Learning Beyond Borders: The Teaching of English for Refugees in Jakarta Learning Centers During COVID-19

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Abstract

Proficiency in English is essential for refugees as it significantly impacts their integration, social inclusion and self-reliance. In temporary host countries like Indonesia, refugees are keen to learn English before resettlement, but the COVID-19 pandemic hindered this process. Nevertheless, efforts to maintain English education at learning centers continued. What were the experiences of refugees learning English during COVID-19, and how did they navigate access to education amid the pandemic? This qualitative study examines refugees' experiences in learning English during COVID-19 and their access to education. It focuses on two learning centers managed by Human Initiative (HI), a UNHCR partner organization in Greater Jakarta. Data was collected through interviews with UNHCR staff, Human Initiative employees, refugee students and volunteer teachers, along with class observations. The findings reveal that English instruction functions as a vital support system for refugees. The curriculum was adapted to accommodate their needs, with materials sourced online and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods applied to improve speaking skills. The study also highlights the obstacles faced by students, teachers, and management as well as highlighting their adaptive and flexible strategies for maintaining education in difficult circumstances.

Keywords: *refugee, teaching, English, COVID-19, UNHCR*

Introduction

One of the biggest dilemmas of global challenges is the refugee crisis which repeatedly and intensively appears in many regions. War leads many people to live with conflict, crises and persecution, prompting a significant number to flee their countries and seek refuge across the world (Bhatt, 2022). These individuals come from various conflict-ridden nations and live as refugees and asylum seekers elsewhere. According to UNHCR data, there are 65.6 million refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and asylum seekers worldwide (Pathak & Sharmiladevi, 2018).

Indonesia hosts over 14,000 refugees and asylum seekers despite not signing the 1951 Refugee Convention (Ali et al., 2016; Hirsch, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) strives to uphold its mandate based on the General Assembly Resolution 428 (V) from 14 December 1950, which aims to coordinate international efforts for the protection of refugees and the resolution of related issues, guided by the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Saleem, 2019).

In order to fulfill this mandate in Indonesia, the UNHCR and the Indonesian government require resources and legal frameworks to provide solutions, including education for refugees. After a lengthy wait, the Indonesian government ratified a law on refugees through Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 125 of 2016, signed on 31 December 2016. This regulation outlines the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia (Missbach et al., 2018). Under this regulation, the UNHCR facilitates access for refugees and asylum seekers, allowing them temporary residency in Indonesia until their refugee status is confirmed and appropriate solutions are identified.

In this context, the UNHCR actively seeks various options for refugees based on their unique circumstances, including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education (Frank, 2014). It also ensures equal access to post-basic education and

training, which may necessitate adjustments to international legislation, whether in transit or in third countries. Consequently, UNHCR and its partners establish centers to provide skills training in areas such as language (*Bahasa Indonesia* and English), computer knowledge, cooking and sewing.

However, refugee education faces significant challenges stemming from complex factors affecting teaching and learning, including economic accountability, health (both physical and psychological), language and cultural barriers (Silove et al., 1997). Research highlights various issues surrounding education in pre-resettlement countries (Isik-Ercan, 2012). Recent policy discussions indicate that language remains a pivotal concern in refugee education, whether in host or repatriation settings. Challenges in host countries include language barriers, teacher-centered pedagogy, and discrimination within school environments (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Tshabangu-Soto and Caron (2011) identified factors undermining the effectiveness of English teaching programs for refugees. Additionally, the language barrier significantly complicates English instruction (Del Carpio et al., 2018; Karam et al., 2017; Torres, 2004; Warriner, 2016).

The barriers refugees face in learning English create unique challenges in instruction. For example, differences between refugees' native languages and those of their teachers pose difficulties. The linguistic diversity among refugees in classrooms reflects their varied origins, such as Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia and Afghanistan (Yasin et al., 2018). Consequently, research on teaching English to refugees in transit countries has emerged. Lee (2011) studied young refugees in shelters in Thailand, examining eighty participants aged 6–19 through interviews, questionnaires and observations to identify necessary language instruction and how language is facilitated among young refugees. The findings indicate that English serves as a means to address the diversity of native languages. Similarly, Steele (2017) researched English teaching for refugees in Turkey, analyzing various factors impacting classrooms,

including administrative, cultural and psychological challenges, as well as curriculum choices and teaching methodologies.

Alrawashdeh and Kunt (2022) investigated the challenges refugee children encounter while learning English, from the perspectives of their teachers in Jordan. Utilizing a quantitative questionnaire, the research identifies key difficulties faced by both teachers—such as cultural competency, preparation, self-efficacy, and teaching practices— and students, who struggle with linguistic and psychological barriers. It explores the connections between teachers' preparation and their effectiveness, as well as the relationship between refugees' psychological needs and linguistic challenges.

Based on these literature reviews, it can be concluded that the unique circumstances of being a refugee make the process of teaching English complex and challenging. Life in transit countries is often difficult for refugees, as they must struggle not only with the linguistic diversity among themselves but also with the language barrier that hinders communication with teachers. Additionally, refugees face administrative, cultural and psychological challenges that complicate their educational experiences. Communicating with the UNHCR or other immigration authorities poses further difficulties. As a result, learning English becomes essential for improving their communication skills. However, the curriculum and teaching methodologies used in these classes are often ill-suited to their specific needs and conditions.

This study explores the challenges refugees encounter in English language education, focusing on the UNHCR-affiliated programs in the Greater Jakarta area. The research aims to examine the curriculum, teaching materials, methodologies, and various factors influencing the English teaching process, as well as the assessment of student progress amidst the pandemic. Additionally, the study investigates the obstacles faced in teaching English and

refugees' access to education, highlighting the struggles they face in the learning process.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, using a case study and descriptive analysis to investigate English teaching for refugees at two UNHCR learning centers in the Greater Jakarta area.

Research Design

The researcher collected data through interviews, documentation and observations in English classes at the UNHCR learning centers in Jakarta from August 2021 to January 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to address questions regarding curriculum selection, teaching methods, materials, assessments, class activities, and challenges faced by refugees in English instruction. Classes were conducted online using various platforms during the pandemic. The research further details findings and provides conclusive answers to the research questions, investigating two educational settings: the Ciputat and Asem Baris (Tebet) learning centers over six months.

Research Participants

The research participants include one UNHCR staff member in Indonesia that has position as Community Based Protection in refugee education, three staff members from Human Initiative that are the project manager, education officer, and project officer who managed the education project for refugee education, and 34 refugees enrolled in UNHCR English programs, and seven volunteer teachers at the UNHCR learning centers. The snowball sampling was used to take the sample of participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved conducting interviews face-to-face via Zoom, or through WhatsApp text/calls. Documents were compiled and reviewed, including the existing curriculum, modules, teaching materials used by English teachers, teachers' Curriculum Vitae of the teachers, examples of students' placement tests, and reports. These documents supported the data gathered from interviews and observations. Observations were conducted mostly by joining Zoom classes and other applications used by teachers during the online setup compelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a Google Form was distributed to students from two classes, who also participated in the class observations. For data analysis, the researcher followed three concurrent steps based on Miles and Huberman's theory (1994): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

To collect the data, interviews were conducted face-to-face via Zoom, or WhatsApp text/call. Then documents containing the existing curriculum or syllabus, existing modules, existing teaching materials used by the English teachers, the curriculum vitae of the English teachers, students' placement test examples, and reporting examples were compiled and observed. All of these documents are used to support the data needs that are collected together with interview sheets and also the observation sheets. Moreover, the observations were carried out as naturally as possible by joining Zoom or observing other applications used by teachers because they were still online due to the COVID-19 pandemic without disturbing the class. In addition, the g-form spread to the students of two classes as the sample. The students are the participants who also join in the class observation. Later, in analyzing the data, the researcher used three concurrent steps based on Miles and Huberman's theory. They are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing or verification.

Results and Discussion

1. Education without Limits: Curriculum, Materials, and Methods of English Teaching for Refugees in Learning Centers

a. Curriculum in Learning Centers

Human Initiative (HI) has made significant efforts to design an appropriate curriculum for refugee education in its two learning centers. This aligns with previous research such as by Essomba (2017) who noted that educational systems are often ill-prepared to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees, with curricula frequently failing to provide the necessary language and social skills. NH, an Education Officer at HI, remarked, 'The diverse circumstances of refugees encourages HI officers to tailor the curriculum to meet their specific needs'. Similar to the curriculum applied in Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, which was designed to be simple and accessible for learners (Steele, 2017), HI has adopted a flexible approach.

Alpaydın (2017) also emphasized that the content and language of refugee curricula in Turkey, supported by Arabic translators, are adapted to the unique needs of refugee students. Crul et al. (2019) highlighted how public schools in Lebanon are legally required to teach refugee students using the same curriculum as Lebanese students to address the limitations of Lebanon's educational system and overcome the challenges refugees face with the national curriculum.

In developing and implementing curricula, learning centers must prioritize the specific educational needs of refugee students. At HI's centers, English is regarded as a 'survival language', meaning the focus of instruction is on equipping refugees with practical language skills necessary for navigating life in a new country or preparing for their future. This is echoed by a UNHCR staff member who stated, 'Languages, including English, are part of a survival kit.

By mastering the language, refugees are better able to meet their basic needs. In the Indonesian context, proficiency in Indonesian is also strongly encouraged, as it fosters peaceful coexistence with locals. Refugees can certainly learn English and use it for daily communication among themselves and with the local community'.

However, the diverse cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds of refugees pose challenges for learning center management and teachers in adapting the curriculum to the learning process. As a result, the curriculum used in these centers is not yet standardized. To address this, HI, which oversees English education in the learning centers under UNHCR in Greater Jakarta, has implemented multiple curricula for its Basic- level English classes. These ongoing adjustments reflect the institution's efforts to meet the evolving needs of students. The specific changes in the curriculum are outlined in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. *The Development of Curriculum*
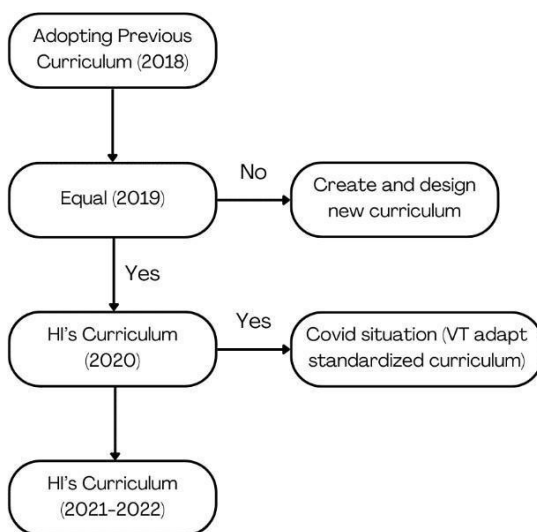
In 2018, they continued using the previous management's curriculum but later partnered with a language institution to

develop a more appropriate curriculum. Recognizing its irrelevance to refugee students' needs, HI and the teachers collaborated with an expert to create the HI curriculum. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the HI curriculum served as a guide for teachers to source standardized materials from Oxford and Cambridge for online learning.

b. English Teaching Materials

In refugee education, the scarcity of teaching materials is a common issue in camps or learning centers. Steele (2017) highlights that Syrian refugees often lack basic resources and space in refugee camps, exacerbating the difficulties in delivering education. Furthermore, the materials provided are frequently misaligned with the specific needs of refugee students. Ghosn (2013) noted that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were taught using textbooks developed for Lebanese students, despite the vastly different real-life contexts between the two groups. This discrepancy extends to subject areas as well—while refugee students often seek to improve their English communication skills and acquire knowledge in Math and Science, the available teaching materials do not adequately address these needs.

In both HI's learning centers, teachers are encouraged to source materials from a variety of resources, provided they align with the HI curriculum. The management of these centers, operating under the UNHCR, follows a structured process to ensure the relevance of teaching materials. This includes training teachers in material selection, analyzing material suitability, monitoring the adaptation process, tracking student participation, conducting evaluations, and revising materials as necessary. According to Olawale (2013), teaching materials are designed to help both teachers and students grasp concepts and ideas, typically presented in visual, audio or audiovisual formats. As one HI Education Officer explained, 'The refugee students come from diverse communities,

conditions and circumstances. Therefore, teachers are free to use any instructional materials, provided they adhere to the agreed syllabus'.

During the pandemic, the shift to online learning made material selection easier and more diverse, allowing teachers to tailor their choices based on their experience and the specific needs of their students. However, Efriana (2021) pointed out that online learning presents challenges in understanding subject material, as students may grasp the material but lack a comprehensive understanding. This has prompted many teachers to seek standardized sources of instructional materials. As MJ, a teacher from Afghanistan, noted, 'I prefer standardized sources; I find them helpful, especially resources like those from the British Council and various websites'.

At the two UNHCR learning centers, teaching materials vary according to the needs of students in different classes. Based on interviews with volunteer teachers, commonly used resources include Websites (40%), PDF/E-books (32%), Books (18%), and YouTube (10%). These materials are employed to teach Basic English classes and are tailored to meet the students' learning requirements. The specific usage of teaching materials is illustrated in the Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2.** *English Teaching Materials*
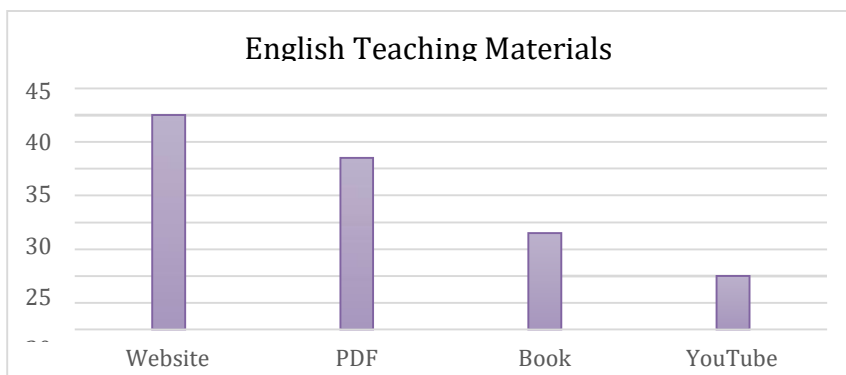
c. English Learning Method

Human Initiative recognizes that teaching methods are crucial for achieving learning goals. Daus, the manager of HI education, stated, 'Using effective learning methods enables teachers to collaborate on the best techniques to present materials, helping refugee students meet their objectives'. Essentially, a method serves as a comprehensive plan for the learning process based on a chosen approach (Edisherashvili, 2014). According to Vin-Mbah (2012), the success of learning pivots on the classroom methods employed by teachers. Effective methods assist educators in supporting students who struggle with comprehension.

The teaching method in the English learning center significantly influences learning outcomes. When selecting an approach for teaching Basic-level English, volunteer teachers must prioritize one of these four skills: speaking, reading, writing or listening. Most teachers here emphasize students' oral skills, as indicated by a survey of 29 students from two English classes, illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *English Skills*
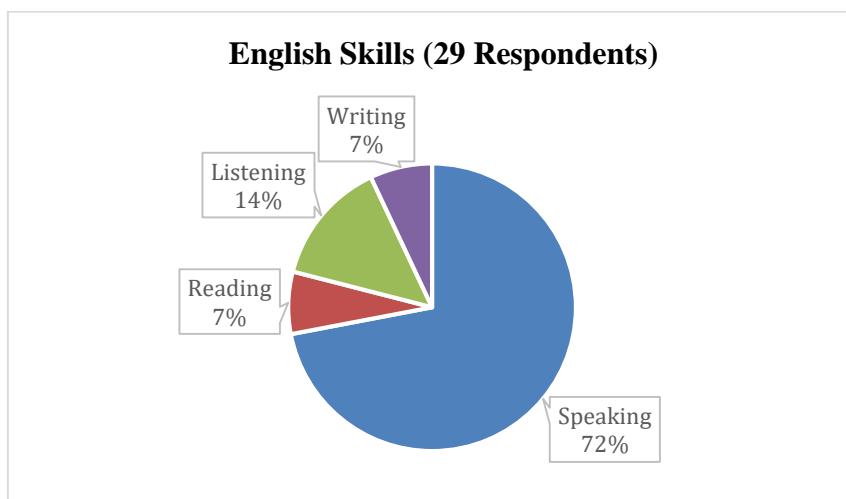
Based on Figure 3 above, more than 70 percent of students expressed a desire for the English classes at the learning center to focus primarily on speaking skills. Why the emphasis on speaking? According to Rugel (2018), the primary challenge for refugees in learning English is that they must prioritize acquiring language skills that enable them to function in society. Refugees rely on English to communicate with officers, peers, classmates and others in their daily lives.

In teaching English to refugees, various methods can be employed by educators. Given the focus on speaking, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is considered the most suitable approach for English instruction at UNHCR- affiliated learning centers. This method is particularly effective because CLT emphasizes the direct use of the target language. Often referred to as the Communicative Approach, CLT is a teaching method that centers on student interaction to achieve learning objectives (Savignon, 1987). It is especially effective for developing students' oral skills when learning a foreign language. The CLT method provides students with ample opportunities to engage in daily conversations in English, thus enhancing their communicative abilities.

In order to facilitate English instruction at the learning center, volunteer teachers often incorporate translations into the students' native languages. Teachers first identify the primary languages spoken by the refugee students. For example, MJ, a volunteer teacher, shared in an interview, 'I try to translate into their language using pictures. I also learn other languages by teaching through translation'.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have had to combine methods with various digital applications and mobile platforms to enhance student comprehension and adapt to online learning. This has required educators to integrate technology into their teaching practices (Masoud & Bohra, 2020). Zoom has

become the most popular platform for delivering English lessons online, while WhatsApp remains widely used by volunteer teachers as a primary communication tool in the classroom. Pramana et al. (2021) reported that WhatsApp is the most commonly used platform in teaching. Additionally, platforms like Kahoot, Skype and others are occasionally used to make the learning process more engaging and effective.

The Figure 4 below illustrates the various applications utilized by teachers in the learning centers.

Figure 4. *Teaching Platforms*

Teaching Platforms

- Power Point 4%
- Flashcards 4%
- Skype 11%
- Youtube 12%
- Kahoot 15%
- WhatsApp 27%
- Zoom 27%
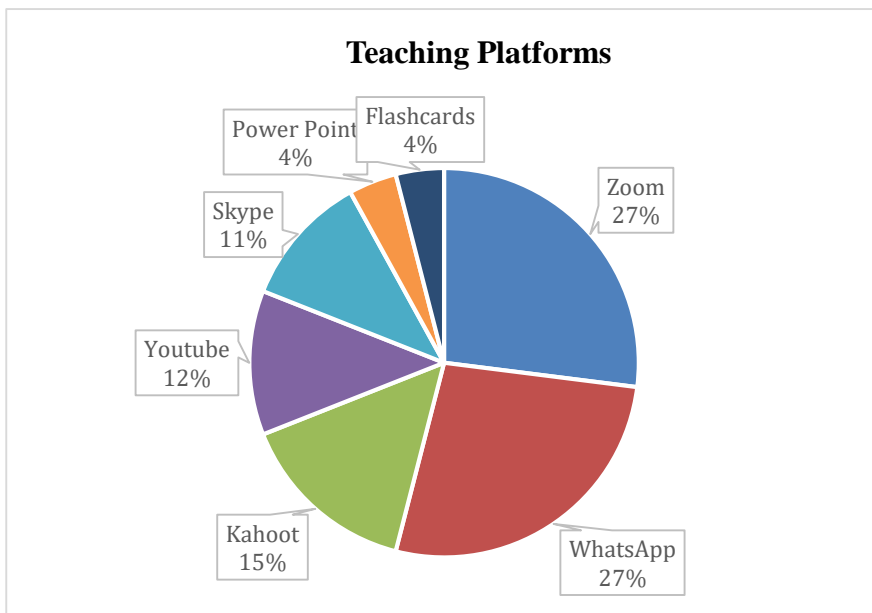
2. Learning in Lockdown: Refugees' Resilience in Pursuing Education Amid the Pandemic

The pandemic, which spread globally, including to Indonesia, has significantly altered learning environments. Teachers and students were unable to meet face to face in traditional classroom settings (Blake, 2011), compelling students to seek alternative

learning methods. One such alternative is online language learning (Plaisance, 2018). This shift to online learning is also observed in educational centers under the auspices of the UNHCR in Jakarta, where learning activities have been adapted to the virtual. Volunteer teachers facilitate lessons using various forms of technology.

Consistent with the findings of Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), HI learning centers commonly employ gadgets such as laptops and mobile phones for online learning. Platforms like Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype and Kahoot are frequently used in these virtual classrooms. These creative practices provide refugee students with plenty of opportunities to use English for self-expression. Activities such as singing, interviewing peers, role-playing and group discussions are integral to the learning process.

However, refugee language classes in Turkey present a contrast, where students' diverse backgrounds pose challenges to fostering interactive learning environments (Alefesha & Al-Jamal, 2019). In both learning centers in Greater Jakarta, each class follows a distinct pattern and method, shaped by several factors. One key factor is the creativity of the teachers, which has long been recognized as crucial to the learning process (Husin, 2016). Cultivating creativity in the classroom is vital to the teacher-student relationship and involves various elements, such as setting different expectations, maintaining mutual respect, encouraging creative behaviors, promoting flexibility and fostering open discussions. Teachers must shift away from traditional, one-way instruction and integrate creative teaching methods into their practices. This increase in classroom creativity correlates with heightened student motivation.

In Indonesia, refugees are prohibited from employment. To utilize their time constructively, they are encouraged to join capacity-building programs at learning centers. According to a survey conducted by HI in early 2022, 234 students registered online for these programs. This number is expected to grow as

additional students apply directly by contacting the HI education officer. The student body comprises individuals from various countries, backgrounds and age groups. Most participants are from Afghanistan, with a significant number from Arabic-speaking countries such as Iraq, Sudan, Yemen and so on. The data representing this demographic diversity can be seen in the Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. *Country of Origin*
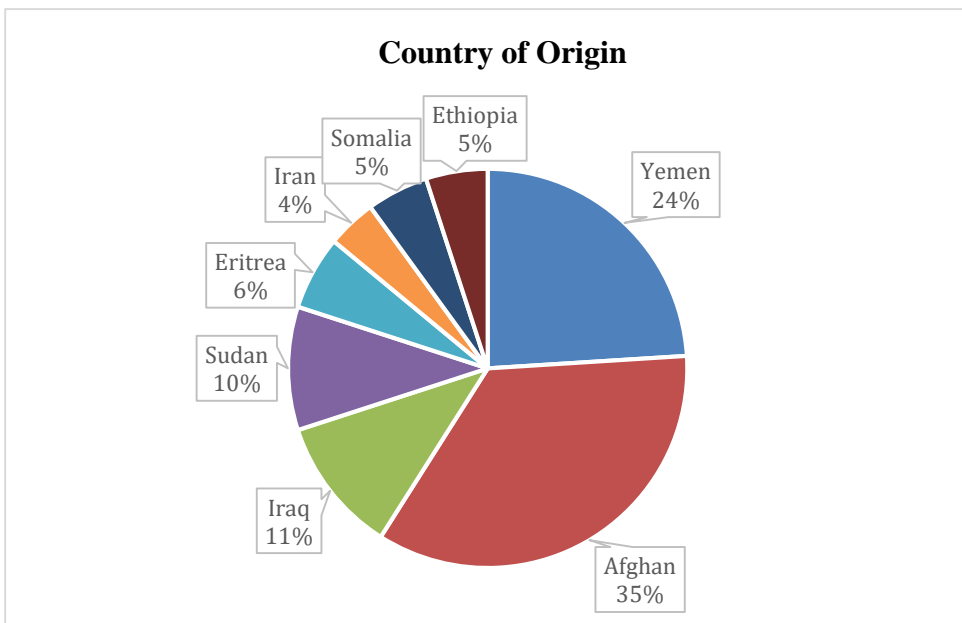
The observation was conducted in two English Basic classes taught by a Somali teacher and an Afghan teacher. The findings revealed differing teaching methods. The Somali teacher primarily used WhatsApp to build relationships with students on the platform, sharing materials, and sending voice notes. He conducted a group video call with three students for 15–20 minutes to discuss course content and dedicated additional time to assist slower learners. In contrast, the Afghan teacher utilized multiple technological tools in her teaching. She used a WhatsApp group for communication and

homework review, while utilizing Skype and Zoom for lessons. She stated, 'I used technology in my classroom, including Google and YouTube. I try to translate into their language using Google Translate or sometimes images from Pinterest'.

In order to increase students' knowledge and assess the extent of their abilities, teachers typically assign tasks and conduct examinations. Therefore, assessment becomes a significant factor in determining the effectiveness of learning during virtual classes. Assessment is the process of gathering and analyzing information, often in the form of exams or tests, to evaluate student learning outcomes (Gultom, 2016). However, assessing refugee students poses unique challenges for teachers. While refugee students are similar to other learners, their prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds often differ significantly. UNICEF highlights these challenges in its examination of refugee education across three countries (UNICEF, 2015).

At HI learning centers, teachers employ various methods to assess students' performance on a daily basis. These include administering tests, drilling, dictation, asking direct questions, assigning tasks after class and providing homework, as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 6. Type of Assessments
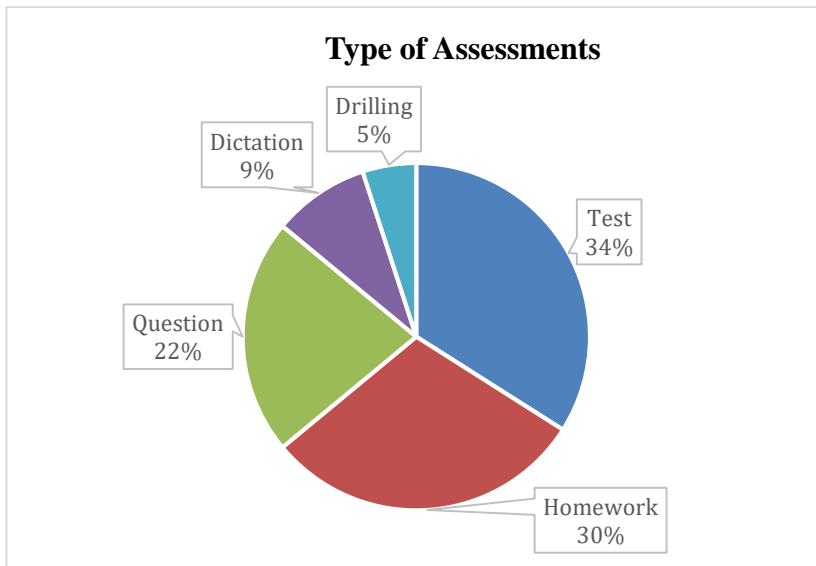
The learning centers conducted final exams at the end of each semester to assess the progress of refugee students. Teachers submitted daily and final scores to the education officer, which were compiled into each student's report. This report includes both cognitive and affective evaluations. The cognitive evaluation measures intellectual progress, while the affective evaluation provides insights into student interests and motivations, including receiving, responding, valuing, managing and characteristics.

 3. Breaking Barriers: The Obstacles for Students, Teachers and Managements in Refugees' English Education

This section commonly presents obstacles in learning English, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, at two learning centers under the UNHCR in the Greater Jakarta area. It examines challenges faced by refugees, volunteer English teachers, and the Human Initiative, the institution managing the English learning program.

a. Refugee Students

Most refugee students view English as an international language, widely used in various countries across different aspects of life. They believe that their ultimate goal is to resettle in a third country, such as Canada or other countries where English serves as the national language. Additionally, they recognize the necessity of learning English to pursue education and employment opportunities. Wachob and Williams (2010) noted that many refugees anticipate resettlement in a third country and understand the importance of preparing themselves by acquiring English language skills. This view is further supported by volunteer teachers who emphasize the need for refugees to learn English. For instance, AZ, an Afghan teacher, stated in an interview: 'Refugees in Indonesia do not have the right to formal education. Language is the only opportunity to address the biggest challenge they face upon resettlement to a third country. Most of these countries are English-speaking, making English crucial and highly beneficial for refugees as they prepare for resettlement'. Therefore, English is perceived as essential for refugees to secure a better future in a third country.

Despite the importance of English, learning the language is not easy for refugees. The first obstacle they encounter is the language barrier. As AZ, a volunteer teacher from Afghanistan, noted in her interview: 'The language barrier is a challenge that most teachers working with refugees will likely face'. In addition to the language barrier, English is a foreign language for many refugees, making it more difficult to learn. Pronunciation, in particular, poses a significant challenge. For instance, refugees from Arabic-speaking countries are accustomed to using Arabic script rather than the Latin alphabet, which makes them less comfortable speaking, listening, writing and reading in English (Alefesha & Al-Jamal, 2019). One Yemeni student shared, 'I have difficulty with pronunciation, and this is a challenge for me right now'.

The obstacles faced by refugees are often compounded by financial difficulties (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Silove et al., 1997), as many prioritize meeting their families' basic needs over pursuing education. Their challenging circumstances, coupled with the inability to secure employment in transit countries, intensify these economic constraints. As one Somali refugee expressed, 'Most refugees are concerned about finances because they cannot work here and do not have jobs. They worry about how they will afford their next meal or where the money will come from tomorrow'. Although the Human Initiative, an organization managing classes at the learning centers, provides support in the form of school kits and learning materials, refugees' concentration on education is often diminished as their basic needs remain unmet. This support, while helpful, is insufficient to fully address their economic challenges (Alefesha & Al-Jamal, 2019).

Since 2019, the global outbreak of Coronavirus disease, caused by SARS-CoV-2, has posed a significant threat to public health worldwide (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020). In response to the pandemic, many schools and universities across the globe transitioned from face-to-face instruction to virtual or online teaching (Crawford et al., 2020). Governments introduced various educational platforms, such as Google Classroom, Zoom and Skype, to facilitate remote learning. Refugee students have also been impacted by this shift, with one notable example being in Jordan, where nearly 145,000 Syrian refugee students have had to adapt to online learning. To address these challenges, the Jordanian Ministry of Education introduced an online platform for use in camps and urban areas, available free of charge from 6 am to 4 pm, and re-purposed a national sports channel to broadcast televised lessons for students (Reinprecht et al., 2021). However, refugee students continue to face numerous challenges in online education, including limited access to technology, insufficient data quotas and unstable internet connections. NA, a Somalian volunteer teacher, described the difficulties: 'Online learning is challenging for teachers globally,

but as a refugee teacher, it's even harder when your students lack proper technology or internet access'. Additionally, the sense of isolation in virtual classrooms poses a significant barrier to effective learning, as students struggle to build strong interactions. These challenges, compounded by unmet basic needs, contribute to heightened mental health issues among refugees. The pandemic has worsened these pre-existing difficulties, creating a domino effect that further hinders their education.

b. Volunteer Teachers

In teaching English to refugees, the role of the teacher is crucial. Teachers must serve as class controllers, organizers, assessors, prompters, resources, tutors, motivators and observers (Neupane, 2019). However, it can be quite challenging for teachers with refugee status to teach effectively. Being a refugee teacher is particularly difficult due to their own uncertain legal status and the challenges of teaching in such conditions. While many factors influence the education of refugees, the impact of forced migration is especially significant. Although the Human Initiative provides teaching allowances, these are often insufficient to meet the teachers' basic needs.

Additionally, refugee teachers face the challenge of students who may have been exposed to multiple languages during their migration, leading to language confusion. Another common difficulty is the disparity in students' prior knowledge and ages within a single class, stemming from differing educational backgrounds in their home countries. As one Afghan teacher explained, 'The varying levels of students pose a challenge, some are faster learners, while others are slower, often due to their age differences'. Another issue highlighted by a volunteer teacher is the lack of a standardized curriculum for teaching English to refugee students at the learning centers. A Somalian volunteer teacher remarked, 'We don't have a set curriculum. We have to create our

own materials. This is a challenge for me when preparing lessons for my students'.

Although the Human Initiative has provided a curriculum that was mutually agreed upon by the volunteer teachers, some teachers still struggle to find appropriate teaching materials. They face difficulties interpreting the curriculum and identifying materials suited to the levels and needs of their students.

c. Human Initiative (Management)

Management plays a critical role in the education system, particularly in ensuring the continuity of education for refugees. However, several challenges hinder the effective management of refugee education, including limited resources (such as workforce and budget), the nomadic nature of refugee populations, language barriers, class size limitations and commitment issues.

In an interview with a UNHCR staff member, it was revealed that limited resources, including both workforce and budget, pose significant obstacles for management in overseeing refugee education. Additionally, as an education officer from the HI noted, 'The main challenge is the nomadic status of refugees. We cannot guarantee that these students will consistently participate and remain in class'. This mobility presents a substantial challenge for HI, as ensuring student retention in English classes becomes increasingly difficult. This issue is further exacerbated by the declining motivation of students to continue their studies. In summary, budget constraints, the transient nature of refugee populations, and low student motivation are major challenges faced by management in running English classes for refugees.

In the context of teaching English to refugees at UNHCR learning centers, numerous obstacles confront students, teachers, and the management overseeing these programs. Dina, along with several other researchers (Al Hariri, 2018; Cinkara, 2017; Ogilvie &

Fuller, 2016; Steele, 2017), has highlighted various challenges faced in English classes for Syrian refugees in Jordan. These challenges include social, educational, financial and institutional barriers.

Many of the social challenges stem from economic crises, concerns about family members in their home countries, child-rearing responsibilities, lack of basic needs, and psychological stress. Financial challenges arise from the inability to cover everyday household expenses such as food, clothing and medicine. Educational challenges are primarily due to poor educational backgrounds, difficulties with English, a lack of trained teachers to support refugees, and diminished motivation. Institutional challenges include budget shortfalls, the need for additional learning materials, inadequate classroom conditions, shortages of teachers and volunteers, and the generally weak academic backgrounds of refugee students.

Alefesha and Al-Jamal also emphasize that refugees face significant challenges in learning a foreign language. Other studies have noted similar difficulties, including unfamiliarity with the language (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Riggs et al., 2012), adapting to new teachers and classmates (Al Hariri, 2018), adjusting to new educational systems (Popova, 2016), and integrating into new societies (Burgoyne & Hull, 2007). These factors sometimes lead students to feel that learning English is unnecessary, which can further hinder their motivation and engagement in the learning process.

Consequently, educators and management need to recognize these multifaceted challenges and implement targeted support systems that address both the emotional and educational needs of refugee students. By fostering an inclusive environment that values their backgrounds and experiences, it would help alleviate some of the barriers to language learning and promote a more positive outlook toward mastering English.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these challenges, particularly in the realm of online learning. The lack of devices, limited internet data, unstable connections, and other technological barriers have further constrained refugees' ability to engage in remote education (Pramana et al., 2021). Educational institutions that could potentially offer support have also faced hurdles, struggling to transition to effective online platforms while addressing the unique needs of their refugee students. Without tailored resources, such as language support and psychological counseling, these learners remain at a significant disadvantage in a digital landscape that increasingly demands technological literacy.

Conclusion

Teaching English to refugees presents special challenges due to their diverse backgrounds, varying levels of education, and potential trauma from their experiences. It requires sensitivity to their situations, adaptable teaching methods, and cultural awareness, making it a unique educational endeavor. Teachers must be mindful of the cultural differences among their students, many of whom come from war-torn countries and may be traumatized. It is not just the teachers, but also the management that must acknowledge the significant challenges. Human Initiative (HI), one of the partners affiliated with the UNHCR, plays a key role in managing refugee education, including English courses across two learning centers. These English courses serve as a vital survival tool for refugees.

At the UNHCR learning centers in the Greater Jakarta area, the curriculum has undergone several revisions to accommodate students from diverse backgrounds, conditions and circumstances. HI collaborates with volunteer teachers, led by subject matter experts, to design the curriculum and syllabus. This curriculum guides volunteer teachers, ensuring that instructional materials

align with the objectives outlined in the syllabus. The HI curriculum also offers opportunities for volunteer teachers to integrate internationally recognized curricula, such as those from Oxford and Cambridge. HI further supports teachers in selecting appropriate teaching materials to ensure continuity and sustainability. During the pandemic, virtual learning was implemented, and many teachers sourced their teaching materials from online platforms. In addition to these online resources, teachers continued to rely on textbooks—both physical and digital (PDF)—from Cambridge and Oxford as their primary instructional materials. They also utilized online resources such as Pinterest, YouTube, Facebook and other platforms.

Refugee students at the learning centers come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, often with limited resources and opportunities. As a result, teachers must employ additional effort to identify effective English teaching methods for these students. Given that the primary focus is on developing speaking skills, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been identified as the most appropriate method for teaching English to refugees, particularly when combined with relevant online applications or platforms. Teachers employed tools such as WhatsApp, Zoom, Skype, Kahoot, and others to facilitate their classes, though WhatsApp was the most commonly used platform. To assess student progress and achievement, the learning centers administered exams at the end of each semester, typically twice a year. Despite the many challenges faced by refugees, teachers, and management, HI strives to sustain the English classes for these displaced individuals.

In light of the complexity of teaching English to refugees, teachers need to incorporate engaging and appropriate learning activities. Refugee students, like other learners, should be motivated and encouraged to overcome the difficulties they face in their educational journey. This can be facilitated through a standardized curriculum for teachers and the creation of a supportive and comfortable learning environment. Further research is needed to

conduct more in-depth observations of the teaching of English to refugees, exploring both the challenges and obstacles encountered by all parties involved. Comparative studies between teaching English in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and non-pandemic conditions would provide valuable insights into the unique difficulties faced by refugee students and educators alike.

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