



REFUGEE-LED
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ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS IN NYARUGUSU CAMP

Preparing Refugee Youth for Higher Education in
Tanzania and Beyond

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Abstract

There are an increasing number of scholarship opportunities for refugee students in higher education, including the DAFI scholarships and the Mastercard Foundation scholarships. However, in Tanzania, Congolese refugee students in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp are struggling to benefit from these opportunities. These refugee students are held back by their limited English language skills, and by the fact that as they still follow the curriculum of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), their country of origin, they have to wait for an extended period to receive their certificate of curriculum completion from DRC. This paper explores the potential use of the host country curriculum as an alternative secondary school education pathway that could help Congolese refugee students take advantage of available scholarship opportunities to access higher education. It proposes ways to implement this alternative pathway based on focus group discussions conducted in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp.

About the author



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About the Refugee-Led Research Series

The Refugee-Led Research Series publishes primary and secondary research that has been authored by individuals who have been affected by forced displacement. The Series comprises Research Reports and Working Papers. RLRH prioritises papers that apply ethical and rigorous research methods to capture the thematic priorities of displaced communities. Through the Refugee-Led Research Series, we aim to provide evidence to stakeholders to advance policies and programmes that are more responsive to displaced communities' needs.

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The Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) is an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford. The RLRH is based in the UK and Kenya, with a research office located in Nairobi at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). We create opportunities for researchers with a displacement background to lead primary and secondary research studies in the field of forced migration, from start to finish. Our main thematic interests in Refugee Studies relate to 1) livelihoods and self-reliance, and 2) leadership and participation of displaced populations in humanitarian response and policymaking. RLRH also offers a series of academic programmes which support graduate access and professional development for students with lived experiences of displacement.



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Acronyms

ASEP	Alternative Secondary Education Pathways
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EHI	Equipping Hope International
FASSA	Fighting Against Silliness School in Africa
F4E	Friends Forever
IEB	Inter-regional Examinations Board
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MECA	Ministère Évangélique Chrétien en Afrique
NACTE	National Council for Technical Education
NECTA	National Examinations Council of Tanzania
NTA	National Technical Award
QT	Qualifying Test
REDESO	Relief for Development Society
RLO	Refugee-Led Organisation
TENAFEP	Test National de Fin d'Études Primaires
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VETA	Vocational Education and Training Authority

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In Tanzania, access to higher education for refugees is generally made possible through scholarships provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners, including the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), which enables refugees to pursue higher education in their host countries. To be eligible for higher education and scholarships, applicants must be registered refugees, proficient in the English language, and have completed secondary school with certification at the time of application. However, Congolese refugee students in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp are often ineligible for these scholarships owing to the long waiting period (up to five years) for certificates from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and their limited knowledge of English since the DRC curriculum is in French.
- The Tanzanian refugee education policy focuses on education as a pathway to repatriation – in other words, refugees are required to follow the curriculum and education system of their home country in preparation for repatriation. However, although Nyarugusu Refugee Camp was intended to be temporary, in reality refugees live there for many years without any meaningful hope of repatriation, and education aimed solely at repatriation cannot facilitate access to higher education.
- This action research was conducted in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp to explore alternative secondary education pathways that could facilitate a smooth transition to higher education for refugee students from DRC. The findings are the result of 12 focus group discussions and four key informant interviews conducted to understand the perspectives of Congolese refugees on pathways to higher education.
- While there have been efforts by UNHCR and refugees themselves to allow Congolese refugees to learn English and obtain secondary education certificates similar to those of Tanzania, those efforts have largely subsided. These included a now abolished Inter-Regional Examinations Board set up by UNHCR to administer Form Six examinations and provide valid completion certificates, as well as refugee-owned English learning centres within the Camp. These initiatives did not serve as permanent solutions, however, and respondents expressed the need for lasting solutions to enable access to higher education.
- Refugee educators and students recommended transitioning to the Tanzanian education system at the secondary level to give refugee students better prospects for higher education in Tanzania. This approach also leaves room for maintaining the DRC curriculum at the primary level in case of eventual repatriation. This necessitates a change in the refugee policy on education to allow refugees to use the host country education system and advancement to higher education within Tanzania and beyond. This policy change would open potential pathways to higher education in Tanzania for Congolese refugees through: Tanzania's formal secondary school; Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET); and Alternative Secondary Education Pathways.

Introduction

Problem statement

In settings of displacement, education is crucial. Access to higher education can lead to better employment opportunities, higher wages, and improved life outcomes for displaced people.¹ According to the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, “refugees’ future security and livelihoods are tied to education, and in particular higher education”.² In 2016, fewer than 1% of refugee youth worldwide had access to tertiary education. This figure rose to 5% in 2021³ but, while this increase in enrolment rates represents a significant improvement in access to higher education for refugee youth, the overall rates are still extremely low. With UNHCR’s 15by30 Roadmap for Inclusive Higher Education aiming to achieve 15% refugee enrolment in higher education by 2030,⁴ there is still much to be done.

Access to higher education has long been a challenge for Congolese refugees in Tanzania. The conflict between Mobutu Seseseko’s government and Laurent Desire Kabila’s rebel forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), backed by the Rwandan military, forced Congolese refugees to seek shelter in Tanzania in 1996. In response, the Tanzanian government, in collaboration with UNHCR, opened Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in 1996, which hosts 135,026 refugees as of September 2024.⁵ One of the many challenges that emerged was how to provide education to young people in Tanzania’s refugee camps hosting Congolese refugees, given the differences between the languages and examination systems used in Congolese and Tanzanian schools.

Educational activities in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp (hereinafter referred to as Nyarugusu) started as refugee initiatives soon after the refugees’ arrival. Dedicated teachers from DRC, in collaboration with children’s parents, established both primary and secondary schools.⁶ The only option at the time was to study under trees while teachers’ incentives were paid by parents of enrolled students.

Upon their arrival in host countries, young refugee students often struggle with adjusting to the new culture, language, and education systems. To address the differences of the home country and host country’s education systems, some camp-based schools – such

¹ UNHCR (2023) [Unlocking Potential: The Right to Education and Opportunity – Universal, Inclusive, Essential](#).

² [New York Declaration](#), 2016.

³ UNHCR (2021) [Staying the Course: The Challenges Facing Refugee Education](#).

⁴ UNHCR (2019) [15by30 Roadmap: Expanding Higher Education, Skills and Self-Reliance for Refugees](#).

⁵ UNHCR [Operational Data Portal: Tanzania](#), accessed 31 October 2024.

⁶ Fresia M, Känel A & Perret-Clermont AN (2021) ‘[Education in refugee camp contexts: Making School on the Margins of the Nation-States](#)’, *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies* 22 (1):32–64.

as in Tanzania – use the curriculum of the refugees’ country of origin while others – such as in Kenya and Uganda – adopt that of the host country. The choice of curriculum for refugee education is often influenced by the preferences of the host country. Those that favour integration are more likely to allow refugees to use the local education curriculum.⁷

Students in the Nyarugusu have been following their country-of-origin curriculum since the camp’s establishment in 1996. In 2003, the Government of Tanzania, following consultations with UNHCR and DRC, officially agreed that Congolese refugees would use the curriculum of their country of origin, with the aim of ensuring a smooth reintegration in DRC should repatriation occur.⁸ The DRC government was consulted about supporting its refugee students in a number of ways, including through quality assurance; the issuing of updated curricula, syllabuses and books; and the administration of national examinations and certification.⁹ Financial and material support from UNHCR, along with its implementing agencies, enabled the construction of physical infrastructure and educational systems in the refugee camp. These included school buildings, teaching supplies, teachers’ formal recruitment and incentives payment, and curricula. After the DRC government approved use of the DRC education system, a formal education system for Congolese refugees in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp was established, replacing the previous informal system. As a result, Form Six candidates were able to sit for the DRC national examinations to obtain official completion certificates (Diplôme d’État).¹⁰

In Tanzania, refugees’ access to higher education is generally made possible through scholarships provided by UNHCR. One of the most commonly known scholarship programmes is the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) which enables refugees to pursue higher education in their host country. In 2021, the programme sponsored 8,307 young refugee men and women in 55 countries around the world, of which 36% were in the Eastern Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.¹¹

As of December 2022, more than 460 refugee students had graduated from different

⁷ Dykstra A (2019) [Refugee Camp Education: Hope, Gaps and Barriers](#), Western Michigan University Library, Honors Theses, 3213.

⁸ UNHCR (2017) Education: [United Republic of Tanzania](#) accessed 6 June 2024.

⁹ UNHCR (2019) [Tanzania Country Refugee Response Plan](#).

¹⁰ Fresia M, Känel A & Perret-Clermont AN (2021) ‘[Education in refugee camp contexts: Making School on the Margins of the Nation-States](#)’, *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies* 22 (1):32–64.

¹¹ UNHCR (2021) [DAFI Annual Report 2021: Now is the Time](#). For more information, see: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/education/higher-education-and-skills/dafi-tertiary-scholarship-0>

Tanzanian universities under the DAFI scholarship scheme.¹² To be eligible for this scholarship, applicants must be registered refugees and proficient in the English language, as English is the main language of instruction in Tanzania's institutions of higher education. In addition, applicants who complete their secondary education under the DRC curriculum are required to have hard copies of their original certificates by the time of application. It is difficult, however, for Congolese secondary school graduates to meet these criteria due to:

- limited speaking, reading, and writing abilities in English due to the use of French as the language of instruction in previous schooling experience
- long waiting periods (from two to six years) to receive secondary school certificates.

Congolese refugees in Tanzania use their home country curriculum while in the refugee camp, which makes their transition to higher education more difficult. Notably, there are refugees who have lived in the camp for over 27 years and are uncertain as to whether they will ever be able to return to DRC. Given that the global average length of time that a refugee spends in exile is approximately 20 years, there is a pressing need to consider lifelong learning pathways and policies for refugee students in host countries.¹³

Rationale for the study

In addition to the DAFI scholarship programme launched in Tanzania in 1994,¹⁴ scholarship opportunities for refugee students in Nyarugusu to pursue higher education are on the rise. In 2023, the Mastercard Foundation Scholarship Program encouraged secondary school graduates in the camp to apply for admission to various Mastercard partner universities that offer scholarships to young Africans, including African refugees.¹⁵ These institutions include Ashesi University and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana), University of Pretoria (South Africa), the University of Rwanda (Rwanda), and the United States International University (Kenya). However, like the institutions in Tanzania, these institutions use English as the language of instruction, while students in Nyarugusu learn in French. This hinders many high school graduates from accessing these scholarship opportunities. In response to this issue, the present study explores viable post-secondary education pathways to enable Congolese refugee students to take advantage of higher education opportunities in Tanzania and abroad.

The literature on alternative secondary education pathways for refugee students in

¹² UN (2022) [UNHCR commemorates DAFI's 30th Anniversary](#), accessed 6 June 2024.

¹³ Pedró F, Moumné R, Bouëtard M & Nguyen K (2019) [Enforcing the right to education of refugees: a policy perspective](#), UNESCO.

¹⁴ UN (2022) [UNHCR commemorates DAFI's 30th Anniversary](#), accessed 6 June 2024.

¹⁵ See: <https://mastercardfdn.org/all/scholars/>

Tanzania is scarce. Existing literature and initiatives target primarily out-of-school students who had their education interrupted especially by displacement. This study was intended to bridge the knowledge gap in Tanzania on alternative post-secondary education pathways for refugee students. Since the education policy decision to use DRC's curriculum was based on the assumption that the camp set-up was temporary, it is important to rethink policy perspectives to accommodate repatriation, resettlement, and pursuit of higher education by the Tanzanian government in the context of prolonged displacement.

Research objectives

The overall objective of this study is to explore alternative post-secondary education pathways that can help break down the barriers faced by Congolese refugee students in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania in pursuit of higher education. Specific research objectives are:

1. Identify secondary education pathways that might help Congolese refugee students achieve a smooth transition from secondary education to higher education.
2. Explore Congolese refugee communities' (students, parents, and teachers) perspectives on available alternative secondary education pathways.
3. Propose strategies that might be used to implement post-secondary education pathways.

Research methods

The study used a qualitative approach with data collected through desk review, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews. Through the desk review, I gathered information from existing literature about past and current alternative post-secondary education pathways globally and in Tanzania, and their implementation. The desk review further helped me to explore refugees' access to secondary education and higher education to identify any challenges they face in accessing both levels of education. I conducted FGDs with current secondary school students in each of the four secondary schools in Nyarugusu; refugee graduates with secondary school experience under the DRC curriculum; and parents and refugee educators of current secondary school students.

Positionality

I am a researcher with lived experience in displacement based in Tanzania. I am also a beneficiary of two DAFI scholarships for both undergraduate and graduate studies. I applied to universities using an Inter-regional Examinations Board (IEB) certificate in 2007, although the certification is no longer recognised in Tanzania. In preparation for

the scholarship applications, I took English courses at various centres, one of which was established by other DAFI scholarship beneficiaries, known as the DAFI English Learning Centre in Lugufu Refugee Camp.

The challenges I faced motivated me to carry out this action research, since Congolese refugee students still face those same challenges. I previously lacked the required English language proficiency after completing secondary school, and even if I had studied an English course before graduation, I would not have been able to get a scholarship without an IEB certificate. At the time, DAFI was only awarding scholarships to students with IEB certificates. Additionally, had the eligibility criteria required an original certificate, I would have been ineligible because I received mine in DRC in 2010, four years after completing secondary school. Consequently, I initiated this study to provide evidence to support my advocacy efforts to rethink the education system in Nyarugusu.

Hypothesis

The working hypothesis heading into data collection was that the use of the host country curriculum is a potential alternative pathway to the Congolese educational curriculum for Congolese refugees.

The Tanzanian post-primary education system involves three pathways that lead to higher education, namely Tanzania Formal Secondary Education, Alternative Secondary Education Pathways (ASEP), and Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET):¹⁶

- The Tanzania Formal Secondary Education system consists of two levels: Form One to Form Four as the ordinary level, and Forms Five and Six as an advanced level. Both levels are taught in English, unlike the preceding primary school levels which are taught in Kiswahili. Students who pass exams at the Form Four level proceed to advanced studies in Forms Five and Six through a government placement, and then proceed to university studies for three years. Those who fail their exams after Form Four or Form Six may proceed to advanced vocational studies.¹⁷
- ASEP targets mainly out-of-school children who are not eligible for formal secondary education. It also offers adults an opportunity to acquire formal education should they choose to do so. The contents of ASEP are similar to that of formal education and candidates from both ASEP and formal education sit for the same national examination. The only difference is that ASEP provides flexibility to its learners to complete the curriculum at their own pace. Students need a specific learning centre where they should be enrolled for studies, but also have to be registered in a centre where they can sit the national examination.

¹⁶ Yahl M (2015) ['Education in Tanzania'](#), *Harvard Education Review* 55: 1, pp 45-52.

¹⁷ Asante Sana for Education (ASFE) [Tanzania Education System](#), accessed 12 June 2024.

Congolese refugee students could take ASEP while studying in the camp and register their names at a nearby national examinations centre, potentially at Makere Secondary School.

- The National Council for Technical Education (NACTE) has a TVET qualifications framework of ten levels. NACTE awards, known as National Technical Awards (NTA), comprise ten levels. The first three levels are provided by the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA). The VETA awards are named National Training and Vocational Awards (NTVA). Upon completion of the third VETA level (NTVA 3), a graduate is eligible to proceed to NTA 4 (Basic Technician Certificate, equivalent to Form Four), and NTA 5 (Technician Certificate, equivalent to Form Five). The NTA 5 graduates are eligible to study ordinary diploma (NTA 6, equivalent to Form Six) and then finally they can move to undergraduate studies.¹⁸

Existing attempts to address educational challenges

This section explores previous initiatives implemented by UNHCR, Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs), and Tanzanian National Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to address existing challenges regarding refugee education. The section further explains how and why these initiatives may have fallen short. It considers four initiatives: 1) The Inter-regional Examinations Board (IEB), 2) TVET Centres, 3) English learning centres established by refugees, and 4) the DAFI scholarship programme.

Inter-regional Examinations Board (IEB)

In Tanzania, UNHCR is responsible for managing education in refugee camps. Due to the challenges facing students after completing their secondary education in Lugufu and Nyarugusu Camps, UNHCR established in 2000 an examination board known as the Inter-regional Examinations Board (IEB). The board was responsible for setting the Form Six exam, administering it, and issuing certificates to those who passed the exam within a year. These certificates were accepted in Tanzanian universities and thus enabled students to be eligible for DAFI scholarships. The IEB removed the inconvenience of waiting for Form Six certificates from DRC by providing students with the option to apply for a DAFI scholarship and be admitted to a range of higher learning institutions, including the University of Dar es Salaam, the Institute of Social Work, the Institute of Finance Management, and the College of Business Education.

In 2003, DAFI began sponsoring students in Nyarugusu. The programme was open to students who had mastered the English language and had their Form Six certificates from DRC. The following year, many universities in Tanzania began to refuse to admit students

¹⁸ [TVET Qualifications Framework](#)

with DRC certificates, claiming that those certificates are ambiguous because they do not indicate the subjects studied. The certificates only mention the field of study (eg pedagogy/education) with a general mark (eg 72%) without specifying all subjects included in that specific field of study. In contrast, Tanzanian certificates show all the subjects studied, which allows universities in Tanzania to determine if a student is eligible for the course applied for. The IEB certificates were similar in format to the Tanzanian certificates, which is why those who obtained IEB certificates were admitted to Tanzanian higher learning institutions.

However, in 2007, the Tanzanian government abolished this board, on the basis that an examination board should fully own its curriculum, with a mandate to administer examinations. Moreover, the IEB was not recognised by either the Government of DRC or the Government of Tanzania. Consequently, since 2009, universities in Tanzania have ceased to admit students with IEB certificates. Congolese refugee students remain dependent on DRC certificates to access higher education because the IEB certificates are no longer accepted by Tanzanian higher learning institutions. As stated by a key informant interviewed for this study: *“Tanzania recognises only one examination board: the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA). Other certificates are not recognised unless they have been issued by examination boards of other countries that Tanzania recognises.”*

TVET Centres

In the Lugufu Refugee Camp, which closed in 2009 the Tanzanian NGO Relief for Development Society (REDESO) operated an accredited vocational education training centre. The training centre provided Vocational Education Training (VET) to refugees in soap making and basic computer skills, and facilitated its learners to sit for the Tanzanian vocational training examinations. Those who passed the examinations received certificates from VETA. Through these certificates, refugee students were eligible to proceed to other levels of higher education. Using the same approach, refugee students in Nyarugusu could also benefit from TVET as a way to access higher education without more difficulties.

Currently, several RLOs in Nyarugusu are providing non-accredited technical and vocational education training, which limits beneficiaries' opportunities to access higher education. If these centres were accredited, Congolese refugee students could use the TVET pathway as another alternative route towards higher education.

Establishment of English learning centres by refugees

English-speaking Congolese refugees have established English learning centres in the camp. When the DAFI scholarship programme awarded scholarships to refugees in Nyarugusu for the first time in 2003, several RLOs, including the Ministère Évangélique

Chrétien en Afrique (MECA), Equipping Hope International (EHI), Fighting Against Silliness School in Africa (FESSA), and Mema Solidarity also began offering English language training. Most English learning centres charge between 500 and 3000 Tanzanian shillings per month (about 0.18 and 1.1 USD).

These English learning centres have helped many secondary school graduates acquire knowledge of the English language, which has in turn helped many refugees earn DAFI scholarships. Although these organisations are not registered, the camp commandant recognises their existence and allows them to run English courses without any interference. The interventions of these RLO English learning centres have played a significant role in empowering youth with English knowledge, which has helped those who met other DAFI scholarship requirements apart from English proficiency to gain access to these opportunities, as acknowledged by an educator who stated: *“We recognise and appreciate the great work that refugees’ established English language learning centres. The English course they provide to their fellow refugees is key in accessing DAFI scholarships.”*

Without the involvement of individual refugees and RLOs in teaching English courses, it would be harder for scholarship providers to find qualified applicants. This is because most of them require English proficiency and do not offer prospective applicants the opportunity to learn English before applying.

The interventions of the RLOs in Nyarugusu camp are small-scale and unsustainable, because of relying on contributions from their members, individual sponsors and in-kind support from UNHCR's partner agencies in the camp. RLOs do not have access to donor funding because they cannot register, and most donors are still reluctant to fund unregistered RLOs.¹⁹

Box 1. The Friends Forever Scholarships Scheme

RLOs continue to play a pivotal role in assisting their fellow refugees in accessing higher education. In 2020, for instance, an RLO named Friends Forever Scholarships Scheme (F4E Scholarships Scheme) initiated a pilot project called Accelerated Learning in Displacement in Nyarugusu. The project was supported by current and former DAFI scholarship beneficiaries. Its aim was to equip primarily out-of-school young girls and boys aged between 11 and 25 years with an accelerated secondary school education. This would enable them to meet the eligibility criteria for both scholarships and admission into higher education in Tanzania and abroad.

¹⁹ Ramazani, U (2022). “Refugee-Led Organisations in East Africa: Community Perceptions in Tanzania.” *Refugee-Led Research Series*, Research Report (2), November 2022, <https://refugeeledresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Uwezo-Ramazani-RLOs-in-Tanzania-ENG-Full-report.pdf>

The project also provided an English language course for refugee students who obtained their high school certificates from the Congolese education system and wanted to improve their English proficiency to increase their chances of accessing tertiary education in Tanzania and beyond. Furthermore, this project represented the first opportunity for out-of-school young girls and boys in Nyarugusu to resume formal education and complete high school within three years instead of six years, using English as the language of instruction. The project provided a year of English courses to all prospective beneficiaries before commencing the Accelerated Learning Programme, on the basis that mastery of the language of instruction is key to academic success.

The coordinator of this project in Nyarugusu provided some brief details and commented on the success of this project, saying: *“The project utilised the Tanzanian curriculum, with the inaugural cohort comprising six students registered at Makere Secondary School, a government-run institution located approximately five kilometres from Nyarugusu Refugee Camp. Four of the six students successfully completed the qualifying tests administered by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania. I was surprised to find that even those who had already completed secondary education were seeking admission to the project. This indicates that there is a challenge in the education system currently used for Congolese refugee students that needs to be addressed.”* (A former DAFI scholarship beneficiary, 2023)

The F4E Scholarships Scheme initiative is a continuation of what refugees have been doing to help solve the challenges they face. This model is beneficial because it does not interfere with the current education system in the camp. It also offers another opportunity for more Congolese refugee students to complete secondary education while addressing the challenges they face in accessing higher education. The only challenge with this initiative is that it was run informally and lacked sustainable funding.

DAFI scholarship programme support

The DAFI scholarship programme in Tanzania currently supports all scholarship recipients who are pursuing undergraduate studies at the University of Iringa. In recent years (from 2017 to present), the majority of DAFI scholarship beneficiaries have attended the University of Iringa. This is the only university where DAFI scholarship beneficiaries from Nyarugusu currently study, as emphasised by a current refugee student at the University of Iringa: *“I have been following up on the notice board in the Camp since 2020 and I noticed that DAFI scholarship selects students from this Camp to go to study at the University of Iringa only. I didn’t see any other university on the list of students that the DAFI scholarship programme selects.”* (A current DAFI scholarship programme beneficiary at the University of Iringa, 2023)

At this university, the DAFI programme sponsors its beneficiaries to study English and computer courses, which are covered during their first academic semester. This approach appears to be ineffective as it is run concurrently with the students' university studies, so most students prioritise their university lectures over the English course, as stated by one respondent: *"We arrived a month into the academic year and started the English course a month after we arrived. It would be better if the DAFI scholarship programme could sponsor us to study English before we come here. Here our priority is university courses, not English courses, although English is important in understanding the university courses."* (A current DAFI scholarship programme beneficiary at the University of Iringa, 2023)

Another challenge in this approach is that the time available to study English at university is limited. The course is for three months, and sometimes students only have two sessions a week to study English. This was emphasised by the same respondent above who said: *"Sometimes a week can pass without having a single session of the English course even if the timetable indicates that we should have two sessions per week. We do not compensate for the missed sessions because everyone is struggling to first catch up with the missed university lectures."*

In 2004, DAFI only supported girls to study English for three months before starting university studies at one of the English learning centres in Dar es Salaam. Men were not part of this programme because they had access to studying English in the camp, which was not available to women. Some informants agreed that the programme was more beneficial than learning English after enrolling to the university, although the three-month period was still not enough, and that it should be extended to men, as suggested by a DAFI scholarship alumnus: *"Supporting women to learn English is a good thing that the DAFI scholarship programme is doing but targeting only women is ignoring the fact that not all men or boys study English before applying for DAFI scholarships. So both women and men should be given equitable opportunities to learn English."* (A former DAFI scholarship programme beneficiary in Nyarugusu, 2023) An alternative option would be for DAFI to provide support to RLOs that facilitate English courses in camps, with the aim of improving the delivery of English training to prospective scholarship beneficiaries.

Congolese refugees' views on alternative secondary education pathways

Awareness of available alternatives to DRC secondary education

During FGDs conducted for this study, the majority of parents and students mentioned the host country's education system as the only potential pathway to seamlessly accessing higher education for Congolese refugee students. Respondents believed that adopting the host country curriculum would help them gain admission to Tanzania's higher education institutions. This sentiment is in line with the provisions of the 2005 UNHCR education policy that states that "refugees should be given education following the curricula of the host country/country of asylum."²⁰

Box 2: Perspectives of the benefits of the Tanzanian education system in FGDs

"We have been here in Tanzania for more than 20 years. We enjoyed using our home country's curriculum hoping that it will help us when we repatriate back home. But the situation is that the children we gave birth to here in the refugee camp have become just like Tanzanians. If you tell them about Congo, they don't understand. So, it is important to think about the lives of our children and one of the best ways is to integrate them into the Tanzanian education system." (A female refugee parent in Nyarugusu, 2023)

"DRC is my country of origin, but I know Tanzania better than I know DRC. So, I need to study like a Tanzanian. Unless I get resettled, Tanzania is my current home. I love Tanzania but I don't hate my country of origin." (A male student in Nyarugusu, 2023)

These perspectives concur with information they had received from organisations in the camp. A male refugee educator in Nyarugusu explained that: *"In 2019, IRC, the UNHCR implementing partner organisation responsible for education in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, held a series of meetings with refugee students, parents, and educators separately to discuss the need to change the education system in the camp. The only alternative they mentioned is the Tanzanian formal secondary education."* Participants were generally not aware of any other alternatives to formal secondary schools such as TVETs and ASEP, whether provided by RLOs or by humanitarian agencies operational in the camp, reflecting a lack of access to information.

While Congolese refugees in Tanzania are aware that Tanzanians have their own education system, they have little knowledge on how it is structured, as evidenced by a

²⁰ UNHCR (2016) [Education for Refugees: Priority activities and requirements supporting enrolment and retention in 2016](#).

refugee educator who said: “We hear about Tanzania’s education system but we cannot really explain it in detail. We are aware that they have primary and secondary education systems but most of us here in the camp do not know exactly how Tanzanians run their education system” (A refugee educator in Nyarugusu, 2023) They also perceived that in case refugees have to shift to another education system, the only alternative is the Tanzanian formal education system. Their limited awareness of other available secondary education pathways might make them reluctant to accept any other suggested alternatives that could improve their access to higher education. Similarly, having little knowledge of the Tanzanian curriculum might cause them to be reluctant to accept a shift to the country’s system.

The need for alternative secondary education pathways

While the majority of Form One to Form Four students who participated in this study did not feel the need to have an alternative secondary education pathway, the majority of Form Five and Form Six students who participated in the study expressed the need to shift to a different system. The differing responses may be attributed to the notion that those nearing the completion of secondary school may be more concerned with post-graduation challenges than those in lower classes.

Box 3: Differing perspectives on the need for alternative pathways

"I don't know what will happen after I pass my Form Six exams. I want to go to university, but my parents can't afford to send me to university. To get a scholarship, I must know English. And even if I know English, the sponsor will still ask me to have a secondary school certificate in hand. Getting the certificate is the problem I foresee. Studying in the Tanzanian system can help us get rid of this problem of not knowing English and waiting for certificates for a long time. I don't think I'll proceed with my studies any more after completing secondary education. I'll just get married... (laughing)." (A female secondary school finalist in Nyarugusu, 2023)

"It is too early to start thinking about going to university when I am still struggling with how I will pass my school exams. I better understand our Congo education system. If the education system changes when I have not finished my studies, I think it will only confuse us. We should continue with this system only because all those who went to study in universities have studied under this current education system." (A male Form Two student in Nyarugusu, 2023)

However, students who proposed the transition from the DRC system to the Tanzanian education system did not wish to implement a complete overhaul of the secondary education system. In the event that the Tanzanian education system is deemed unviable, they recommended firstly that teachers place greater emphasis on English as a subject in secondary schools. Despite the English language being a compulsory subject in the DRC

secondary school curriculum, the majority of Congolese refugee students who participated in this study do not attach much importance to the subject. The primary reason for this is their perception that they would rarely use it when working within the camp or in their home country should they return. Secondly, they requested that results slips be accepted by the Tanzanian government in lieu of certificates due to the delay in obtaining certificates from the DRC government. Certificates do not reflect a student's performance scores; rather, they serve as proof of completion. Therefore, a results slip would be a more suitable eligibility criterion than a certificate.

Interviewed parents of students in the final two years of secondary education have expressed a need for alternative post-primary education for their children, as summed up by one of these parents who said: *"We love our country of origin and its education system but because of the difficulties our children are facing in accessing scholarships opportunities, it is better that the education system for our children in this camp is changed."* Their opinions have been greatly influenced by the idea that the only way for their children to continue with higher education is through scholarships that require students to know English and have their original certificates, as one parent who participated in this study stated: *"It is through DAFI scholarships that our children can attain higher education. No one among us has the financial capacity to pay university fees. We all pray that DAFI continues to provide scholarships, otherwise our children will not have a chance to go to university."*

In contrast, the majority of fourth-year secondary students who participated in this study expressed support for the continuation of the DRC system, citing the possibility of repatriation in the near future: *"Even if we have been here for many years, we could go back home any time. Let us continue with our country of origin education system so it can be easy for us to continue with it once we get back to DRC."* (A female third-year secondary school student in Nyarugusu, 2023) A shift to a different curriculum would make it challenging to reintegrate their children into the DRC system. Furthermore, subjects like history, civics, and geography could instil a sense of patriotism for their home country. Their concerns are further compounded by the fact that the permits that allow all students on DAFI scholarships to be outside the camp are specifically for study purposes only, and the permits clearly state that they must return to the camp upon completion of their studies. They therefore have no permission to continue their stay outside of the camp, where they can find meaningful employment after graduation. Even if students study under the Tanzanian system, they will not become Tanzanians. Therefore, it is more cost-effective to maintain the status quo than to change.

Refugees from Nyarugusu who have resettled in third-party countries recognise the challenges of accessing higher education in Tanzania for refugees. They provide support to refugee students to access higher education by supporting friends and family within the camp through remittances to pay university fees. One refugee parent said: *"I thank*

my brother who is in the USA. He is paying the full university costs for my 27-year-old. These students sometimes go on to study in countries that use French as the language of instruction and accept results slips as proof of secondary school completion, such as in Burundi or DRC. Despite the risk of losing their refugee status by moving back to their home country or leaving the camp without a permit, some parents stated that it is worth the risk to ensure their children receive higher education.

Box 4: Parents' aspirations

"I will incur any cost to ensure that my son goes to university even if it results in losing his refugee status. Education is the key to his life. My young brother in the USA has promised to support my son. He will pay all the fees until he gets a degree at Hope University in Burundi." (A male refugee parent in Nyarugusu, 2023)

"It was a difficult decision that I had to take to agree with my sister who is now in Australia when she proposed that my firstborn goes back to DRC to do his higher education there. I knew he would lose his refugee status once the Government of Tanzania knows about it, but I decided to take the risk. I thank God that he completed his studies well and he is now here in the camp with us." (A male refugee parent in Nyarugusu, 2023)

Readiness to embrace alternatives

The Congolese refugee educators interviewed for this study were reluctant to suggest a shift from the DRC curriculum to the Tanzanian education system, although they did acknowledge the importance of English in gaining scholarship opportunities. On one hand, they recommended finding a durable solution to the challenges that Congolese refugee students face to enable them to complete higher education without interruption. On the other hand, substituting the current education system would result in many teachers losing their employment because they either do not speak English (the language of instruction) or are unfamiliar with the Tanzanian education system. In an FGD, they agreed that: *"The optimal solution would be to introduce the Tanzanian education system in the camp without affecting the implementation of the DRC curriculum. Then students would have a choice between the DRC curriculum and the Tanzanian curriculum."*

The DAFI scholarship alumni interviewed for this study have expressed a preference for a shift from the DRC curriculum to that of the host country, Tanzania. They attribute this preference to the frustration of waiting years for their certificates of completion to be issued. One of the alumni said: *"I was frustrated to miss out on DAFI scholarships because of not having my secondary education certificate. I had to wait for three years to apply for a DAFI scholarship until I got it from DRC. I can say I was lucky because three years may be the minimum time one has to wait for the certificate of completion of secondary education, without which you cannot apply for DAFI scholarships. I know people who got*

theirs five years after completing secondary school. It is so frustrating.” Furthermore, educators and RLOs encourage students to study English since it is one of the official languages of Tanzania, their host country, as well as because of the possibility of resettlement to countries where English is the official language. These countries include Canada, the United States, and Australia. English language skills would make it easier for them to communicate if resettled and to integrate into education institutions in their new home.

Box 5: Support for the Tanzanian education system

“I don't like to see my younger brother getting frustrated waiting to receive his Form Six certificate. They should start using the Tanzanian education system. Many girls gave up, got married, and could not continue with higher education despite us girls being given priority by DAFI.” (A female, former DAFI scholarship beneficiary, 2023).

The DAFI alumni interviewed for this study believe that adopting the host country curriculum would not only solve the challenges they face in accessing higher education but would also allow future graduates to be employed in Tanzania, especially in the private sector. One of these alumni insisted that: *“Private sector employers do not need as many documents as public sector employers. Once they see your Tanzanian education certificates, they usually do not ask your nationality before giving you a job. They usually rely on the education certificates and the competence you have.”* Having secondary school education certificates from Tanzania would give students an added advantage over those who acquired certificates from DRC.

To mitigate the challenges that Congolese refugee students face in accessing higher education, some parents suggested imitating their fellow Burundian refugees. In Nyarugusu, Burundian refugee students follow the curriculum of their country of origin, but their final year examinations are set and supervised by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA). Upon successful completion of secondary education, they receive NECTA certificates, which make Burundian refugee students eligible to access higher learning in Tanzania. This could be attributed to the fact that the Burundian government, unlike the Congolese government, does not conduct exams outside Burundi. This difference in treatment was described as frustrating, with a female Congolese refugee stating: *“I don't know why we are segregated in this camp while we are all refugees. Our Burundian colleagues get their certificates from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania. They do not go through the challenge of delayed delivery of certificates when they want to go to universities here in Tanzania.”*

Proposed implementation strategies

This research has identified a clear need for an alternative pathway to facilitate the transition of Congolese refugee students from secondary school to higher education. This section outlines potential alternatives, and strategies for implementing them.

Replace the DRC curriculum with an alternative curriculum: It would be advisable to implement the Tanzanian education system at the primary and secondary school levels to minimise the time spent waiting for certificates and to enable students to transition to higher education without interruption. To ensure a smooth transition from the DRC curriculum to Tanzania curriculum, training of Congolese educators in the camp on the Tanzanian curriculum is a necessary first step.

Maintain the DRC curriculum at primary school level and use alternative curricula at secondary school level: To prepare primary school graduates to start the new system, it is imperative that students in the last year of primary school education undertake a compulsory six-month (July to December)²¹ intensive English course a month after they have sat the DRC national primary school leaving examination (TENAFEP). This training would enable students to take the Tanzanian secondary education curriculum and to transition from French as a medium of instruction to English in January²² of the following year. This approach has been successfully used with Tanzanian students since the language of instruction in primary schools is Kiswahili and English in secondary schools. Refugee students joining secondary schools may benefit from going through the compulsory English courses.

Implement the DRC curriculum and an alternative curriculum concurrently: This approach would allow for the maintenance of a connection with DRC, the country of origin, while providing students with the option to learn with an alternative curriculum, such as that of the host country. This would necessitate the efforts of RLOs and governmental and non-governmental institutions to establish new schools offering alternative curricula at different levels: elementary, primary, and secondary. These institutions would need to be privately managed by stakeholder sponsors and would require tuition fees. Some parents are able to sponsor their children to go to schools outside the camp or abroad in Burundi and DRC. This may mean that some parents would be able to pay tuition fees to study in private schools providing quality education compared with the schools that currently exist. However, this approach would create an equality disparity since it is unlikely that many camp-dwelling refugees would be able to afford private schooling for their children.

²¹ The DRC national primary school leaving examination is usually conducted in late June.

²² In Tanzania, the academic year for nursery, primary, and secondary schools starts in the first or second week of January.

Conclusion

Education is an important right for all, including refugees and persons affected by displacement. This study has explored major barriers to accessing higher education for refugee students in Nyarugusu, especially the lack of certification following completion of secondary school and a limited proficiency in the English language. These impediments severely limit refugee students' ability to benefit from opportunities in higher education, especially scholarships. Respondents from key informant interviews and focus group discussions involving refugee students, educators, parents, and previous DAFI alumni expressed preferences and possible alternatives in order to improve refugee access to higher education in Nyarugusu. There was a largely unanimous belief that switching to the Tanzanian education system would give students better prospects for higher education and employment within Tanzania. It was also agreed that a complementary system involving both the DRC and Tanzanian education systems would be ideal, especially for refugees hoping to repatriate, as students could easily integrate back into their home curriculum. Current barriers could be addressed by promoting an inclusive education system that allows Congolese refugees' integration into the Tanzanian education system. This would enable them to obtain a valid certificate at the end of secondary school, achieve English proficiency, and benefit from improved eligibility for higher education both in Tanzania and abroad.

Recommendations

The study has demonstrated that Congolese refugee students in Nyarugusu face challenges after completing their secondary schooling and that there is a pressing need to find workable solutions. From the data collected and analysis, the study recommends:

Government of Tanzania

In the short term, the Government of Tanzania should allow Congolese refugee students to use the DRC's results slips instead of original certificates. In determining student eligibility, universities in Tanzania rely on the performance of students in each subject studied in Form Six as shown on the report card. The certificate, however, only displays proof of completion. As such, the results slips are a viable alternative for eligibility while students wait to receive their certificates from the Government of DRC.

Furthermore, the Government of Tanzania should review the country's 1998 Refugee Act and the National Refugee Policy of 2003 to officially allow refugees to follow the host country's education curriculum, whether from primary to secondary school or only at secondary school level. There is also a need to allow for free movement of refugee students from the camp to nearby schools to learn in the Tanzanian curriculum if they can afford to. Furthermore, the registration of RLOs would enable them to implement education initiatives both within and outside the camp.

UNHCR

UNHCR could initiate multilateral discussions among the Governments of Tanzania and DRC, as well as with Congolese refugees in the camp, to find viable solutions to the education challenges that refugee students face. They need to involve refugees in the conversation, as they are the people most affected and can offer initiatives that would work for them. Close collaboration between these stakeholders would ensure timely delivery of completion certificates for refugee students taking the DRC curriculum, and encourage alternatives that would help DRC students access higher education in Tanzania.

In collaboration with donors, UNHCR could provide funding for RLOs within the education sector to improve their delivery of English language courses, increase their reach to benefit more refugee students, and, if possible, pilot alternative education pathways in the camp. There is a need to create an enabling environment for RLOs to complement UNHCR's efforts and activities in providing education to refugees in Nyarugusu. This would create an increased resources base, lessen the burden on UNHCR, and involve more refugees in policy solutions and conversations with support from RLOs.

Researchers

Researchers should carry out a cost-benefit analysis study to provide evidence on the importance of shifting from education for repatriation to the home country to education for integration in the host country. The study could further evaluate the extent to which the aim of adopting education for repatriation has been achieved.

Researchers should also conduct more research to look at whether there is any breach of international or national law by allowing Congolese refugees to use their country of origin's curriculum. Specifically, they should assess the legal implications of giving refugees' home country access to refugee students' personally identifiable information.

Refugee-Led Organisations

There is a clear information gap in what refugees know regarding the alternative education pathways available to students. RLOs are in a unique position to fill this gap by ensuring that relevant education information reaches those who need it most: refugee students.²³ Additionally, they may also advise on which pathways are best suited for refugee students since RLOs are led by refugees who understand the needs of their community. Furthermore, RLOs may undertake advocacy to encourage the Tanzanian government to implement an education policy that integrates refugees into the host education system. This is necessary given that the current education system in place for refugees causes disparity in access to higher education.

²³ For more information about refugee-led organisations in Tanzania, see: Ramazani U (2021) [Refugee-Led Organisations in Tanzania](#), Refugee-Led Research Hub.

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