitment ended at 15 participants. First, many common themes were emerging, and the researcher was satisfied with the content that had been gathered. Second, with approaching deadlines, it was important to end at 15 to ensure adequate time for data analysis. Comments on further research that might be enabled through having more participants will be discussed in the implications in Chapter 5.

Data Collection

This qualitative study used interviews as the source of data. The individual interviews followed a semi-structured approach with some standard questions asked to all participants. However, there was also an opportunity to go with the natural flow of the conversation if new ideas emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This ensured some consistent information from participants, but also “allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). The goal was for the interviews to run between 30-60 minutes. This is in line with Plano Clark and Creswell’s (2015) point that “good qualitative interviews typically last for at least 30-60 minutes to allow for an in-depth discussion of the person’s experiences” (p. 340). For this study, most of the interviews fell within this range. Interviews ranged in length from approximately 17.5 to 55.5 minutes depending on the availability of participants, lasting an average of 34.5 minutes. In future studies, it would be helpful to conduct longer interviews to delve deeper into the topics.

There were separate interview guides created for those working in higher education and those working with community organizations. The questions were roughly

the same aside from minor changes in wording, but there was flexibility for deviations from the following questions based on the context of the conversation, and the experience level of the participant. Thus, not all questions were relevant to all participants.

The interview questions were open-ended and allowed the participants freedom to answer in many ways. This is important, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain how “good interview questions are those that are open ended and yield descriptive data, even stories about the phenomenon” (p. 120). The interview questions included “experience and behavior questions,” “opinion and values questions,” “feeling questions,” and “knowledge questions” (Patton, 2015, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 118).

All interviews took place at the site of the organizations, at a location of the participants choosing. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, and consent from participants was received prior to recording. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed by the student researcher. After the transcriptions were completed, they were sent to participants to give them an opportunity for member checking as

this is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (Maxwell, 2013, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246)

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to institutions and organizations within the boundaries of two urban communities in southern Ontario with the exception of one national

organization. Although the initial goal of this study was to focus on one urban area, the scope was expanded to ensure more thorough data collection. As such, the results may not be generalizable to other contexts. Also, this study focused only on administrators and staff at institutions of higher learning and community organizations. Consequently, other groups were not consulted that otherwise may play an important role in the context of student success for individuals from refugee contexts. This could include municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and the students themselves. However, the focus of this study is on exploring the current initiatives and partnerships that exist to support refugee students in these areas, and thus, a pertinent first step is to develop an understanding of these services through interviews with those administering them. The perspectives of students and those in government capacities would be a good next step in future research. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitation of time. As the student researcher was the only individual conducting interviews, and had a preferred end-date, interviews were ended when 15 participants were recruited to ensure adequate time for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Following the collection of data, I coded transcripts manually while looking for themes from the literature as well as any unexpected themes. Please see Appendix A for a list of themes from the literature. The analysis followed a constant comparative method approach to form initial categories and to compare them throughout the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It started off with open coding, as mentioned above, and led into axial coding to compare the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention how “axial coding is the process of relating categories and properties to each other, refining the category scheme” (p. 229).

Simultaneous data collection and analysis took place to help guide the study as “without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 196). In addition to comparing to themes in the literature, some unexpected themes arose, and thus these were noted as well. In this sense, the analysis followed open coding as to “be open to anything possible” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 204). Initial categories were constructed by recording notes and comments on the first transcript through open coding while being very expansive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following this, a similar process was conducted with further transcripts as “you scan in in exactly the same way as just outlined, keeping in mind the list of groupings that you extracted from the first transcript and checking to see whether they are also present in this second set” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). The process was continued until all the transcripts had been analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

Overall, this study presented a low-risk to participants. However, there were still steps taken to ensure their rights were respected and that the study adhered to all necessary ethical considerations. First, the study was granted clearance by three separate research ethics boards, including the Brock Research Ethics Board (File # 16-230). Second, all participants were made aware of any risks and benefits associated with their participation and the inconveniences, such as time, associated with this study. They were also asked to complete a consent form prior to their participation. Finally, the information from those participating in the study was securely stored, and no personal identifiers were associated with audio recordings and transcripts. Furthermore, to ensure identities are

protected, no names or personal identifiers of participants are used when sharing quotes in the findings section.

Chapter Review

This study took a qualitative case study approach to examine the phenomenon in question. One-on-one interviews were conducted with 15 participants from three institutions of higher learning and four community organizations to examine perspectives on refugee student success. The organizations were located within two urban centres, with one national organization being consulted as well. The interviews were open ended in nature, and guided by themes from the literature while allowing for new themes to emerge.

Now that this paper has highlighted the literature and methodology for the study, it will move forward to explore the findings from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The findings for this study are organized by the four primary research questions. The main themes from the data will be highlighted within these research questions. As some of the postsecondary administrators interviewed did not have direct experience working with refugee-background students, some of the findings extend more generally to international students. Furthermore, some of the information gathered from those working in the non-profit sector also extends to newcomers more generally. However, these insights were still included to allow for more thorough descriptions of the community context and its supports for students from refugee backgrounds.

Research Question 1

The study's first primary research question sought to answer the following: How are institutions of higher learning and community organizations in two urban areas assisting refugee students in their transition to Canadian education?

To answer this question, this section will be broken down in to two subsections. The first subsection will examine the perceptions that participants have about the challenges faced by students from refugee contexts, and how these align with the literature. The second subsection will examine the services that the organizations have in place to meet the needs of newcomer students.

Perceptions of Challenges for Individuals From Refugee Contexts

The first question in the interviews examined the perceptions that staff at postsecondary and non-profit organizations have regarding the challenges faced by individuals from refugee contexts. This was an important first step as it provided some background insight into the services these individuals and their organizations offered,

while also enabling the researcher to identify themes around the challenges experienced by individuals from refugee contexts. The most prominent themes that were identified were related to access, language, economic barriers, and cultural barriers.

Access. Challenges related to access were identified by participants from both non-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions. Within this broader theme, one of the specific challenges related to access was issues with documentation. Regarding the issue of documentation, one non-profit employee in this study explained:

I have a lot of clients, they came from war torn countries. They didn't have any documentation, some of them finished their education, some of them in their final years, and they have no access to their documentation. If universities can do something to help with this. I have many clients, they brought some documentation, but, university over there, they are not existing anymore, buildings are destroyed, so there is no record to compare and certify this documentation.

In total, eight participants, including six from the non-profit sector, discussed the issue of credentials and documentation. One non-profit employee explained how this could prevent high-achieving students from accessing education:

Let's say I have a grade 12 student move here from Syria. They have no access, whatsoever, to transcripts, to previous grades, so they may have been great students in their own country, very successful students in their own country, but have no way of proving that to postsecondary institutions here.

Another concern could be regarding the time it takes to access or get caught up on education. One non-profit employee mentioned:

For this client, she already, she was on her final year, she came here, started all over, this is the second year, and two more years. And instead of getting her baccalaureate, or, like, their degrees in 4 years, she is going to have it in 8 years.

Language. Six of the participants mentioned language as a challenge that individuals from refugee contexts may face in their transition. This could include different understandings of fluency, as one university administrator mentioned:

What is acceptable in the Middle East for a local to learn at what's called, according to their educational system, they're quote "fluent," and once they come, once they actually enrolled in universities and speak in universities, they definitely need assistance.

Although students may have a grasp of the English language, they could still struggle with university content, as one non-profit employee explained:

I had a youth come to me the other day who failed out of [university], he found a way to get into [university], did really well, he's from a French country, so French is his first language, English his second, took computer science, and he said he was great at computer science in French. But all the terms, even when he learned English, he could sit here and have a conversation with us in English, but he didn't know the computer science terminology, which then turned him into a student that wasn't successful.

Another non-profit employee explained how, even though they meet the requirements for proficiency, they can struggle with accents:

Even though we're admitting them into the program with English and French proficiency for academic competition, they still struggle a lot in Canada with

accents. So, in Canada and the Canadian context, although everybody's operating in English, there is a lot of people from around the world that have different accents, so that's a big challenge especially if the pros themselves have accents.

One participant explained how language can intersect with other challenges:

On top of that, they were fantastic in their school, in their own language, are now coming here with no English abilities. So, it's that concept of how can we improve their English skills to a point that they can access postsecondary in the shortest period possible, because these kids are also coming in a situation where they're not financially stable, and they need to support their families, so often times they're looking for jobs. But, that being said, when they're working, they're not improving their English as much as being in classes. So, it's a real struggle, and a lot of times kids give up in the path towards trying to get to postsecondary simply because it seems like it's too long of a process.

Economic challenges. Economic challenges were mentioned by participants from both postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations. These challenges can be broken down in to two main themes of employment, and general financial challenges. In regard to employment, this challenge could be related to a lack of Canadian experience as one postsecondary administrator mentioned:

I think the transitional piece and the need to, sort of, go back to school, so upgrade academically, and, Canadian experience, are huge, because there are many employers, and I have close relatives that work in HR, and many of the companies, even in construction, want Canadian experience, and as a refugee, that is, no one's giving them an opportunity to get the Canadian experience, so how do you expect them to get a job?

Beyond employment challenges, nine participants made mention of financial challenges that newcomers may experience. This can include, in general, the high costs associated with postsecondary education, as explained by one postsecondary administrator:

To add to that too another piece about access is around the, around financials, so university is an expensive place to be if you are living on campus or not living on campus. There are various costs that are associated with that, and depending on, kind of, where a person is coming from financially, that could potentially be a pretty big barrier, regardless of if you have, you know, not only the marks but also the documentation to prove it, you also have to be able to pay for it in some way.

The financial challenges could also be impacted by immigration status. As mentioned above, one non-profit worker explained how some individuals may wait until becoming a permanent resident to access university due to the differences in fees. One postsecondary administrator mentioned:

Our international students are not eligible for student loans through Canadian agencies, they have to pay their fees upfront, they have to show they have a year tuition and lodgings, so it's very different, so depending on what the refugee status is will depend on how they are treated.

That being said, this could impact the types of financial support that can be accessed, as mentioned by one non-profit employee:

I mean, they're applying inland as a refugee, until they pass the hearing and become convention refugee, and until they get their permanent residence, it takes time. By this time, or around that time, sometimes they are not able to get OSAP

for example, if he's ready to go to school, and it's difficult for him to get financial support. So, OSAP is changing their procedures, but I am not sure is there any benefits for refugees. Inland refugees can not receive OSAP for certain time.

If individuals are in the refugee claimant process, they may also choose to wait to access education, as one non-profit employee mentioned:

From the economic standpoint, as you were saying, like I said, a lot of these kids are coming from low-income families who are struggling to make ends meet when they come here. If they are refugees, they are treated as international students and have to pay international fees. So, a lot of our students, even if they have the credentials to be able to apply, will wait until they become PRs before they consider applying to university simply because of the difference in cost.

This participant further explained how the waiting can impact access to education when they do get permanent resident status: "Of course, half the time they're established in to jobs, and working, and don't think about leaving it to go to education by the time their claims come through, if they do come through."

Cultural challenges. Cultural challenges also emerged in conversations with participants from both the non-profit and postsecondary sectors. This could take many different forms, and one non-profit worker explained how different cultural contexts could be a challenge:

In Canada, we have a low context culture, okay? Whereas most newcomers are coming from high-context cultures. And when we talk about high context and low context, low context, we express ourselves more verbally, we are very, very articulate in verbalizing our intentions, and whereas with high context culture, the

communication is a bit more implied, rather than, expressed outright. So, that's where the challenges come in.

Regarding the challenges highlighted by this participant, they appear to be referring to misunderstanding created due to different cultural contexts, which will be discussed further later. One university administrator explained how students may have to develop a "third culture" when transitioning to Canada:

I think that they really have to recognize that they're developing a third culture, I don't know if you've studied on that or not yet, but it's a term that started with expats, and people, you know, living and working abroad and their kids having this thing, but I think it's really, it comes down to, you know, you grew up here and you had this culture, and then there's the Canadian culture, and then you're somewhere in the middle, you know? You're never quite Canadian, you're never quite Lebanese or whatever you were, you're this hybrid, and if you can be comfortable in that and navigating wherever you are, then I think you can be, you know, happy.

In addition to the adjustments made by newcomers to a new culture, another barrier mentioned can be related to awareness of different cultures from those in the country of resettlement. One non-profit employee explained:

But I would say people that we are living here for a long period of time, or let's say are at university, whoever is working at university from different settlement services up to professors. I guess that there is not enough doors, people they don't have enough information about different cultures. And then people that they are coming from different cultures, they are not aware that they should adjust to this

Canadian society. So, there is something that should be done, like kind of awareness about different cultures, cross-cultural education, that should be done for both sides.

In line with the importance of those working in postsecondary institutions or non-profit organizations being aware of cultural differences, three of the participants shared stories of how cultural misunderstandings with newcomers resulted in conflict. For example, one non-profit employee shared the story of a student who got a job working at a restaurant in Canada. This student worked quickly on their tables and would then help other servers on their tables. However, due to views on tipping, this was viewed as “interfering in someone else’s territory,” and as a result, the student was fired. It was explained that back home, tips were shared amongst everyone, whereas in this case, tips were for individual servers.

Overall, many themes emerged within the data pertaining to perceptions of challenges faced by students from refugee contexts and newcomers more generally. Now that the challenges and barriers perceived by participants have been highlighted, the focus will shift to the services currently being offered to meet the needs of newcomers.

Unique Services for Individuals From Refugee Contexts

One of the goals of this study was to develop an understanding of services offered specifically to students from refugee contexts. When asked about the services they offer to meet the needs of refugee background students, none of the postsecondary administrators identified specific services offered in their office for refugee students, aside from one administrator mentioning how they do work with settlement agencies “to try and develop pathways for refugees.” However, three participants from two

postsecondary institutions made mention of an organization that supports refugee students in postsecondary institutions in Canada, the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) being active on their campus. Three of the administrators mentioned how they do not view or label refugee students differently from other international students.

Regardless of the specificity of services offered that meet the needs of students from refugee contexts, all three of the postsecondary institutions offered many services that met the needs of international students, that could also be applicable to students from refugee contexts, as will be highlighted below.

Support for Newcomers

Despite a lack of specific services for individuals from refugee contexts being offered at postsecondary institutions, there were still many services offered that meet the needs of newcomers that will be discussed in this section. Furthermore, the non-profit organizations that took part in this study offered many services for refugees and newcomers more broadly that will be highlighted below. The main themes that emerged relating to services were language, employment, settlement, and social support.

Language support. Staff from all three postsecondary institutions and two of the four non-profit organizations highlighted services related to language learning that they offered to newcomers. Language services included formal language support such as courses, and informal support such as language café events. These language services also intersected with social opportunities, as one university administrator mentioned, in regard to their language café program, “I think it sort of sounds as much social as it is learning a new language, so it’s kind of just like, a place where we can build critical mass.”

The language support also overlapped with employment services, as one non-

profit worker highlighted a program called “Work Link” that helped clients learn English while also assisting with terminology related to a specific profession, such as those wishing to be a carpenter, as was highlighted by the participant. In addition to language support, employment support was also offered by some of the organizations that participated in the study.

Employment support. Staff from two of the three postsecondary institutions, and two of the four non-profit organizations, highlighted support they offer related to helping newcomers with employment. For the two non-profit organizations, these were more broadly for newcomers in general, not just students, as was the same with language support noted above. For the non-profit organizations, this support could take on many different forms including assistance with resumes and applying for jobs, workshops on relevant topics such as Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) and safe food handling, and help with getting a social insurance number. Both of the non-profit organizations helped connect newcomers with mentors in their field of interest.

One non-profit worker mentioned how:

We have things like, somebody dedicated towards mentorship, so getting people one-on-one time spent on job sites, or even just sitting with people in certain job roles so that they can get a better understanding of how it works in Canada. A lot of these people that are getting set up for mentorship previously did that in their own country, but have come here, and now have to re-establish credentials.

For the postsecondary institutions, employment support included assistance with applying for jobs, getting a social insurance number and filling out tax forms, and advising on postgraduate work opportunities. One university administrator mentioned:

The career development piece I think is really important because the students are so busy, but at the other end of it they want to start looking for work, they're worried about their immigration status, they're not sure how to present themselves, you know, to employers, and how to sell themselves, and, I want them to have realistic expectations that they're not going to go in and be the Associate Vice President right away, you know, that they might have to work their way up from an entry level position.

Social support. There are a variety of programs and supports put in place by postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations to offer social support to newcomers. All three postsecondary institutions participating in this study offered mentorship programs for international students. In these programs, incoming international students were paired with other students, domestic or international, for assistance with the transition to their program. Administrators from two of the institutions mentioned how this gives incoming international students an opportunity to ask questions to their mentors before arriving. Administrators from two of the institutions also explained how the mentorship programs are accompanied by events to connect the mentors and mentees. At one institution, they held an event to connect them near the beginning of the year, and at another institution, they tried to hold social events monthly to connect mentors and mentees.

Another common form of social support offered at institutions of higher learning was through social events offered for international students. All of the postsecondary institutions offered social events for international students which have included a language café, a biweekly coffee club, a curling event, a formal at the end of 1st

semester, a monthly restaurant tour, cultural holiday celebrations, and more. Regarding social opportunities, two administrators spoke about the importance of facilitating connections between international and domestic students. One mentioned:

Part of that is also engaging with the domestic students, so, planning events that are interesting to the local students so that we get that, you know, mixing and integration of both students, because part of the experience for an international student is they want to meet the locals and they want to, you know, make Canadian friends. And so, if you have an event that's only international students, you're not kind of meeting that need. So, it's really important that we plan opportunities for all students to engage with one another, and so that's kind of where I fit in, and I'm trying to do that.

Another administrator mentioned, when discussing their cultural holiday celebration events, "it gives our students an opportunity, for the ones that are not domestic to show their culture, and the ones that are domestic to start understanding the culture."

In addition to social support in postsecondary institutions, the same kinds of supports were found within the non-profit sector. One non-profit employee explained the importance of connecting clients with the community:

That networking piece, we feel is really important, like it's a priority for us. So we do try to network people, whether it's connecting with volunteers in the house or getting them out in the community. Sometimes it's their cultural community, sometimes it's not. So, that networking piece, yes, we recognize it as an issue, but having it as such a high value and priority, hopefully we overcome some of it.

Another non-profit employee spoke about current efforts to engage alumni of their

program to provide a mentorship initiative, while another non-profit employee spoke about a youth group they run in their community.

Settlement support. There are many ways that postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations provide settlement support to newcomers. Individuals from two of the three postsecondary institutions explained how they offer advising and support related to immigration matters. Many of those working in the non-profit sector also spoke about settlement services they offer to support newcomers. Speaking of settlement more generally, one non-profit employee explained:

It's usually settlement in the broadest sense. So, everyone that comes through here has an application process, and it's not really a very straight forward application, again, especially if language is a barrier, right? So, there's forms and forms and forms that need to be filled out. Medicals, legal counsel, you know, Ontario works, if they can access that. There's all kinds of things that people need to do, in order to make sure they're pointed in the right direction. So, we make sure they understand the process they are in, and what's required of them. And, we set them in that direction.

As shown above, these services can be multifaceted and touch on many different pieces related to transition, as another non-profit staff member commented:

I assist newcomers to settle in the community of Hamilton. So, basically guiding them through housing or if they have any Ontario works that they need, if they have financial burdens at the moment, information about immigration processes. A lot of our work is information and referral, so we deal with newcomers, also people who have lived here for a long time and they don't have their citizenship

One non-profit staff member explained how they create settlement plans with the newcomers:

And then we have our settlement services, so their job is that first stop, so helping people create settlement plans, a lot of the paperwork that you have to deal with when you're a newcomer to the country, they have access to those, and the ability to help people fill that in. They can help with housing, they can help with setting kids up in schools and all those first step things that you need when you arrive in the country, and then follow-ups throughout until the, kind of, full assimilation has happened.

In summary, settlement services were a big part of the services offered by the non-profit organizations, with all four organizations providing some level of assistance regarding the initial settlement of newcomers.

Overall, the postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations in this study offer many services to support the needs of newcomers. Next, this study will shift focus to look at how prepared the participants and their organizations feel to support students from refugee contexts.

Research Question 2

The study's second primary research question investigated the following: How prepared do staff from institutions of higher learning and community organizations feel to support refugee-background students?

With refugee migration levels very high (UNICEF, 2016), a goal of this study is to understand how prepared the community feels to support these individuals. Overall, participants expressed mixed feelings about how prepared they were to support students

from refugee contexts. Two themes that emerged when exploring this topic were around experience and knowledge, and funding and resources.

Higher Education Staff Experience and Knowledge

Many of the participants from the postsecondary sector expressed concern over the level of experience or knowledge that they have working with students from refugee contexts. One higher education administrator mentioned:

At least internally to this office, and I would argue probably the broader student affairs office, and potentially broader housing and conference services rather, and potentially even out in to student affairs, there isn't much expertise that I have seen around supporting international students and supporting refugees that exist, and so I say that we need to get our house in order, but we can't get our house in order without input from partners

There could also be a lack of awareness of students from refugee contexts within their institutions. One postsecondary administrator in student housing explained how they typically would not know about refugee students living in residence. Another postsecondary administrator explained how, regarding accessing community partners, "because we don't know the difference, and we don't know how many students are refugees, at this time, like I wouldn't tap into that, just because I don't know what the need is." Another administrator explained how they are still learning about this group:

I don't know if they self identify, or if we know that information in the background, I'm still learning that piece. You know, if we physically reach out to those students or they have to say, you know, "I'm a refugee and these are the resources I need," I don't know how that process works yet. I imagine it's a sensitive topic, you know, to dance around.

Overall, five of the eight participants from postsecondary institutions mentioned that they either have a lack of experience working with students from refugee contexts, or do not have a high level of knowledge of them.

Funding and Resources

One theme that emerged from those working in the non-profit and postsecondary sectors was related to concerns around a lack of funding and resources within their organization. Six participants elaborated on how resources can impact the services that they deliver.

This can be related to financial resources, which can impact their ability to deliver the services they want. One non-profit worker explained how a lack of funding meant that they could not provide a bus ticket, or snack to those that are taking part in a workshop. Another non-profit worker explained how a lack of funding can impact professional development: “The non-profit organization is given such little funds from the government, that, there is nothing much that they do in terms of professional development for staff, resources for newcomers and stuff like that.”

A lack of funding can also have more of a personal impact on those working in the non-profit sector, as one non-profit employee mentioned, regarding their wage: “In terms of being prepared emotionally and stuff like that, I am struggling myself, and here you are trying to help someone that is struggling. So that, in itself, is a challenge.”

A lack of resources can also impact the ability of organizations to differentiate services, as one university administrator noted:

I think also, you know, speaking more generally for our office and the staff in our office that, it’s really hard to differentiate, it’s really hard with limited resources

to differentiate to a really granular level, because there is like, you know, as I sort of said before for my role over all, there are lots of ways that we already need to kind of, be planning and delivering a program so it is inclusive for like, a wide variety of social locations.

The same administrator explained how:

Historically our international student programming hasn't really even differentiated for, between like, a Chinese student, a student from Nigeria, or a student in the United States. We kind of still, in some ways, clump them all together, and then they sort of self select in or out. So, to contemplate having like a significant influx of students coming from Arab countries such as Syria, I think, like, poses, like, a pretty substantial challenge for us, that we're probably not, we're not, well, we're not prepared to respond to that specificity of their identity or their experience as refugees.

On the flip side of this, two participants from non-profit organizations mentioned how resourcing had helped with the delivery of their programs. One non-profit worker explained how:

We've been lucky, like I said, as a youth department, to receive grants that have allowed us to establish very enhance and detailed youth programs, so, I think our youth programs would probably be at a higher level and more adaptable to the increased numbers than a lot of other youth programs.

An individual from another non-profit organization explained how they had experienced an increase in staffing in recent years which had allowed them to better respond to an increase in interest around their program.

Research Question 3

The study's third primary research question sought to identify the following: In what ways do organizations and institutions in these areas collaborate in the delivery of services to refugee students?

Another goal of this study was to understand the current collaborations that exist in the community to support newcomer students. In interviewing the participants, it is clear that there are many partnerships that currently exist, while there is also an appetite for more amongst participants.

Current Partnerships

Participants from all four non-profit organizations highlighted ways that they work with postsecondary institutions. Participants from two of three postsecondary institutions highlighted ways that they work with non-profit organizations, with the third organization highlighting ways they work with other community partners. However, it seems that there are few partnerships that exist specifically for students from refugee contexts. Although there is a wide range of ways that postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations partnered in support of newcomer students more generally, there were a few themes of partnerships that emerged including student placements, events and volunteering, on-site support, and informal communication and one-off collaboration.

Student placements. Individuals from three of the four non-profit organizations mentioned how they accommodate students from universities and colleges for work placements. These students have taken on many roles within the organizations. In one case, medical students from one university came in to the organization and ran programs related to health care for the clients, such as information on accessing health care

services. For another organization, students in the nursing program at a university helped create a pamphlet on first steps for newcomers. One staff member from a non-profit organization spoke about the helpful role these placements can play:

It's also helping us in the sense that I know [university], for example, has an experiential learning team, so this team of individuals, you can sit down with the brainstorming idea, and they will create different roles and co-ops for you to help fill the holes in your organization, which has been massive for us as a not-for-profit, a lot of times, for example, let's say we want somebody to look at the way we intake data, that's not something we're going to get funding for as a settlement organization, but it's something a placement can fill the holes for.

Another non-profit staff member discussed how the length of the placement can impact its helpfulness:

The program at [college] actually, they've got a program that we tap into basically every year. And we like [college] in particular, because their practicum goes for the whole school year. There's like [university], like, we enjoy them as well, but we get their student for a semester. So, it's September to December, or January, like it's so short, like it's almost not helpful, because it requires more of us staff, to come along side this student, then it does to set them in motion with actual projects of their own. So, the [college] model is superior.

Events and volunteering. Another way that postsecondary institutions and community partners collaborate is on community events and volunteer support. One university administrator explained how a local non-profit organization came to their

“celebration of nations” event and gave out resources. One non-profit worker explained how they collaborated with a university drama department:

We had, [university’s] drama program came in and did a study of, I believe it was six of our clients, listened to their stories and that sort of thing, and then produced a dramatic play that they did both in front of us as well as the performing arts centre to the public.

Another institution runs an event where they collaborate with the owners of local restaurants to introduce international students to different cuisines in the city. In addition to community partnerships being used for events, organizations may also provide volunteers as a form of collaboration. One non-profit worker explained how their organization has gone to a university’s volunteer fair to recruit volunteers. One postsecondary administrator spoke of providing volunteers to non-profit organizations:

In my role, a lot of it is volunteer, like, students are looking to get involved and they want to, you know, to give their time and skills. So a lot of the referral I do is to, you know, whether it’s just to organizations for, you know, that are having events that need volunteers, and sometimes those community partners will reach out directly to the university, and I’ll get a call to say “hey we’re having this,” like the [non-profit organization name], they might contact us and say “we’re having this event, do you have volunteers or do you have people that would like to get involved?”

Another administrator from that institution explained how:

We do get requests from local schools as well, in [regional municipality] to say, you know, “we would love to have some students come and read stories about

their homeland to our students, could someone come?” This request has always gone out again through the academics coordinator, so if any student is interested in doing that, they’re more than welcome to do that, as long as it doesn’t interfere of course with there study time

Overall, although the collaborations for events and volunteers seemed to be more informal in nature, they still played an important role in the partnerships between organizations.

On-site support. Another form of collaboration was community partners having a presence at educational institutions. One non-profit organization sent a representative weekly to an adult education school, where ESL courses are taught, to provide settlement services. One postsecondary administrator explained how they have an immigration consultant who comes to the university to provide immigration advising to international students. As mentioned above, one non-profit organization sent a representative to an event where they provided resources to students, and one organization had gone to a university’s volunteer fair. This can also go the other way around, with postsecondary institutions providing students to the non-profit organizations for placements, as mentioned above. One good example of on-site support through this method was the support by medical students at the non-profit organization providing programming on health care.

Informal and ad hoc collaboration. In addition to more formal opportunities like student placements, organizations also collaborate informally and on an ad hoc basis. This included approaching partners for one-off support, as one postsecondary administrator mentioned:

So, what is happened is it is mostly, knowing the settlement agencies, and asking them, sort of what they need. Or them coming to us and telling us of their needs. So, they may say, you know, excuse me, I have a student that was a plumber in Iran, would like to, you know, take a plumbing course, is there anything that can be done?

Non-profit organizations may also reach out to organizations to advocate or seek out information, as one non-profit employee mentioned: “I know that we have also approached most of them for scholarships, for example, for refugee students. And we also advocate, we also advocate for credential evaluations for example.” One non-profit worker explained an interesting example of a one-off collaboration with a local college:

[College] brought me in to their journalism department, and I brought one of my youth, and he just sat down there and the journalism class just asked him questions, because the teacher was teaching about Syria and said this is ridiculous, I’ve never been to Syria, I don’t know anything about Syria, so she called me and I brought him in and he just talked about Syria for 2 hours.

Another form of one-off collaboration, mentioned by two non-profit participants, is that academic institutions reached out to them for data collection for research. Although more informal, these types of collaboration certainly seem to fill a need.

Appetite for Greater Collaboration

Although there was some collaboration taking place currently, there was certainly an appetite for greater collaboration amongst those interviewed. Overall, there seemed to be a desire and interest in greater collaboration. One university administrator explained “It’d be neat if there was a closer partnership that we were, like actually working on a

project, like welcoming refugee students into the community I guess, that particular group, together. But right now we don't have that opportunity to do that."

Another university administrator expressed a desire for a more formal collaboration tied to student involvement:

We want to, we do have students that they go visit, you know, schools, and they do volunteer work and what not, but we don't have anything formal, but we're working on that to have more non-profits for internships and placements and what-not for that type of thing

Another non-profit employee explained the role community partnerships can play in helping fill gaps in service delivery:

Just the idea of, I think, and I think they're doing a better job, even within the last five years, within not-for profits and universities, is just that idea of community partnerships, like from a university standpoint. So, the idea of understanding that yes, they may not have the services at [university], let's say, to help support a refugee student, but if they have a partnership with an organization like us, they have somewhere to send that student, right? So, using organizations like us, to fill gaps within their services, and I think that's a massive component that they need to make sure that they're keeping strong, if they don't already have it established.

A desire for greater collaboration did not mean they were unsatisfied with the current levels of collaboration. When asked if they were satisfied with the current partnerships, one non-profit worker mentioned: "On the current operation level, absolutely, but in terms of looking at opportunities for growth and increase, I think

there's room for more to be done.” Another non-profit worker shared a similar sentiment. Regarding student placements, they mentioned “And the co-op idea, and that I definitely think is very satisfactory. Again, my idea, the weakness of this is how do we get refugee newcomers into the postsecondary institutions in the easiest process and the cheapest process possible.”

When asked about their satisfaction with the current partnerships, another non-profit worker explained: “Pretty good, I think as far as it goes, like in terms of our, meeting our needs, but in terms of meeting the needs of our guests, I think yeah, I think the institutions could do more.” Overall, although there may be satisfaction with some aspects of the collaboration, the general sense seems to be that more can be done, and that there is a desire for greater collaboration. One university administrator mentioned: “The one thing I don't want us to be is an island, we have to be part of something.” When considering greater collaboration, one could consider the importance of the relationship being reciprocal, as one participant mentioned: “It's really important for us to remember that, we can't just, it's not fair for us to just go and ask them for support, we need to offer something back as well, so we need to think very carefully about what that would be.”

Research Question 4

The study's fourth primary research question investigated the following: What do higher learning and community organizations feel would help them better support refugee students, and what role can community partnerships play in this?

Those working in both the non-profit and postsecondary sectors had many great ideas and insights about what would help them feel more prepared to support newcomer individuals, whether that was students from refugee contexts, or newcomers more

generally, and to implement programming at their organizations. This included a need for training and education, greater communication and networking between community partners, more opportunities for exposure, more bridging programs, greater flexibility with postsecondary admissions process, and greater cultural representation in their organizations.

Need for Training and Education

The importance of further training and education related to supporting individuals from refugee contexts was a prominent theme. This training could involve learning about the unique characteristics of the population, as one university administrator mentioned:

I think, it maybe falls into training as well, but some sort of direct conversations around, some of the known differences between domestic students and international students, and international students who are refugees, and maybe including exchange students in that because I know that there is often, even though, I know the difference between an international student and an exchange student, there is often confusion in regards to those two things, and so, I think that that would be, even just a useful place to start

Another administrator mentioned how education around the status of the students would be useful:

I think, education as to what exactly, when the refugees arrive, what is there status, and I'm not, I'm not sure what, but there are two types of refugee status, and depending on the type of status they have, some are considered international, and some are not.

One postsecondary administrator spoke about the value of the perspectives of

organizations that do work in the community:

It's in the community right, they're, I would say, they're the experts on, you know, providing services for not only, like not university students but refugees who come to [region], and exist in the community in other ways. I would only see it if they are involved in the university life, if they're a student, that's kind of where I would meet them. So, you know, they have their resources for, you know, the much wider context, and so we use them whenever possible.

Another postsecondary administrator mentioned:

I think another thing to keep in mind is that you can't boil the ocean, and so, you know, I would say like within our, within residence life within my role we do a good job of a lot of things but we can't do a good job with everything and it's important to remember that, like, that we're never going to be experts in everything, and so, we need to use our resources, and they need to use us as well.

Training and education does not necessarily need to be formal, and other methods of education could be helpful as well. For example, one participant mentioned how case studies could be useful:

I think, you know, in some cases like, just being able to, almost have case studies of, both of refugee university students who have thrived, and, to some degree have failed to thrive as well, because I think that, you know, like both for the research that you're doing, and also just how I think kind of, sometimes training and data is received by folks that we resonate with stories, and like then draw things out of them. And so, to me it seems like, you know, case studies of different students and saying like, you know "student A had, you know, came to an institution and there were these supports in place to meet these specific needs,

and, you know, lets try and like connect some dots as to why they ended up being successful,” as opposed to student Z who, you know, came here and like, maybe the pre-arrival information was really good but once they landed here they were just kind of clumped into the general student population and they struggle because they didn’t have, you know, like the mentor that they needed or just someone to help them kind of navigate the different systems that kind of compose a university.

This education could also come in the form of research, as one participant mentioned how this could be helpful:

Maybe more research needs to be done to say “what are those specific needs.”

And we’re starting to track that data a lot more, who comes in, what kind of assistance do they need. And then if we build up that, kind of, that track record of, we have more of this type of question, than that’s a message to us to say we need to, maybe provide more of that service, or, you know, that might dictate the future, but those are beginning plans right now.

This could also include hearing directly from students themselves:

I guess hearing from them, like it would be neat to get a bit more like, feedback or research that might have been done about what did they need, like, what did they see their needs are, you know, what is important to them, in terms of support?

Like coming from the actual refugees too, not just us Canadians sitting here going what we think they need right?

Greater Communication and Networking

Throughout the interviews, many participants from both the non-profit and postsecondary sector spoke about the value of greater communication, exchange of

information, and networking between postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations. One way that this could take place is by having a contact person or liaison between the partners. One non-profit worker explained how “if you have liaison, someone from university in contact regularly with our employment councillors, and who’s responsible for education also, would be great.” Another staff member from a non-profit organization explained:

I think just having those contact information, or, knowing who to reach to, when it comes to university and colleges would be great, not just a general number, right? So, I think it’s, again, it’s that collaboration, right, to have someone to speak and know, okay this is the [organization], they’re dealing with this type of people, and, maybe that’s where we can get also clients.

One non-profit employee explained how having a point of contact could help, given their heavy workload:

We are trying to be up to date with the information. But, as you see our case load is kind of heavy, so we don’t have that time to go search for any update information. It will be very good if they have something ready in, or something like service providers who are up to date, update the information up to date with other service providers like our organization. For example, [university], if they have someone who is communicating regularly with our organization.

In regard to supporting international and refugee students, one postsecondary administrator mentioned the importance of having input from partners:

That said though, at least internally to this office, and I would argue probably the broader student affairs office, and potentially broader [department name] rather,

and potentially even out in to student affairs, there isn't much expertise that I have seen around supporting international students and supporting refugees that exist, and so I say that we need to get our house in order but we can't get our house in order without input from partners, so I think, I think what needs to happen is, we need to be able to get the right people around the table who can help us form our, form our strategy from an informed and somewhat nuanced perspective.

Another idea that was raised was around accessibility of information. One non-profit employee explained:

I think it's just the information, like, to have, like access to information which is, because sometimes, when you go to the colleges or university websites, you have to go through all this clicking, but sometimes it doesn't get you anywhere, they just give you very general information, right? Or, I find that it's not like before, before they would give you a phone number you can talk to a person and they'll give you the information. Now what people are doing is like go on the website and go here and it will tell you.

The same participant explained:

Websites need to be a lot, like, immigrant friendly, because, some parents don't have the same skills as the kids, right, because the kids are dealing with computers, everyday, and their phones everyday, parents don't, so it needs to be a lot easier for them to access certain things.

The communication can go the other way to, in terms of non-profit organizations advocating to postsecondary institutions. One non-profit employee explained:

I think part of it would be just that advocacy piece, right? Because, making them

aware of the population and the unique characteristics of the population, right? Like, what are some of the timelines for a refugee claimant? What are some of the hurdles they face? What are some of the things that would push them back and would look unappealing to them? So, you know, how can we make the institutions aware of the thinking that these folks go through.

Opportunities for Exposure

Four participants made mention of non-profit organizations having a presence on campus. One staff member from a non-profit organization mentioned how:

Something else that academic institutions could maybe do more for example, just have an open house for example, a community open house and invite all service providers. Like when they are having an international students event at school, welcome the community agencies that are serving newcomers, to also come and be part of those events. Organize a refugees family open house event or something, but include the community service providers.

In addition to a one-time event, as mentioned above, it could also be helpful to have a more consistent presence on campus, as one non-profit employee mentioned, “like maybe having some sort of collaboration with settlement services to come in once, twice a week or one day a full day and people make appointments as needed. Because those things would teach also about what we do.”

One postsecondary administrator explained how it can be helpful for organizations to have a presence on campus, as it can be difficult to refer students to services off-campus:

Anytime, you know, a student is told, you know, “you have to go here, you have

to go downtown, take this bus,” like if the pathway to get to the service is really long-winded and complicated, that really cuts out on the likelihood that they’re going to, you know, reach that services.

Bridging Programs

One way that universities could better support non-profit organizations is by providing more bridging programs for newcomers. For the purpose of this study, bridging programs refer to educational programs that help newcomers transition their previous professional experience and qualifications in to a Canadian context. One non-profit employee explained how there are few bridging programs in place for newcomers to the community, and that they may have to refer clients to other communities as a result. The same individual mentioned:

[University] has one of the best medical schools in the country. They have a beautiful engineering program and stuff like that. Why can’t they collaborate with settlement, with CIC to be able to offer bridging programs that are federally funded by the government?

One non-profit worker explained how it would also be helpful if they were more accommodating to newcomers:

I know there is some bridging programs for doctors and stuff like that or for nurses that they’ve done and it’s great. Because those people actually get ahead right? Because it’s, I guess, for doctors it’s hard to do it, because they have to do so much, like, to me, I’ve heard that a lot of the English, or the wording that they use on those tests, are really like hard. So, I think they should also think of like, you know, kind of make it more friendly for newcomers and, is the practice, yeah

you want them to learn our laws because there is different maybe laws and what not, or policies, but I think it should be more like, language friendly for them.

Three non-profit workers mentioned bridging programs in the interviews, and some of the areas of interest discussed included teaching, medicine, engineering, and accounting. Although these bridging programs seemed to focus on professional programs, there was also the need for opportunities to get students up to speed in English, as was mentioned by the one non-profit employee previously.

Flexibility With Admissions

In discussion with those in the non-profit sector, four of them shared insights related to flexibility with admissions processes. One non-profit worker posed what they perceived to be a challenge to be addressed in this regard:

I think the big challenge, and I think it is what you're looking at, which is why I was so interested to talk to you about it, is the idea of going the other direction, how we best get our students, or our youth access to that postsecondary level, and how can we make it a smoother transition and one that isn't time intensive.

There were many ideas that were raised about how this concern can be addressed. One non-profit worker shared an example of a program offered by another university that they thought would be helpful in their community:

Basically, they are taking in students, I think they've got some funding for this or something, but, they're taking in students who would otherwise not be able to, and it's a select field, it's not a huge class, it's like 40 kids or something. And they're taking them in and they're giving them a general, they're starting with like

a general education that goes for like one semester, and the work that they do will count as credit should they enroll at the school.

They further mentioned:

So how can you take people that, can't afford or start school right now, but, really want to track in that direction. Like, if you can make a mark on their life right now, by investing in them and saying "hey it's only going to be 2 months of school, you're going to get a taste of these four different disciplines, you're going to be marked, and, you're going to come out of here with two credits which are good if you end up enrolling here when things become more available to you," right?

Another non-profit worker shared a similar idea of creating a trial program that prospective students can take part in:

I think about creating a way of giving them experience within their areas of interest, their subject knowledge of interest, but also being able to use that because it's on the campus, because it's part of the university, the university gets to see who they are before they give them full acceptance into a, like almost trial version of a program. Because, otherwise they have to go back through high school which costs them a lot of years and often times the same issue comes up, where their English isn't strong enough, they're not doing very well on subjects, so then they don't have the grade point average in order to apply to postsecondary.

Flexibility with admissions could also include taking a more individualized approach to students or possibly an entrance exam to determine where students are at:

In 1990s when we came, we had diplomas, we had certificates, but what they did, they saw our certificates and they said, for example, instead of taking 4 years, you will take 2 years, or instead of taking 1 year, you will take 6 months, if they do something like that. Like, do an exam, like, to be in this course, pass this exam, if they pass the exam, they have the knowledge.

Although the concept of flexibility with admissions may seem difficult, one of the participants interviewed was from a non-profit organization that has worked successfully with postsecondary institutions for many years on admitting students from refugee contexts. This individual mentioned:

So, we're starting to think about having those conversations about how can the presence of our program inform and enhance access to higher education for other resettled populations that are already here? Because we do have accommodations made for our program, but we're kind of that in between liaison that they trust, that the admissions offices trust, that we've selected them, we've verified on the student's behalf, whereas that wouldn't exist, so a lot of the schools would need to consider if they're going to be applying admissions accommodations for people coming from refugee contexts, just to consider what accommodations they can provide and the capacity that they have to provide those.

Representation

Two participants in the non-profit sector mentioned cultural representation in postsecondary institutions. This could be regarding language, as one non-profit employee mentioned:

So, we have an Arabic speaking youth worker, Filipino youth worker, so she

speaks Tagalog, but, having that comfort of their own language, even with my youth that have very good English, they still have that extra element of comfort when it's in their own language, so, having access to that sort of thing within international services at university would be massive.

This same individual mentioned:

I think, unless you have the collection of employees that make up the different cultures that you're dealing with, you're not truly sensitive. So, I think languages, and multi-culturalism, diversity within your departments, is as important as training could ever be.

Another non-profit employee put it simply in stating, "just hire, hire immigrants, really, let your institutions reflect the people that are in your community." An individual from another non-profit organization explained the value of lived experience, in regard to a mentorship program they are interested in establishing:

It's one thing when, you know, a formal staff person at an organization says something to you versus somebody who has lived experience, not that the staff person may or may not have lived experience, but once you have that hat on as a staff person, somebody's going to listen to you in a certain way versus a more personal experience. So, that's what we're trying to build on, and maybe have them do more of the, the mentors do more of the support, the follow-up, the potential like webinar content we may be delivering to students, all those kinds of things.

Taking Advantage of Internationalization Efforts

While interviewing the participants, it became clear that there are many internationalization efforts taking place at postsecondary institutions. For example, one postsecondary participant explained how a new committee has been started to respond to an increase in international students, and another postsecondary administrator referenced a strategic partnership with the Confucius institute. One non-profit employee mentioned:

We've been trying in our growth and our engagement efforts to focus on how the presence of a program like this, and initiatives to support refugee students, should align with your internationalization goals, and that, internationalization doesn't only mean sending your students overseas and having partnerships with institutions overseas, but it is also about what sort of environment are you creating on campus, and having the presence of this program and the opportunities for students to be involved in refugee resettlement is quite a powerful experience. And, I think, you know, one of the outcomes that we talk about in our program is, obviously there's huge benefit to the individual who's being resettled to Canada and being given a scholarship to, and admission in to an institution, but those that are part of the sponsoring groups, the local committees, the staff, the faculty, the students, it in many ways changes their lives and it informs them to be more aware and educated people, in their communities.

When considering international services, another non-profit employee explained the importance of understanding the diversity of backgrounds that newcomer students come from:

But understanding that there's two different types of international. There's the international student that's coming here specifically to study, and then there's the

international student that is technically, let's say they have their PR, or is coming here as a Canadian student now, but would recognize themselves as a newcomer. And I think that's the gap, that's what's being missed. The international services department is looking more at that international student. A lot of times they have financial backing, majority of time. They have an understanding of how the system works, they've been coming through probably private education, IB [International Baccalaureate] programs that are set up to establish into a university program, where as the other one is fighting through that secondary school, and is struggling finding a way to access the program, but then, no understanding whatsoever of what that means.

Overall, the participants highlighted many relevant suggestions and reflections that could be applied to practice and relate to the themes highlighted in the literature. Next, this study will discuss the findings while comparing them to the themes from the review of literature, such as the economic, cultural and familial, social, health, structural, and academic challenges highlighted above.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When reviewing the data for this research, there were many themes that emerged that were consistent with what was identified in the review of literature. However, there were also some key themes from the literature that were not identified. There were no surprises that emerged from the data collection. The wide array of participant experiences was very helpful as it resulted in many different perspectives being brought to the table.

Perceptions of Challenges for Individuals From Refugee Contexts

Although some of the participants expressed a lack of knowledge of or experience with students from refugee contexts, and focused more on international students, they still highlighted many different challenges faced by newcomers that were consistent with the literature.

Access

When looking at issues of access, documentation was a prominent theme among participants, which is consistent with the literature reviewed above (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Gately, 2015; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Shakya et al., 2010). In total, eight participants raised concerns regarding the challenges associated with credentials or documentation. Of interest, is that six out of seven non-profit workers highlighted this as a challenge, which demonstrates the significance of this concern.

Language

Language is a multifaceted challenge that was identified by the participants, which is consistent with the findings in the literature that refugee and international students may encounter language challenges (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kong et al., 2016; Shakya et al., 2010). One area of interest that emerged in the data was the concept

of students having an understanding of the English language, but struggling with the academic side of the language. Perhaps this could be due to the fact that they have not had ample opportunity to develop academic fluency, as it was highlighted above that “researchers have noted it takes from five to seven years for one to acquire proficiency for academic learning in a second language” (Naidoo, 2013, p. 450). Beyond this specific concept, language in general was a common theme that emerged. This could possibly be explained by language being an easily observable challenge that is more visible at the surface level during initial consultations with students. The stories shared by participants about the challenges regarding language could also align with the idea of English being a “gatekeeper” to higher education as highlighted by Naidoo (2015).

Economic Challenges

Another theme that emerged in the data was economic challenges faced by newcomers. One area of interest from this corresponded to employment concerns. Employment challenges were a common theme in the literature (Calder et al., 2016; Ferede, 2010; Joyce et al., 2010; Kanu, 2008; Plasterer, 2010). However, most of the literature reviewed for this study focused more on employment challenges faced by international or refugee students, whereas some of the conversation with the participants in this study had a focus on employment issues faced by adults. As such, much of this data fell outside the scope of this research, and was not included. One comment of interest that was included was about the difficulty refugees may have getting Canadian work experience. In a study by Plasterer (2010), as referenced above, a participant highlighted a similar concern: “The barrier was lack of Canadian experience. That was

the barrier in getting your first job, it was hard to get that first job. But after getting it, the second was easier, the third was easier” (p. 67).

Beyond employment, financial challenges more generally were mentioned by nine participants. This is a high response rate for this challenge which demonstrated how large and well known of a challenge financial issues can be. The theme of financial challenges faced by newcomers also emerged in the literature (Plasterer, 2010; Shakya et al., 2010). Of interest, one theme from the literature review that did not emerge from the participants in this study was regarding newcomer youth working to support their families (Joyce et al., 2010; Kong et al., 2016; Shakya et al., 2010). It is difficult to speculate why this may be the case. Perhaps it could be because this is beyond the scope of what many of these individuals may know about refugee students.

Cultural Challenges

Cultural challenges were another theme raised by some participants that is consistent with the literature. In particular, one insight shared around the development of a third culture is of interest when looking at the literature. The participant explained the concept of developing a third culture in between the culture they grew up with and the culture of the country they are transitioning to, in this case Canada. This idea of creating a third culture could relate to the study by Brooker and Lawrence (2012) that highlighted the differences in transition amongst students who identified as biculturally exploring and committing and biculturally exploring without committing. It also shares commonalities with the idea of individuals balancing the differences between their ethnic and host cultures as mentioned above (Kong et al., 2016; McBrien, 2005).

Another area of interest from the data regarded the stories shared by participants

about cultural misunderstandings. As shown above, three participants shared unique stories about cultural misunderstandings that resulted in conflict. One could use these examples as an indicator of the importance of educators working to understand the context of refugee and international students (McBrien, 2005; Naidoo, 2013, 2015). If these individuals can develop a strong understanding of the cultural norms and customs of newcomer students, then perhaps it could make it easier to avoid potential misunderstandings and conflict due to differing cultural contexts.

One interesting concept in the data worth further exploration is the fact that three of the administrators mentioned how they do not view or label refugee students differently from other international students. This could be positive for some students if they would like a fresh start and are trying to shed the label of refugee or negative stereotypes that could be associated with it, as highlighted above in the literature. As Uptin et al. (2016) mention, “The young people in the study, like the young people in Kumsa’s (2006) study in Canada, strongly reject being called ‘refugee,’ particularly in relation to its use to describe their current identity and status in Australia” (p. 600). That being said, on the contrary, the literature also states the importance of understanding the unique context of these students (McBrien, 2005; Naidoo, 2013, 2015).

Although many insights were shared regarding cultural challenges, one area that was missing that emerged in the literature is the impact of gender as a challenge that could impact the success of newcomer students. Perhaps this is due to the broad nature of the questions asked in this study, or the scope of the work done by participants.

Discrepancies in the Data and Literature

Overall, the main themes of challenges that emerged from the interviews were

consistent with the literature. As shown above, there were some subthemes that did not emerge in the data collection. Furthermore, there were also some larger themes from the literature that did not emerge in the data from this study. First, familial challenges and impacts on education was not a common theme raised by participants in this study. On the higher education side, this could perhaps be due to the fact that many of the participants were still in the early stages of considering potential services for students from refugee contexts, and have not thought that far ahead.

Second, another area that was not commonly addressed by participants was the mental and physical health challenges that could be faced by newcomer students. Perhaps this could be because those that were interviewed were more focused on the initial transitional and settlement needs of newcomers. Furthermore, perhaps it could be due to a limitation of perspectives, and that this is a factor that is not commonly thought of by staff and administrators. Future research could involve participants who work in the counselling and health services side of postsecondary institutions, as they may be able to speak more thoroughly to this area.

Despite these two themes, the perceptions of challenges raised by participants was consistent with the themes that emerged in the literature. That being said, although some participants highlighted concerns about a lack of understanding of the needs of students from refugee contexts, the perceptions of participants in this study were in line, for the most part, with the literature.

Support Services for Newcomers

The participants in this study highlight many services and supports offered through their organizations that could certainly benefit students from refugee contexts.

All of the supports highlighted in the data can easily be related to the challenges that emerged in the literature.

First, the participants in this study highlighted a variety of language supports that were offered to newcomer students. These language supports could certainly help address an important challenge, as mentioned in the literature, linguistic challenges could be a barrier faced by international and refugee students (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kong et al., 2016; Shakya et al., 2010). Furthermore, looking back again at the concept of English being a “gatekeeper” (Naidoo, 2015), if this is indeed the case, it is valuable for institutions of higher learning to offer language supports to ensure that students are not being excluded on this basis.

Second, when looking at the support services offered pertaining to employment, these supports could help address the challenges raised in the literature, as employment and economic challenges more broadly were themes that emerged (Ferede, 2010; Kanu, 2008; Plasterer, 2010; Shakya et al., 2010). However, there was not an emphasis by participants on supports pertaining to broader economic challenges, and this is an area that could certainly benefit from greater support.

Third, within the domain of social support, some participants highlighted services and initiatives they offer that could help newcomers in the development of relationships. One area in particular was the mentorship opportunities highlighted by the institutions of higher learning. These mentorship opportunities could help address the challenges related to the development of relationships and social networks highlighted in the literature (Joyce et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Furthermore, participants offered examples of events they offer for international students that could help connect them with each

other and local students. Events such as this and opportunities to connect local and international students could have a positive impact, as the study by Hendrickson et al. (2011) noted earlier demonstrated the potential positive impacts of relationships between local and international students. Furthermore, having these cultural events and opportunities to connect local and international students could also help create the supportive environment that was highlighted as a success factor in the review of the literature.

Finally, when looking at the broader theme of settlement services, which was a large component of the services offered by the non-profit organizations, these services could perhaps assist newcomers with overcoming many of the challenges that emerged in the literature including issues with housing (Calder et al., 2016; Kanu, 2008), and issues with information (Calder et al., 2016) or having unrealistic expectations (Plasterer, 2010). In conjunction, it seems that the settlement supports offered by these organizations touch on many key areas of challenges that were highlighted in the review of literature.

Despite a wide array of services being offered that meet the needs of newcomer students, including those specifically from refugee contexts, there are still some challenges in the literature that were not addressed by the supports highlighted by the participants. In particular, services in support of newcomer mental health did not emerge as a theme. Mental health as a challenge experienced by newcomers was also not a theme that emerged in the data, which could suggest that this is not an area that is currently a high priority when looking at the provision of services for newcomers. Perhaps this could be due to the limited resources that some organizations have to work with, and as such, they must focus on certain areas. Another theme of challenges that was not sufficiently

addressed by the services offered by organizations was structural challenges. Again, perhaps this could be due to limited resources, and organizations focusing on and prioritizing the most immediate and pressing issues experienced by newcomers.

Participant Preparedness

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that there were many different levels of preparedness that participants felt towards supporting students from refugee contexts. It appeared to be a spectrum with some participants feeling prepared, some feeling underprepared, and some expressing feelings of both. As highlighted above, from the interviews, some of the factors that emerged that could impact these feelings of preparedness were the participants' experience working with and knowledge of students from refugee contexts, and funding and resources available within their organizations.

First, as highlighted above, five of the eight participants from postsecondary institutions mentioned that they either have a lack of experience working with students from refugee contexts or do not have a high level of knowledge of them. This could justify the need for training in this area because, as was highlighted in the literature review, it is important to understand the context of refugee students (McBrien, 2005; Naidoo, 2013, 2015). As was mentioned above by Fruja Amthor and Roxas (2016), "a comparative lack of engagement with experiences of immigrant or refugee youth tends to obscure the complexity of some of these silenced experiences" (p. 157).

Second, funding and resources can certainly have a large impact on an organizations ability to deliver adequate services, and this was a concern for some in this study. Funding and resources were not an area that were explored initially in the review of literature for this study, but evidence of similar concerns in the literature can be found.

In one study looking at challenges faced by immigrant settlement agencies in a nearby region, both executive directors and frontline staff expressed concern with a lack of funding, as well as restrictive funding mandates from the government (Mukhtar, Dean, Wilson, Ghassemi, & Wilson, 2016). That being said, the participants in this study are certainly not alone in their concerns about funding.

Another study of interest looked at the competing priorities for funding at a postsecondary institution in Australia with a large number of international students, that some believed did not provide adequate funding to international services (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2012). It was found that a large amount of the funds was going to research intensive faculties, perhaps at the behest of services for international students. In one case, the business faculty at this university was asked to earn a large surplus to go back to the university. Not all were happy with this:

Two interview participants from the Business faculty expressed strong emotion associated with their belief that excessive resources were distributed to research intensive faculties to the detriment of providing adequate resources to support international students. (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2012, p. 188)

One participant from this study mentioned: “I mean if we’ve chosen to take international students then we need to be fair dinkum about what we give them, in some sense match their expectations” (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2012, p. 188). Although there is no indication from the participants in this study that similar concerns had emerged at their institutions, this certainly speaks to the political nature that funding can take on when it comes to increased international student enrollment. It also speaks to the importance of universities and colleges using funds to adequately resource international student services, to ensure they can provide adequate services to this demographic.

Current Collaborations

As shown above, there are many ways that postsecondary institutions and community organizations collaborate. When examining these collaborations, it appears that their primary function is to build the capacity of these organizations and institutions to provide support for students from refugee contexts and newcomers more generally. For example, when looking at the themes of student placements and providing volunteers, although these collaborations may not directly address challenges faced by newcomer students, they could potentially go a long way in providing organizations with greater capacity to provide a wider array of services. When considering the concerns over funding raised earlier, student placements could perhaps be an effective way of addressing needs in organizations at lower costs.

Enhancing Feelings of Preparedness to Support Students From Refugee Contexts

As demonstrated above, the participants in this study raised many suggestions for what would help them feel more prepared to support students from refugee contexts. Many of these ideas are relevant when considering the challenges and success factors highlighted in the literature. First, many participants discussed greater training and education, and regardless of whether it is specific training, research, or case studies, this all relates strongly to the importance of understanding the context of refugee-background students (McBrien, 2005; Naidoo, 2013, 2015). In turn, this could perhaps help further build capacity for organizations to implement supports and services for students from refugee contexts.

Second, as highlighted above in the review of literature, international and refugee students may face challenges with employment (Joyce et al., 2010; Kanu, 2008; Plasterer,

2010) and thus, may benefit from bridging programs. However, this is certainly the case with newcomers more generally as well. Bevelander and Pendakur (2014) found that in the first 5 years since migrating, both male and female government-assisted refugees and asylum refugees in Canada had lower employment rates and lower average incomes than family reunion immigrants (p. 700). In a different study of recently arrived immigrants from a variety of ages to London, Ontario, Huot, Chen, King, Painter-Zykmund, and Watt (2016), mention how

a frequent experience among participants was being denied consideration for job openings due to a lack of Canadian experience. Participants felt marginalized when they faced exclusion on the grounds of having no previous experience working in Canada, despite extensive vocational and educational experience gained elsewhere. A common response was to pursue volunteer positions that offered insights into Canadian workplace values and culture. (p. 712)

Overall, it appears that newcomers to Canada, whether they are immigrants more generally or refugee postsecondary students, may experience challenges with employment. This provides a rationale for a greater investment in bridging programs, as was advocated for by some of the participants.

Third, when exploring the suggestion of greater flexibility with admissions to postsecondary institutions, this is very relevant to the literature. As highlighted above in the literature, issues with admissions can be a big challenge for students from refugee contexts, which justifies the need for “a more sensitive and flexible system for assessing diplomas and degrees from back home” (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 71). The fact that four of

seven participants from the non-profit sector shared insights pertaining to flexibility with admissions processes speaks to how prominent of a concern this is.

Finally, when looking at the theme of representation within organization, this again relates to the concept of taking a culturally relevant approach and understanding the context of refugee students as was mentioned in the review of literature. By having stronger cross-cultural representation within institutions, perhaps it could help them be more prepared to address the unique needs of these individuals. A desire for greater diversity is also consistent with government approaches, as according to the Ontario Public Service website, “The OPS strives to be a workplace where everyone feels welcomed, valued and respected. Its Diversity Office is responsible for transforming the OPS into a more diverse, accessible and inclusive organization that supports all employees in reaching their full potential” (Government of Ontario, 2016, Diversity and Accessibility section, para. 1). Ensuring equitable hiring practices for those from refugee contexts is a tangible example of how institutions of higher learning could better position themselves to support these students.

Implications for Practice

When considering the themes from the interviews and the review of literature, there are many implications for practice that emerge including taking advantage of internationalization efforts, engaging in meaningful training and learning opportunities, stronger communication and information sharing between organizations, focusing on a broader demographic scope, making the most of student placements, and ensuring mutually beneficial partnerships between non-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions.

Taking Advantage of Internationalization Efforts

Canadian institutions of higher learning are certainly going through processes of internationalization. Guo and Guo (2017) cite a couple of indicators at Canadian universities, such as an increasing number of international students and a 2014 survey “where 95% of responding institutions identify internationalization as part of their strategic plan” (p. 854). This internationalization was apparent when speaking with participants in the postsecondary sector. As mentioned above, when institutions are developing internationalization strategies, it is important for them to consider how these strategies can align with refugee student success strategies.

Engaging in Meaningful Training and Learning Opportunities

As shown above, many participants in the postsecondary sector expressed a desire for training and education so they can understand the contexts of students from refugee backgrounds. This is in line with the literature highlighted in this study which calls for educators to better understand the contexts of these students. When examining the literature reviewed for this study, there were some challenges identified that were not raised by participants from the postsecondary study in this sector, which indicates a need for further training. Furthermore, based on the mixed feelings shown by participants in the postsecondary sector when it comes to knowing the needs of students from refugee contexts and the desire expressed by some participants to engage in education, it seems prudent that institutions of higher learning engage in some training or education on the contexts of these students. This could be a unique opportunity for organizations to come together and support one another, and to share expertise, as mentioned above. It could be helpful for postsecondary institutions to reach out to non-profits and other community experts for support with institutional training and education efforts.

In meeting with participants from the non-profit sector, it is obvious that a high level of knowledge and expertise exists that postsecondary organizations could take advantage of. However, regardless of who provides the training, there is a strong rationale for some education on the needs, challenges, and contexts of students from refugee backgrounds.

Communication and Information Sharing

As shown above, some participants expressed a desire for better communication between non-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions. One way that this could be done, as mentioned by some participants above, is having a designated liaison person at organizations for ease of communication. This could be useful in one-off situations when those in the non-profit sector would like to reach out with a question or to gather information. As mentioned above in the literature, international students accessing and understanding relevant information from universities can be a challenge (Calder et al., 2016), and thus, having a liaison that non-profit organizations could contact could help alleviate this. Furthermore, there was some concern raised by participants about difficulties finding information from postsecondary institutions. As such, it is recommended that institutions of higher learning and non-profit organizations work together to ensure all websites are up to date, contain all relevant information, and as one participant put it, are “immigrant friendly.” Perhaps this could include having more language options on websites, or regularly updated sections specifically for newcomers.

Focusing on a Broader Demographic Scope

One interesting recommendation for this study that came as a surprise was regarding the demographics of newcomers accessing postsecondary education. For the

review of literature for this study, the research focused on newcomer youth, and research was not consulted that focused on access to education for newcomer adults or those who have established careers back home. However, while interviewing some participants for this study, it became clear that it is important to examine postsecondary access beyond the traditional lens of youth accessing education. From this comes the importance of remembering that those who access higher education can be from many different age groups and at different points in their careers. Therefore, when thinking about services or initiatives to support the access and success of individuals from refugee contexts to education, it is important to think about how you can also support the needs of those from older age groups or who had established careers back home. It is important to think not only through the lens of an undergraduate degree, but also to consider continuing education departments as well when thinking about services for refugees. One way that this could be done, as was mentioned in the findings section, is with more options for bridging programs for newcomers. As shown in some of the studies highlighted in this paper, refugees from all age groups face challenges, and thus, it is important for postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations to work together to figure out how they can address this.

Making the Most of Student Placements

As shown above, student placements were a common partnership amongst the organizations. These placements can be of great value to the organizations. It is important for institutions of higher learning to continue working with non-profit organization to make sure that the placements are of value and meet the needs of the organization. One way that this can be done is by looking at length; as highlighted above, one participant

mentioned how they had a preference for the placements that ran the full year as opposed to just a semester, for which they commented “like it’s so short, like it’s almost not helpful, because it requires more of us staff, to come along side this student, then it does to set them in motion with actual projects of their own.” Second, postsecondary institutions should work with those in the non-profit sector to make sure they are meeting a need within the organizations. As shown above, placements have the opportunity to be very useful for the organizations that they support, with the one non-profit employee highlighting the value of the experiential learning team that can help develop opportunities to meet the needs of organizations. Overall, student placements can be very valuable for organizations, and it is important that the postsecondary partners try their best to make them as useful as possible for non-profit organizations.

Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

As a final implication to consider when implementing the above suggestions, it is important for all partners to work to ensure that community partnerships are truly mutually beneficial. As shown above, some of the participants were concerned with funding and resources, and it was clear in the process of scheduling and taking part in interviews, that all participants were very busy with their day-to-day work. Therefore, it is important to make sure that all partnerships provide value to everyone involved. To reiterate what was highlighted above, one education administrator mentioned how “it’s really important for us to remember that, we can’t just, it’s not fair for us to just go and ask them for support, we need to offer something back as well.”

Overall, community partnerships can have a positive impact on those involved. According to Naidoo (2013),

School–community–university partnerships like RAS can increase the control of people over development processes; lead to more resources from a wider range of actors; increase program demand, relevance, efficiency and sustainability; and develop new knowledge, skills and attitudes in those participating in the process. (p. 460)

In this study it became apparent, as well, that participants saw the value in partnerships.

Implications for Policy

When considering the data highlighted above, there are many implications for policy pertaining to refugee student success. First, a lack of funding was a concern identified by participants. There were also positive examples shared of how organizations can thrive when given appropriate resources. As such, it would be valuable for policymakers to consider the issue of funding, and commit to ensuring funding practices meet the evolving needs of both postsecondary institutions and community organizations.

Second, as highlighted in the literature and data, there are a variety of challenges related to postsecondary admissions processes, student loans, and other structural barriers. As such, governments should make a concerted effort to reduce structural barriers that could impact the successful transition of students from refugee contexts and newcomers more generally. Policymakers should work to better understand the journey that newcomer students take from start to finish in their educational endeavours, and use this to inform the policies they enact.

Third, as is highlighted above in the findings and implications for practice, there are benefits to putting in place more intentional training and educational opportunities for educators who work with newcomer students and students from refugee contexts. The

government could play a key role in this by mandating institutions of higher learning to develop training strategies for those who work closely with this demographic. As highlighted above, the government of Canada has expressed a commitment to supporting refugees, and this could help take it a step further.

Finally, as discussed briefly above, an area of development that could be impacted by policy is working towards a more representative workforce. Policymakers can make intentional efforts to ensure appropriate representation in the workforce, which could include ensuring equal opportunity for applicants from refugee contexts, and ensuring that the credentials of newcomers are valued and accepted.

Implications for Research

This study barely scratches the surface of a very important area that deserves further research. In addition to more research being conducted on the topic of refugee education generally, there are a few key areas that would specifically benefit from greater research. First, the findings above indicate that institutions of higher learning have many great programs in place to support international students, and many new ideas for the future as well. In the future, after they have had time to initiate and assess current and new programs, it would be valuable to revisit these institutions and explore how the changes have translated in to services that meet the needs of students from refugee contexts.

Second, this study focused only on staff and administrators, and missed many important perspectives. In the future, it would be valuable to have research focused on the perspectives of students from refugee contexts. This could include inviting students to share their thoughts on their challenges and barriers, and their perceptions towards

support services. In addition to students, it would be helpful to have the perspectives of those working at all levels of government, faculty from postsecondary institutions, and family of students from refugee contexts.

Third, to develop a more holistic understanding of the barriers faced by refugees, and support services that exists, it would be valuable to conduct research focusing on the K-12 educational environment. This would be particularly valuable since, as mentioned above, many of the newcomer refugees to Canada may be under the age of 18. Furthermore, some these students are likely to transition to higher education, so it would be helpful to understand the experiences they are bringing with them. It would be useful to gain the insights of teachers, K-12 administrators, and parents.

Reflections

After approximately one year working on this project, there a few key reflections that have emerged. First, in speaking with 15 staff members from the higher education and non-profit sectors, it has become clear that these individuals care deeply about the work that they do. The participants consistently demonstrate a willingness to learn more about the challenges facing newcomers, and developing the services they offer. One way they demonstrated this is by going above and beyond by dedicated their time and efforts to this study.

Second, in meeting with 15 individuals from different backgrounds and with different perspectives, the power of story telling became apparent. Throughout the interviews, many participants shared powerful stories from their lived experience, or their interactions with newcomers to Canada. The stories were empowering and demonstrated the importance of ensuring story telling has a place in research.

Third, despite engaging in a high level of secondary research and meeting a variety of individuals that work with those from refugee contexts, one can still not fully understand the challenges these individuals face without having lived experience. That being said, it is important for researchers to be cognizant of their privilege and to understand the value of lived experience when exploring complex phenomenon such as those studied in this project.

Conclusion

Individuals from refugee contexts may face numerous barriers when accessing higher education. This could include economic, cultural and familial, social, health, structural, and academic barriers. When interviewing the participants for this study, some of the main challenges identified related to accessing education, language, employment and finances, and cultural challenges, showing some consistency with the literature.

From the interviews, it was determined that non-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions have many services in place to support newcomers. However, there appears to be a lack of specific services for students from refugee contexts present at postsecondary institutions. The main themes of services offered by participant organizations were language support, employment support, social support, and settlement support. The social support offered by these organizations, including the mentorships, are in line with the success factor identified in the literature of creating an inclusive environment and developing supportive relationships.

From speaking with participants, there seems to be an appetite for greater collaboration between postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations. That being said, these organizations still collaborate in many ways including for student placements,

events and volunteers, on-site support, and informal or ad hoc support.

The participants identified many ways that they could work together in the future to better support their operations including participating in training and education, having greater communication, more opportunities for exposure or an on-site presence, more bridging programs, a greater flexibility with postsecondary admissions processes, and greater cultural representation within organizations.

A few key implications for practice have emerged from this study. The first of these implications is to make sure to include the needs of students from refugee contexts in current and future internationalization plans. Second, it is recommended that intentional training and learning take place to make sure postsecondary administrators understand the challenges and needs of students from refugee contexts. The third implication looks at greater communication between organizations and the potential establishment of liaisons. Fourth, it is recommended that organizations work together to implement more bridging opportunities that meet the needs of newcomers. Fifth, it is important to widen the scope when looking at initiatives for individuals from refugee contexts, and not just focusing on youth. Sixth, the study argued for a strengthening of student placements to make sure that they are truly meeting the needs of non-profit organizations. Finally, the study stressed the importance of ensuring that all partnerships are mutually beneficial in nature.

This study barely scratches the surface of a very important issue, and as such, there is certainly a need for greater and ongoing research. Although non-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions have many great services in place to support the transition of newcomers, there is certainly a great opportunity for collaboration to

ensure the smooth transition of students from refugee contexts to campus. As one non-profit employee explained, “I feel as though that’s our role as advocates to go there and say, ‘you know what, here’s some brilliant people that you would be proud to have in your school, so what do you think we can do to get them there.’”

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Appendix A

Themes From Literature

Challenges and Barriers to Refugee Student Success

Economic Challenges

- Employment
- Financial hardship
- Balancing studies and income-earning

Cultural and Familial Challenges

- Family obligations and challenges
- Cultural norms
- Gender norms
- Discrimination against muslim refugee-students

Social Challenges

- Discrimination and racism
- Challenges developing social networks
- The impacts of ESL status on socialization
- Challenges with identity development

Health Challenges

- Mental health challenges
- Physical health challenges

Structural Barriers

- Challenging immigration systems and procedures
- Issues with information delivery systems
- Support structures not catered to refugee-background students

Academic Challenges

- Issues of accreditation and admission
- Educational gaps and interruptions
- Literacy challenges
- Difficulty transition to new academic and pedagogical environments

Refugee Student Success Factors

Student Aspirations and Resilience

Education as a motivator for students

Supportive Relationships and Inclusive Environments

Friendship formation

Positive family relationships

Inclusive educational environments

Supportive school relationships

Taking a Culturally Relevant Approach

Understanding the unique needs of refugee-background students

Appendix B

Interview Guides

Interview Guide – Higher Education Version

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to examine the range of services offered to refugee background, postsecondary students in a large urban centre in Canada, and the role of community partnerships in effective service delivery. I will be conducting interviews with administrators and staff from higher education and non-profit organizations in the community. After analyzing the data from the interviews, I will offer recommendations on opportunities for new interventions and partnerships to help fill gaps in service-delivery.

1.2. Confidentiality

All participant's answers will be confidential and results will be shared using pseudonyms such as "Higher Education Administrator A"

1.3. Final Data

Copies of the transcribed data will be provided to participants for their final review prior to being analyzed.

1.4 Recording

I would like to record the conversation so that I can look back to it and to ensure I have captured everything. Please note that the recordings will be kept on a secured drive, and will not contain any identifiers associated with you. After a period of 5 years, the recordings and transcriptions will be deleted/destroyed.

1.5. Consent Form

Review full consent form with participants and answer any questions they may have, have them sign it.

2. Introductory Questions

1. To start off, can you please tell me a little about yourself?
2. Please tell me about your role at the institution
3. How long have you been in this role?

3. Interview Questions

1. Can you share what you perceive to be the largest challenges and barriers faced by new refugee students?
 - a. Existing literature highlights many types of barriers faced by refugee students including economic, cultural, social, health, academic, and structural barriers (i.e. difficult admissions processes). Could you please share examples you have seen of these barriers in your work?
2. As you may know, the Government of Canada has committed to the resettlement of Syrian refugees to Canada. Can you tell me about how prepared you feel to support refugee-background students?
 - a. What do you feel your organization needs or can do to be more prepared?
3. Can you please tell me about the services you offer to meet the needs of students from refugee backgrounds or newcomer students more generally?
 - a. Existing literature indicates that developing supportive relationships and a supportive environment, and taking a culturally relevant approach can help refugee students succeed in higher education. Could you please tell me about services you offer that may accomplish this?
4. In what ways do you work with campus or community partners to provide services to refugee students or newcomer students?
 - a. Please tell me about the results of these partnerships
 - b. Which community organizations do you work with in the community?
5. How do you feel that community partners (such as non-profit organizations, the government, etc.) can best help you and your organization implement supports for refugee students?
 - a. With that in mind, can you tell me about any partnerships you are interested in developing in the future?
 - b. As discussed previously, supportive relationships and environment, and taking a culturally relevant approach can help refugee students succeed in a higher education setting. How could community partnerships help you achieve these success factors?
6. Do you have any other thoughts you wish to share regarding the provision of services for refugee students?
7. Do you have any questions for me?
 - a. I was wondering if you would be able to pass on my invitation to potential participants in your organization or other organizations who have a knowledge of refugee student services who you feel would be a good fit for this study?

3. Wrap-Up

- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, your insights and thoughts are extremely valuable
 - Remind participants of next steps – member-checking
 - Provide card for if they have any further questions
-

Interview Guide – Community Organization Version

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to examine the range of services offered to refugee background, postsecondary students in a large urban centre in Canada, and the role of community partnerships in effective service delivery. I will be conducting interviews with administrators and staff from higher education and non-profit organizations in the community. After analyzing the data from the interviews, I will offer recommendations on opportunities for new interventions and partnerships to help fill gaps in service-delivery.

1.2. Confidentiality

All participant's answers will be confidential and results will be shared using pseudonyms such as "Higher Education Administrator A"

1.3. Final Data

Copies of the transcribed data will be provided to participants for their final review prior to being analyzed.

1.4 Recording

I would like to record the conversation so that I can look back to it and to ensure I have captured everything. Please note that the recordings will be kept on a secured drive, and will not contain any identifiers associated with you. After a period of 5 years, the recordings and transcriptions will be deleted/destroyed.

1.5. Consent Form

Review full consent form with participants and answer any questions they may have, have them sign it.

2. Introductory Questions

1. To start off, can you please tell me a little about yourself?
2. Please tell me about your role at the institution
3. How long have you been in this role?

3. Questions

1. Can you share what you perceive to be the largest challenges and barriers faced by new refugee students?
 - a. Existing literature highlights many types of barriers faced by refugee students including economic, cultural, social, health, academic, and structural barriers (i.e. difficult admissions processes). Could you please tell me about examples you have seen of these barriers in your work?
2. As you may know, the Government of Canada has committed to the resettlement of Syrian refugees to Canada. Can you tell me about how prepared you feel to support new refugee youth?
 - a. What do you feel your organization needs or can do to be more prepared?
3. Can you please tell me about the services you offer to meet the needs of students/youth from refugee backgrounds or newcomers more generally?
 - a. Existing literature indicates that developing supportive relationships and a supportive environment, and taking a culturally relevant approach, can help refugee students succeed in higher education. Could you please tell me about services you offer to refugee youth that are aligned with these factors?
4. In what ways do you work with institutions of higher education to provide services to refugee students or newcomer students?
 - a. Please tell me about the results of these partnerships
 - b. Which institutions of higher education, and other community partners do you work with?
5. How do you feel that institutions of higher education can best help you and your organization implement supports for refugee students?
 - a. With that in mind, can you tell me about any partnerships you are interested in developing in the future?
 - b. As discussed previously, supportive relationships and environment, and taking a culturally relevant approach can help refugee students succeed in a higher-education setting. How could community partnerships help you achieve these success factors?

6. Do you have any other thoughts you wish to share regarding the provision of services for refugee students?
7. Do you have any questions for me?
 - a. I was wondering if you would be able to pass on my invitation to potential participants in your organization or other organizations who have a knowledge of refugee youth services who you feel would be a good fit for this study?

3. Wrap-Up

- Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, your insights and thoughts are extremely valuable
- Remind participants of next steps, member-checking
- Provide card for if they have any further questions