Prospects
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-023-09645-w

TRENDS/CASES

The real cost of teaching in a refugee camp: Asking the difficult questions

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Accepted: 17 June 2023
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Abstract This article asks difficult questions about higher-education courses provided by Western institutions to people living in refugee camps. It critically examines a blended-learning approach that incorporates a massive online open course (MOOC) into a scaffolded higher-education program—the University of Geneva's Connected Blended Learning model—in the Kakuma refugee camp. It assesses the effectiveness of this approach in an accredited University of Geneva human-rights law course, which ran in the Kakuma camp from 2017 to 2020. On the basis of the long experience of the course leaders and research carried out with students who participated in the course, the article explores ways of improving this model by answering difficult questions about the real cost of teaching in a refugee camp. This paper was co-written by a professor, a researcher, and students who were involved in the course, two of whom are refugees living in Kakuma refugee camp.

Keywords Higher education · Refugees · Human rights · Blended learning · Online learning · Scaffolded learning

Kakuma refugee camp in North Western Kenya is "home" to nearly 200,000 refugees, representing twenty-two nationalities from various countries in East Africa and beyond (UNHCR, 2021a). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the administrative authority of the camp, just 1,503, less than 1%, of these

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Published online: 04 July 2023

people had access to higher education in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). This is lower than the estimated 3% of the global refugee population of tertiary-education-going people who were able to access higher education during the same time period and far lower than the 34% of the tertiary-education-going non-refugee people globally in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). Limited access opportunities for Kakuma residents to higher education, coupled with a vast array of technical, social, political, economic, and practical barriers, make studying in Kakuma a difficult pursuit (Carron, 2019).

Participating in the higher education offered in Kakuma is further complicated by the main pedagogical mode of delivery available in the camp—online learning (O'Keeffe, 2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). The geographical distance from hosting-university urban centers; limited financial, infrastructural, and human resources; growing populations; and the information and communication technology (ICT) for development narrative that dominates the international humanitarian and development space (Madianou, 2019) have coalesced into a belief that online higher education is the most viable solution for refugees confined in remote and inhospitable camps (O'Keeffe, 2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020).

Online education, such as massive online open courses (MOOCs), might seem like a robust development solution for an ever-growing population of refugees in places like Kakuma, where it is difficult to implement face-to-face classes (Dahya, 2016). However, where food, electricity and internet connections are rare commodities and the daily realities of refugee students are often not considered or understood, online higher education does not yield positive results (O'Keeffe & Akkari, 2020). Furthermore, the Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated this situation as universities all over the world switched their delivery mode to online learning, hoping it would provide a quick and easy solution to their inability to provide face-to-face lessons for their students (Dhawan, 2020). While this might be seen as a leveling of the playing field between refugee and non-refugee students in terms of access to higher education, this has not been the case. For many institutions, the transition to online learning has not been easy. The impact of technological gaps, digital divides, isolation, and the lack of motivation experienced by online learners has resulted in increasing calls from Western institutions to return to face-to-face classes as soon as possible (Burke, 2021). However, despite evidence suggesting that online learning has not been optimal for refugees confined to refugee camps during the pandemic (Tobin & Hieker, 2021), the authors are unaware of calls by education-providing organizations active in refugee contexts for similar transitions to face-to-face classes for their students. This raises the question: What are the real motives that drive higher-education institutions to promote online learning for the refugee populations they intend to serve?

Due to their ease of access and relatively low cost, the types of online learning courses mainly used in higher education in refugee contexts are MOOCs (Bolon et al., 2020). In the best of conditions, where electricity, internet connections, adequate social and emotional support, and other basic needs are available, MOOCs have a dropout rate of 40% to 80% (Bawa, 2016). Where some or all of these resources are lacking, scaffolded and blended approaches that utilize MOOCS but include added pedagogical support to increase interaction and motivation have been found to be more effective than non-scaffolded approaches at augmenting retention rates for online courses (Bonk & Graham, 2006). While retention is not the only measure of success for a program, it is a key indicator used in evaluating most courses and can provide a basic snapshot of whether or not an education model is successful in enabling a student's journey from enrollment to course completion.

This article presents a blended-learning approach that incorporates a MOOC in a scaffolded higher-education program in a refugee context—-the University of Geneva's

(UNIGE) Connected Blended Learning model. In this contribution, we critically assess an accredited course in human-rights law from UNIGE that ran in Kakuma refugee camp from 2017 to 2020. On the basis of the long experience of the course leaders as well as research carried out with students who participated in the course, we explore ways of improving the model by answering difficult questions about the real cost of teaching in a refugee camp.

Description of the University of Geneva's collaborative blended-learning ecosystem

UNIGE's collaborative blended-learning model is a learning ecosystem that brings students, teachers, tutors, facilitators, and management together to maximize the transmission of knowledge and exchange of ideas in structured higher-education courses in refugee contexts. It has been empirically developed at UNIGE over the last decade through the embedded experience of enabling higher education for refugee learners in refugee camps in the Middle East and East Africa (O'Keeffe, 2020). UNIGE employed the collaborative learning ecosystem (CLE) in the Kakuma (Kenya) and Azraq (Jordan) refugee camps between 2017 and 2020 and allowed refugee learners to take part in various accredited blended-learning higher-education courses UNIGE offered during that time.

The CLE model sprung from an early intervention from the Faculty of Interpreting and Translation at UNIGE, which was engaged by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2005 to train interpreters operating during the Iraq war. The initial approach involved a loosely structured training scheme in which lecturers from UNIGE spent short periods of time training interpreters face-to-face, through official organizational assistance, to become interpreters. In 2010, it was applied to train refugees as interpreters in Kakuma refugee camp under the auspices of UNHCR. Organizational demands led to the decision to form an organizational team of refugees to help manage the day-to-day particularities of the project on the ground (InZone, 2019).

Through its evolution over time and the application of the CLE model to other fields of study (medicine, law, ethics, engineering, history, global health, and global poverty), the model evolved to become a framework for scaffolding and enabling European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) accredited blended-learning university courses in the refugee camps Kakuma and Azraq, Jordan. In addition to its application to courses from UNIGE, it was utilized to scaffold and enable courses from Princeton and Purdue universities and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which ran courses in partnership with UNIGE between 2017 and 2019 (O'Keeffe, 2020).

Grounding itself in the Vygotskian principle of collaborative learning, which views human learning as a sociocultural development process involving interactions, social connections, and cooperation (Doolittle, 1995), the CLE scaffolds groups or actors to connect, create, and enhance learning. At its most basic level, collaborative learning brings individuals together to learn with and from each other (Dillenbourg, 1999). The CLE model went one step further in that it was not merely a system for peer-to-peer interaction but incorporated instruction from subject matter experts (lecturers), guidance and mentoring from tutors who had more advanced subject knowledge than the students, and facilitators who were trained to guide learning on the ground. Under the guidance of a course coordinator, all the actors in this ecosystem worked together to maximize knowledge transmission and

the exchange of ideas within a delineated academic pursuit. Figure 1 illustrates the systemic interaction in the CLE:

As the graphic shows, the CLE model is populated by five key actors: the lecturer, the online tutor, the onsite facilitator, the course coordinator, and at the center of the system, the students. Each of these actors worked individually and collectively to encourage, enhance, and continue learning within the parameters of a specified higher education course. The CLE existed within virtual (online) and physical (onsite) learning spaces, which were co-managed by a coordinator at UNIGE and a refugee-management team in Kakuma refugee camp. The following section elaborates on the role of each of the key actors in the CLE.

The students

While all actors in the CLE were necessary for the successful running of the model, the refugee students were the focal point of the CLE. The entire CLE was designed to meet their educational needs and promote progressive learner autonomy.

The lecturer

The lecturer, who was based in Geneva, delivered the course materials via an online learning platform (UNIGE's Moodle platform), encouraged the generation of new knowledge, and evaluated the student's learning. Through discussions, group work, and interactions with their peers and the other key actors in the CLE, the students acquired and developed knowledge. For the final week of the course, the lecturer delivered face-to-face classes in the camp.

The online tutor

The online tutor was a subject-matter expert or peer with an advanced level of subject knowledge whom the lecturer enlisted to mentor knowledge development in the CLE. Typically, the tutor was a PhD researcher or master's degree student. The tutor played a pedagogical role by ”meeting” the students regularly (synchronously and asynchronously) over an ICT platform (typically WhatsApp) to stimulate new knowledge acquisition by leading group learning activities, discussing the students' progress, and offering advice on becoming successful

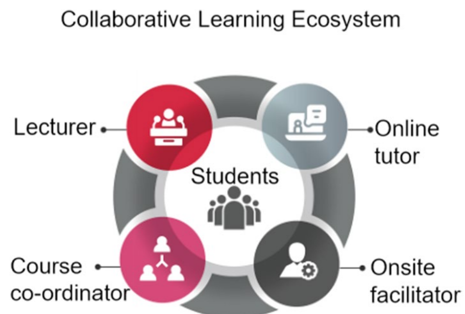

Figure 1 Collaborative learning ecosystem

independent learners. Typically, there were two online tutors for a class of 15–20 students. In the final week of face-to-face classes, the online tutors traveled to the camps to assist the lecturer.

The onsite facilitator

The onsite facilitator was a peer refugee who typically had completed the course in a previous cohort. They provided onsite technical and guiding support to learners by convening them in the physical learning space, helping them to access and interacting with them on the learning platform, making sure they were up-to-date with course work, and offering pastoral care. The onsite facilitator was a critical contact person in the relationship between the students and the other members of the CLE.

The course coordinator

The course coordinator was responsible for ensuring the day-to-day running of the course and liaised with the other members of the CLE to ensure its smooth operation. The role was divided between the refugee management team's program coordinator and a program manager based at UNIGE, who interacted regularly via WhatsApp.

Methodology

To explore the effectiveness of the CLE as a pedagogical model, we use the example of a human-rights course that was offered by UNIGE from 2017 to 2020 in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. After several years of observing the successes and failures of the CLE, the 2019–2020 academic year was designated by the program leaders (the lecturer and course coordinator) as a research period to analyze the model for ways of improving it and propose pedagogical and practical solutions to the many difficulties students were experiencing. For this purpose, 17 online and 17 face-to-face surveys of students' opinions on the course and its delivery were carried out in the middle and the end of the course. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with the tutors, facilitators, and course leaders to better understand how the CLE functioned and evaluate its effectiveness as a method for delivering the course. Tutors were also asked to keep a notebook throughout their work on the course. The evaluation of the model and subsequent recommendations are intended for education providers who operate in refugee camps.

After collating the results of the notebook, the surveys, and the interviews, we organized our findings according to the following six themes: logistics and technological resources, online/distance learning, a pedagogy adapted to the context, additional vulnerabilities, unique characteristics of life in Kakuma, and learning pathways. All these themes heavily impact students' learning in refugee camps. Our analysis and reflections enabled us to propose concrete solutions for meaningful access to higher education in refugee camps that are beneficial not only for refugees but also for the image of Western universities.

Logistics and technological resources

Findings

The most common issue raised in the interviews and surveys concerned the lack of logistics and technical resources adapted to the living and learning environment of the camp. Kakuma refugee camp resembles a large, low-resource, overcrowded city, where food, water, and jobs are in scarce supply. The climate is inhospitable (hot and dusty) and the buildings are poorly insulated (Betts et al., 2018; Rodgers & Bloom, 2016).

Like many universities operating in refugee camps, UNIGE had a learning "hub" in Kakuma camp consisting of a couple of buildings, stationary computers connected to the internet, and a generator. Power and connectivity were not always guaranteed at the hub (Betts et al., 2018; Rodgers & Bloom, 2016), which drastically impeded students' learning (Facilitator's interviews I, 2019). Additionally, the number of shared computers available at any time at the hub was insufficient for the number of students (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). There was also a lack of headphones, which were essential items for learning given the noisy environment (Students' interviews, 2019–2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). It is also important to note that the vast majority of students did not have laptops, and those who did usually did not have access to the internet when they were not at the learning hub (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). Studying at home was thus impossible for most students and not a "safety valve" when traveling to the hub was prevented (e.g., during the COVID-19 lockdown) or not possible (e.g., if they had jobs to attend to, had to collect their food rations, or were otherwise engaged by the authorities of the camp for administrative purposes). Even for the privileged few students who had a computer and access to the internet at home, the precarious conditions in which refugees in Kakuma live make studying at home a difficult task (Students evaluations, 2020). Moreover, the CLE, as with most other systems put in place by Western universities in refugee camps, is built around communication between students and tutors using WhatsApp, access to which requires a mobile phone with specific settings and connectivity. A student without a mobile phone is unable to participate in the course.

These logistics and technical deficits have a negative impact on participation in University of Geneva courses and contribute to students in the camp with better living standards having better educational opportunities (Betts, et al., 2018; Rodgers & Bloom, 2016).

Kakuma, like other refugee camps, is a dangerous place, with frequent outbursts of tension and violence between the different communities (Adams & Bell, 2016; Farmer, 2006; Kinchin, 2016; Megret & Hoffmann, 2003; Stevens, 2006; Wilde, 2014). The many students who live a long distance from the learning hub take great personal risks when traveling to the hub using motorbike taxis, which are expensive and out of reach of most people in the camp (Ngabirano et al., 2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020; WhatsApp groups, 2019–2020). Such problems are further compounded by occasional heavy rains, which inevitably cause flooding in the camp and exacerbate travel difficulties (Ngabirano et al., 2020).

Recommendations

It goes without saying that universities providing higher education opportunities in a refugee camp do not have the power or capacity to profoundly change the environment that their students live in. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on the university to make sure it has

the capacity and knowledge to ensure a safe and meaningful learning environment for the students in its care (Adams & Bell, 2016; Arts. 2 and 3 of the law of the University of Geneva; Freire, 1970; Freire, 2014). It is our experience that there has been a tendency by Western universities operating in humanitarian settings to put energy into the content of online courses without taking into account contextual elements of living and learning in refugee camps (Bajaj, 2011; Griek, 2006; Purkey, 2013; Tibbitts, 2002). The material conditions that shape everyday life in refugee camps must be taken into account by education providers if they are serious about fulfilling their goals.

As most universities present in refugee camps rely on online or blended-learning pedagogical methods, a key recommendation is that they provide their students with sufficient materials and technological access. This includes spacious and comfortable classrooms and reliable access to computers, internet connectivity, and other technological necessities. In addition to providing these resources, we recommend that universities operating in refugee camps also provide water and food for students and a nursery to help support students who are parenting children. Ideally, each student enrolled in a course should receive a tablet, a phone, access to the internet, and money for charging the devices for the duration of the course so that they can work from home when necessary.

Universities should consider providing students with bicycles to get to classes and negotiate preferential rates for students who purchase travel to and from learning facilities. We also recommend that payment for transport be made before the start of each week's course so that students do not have to advance these costs. Most refugees do not have sufficient savings to pay in advance for transportation.

Online/distance learning

Findings

In the majority of the surveys, students raised concerns about online and distance learning and expressed a strong preference for more face-to-face lessons. "Videos are all we have, but we need face-to-face lessons for people who don't have access to video or go for days without electricity" (Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020). "Physical presence is important because it removes insecurities" (Facilitators' interviews I, 2019).

A possible reason for this preference is that online and distance learning requires adequate technological and pedagogical support. Another possible reason was the use of a non-contextualized MOOC to communicate the syllabus. MOOCs are culturally situated, and it is well established that access to MOOCs does not equate to participation in quality higher education (Betts et al., 2018; O'Keeffe, 2020; Rodgers & Bloom, 2016; Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020). As the content and format of the MOOC were designed for students based in Switzerland, those from a very different context have a distinct educational disadvantage (Bonilla, 2013; Coysh, 2014; Kapur, 2006; Mcconnachie, 2014; Slim, 2020; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019).

This factor is even more relevant when teaching human rights in a deeply power-structured environment like Kakuma, where most students have encountered and continue to encounter human-rights violations that greatly impact their emotional well-being; in fact, this was a major topic of discussion in the course materials. Parachuting in a Western-centric course designed for Western students to a refugee camp in Kenya could even be interpreted as a neocolonial endeavor (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2002). This was summed up by a

student who said, "The European teachers focused a lot on Europe to illustrate their human rights. As a result, we felt less seen as Africans with refugee status, and this can lead to a loss of motivation to take the course" (Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews I, 2019–2020).

Due to time differences, technological disparities, and other logistical factors, online learning between the students in Kakuma and their tutors in Geneva resulted in a proliferation of asynchronous interactions (such as providing post-lesson feedback) over synchronous engagement (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). This resulted in a reduction of bond formation between teachers, tutors, and students. The surveys and interviews highlighted this as a major stumbling block in the CLE model. One student said, "It is difficult to test one's knowledge on a WhatsApp group as opposed to a classroom setting. Indeed, when a student asks a question, it leads to several debates, and the answer brought by the tutors to the question is often lost [until] one or two days later" (Facilitator's interviews II, 2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020).

Furthermore, the establishment of trust between students and tutors in the study of human rights is a crucial element for successful pedagogy (Adams & Bell, 2016; Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2010). The lack of contact between tutors, teachers, and students in online courses can make the establishment of trust more difficult, especially when tutors and teachers have completely different daily lives from those of refugee students (Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). Onsite contact would have enabled the students to better understand the subject matter and make better progress in their learning (Facilitators' interviews II, 2020).

Recommendations

In order to overcome the difficulties associated with delivering online higher education in refugee camps, we recommend that universities engaged in these spaces use blended learning models instead of purely online approaches, as blended learning allows for increased face-to-face interaction between students and their teachers (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020; O'Keeffe, 2020). In addition to facilitating the development of trust between students and teachers, it would also allow course leaders to better understand the conditions in which their students live (O'Keeffe, 2020; Tutor's Notebook 2019–2020). In our view, the optimal model would start and end with a face-to-face week of learning with the teacher present in the camp. This would have the added benefit of incorporating local communities into the education and development process and mitigating the all too prevalent colonial approaches we have observed in refugee camps these days. To address some ecological concerns surrounding the environmental impact of flying educators from Western countries to refugee camp locations thousands of miles away, we recommend that some course sessions be delivered onsite by local experts, such as human rights activists or international organizations. In addition, we believe that learning sessions dedicated to visiting important human rights locations such as courts or prisons would benefit the learning process.

Another area of concern for online learning that we feel could be easily addressed is the issue of contextualization of learning content. Adapting the contents of a MOOC to better suit the needs of a particular audience would make the materials more meaningful and relevant (Bonilla, 2013; Coysh, 2014; Kapur, 2006; Mcconnachie, 2014; Slim, 2020; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019). In the case of the human-rights course, additional sessions on the African history of human-rights, African human rights systems, current debates among African scholars on human rights, customary law, etc. would all add value. Finally, it would also be useful to include in the MOOCs learning materials that are co-created by refugee students

and presentations that are made by non-Western academics (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020; Tibbitts, 2002; Bajaj, 2011).

A pedagogy adapted to the context

Findings

The study and teaching of human rights in refugee contexts requires a specific pedagogy. The vast majority of students in camps like Kakuma have fled human rights violations in their home countries (Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020). Moreover, human rights are constantly at risk in refugee camps themselves even as the camps are overwhelmed with slogans about human rights (Farmer, 2006; Kinchin, 2016; Stevens, 2006; Wilde, 2014; WhatsApp groups, 2019–2020). Students constantly raised human rights questions connected to their own lives in the camp. Examples of this include the legality of violence used by authorities during food distribution the length of time they experienced waiting to obtain a decision on their application for refugee status, the difference in wages between Kenyan workers and their refugee counterparts for doing the same work, violence used against refugees by police enforcing curfews, etc. (Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020; Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020). The raising of human-rights abuse issues in class challenged the actions of the main human-rights protection authority in Kakuma: the Kenyan government (Farmer, 2006; Kinchin, 2016; Stevens, 2006; Wilde, 2014). However, it also addressed head-on the responsibility of humanitarian organizations and the international forced migration management system operating in the camp (Farmer, 2006; Kinchin, 2016; Stevens, 2006; Wilde, 2014). Teaching human rights in this context requires educators to take into account their learners' experiences of human-rights violations, the learners' skepticism toward a protection system that did not work very well for them, and the power structures that impact their lives in a refugee camp (Adams & Bell, 2016; Batra, 2019; Pereira & Freire, 2018).

The surveys revealed that the students wanted to better understand the international human rights system and their own rights in Kakuma and wanted to learn how to build capacities to improve the human-rights situation in the camp (Facilitator's interviews I, 2019; Facilitator's interviews II, 2020; Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020). Such expectations require a specific pedagogy that links the global with the local and theory with practice and are common expectations for all adult learners (Adams & Bell, 2016; Bajaj, 2011; Freire, 1970; Griek, 2006; Mcconnachie, 2014; Purkey, 2013; Tibbitts, 2002).

Recommendations

We recommend a specific methodology anchored in critical pedagogies (Holzer, 2013; Hooks, 2010), which would allow refugee students to better understand the forces that shape their lives in refugee camps.

To bring this about, it is crucial to create a climate in the classroom that allows for the sharing of emotions and experiences and critical thinking about the human rights situation in camps (Freire, 1970). To discuss such issues in the classroom, a bond of trust must be created between facilitators, tutors, teachers, and students. This implies that students understand the role of a university, a rare actor in such a context, its link with humanitarian and state authorities, as well as the notions of academic independence and freedom. While

this message is abundantly important, it is not easily delivered when actors from universities who are present in the camp are chauffeured around by camp authorities and housed in comfortable accommodations by UNHCR. Creating this open-minded and safe climate requires deep self-reflection by teachers, tutors, and their administrative enablers—self-reflection that we, unfortunately, have rarely witnessed during our time working in post-colonial Kenya in a refugee camp deeply mired in entrenched power hierarchies.

When linking theory to practice, it is essential to contextualize the knowledge taught in the classroom (Adams & Bell, 2016; Freire, 1970). For that to happen, a lot of work needs to be put into improving MOOCs. First, it is essential that course leaders start from the situation in the camp and the experiences of the students. In the case of a human rights course, students should be encouraged to share their experiences in class, if they so wish, so that the course links concepts of international law with elements of everyday life in the camp and in the students' countries of origin (Adams & Bell, 2016; Freire, 1970). For example, sessions should be devoted to analyzing concrete situations in the camp, identifying the human rights in question and determining the means of action that could be taken. In this way, through the mitigation of the traditional vertical relationship between teacher and students, the class would be less hierarchical. This would require the participation of everyone and a non-discriminatory framework that would allow students to question their own position within systems of oppression.

Finally, a critical look at the subject matter (in this case, human rights, law, and power relations) is essential to a pedagogical method used in a refugee camp (Pereira & Freire, 2018). Throughout the course, through exercises, simulations, and discussions, students examined human rights, their history and functioning, their beneficiaries, and those left behind. This work also made it possible to address the power relationships in the camp between refugees and humanitarian personnel, between refugees and the local community, and between refugees and the Kenyan state, particularly the police. The course also addressed power relations, such as gender issues, in the various refugee communities and took into account the experiences and opinions of the individuals in the class.

Additional vulnerabilities and the specificities of life in Kakuma

Findings

The population of a given refugee camp is not uniform. As in all societies, economic inequalities exist. It has wealthy and poor people, people with a job and people living exclusively on aid, ethnic and racial majorities, and gender divides, and it also excludes certain groups like LGBTIQ+ people (UNHCR, 2021b). Thinking generally about refugee students without understanding those particulars can lead universities involved in higher education in refugee camps to make serious mistakes.

It would also be erroneous to assert that every refugee camp faces the same divides. To facilitate our argument, we take one example from Kakuma that was raised in the interviews with the human rights students: working students.

Refugees in Kakuma live in a situation of poverty and depend largely on resources provided by humanitarian organizations, such as food, water, soap, basic health care, and a plot of land on which to pitch a tent and then build a house (Rodgers & Bloom, 2016). This aid is all the more necessary due to the compulsory encampment policy the government of Kenya has decreed, the meager professional opportunities in and around the camp, and Kakuma's location in a semi-arid and very remote region of the country (Ngabirano et al.,

2020). The assistance of humanitarian organizations in Kakuma allows for survival but also defines an existence marked by hunger, disease, and dependency. In order to ensure a more decent life, refugees try to obtain professional opportunities in the informal market of Kakuma (through the sale of food, fabrics, and clothes, or in bars, beauty salons, machine repair, etc.) or from humanitarian organizations through the system of "incentive payments".

Incentive payments are a form of financial compensation used in Kakuma, as in many other refugee camps, to remunerate the work refugees do for the humanitarian organizations that serve the camp populations (Betts et al., 2018, 2019; Morris & Voon, 2014). In addition to international staff and local workers, these organizations rely largely on refugees who, for example, teach in schools, care for the sick, and distribute food. In Kenya, the remuneration of these individuals through incentive payments operates outside the Kenyan labor law, which does not reach the level of salaries of Kenyan and international staff working in the camps and does not offer the same protections (leave, accidents, etc.). This parallel functioning is due to the fact that it is practically impossible under Kenyan law for a refugee to obtain a work permit allowing them access to the labor market and labor law (NRC & IHRC, 2018).

Students studying with UNIGE in Kakuma are often multilingual and have an educational background beyond high school graduation. As a result, they are often among the people chosen by humanitarian organizations to work for them in the incentive payments system. Other UNIGE students are active in the informal market and sometimes run their own businesses in the camp.

However, the successful completion of a course requires a significant investment in time and effort during the day and can therefore be incompatible with a professional activity, forcing students to choose between working and studying. We observed in the academic year 2019–2020 that many students missed courses and sometimes even exams due to professional obligations. Furthermore, budget cuts by humanitarian organizations have affected incentive payments for workers; there are fewer jobs and more competition for them. While in the past, students could make arrangements with organizations to take time off for their studies, this has become increasingly difficult.

Recommendations

When a university organizes courses in a refugee camp, it is essential that it take into account the extreme vulnerability of refugee students and the precarious safety conditions in the camp. This is particularly relevant to students who must travel long distances to get to class and have to consider curfews when returning to their shelters after class.

A possible remedy is to allow more flexibility when students take their courses at a learning hub. This is also an important consideration for students who have to work to support themselves and their families during normal daytime hours. A significant number of students who took part in our course had day jobs, which made it difficult for them to attend class during working hours.

It is also possible that students working in the camp could compensate for their absence from the learning hub by participating more in the WhatsApp group or by doing additional individual exercises. This would require teachers, tutors, and facilitators to know the students and their schedules and to be prepared to implement different regimes depending on the students' obligations.

Education providers could also contact students working for humanitarian organizations to negotiate a special regime so these students can free themselves to attend classes.

Humanitarian organizations are more likely to make such accommodations if an institution such as a university requests it for a certain number of students.

A more radical response to the difficulty of finding employment in Kakuma is to pay students for their participation in the course or grant them a substantial stipend. This practice is followed by various educational institutions in the camp, but it is a difficult decision to make, as payment in a refugee camp can affect relationships between individuals and groups (Morris & Voon, 2014). Conversely, the lack of remuneration also has an effect on these power dynamics. It is interesting in this respect to note that some international soft-law rules recommend remunerating inmates who work and study. The close relationship between the state and individuals in both the prison and refugee context may argue for a similar solution.

Learning pathways

Findings

Certificates and credits are extremely important for refugee students, as they are for students everywhere. The research shows that students want their courses to be accredited and want to be awarded valid certificates. During our interviews and other discussions, students asked many questions about ECTS credits and where they are recognized (Facilitator's interviews I, 2019; Facilitator's interviews II, 2020; Students' evaluations, 2020; Students' interviews, 2019–2020). It soon became clear to us that linking our program with local universities, particularly with regard to accreditation, was crucial to maintaining both the quality of the program and student motivation. Students in Kakuma invested substantial amounts of time and energy studying in our program and felt that, academically, there was too little recognition of its worth in the local context. One student referred to "the unequal treatment of students from Kakuma who took this course online and received no credit, while the tutors from Geneva who took this same course online received 6 ECTS credits. . . . " (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020).

In addition to the lack of accreditation for some courses, the credits awarded for other courses can be very low; this, combined with the fact students cannot take several courses at the same time, led to frustration among the students. One of the facilitators in the human-rights course pointed out that refugees know that in order to obtain a bachelor's degree at the University of Geneva, one hundred and eighty credits must be accumulated. In its program, InZone allows for three credits per year, which means that in order to get the bachelor's degree, one has to complete sixty years of study in Kakuma, which is absurd because that is the average life expectancy in Africa (Tutor's Notebook, 2019–2020).

UNIGE has been slow to recognize credits for its own courses in Kakuma. This is largely due to the bureaucratic nature of course accreditation and the lengthy internal process required for the recognition of new courses.

Recommendations

In the interest of transparency, clarity, and accountability, it is important that universities and teachers communicate clearly with students about what courses bring and do not bring with regard to credit and access (Ngabirano et al., 2020). Several such discussions may be necessary for any given course. Although refugees often perceive the procedures of humanitarian aid as vague, universities can stand out by ensuring that instructions are clear

and respected. Students should feel free to continue or end their involvement in a course depending on what they receive from it, not only in terms of the quality of the teaching but also in terms of credit and access. And if students need to leave a course for professional or family reasons, the role of the teacher is to understand and support these choices, not prevent them.

It also seems to us that universities could grant more credits per course taken. The successful completion of Introduction to Human Rights, for example, should bring six ECTS credits in order to meet the standards of UNIGE. We also recommend that any new courses implemented in refugee camps be already accredited to allow refugee students to benefit fully from their efforts to learn under such difficult circumstances.

It also seems more logical to have local universities involved in the course. Indeed, students need to understand the law of the country they live in as well as possible. It would therefore be interesting to offer courses by professors from local universities in the refugee camp. It would also be important to offer internships to refugees directly at the universities in question—for example, offering students the chance, after passing a certain number of credits, to continue their education at the local university with which they have already collaborated.

Finally, universities could strengthen refugee students' sense of belonging to their institutions through symbolic measures such as providing student identification cards to all students and offering simple paraphernalia such as badges, pens, notebooks, etc. Such small measures can help greatly to create a sense of community and enhance motivation in places where it remains extremely complicated to pursue higher education. However, it is important that this symbolic commitment be accompanied by real support and is not merely a meaningless marketing exercise (Ngabirano et al., 2020).

Conclusion: A pedagogical program for emancipation, not a marketing slogan

At a time when higher education institutions all around the world are assessing the benefits and pitfalls of several months of distant learning, little thought has been given to the model of higher education Western institutions have offered in refugee camps. This article is grounded in the experience of course leaders, tutors, and students who are leading and enrolled in human-rights courses for the University of Geneva in Kakuma refugee camp. Information we collected from the period 2017 to 2019 allows us to nuance the prevailing assumptions regarding the use of MOOCs by Western institutions in refugee camps. While the vast majority of our students welcomed the opportunity to take courses from a first-class university in an under-resourced setting, they were nevertheless conscious of the low standard of services they were receiving.

Refugee camps are complex environments. They are not identical, nor can they be compared to a typical low-income city in the global South. They are living places where people gathered after fleeing their country in dramatic circumstances. They are places where multiple layers of power dynamics are at stake among refugees, state authorities, humanitarian organizations, and local populations. None of those groups is homogenous. All have common and divergent interests. The first thing Western higher education institutions must realize when stepping into such an environment is that they are entering a complex situation where the interests of refugees are not always at the center.

Throughout our years working in Kakuma refugee camp, we have taken the time to listen to our students regarding our pedagogical model and the content of the courses we offered. It took some time for students to trust us and find the courage to express what they really think, as we were for a long time assimilated to the humanitarian world. After all, we were white foreigners circulating in UNHCR cars around the camp and staying in the humanitarian compound. Once this trust was built, it gave us the chance to better understand how they perceived our presence in the camp and the work we were doing there. Finally, we were able to break through the nice feedback they gave us about the opportunity to participate in courses of a renowned university and were ready to engage in a dialog that took into account the inherent power disparities among us. The main results of those discussions are presented in this article. They highlight the necessity for Western universities acting in refugee camps to put more funding into logistics and technological resources, implement a hybrid model of learning (i.e., move away from the purely online model), develop a pedagogy adapted to context, take into account the unique characteristics of some groups among the refugee population, and ensure real learning pathways. For all those findings, we identified, with the assistance of refugees, concrete recommendations that could be put into place by Western institutions operating in refugee camps.

On a more general note, our experience in Kakuma highlights the necessity for foreign universities in refugee camps to adopt a reflexive approach. Many institutions operate with a very low understanding of refugees' living conditions and the power relationships at stake in such places. Many universities seem to have a charity model of service that echoes the negative experiences of the colonial period. We think that higher-education institutions can do better—first, by accepting the need to question the reasons behind their involvement in such contexts and second, by building a dialog with their students to improve the quality of their work. It may well be that, in some instances, Western higher-education institutions are the only way for refugee students to access education in refugee camps. This does not mean that the standards of these universities should be lowered in order to adapt to the local situation.

For us, Western universities in refugee camps are another game player. They can use this privileged position to reinforce a system in which refugees are not given enough power or a large enough role in promoting their right to access emancipating, quality higher education, or they can help to provide a much needed space that challenges the status quo and puts forward real and lasting solutions. Refugee camps are saturated with slogans and soundbites. There is no need for more of them with the nice flavor of higher education. It is possible for Western universities to do meaningful work in refugee camps but it requires resources, dialog, and a huge dose of humility to ensure that their presence responds to a pedagogical program, not a marketing slogan.

Funding Open Access funding provided by the IReL Consortium.

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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