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A STUDY ON EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES: WHICH MODEL WORKS BEST FOR MALAYSIA?

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ABSTRACT

In 2021, Malaysia achieved impressive completion rates of 99.8% for lower secondary education and 97.8% for upper secondary education. However, only 4% of marginalized non-citizen children are enrolled in primary education, and just 16% in secondary education. These figures are significantly lower than global refugee enrolment rates, which are 68% for primary and 37% for secondary education. Given the global resettlement rate that is below 1%, it is crucial for Malaysia to increase refugee learners' enrolment in education programs. This study employs a systematic literature review to compare education models from six other refugee-hosting countries - Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon - to identify the most effective education model for refugees in Malaysia. The findings uncovered that there is no universal approach as different models are effective at varying context and time frame. The literature review also reveals coherent views on Alternative Learning Centre model as the most appropriate framework for Malaysia's current context. However, given the prolonged stay of refugees, the paper argues for gradual integration into the national education system. Hence, the recommendations address models relevant to both scenarios, operationalizing them by leveraging accessible resources through their socio-ecological system.

Keywords: refugee, education, model, Malaysia, policy

INTRODUCTION

UNHCR defines a 'refugee' as someone confirmed through the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) to have a genuine life-threatening situation in their country of origin, while an 'asylum-seeker' refers to someone awaiting RSD approval. Currently, 186,490 individuals in Malaysia are recognized at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as refugees and asylum seekers, whereby 88% are from Myanmar. The rest from around 50 other nations such as Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Palestine, etc. (UNHCR Malaysia, 2024).

Malaysia is not a signatory to the UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, leaving them in legal limbo under the Immigration Act, with the risk of penalties and limited access to essential services like quality education. As the local government facilitates non-citizen marginalized children's education through alternative learning centres, around 30% of the refugee and asylum seeker children are enrolled in 145 Alternative Learning Centres (ALCs) in Peninsula Malaysia, and among the ALCs, 36 offer secondary education (UNHCR Secondary Learning Centres, 2024).

The chronology educational trajectory for marginalized non-citizens, including refugee populations from 1995 to 2020 (Figure 1) reveals distinct discontinuities and an ambiguous direction in past educational policies and programs for these children, depicting challenges in

establishing education for non-citizen immigrant children, including the refugees (Bakar and Subramaniam, 2023a; Loganathan et al., 2021).

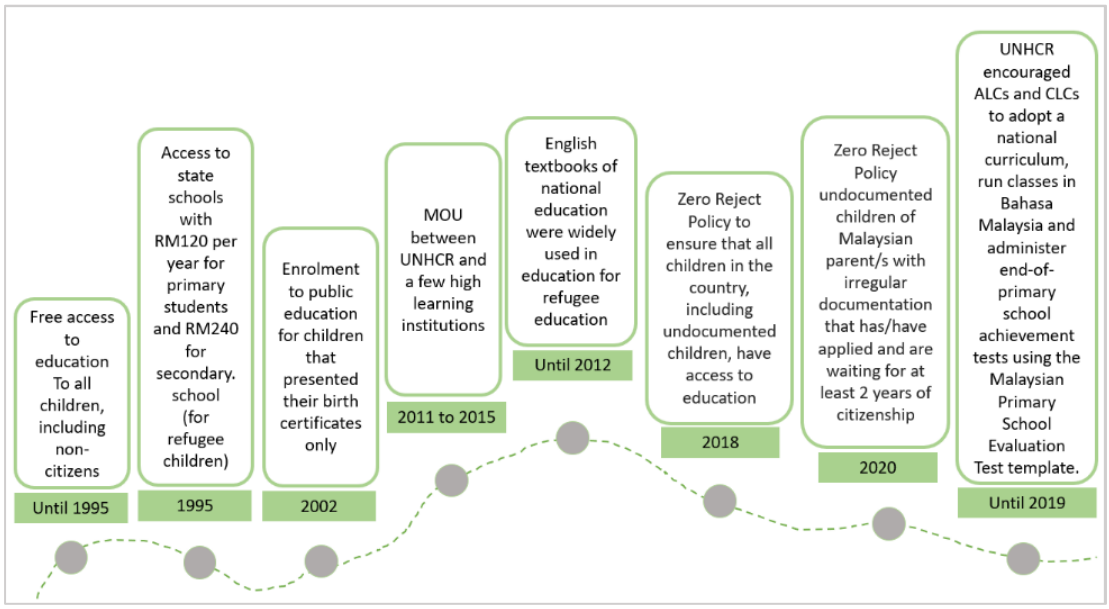

Figure 1: Timeline on Key Changes for Implementation of Education for Non-Citizen Immigrant Children (1995 to 2020)

(Source: Bakar and Subramaniam, 2023a)

Malaysia's national education SDG progress is monitored by the country's National SDG Implementation framework developed by Economic Planning Unit. Unlike public education, currently there is no central governance that strategize implementation of SDG 4 Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education for marginalized school-going-aged non-citizens (Bakar and Subramaniam, 2023b). Consequently, education data for this disadvantaged children and youths are poorly integrated into national statistical frameworks (UIS and UNHCR, 2021).

This study conducted a systematic literature review that contributes towards a comparative analysis of diverse refugee education models from other countries, offering valuable insights into education system considered most effective to Malaysia's context. These six countries - Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon - were selected and compared primarily due to their common role as the first country of asylum, as well as the similarity in the refugees' countries of origin and the geographic proximity between them and the refugees' countries of origin. The first two nations are the primary host countries for refugees from Myanmar, while the latter three accommodate refugees mainly from Syria.

So far, this paper stands out as the most comprehensive comparative study to date, bridging framework and practices of other first asylum countries with local needs to inform evidence-based policy on the appropriate refugee education model and development for Malaysia. Additionally, the latter part of this paper provides recommendations to enhance the respective models. As most refugee education providers face acute resource constraints, this paper emphasizes leveraging potential social relations as a cost-effective approach. These suggestions are framed within various socio-ecological levels, applying Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research emulates a systematic review approach (Booth et al., 2021; Mulrow, 1995) based on selected peer-reviewed literature and grey literature. The citation selection process, as illustrated in Figure 2, entails four phases: (1) identification, (2) screening, (3) eligibility, and (4) inclusion. This literature review first focused on papers relevant to Malaysia. During Phase 1, 'Identification,' of literature on refugee education in Malaysia, 241 citations were identified from SCOPUS and WoS for publications from 2002 to 2023. In Phase 4, 'Inclusion,' fifteen works were selected, comprising five peer-reviewed articles and ten grey literature sources.

For the understudied six refugee first asylum countries: Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, Google Search and Google Scholar were utilized, and the word "Malaysia" was replaced with the name of these countries. The search also referred to UNHCR website of each country. Papers published between 2014 and 2024 were selected following the forementioned four systematic literature review phases. In Phase 4, nine papers were selected for Thailand, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, and fifteen papers were selected for Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

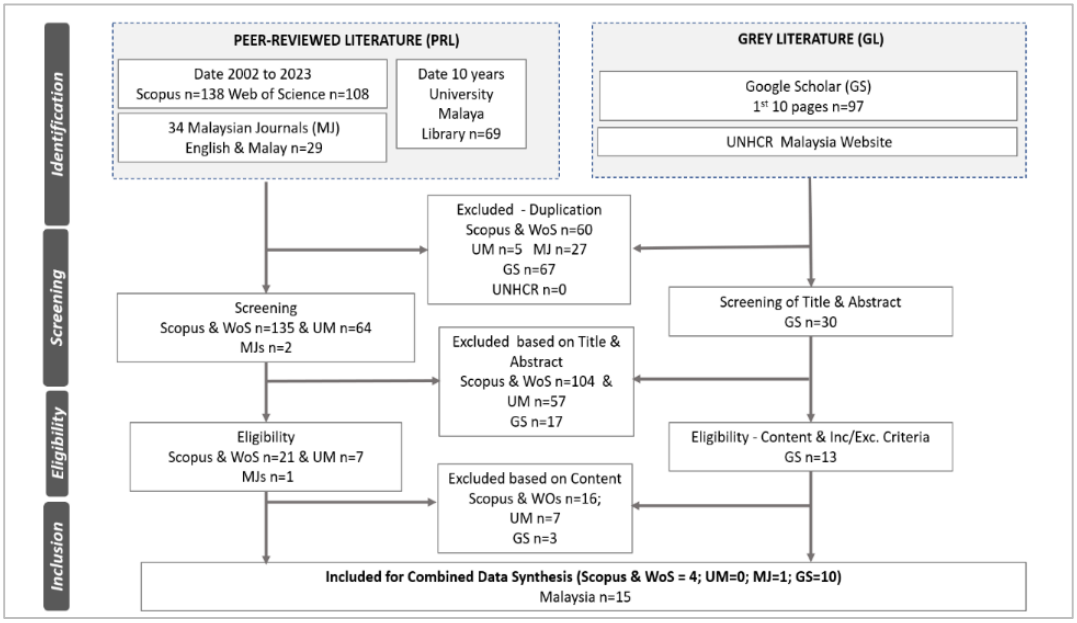

Figure 2: Systematic Literature Review for Refugee Youth and Education in Malaysia

Including grey literatures as research references increases the likelihood of unbiased study as well as extending the relevance of its findings to a wider audience, scholars and non-scholars. They are published and unpublished writings that are not indexed in bibliographic databases (Tillett and Newbold, 2006). Some grey literatures such as abstract, annual report, and conference proceeding are peer-reviewed. In ensuring their trustworthiness and relevance, this research refers to Tyndall's checklist (2021) which guides the selection of grey literature based on "Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, Significance" or AACODS.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Among the selected literature review papers for the six countries, Bronfenbrenner's theories were most frequently referenced for operationalizing improvements in education for refugees,

including by Careemdeen et al. (2020), Adam-Ojugbele and Mashiya (2020), Özel and Özgür (2023), and Correa-Velez et al. (2010). Bronfenbrenner's theories evolved progressively over the years (Tudge et al., 2009; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Approximately between 1980-1993, he focused on development of the individual, naming the theory Bioecological Systems Theory of Human Development. This is an extension of Ecological Systems Theory, upon recognition of the gene-environment interaction and the process of heritability (Bronfenbrenner & Cecci, 1994). In the last phase of his theory development (1993-2006), the emphasis was on the proximal process, employing Process, Person, Context, and Time (PPCT) Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The descriptions of PPCT components are summarized below:

Process: The person's interactions with the people and objects in a respective ecological system, including the interactions among the stakeholders of each ecological system.

Person: The person's IQ, physical characteristics, ability to handle emotions, and personality.

Context: The levels embedded within the referred overarching socio-ecological system.

> ***Microsystem*** – individuals and group of people that have direct contact with a child in their most immediate setting, a place with physical feature that the "Person" engage in specific activities and roles.
>
> ***Mesosystem*** – interactions between the different microsystems or major settings that asserts influence upon one another that can impact a child's development at a particular period of his/her life.
>
> ***Exosystem*** – formal and informal linkages of social structure that exist but do not affect the children directly but impinge upon the person's microsystems thereby determines the relations within the microsystems.
>
> ***Macrosystem*** – Established social conditions consisting of cultural ideologies, political and economic system that set patterns that can influence the children's cultural patterns, values, and world views.

Time: ***Chronosystem*** – key shift or transition process in a time frame, length of a process, or cultural and historical period

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In recent years, less than 1% of the 20.7 million refugees were resettled by the end of 2020 (UNHCR, 2023). So far, Malaysia has not developed a long-term strategy or formed a national committee to systematically provide refugees with greater access to quality and affordable education (Bakar and Subramaniam, 2023b). This is despite these refugee children and youths will likely spend a significant portion of their lives in the country, given that the average duration of exile for refugees globally has varied between 10 and 15 years since the late 1990s (Devictor and Do, 2017).

The growing concern over refugees' prolonged stay has led many first-asylum countries to shift their approach to providing education for refugees. Consequently, various education models exist in these countries, including the integration of refugees into national schools. Unlike these countries, alternative learning centres remain Malaysia's primary education provider or model for refugees.

A scoping review on 15 sources by Yunus (2023) reaffirmed the research gaps on the lack of research on refugees' local integration through the public education system. The author also posited that the scarcity of research on refugee education within national schools could be attributed to the prevailing assumption that Malaysia is not a permanent settlement destination for refugees. Numerous high-level meetings have addressed the enrolment of school-going-aged refugees in public schools. However, a comprehensive academic exploration of the advantages and disadvantages, as experienced by other refugee host countries, specifically applicable to Malaysia's refugee education context, is notably absent. Such a detailed comparison is crucial for guiding Malaysia in making informed decisions to address the educational needs of refugees.

RESEARCH AIM

This study explores education models used by other first-asylum countries to compare and identify the most suitable approach for Malaysia. The findings aim to support evidence-based planning, implementation, and monitoring. Additionally, the insights are intended to guide recommendations for improving the current model, addressing social and financial challenges, utilizing untapped accessible resources, and fostering partnerships to enhance educational opportunities for refugees.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This sub-section highlights three areas of findings: firstly, the key policy related factors that influence refugee education system in another refugee host countries; secondly, the socio-ecological systems that form external influence to each education providers; and thirdly, the different models that have been applied in providing education for refugees in relation to the mainstream public education.

Comparison on Key Factors Related to Refugee Education in Six Host Countries

Based on the literature review, the key factors influencing refugee education models in the six first asylum countries and Malaysia - such as the types of refugee settlements, the demographic characteristics of the majority refugee populations, and their accessibility to public schools - are summarized in Table 1. These factors are governed by the countries' constitutional and policy framework.

Malaysia's progress in scaling up the enrolment rate for refugee learners was reported to be much slower compared to other refugee host countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Uganda (UNESCO, 2019). In response to refugees' prolonged stay, the six host countries begun making their public education systems accessible to refugees in an attempt to increase enrolment (Bakar and Subramaniam, 2023b; Özel and Özgür, 2023; Unlu and Ergul, 2021). Over time, their education models have shifted from being exclusively for refugee learners to adopting blended approaches, incorporating integrated systems where both refugees and citizens attend public schools. Regardless of these models, it is deemed rational that the purpose of refugee education and the design of the curriculum must anticipate these two scenarios, i.e., extended stay and resettlement (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; Letchamanan, 2013).

This prolonged educational gap not only hinders school-age refugees' personal and social development but also has broader implications for their communities and Malaysia as a whole. Being part of a learning community, whether at alternative education centres or within the public education system, can facilitate their social integration and the socio-economic stability of the nation. Quality and affordable education and training will also enhance their

employability and livelihood skills, as refugees in Malaysia are likely to join the migrant workforce as they transition to adulthood.

It is important to also note that among the six countries studied, Turkey is the only country that accedes 1951 Refugee Convention, and Malaysia is the only country among them that still imposes a barrier to national education to refugees (Dewansyah and Handayani, 2018). In regard to refugees' prolonged stay, the six countries responses also include shifting their policies towards an integrated education system. However, it is vital to take note that while Turkey progressively moved towards an integrated education system for its citizens and refugees, Jordan shifted its preference towards a separated system (Unlu and Ergul, 2021). The experiences in these countries demonstrated that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution and unanticipated challenges could assert backlash or hurdles that divert any national level plan for refugee education. The following section highlights key points that are crucial for gaining insights and guiding the future direction in determining the appropriate refugee education model in Malaysia.

Table 1: Comparison on Education for Refugees in Refugee Host Countries

	Malaysia	**Thailand**	**Indonesia**	**Bangladesh**	**Turkey**	**Lebanon**	**Jordan**
Signatory of 1951 Refugee Conventions and 1967 protocol	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Country of majority RAS and % and number	Myanmar (160,320 - 86%)	Myanmar (91,000- 95%)	Afghanistan (6572 – 55%)	Myanmar (982,772– 99%)	Syria (3.6 million 90%)	Syria (1.5 million)	Syria (653,29 2)
Estimated Camp settlement	0%	95%	50%	98%	2%	0%	19%
Self/urban settlement	100%	5%	Yes	2%	98%	100%	81%
Access to national education	No	Yes	Yes (on-going)	Yes (under UNICEF lead)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free public-school education	No**	Yes	No	No***	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: RAS – refugees and asylum seekers Source: Authors' compilation
** - alternative learning centres that imposed tuition fees.
*** - education and TVET provided by UNHCR and its partners at registered camps is free of charge
50%* – RAS live in temporary shelters by International Organization for Migration instead of camps.
On-going – access to high school depends on areas

Thailand

Its "Education for All " policy allows school-going aged children to formal and free education regardless of their nationality and legal status, including refugees that live in the nine temporary campsites (95%) on Thai Myanmar border and in the cities (5%). By 2021, 55% of refugee children aged 6 to 17 years old are attending Thai's public schools. Thai language classes are provided through UNHCR facilitation or other NGOs (UNHCR Thailand, 2023).

Bangladesh

This country has the highest number of Myanmar refugees, close to 1 million, and 99% live at refugee camps. Through UNICEF leadership, the Bangladesh government has now allowed

access to its formal education to Rohingya refugee children (Shohel, 2022). Prior to this, education offered at the camps were following Myanmar curriculum. The training for Myanmar curriculum was provided to respective RE staff by Bard College, BRAC University and UNHCR, through their Master Trainer professional development program.

Indonesia

Indonesia's 1945 Constitution does not explicitly guarantee education rights for refugees. In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Culture issued a circular allowing refugee access to public schools, but this depends on regional implementation and ensuring no extra cost to local governments. Refugees in remote areas often rely on community learning centres. Those seeking public school admission face challenges like incomplete documents, such as a sponsorship guarantee or a recommendation from an Immigration Detention Centre, and language barriers (Adhi et al., 2021). Among the six countries understudied, only Indonesia imposes education fees to the refugees.

Turkey

This is the largest refugee hosting country, hosting around 3.6 million Syrian refugees. From 2011 to 2019, the country shifted from having a relaxed attitude towards refugee education (2011-2014), to greater control and partnership (2015-2016), and full integration into the public education system (2016 onwards) (Unlu and Ergul, 2021). Like Bangladesh, curricula of other countries were initially taught in Turkey. The policy shifted from permitting Syrian private schools, to temporary learning centres and later to national school after realising Syrian refugees' prolonged stay in its country. UNHCR (2019) reported that, "At the start of the 2019/20 school year, 684,253 Syrian children under temporary protection were enrolled in Turkish public schools and Temporary Education Centres (63% of school-aged Syrian children). Approximately 94 percent of those enrolled are attending public schools including 3.6 per cent of them enrolled in open schools." At tertiary education level, 744 refugees received scholarships to study at its university and 128 graduated by the end of 2019.

Jordan

This country offers its public education to all refugees that are staying in camps and cities and are registered with UNHCR or Jordanian Ministry of Interior (Beste, 2015). The country has had four models: (1) camp schools – Jordan curriculum but all Syrian students (2) second shift schools – morning Jordanians and afternoon Syrians (3) host community school – Jordanians and Syrians attending the same classes, and (4) regular school – all Jordanians (Morrice and Salem, 2023). The limitations and challenges of each model impede social justice and equitable education. Moreover, many public schools in Jordan are under-resourced and were stretched to accommodate integrated education. The authors elaborated that the concerns on the quality education of both, the locals, and the refugees, eventually led Jordan to shift its preference from integrated to separated education system.

Lebanon

Most refugees self-settled in the cities in this country. The school-going-aged refugees have access to public schools, and face common challenges for refugee education such as transportation, tuition fees, language barriers, safety concerns, and curriculum challenges.

Young Syrian refugees also find mixed-sex education (Beste, 2015) and changing gender norms and relations challenging (DeJong, et al, 2017). Many of the girls were also married at an early age and in 2014, around 91% of female refugee students drop-out (Beste, 2015). It is vital to take note that similar experiences could be faced by Malaysia's education system if refugee learners are integrated into the public schools due to the cultural context and the social core process of refugees and Malaysians as both interact with one another in the public education space.

External Factors Influencing Education Model

In their findings based on a comprehensive review of 125 grey literature writings, Careemdeen et al. (2020) identified four socio-environmental supports essential for enhancing the educational well-being of refugee students: (1) home environment, (2) school environment, (3) community environment, and (4) virtual environment. These factors can be aligned with the various levels of the socio-ecological context that Bronfenbrenner identified as influencing a child's development. Their findings also demonstrated the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's theory in understanding how external factors interact to influence the learning outcomes of refugee students.

Therefore, when developing an education model for refugees in Malaysia, it is important to consider integrating these four socio-environmental factors and their interrelatedness. For instance, while providing hostels for refugee students attending public schools might reduce the risk of harassment during their commute, it could also lead to their isolation from their home and community environments. This isolation may, in turn, diminish their sense of ethno-community belonging, potentially leading to other negative impacts on their well-being. In overcoming such challenge, regular interactions and home visits between refugee students and their families must be integrated into the education framework. Such interconnection, between the immediate social actors of the students' learning community, i.e., the learning centre, the family, and the ethno-community, is described by Bronfenbrenner as the mesosystem within the students' socio-ecological context.

Education Models: Integration and Segregation of Refugees and Citizens

Based on the education practices of the six host countries, four pertinent education models were identified: (1) alternative learning centres – all refugee students (2) shift schools – separating refugees and citizens according to morning and afternoon sessions (3) host community school – refugees and citizens attending the same classes, and (4) regular school – all citizens. The actors of the socio-ecological systems of any of the four models for country with self-settle refugees like Malaysia would vary compared to camp-settlement context. The challenges and the facilitators would also differ according to each education model.

Regardless of the model, the road map towards an integrated education system can begin by sharing of spaces for common interest, such as sports facilities like soccer fields and volleyball and badminton courts. Implementing a shift system, where ALCs contribute to utilities such as electricity and water bills and handle building maintenance, including paying staff to clean the compound, would offer a win-win solution for both parties. Segregating refugee and non-refugee students and bringing refugee students to public schools contradicts the goal of social integration in common spaces. However, gradually integrating refugee students into mainstream education is the only possible solution towards enhancing the success of social integration efforts. This is crucial as more children from refugee couples are being born in Malaysia in recent years.

The poor implementation of refugee enrolment in public education may disadvantage all learners, citizens and non-citizens. Issues that may surface include xenophobia, disruptions to national school operations, challenges related to affordability, and cultural differences. For instance, Jordanians and Syrian school-going-age refugees faced difficulties studying together despite Jordan-Syrian similarities in language, religion, and culture.

Similar experience is to be anticipated in Malaysia, for example with the Rohingyas. This is despite many Rohingya families living in Malaysia for almost one to two decades, having Malaysia born children growing up speaking Malay and acculturated with the local culture. On the other hand, another significant percentage of school going-aged refugees hardly converse in Malay and live in an enclaved refugee community. Often, the Malay language is also not taught at their ALCs. There will be more difficulties, other than these cross-cultural challenges, that will be faced by refugee and Malaysian students when learning together.

However, the advantages are also many. Examples are the rich diversity and heritage, and character values such as resilience, endurance to suffering, and commitment to families that many students of refugee background have. With great facilitation, students of both backgrounds can benefit from their learning encounter.

Without evidence-based planning, progressing the enrolment of refugee learners into the public education system becomes an impossible task. As the country has yet to establish a decision on a refugee education national roadmap and steering committee, integrating refugee education without a task force, likely to be led by the Ministry of Education and the Department of Statistics Malaysia, seems unfeasible. Therefore, it can be concluded that for the current local context, opting for upscaling and enhancing refugee education via ALCs appears to be a more viable solution. This view is supported by Yunus's (2023) scoping review, which finds that most published studies on refugee education models in Malaysia focus primarily on education through ALCs rather than integrating refugee learners into the public education system.

The issue at hand raises questions about whether the current approach is a sustainable long-term strategy for the country, given factors such as the low resettlement rate, an unpredictable future, and the rising population of children born to refugees in Malaysia and those entering through porous borders. Based on Kunz's theory (1981) and the state of refugee governance in Malaysia today, proactive and occasional reactive emigration into Malaysia is to be continuously anticipated. The emigration becomes more conducive as greater network and financial stability are achieved among refugees in Malaysia, those who have resettled, as well as relatives still in their country of origin. Opening enrolment to public schools for refugees could serve as another pull factor for migration into this country. It would also potentially lead to backlash against the integrative education system and destabilize the education at public schools until the students and education system are adjusted with the transition.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES

Within Malaysia's current context, tapping into social capital emerges as the most feasible approach for establishing a quality refugee learning centre, especially when other resources are severely constrained. Aligned with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems model, this paper emphasizes practical and achievable solutions that leverage social relationships and their engagement, a process within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, throughout a period of time (chronosystem) to create sustainable improvements in refugee education.

Suggestions for changes that can be implemented by the management of ALCs and public schools are categorized under the microsystem, while recognizing that there will be

overlaps with other socio-ecological systems. Most of the refugee education providers identify their entities as ALCs, and the recommendations detailed in this section are written specifically for ALCs. The proposed improvements aim to facilitate a gradual transition toward a more integrated education system for refugees.

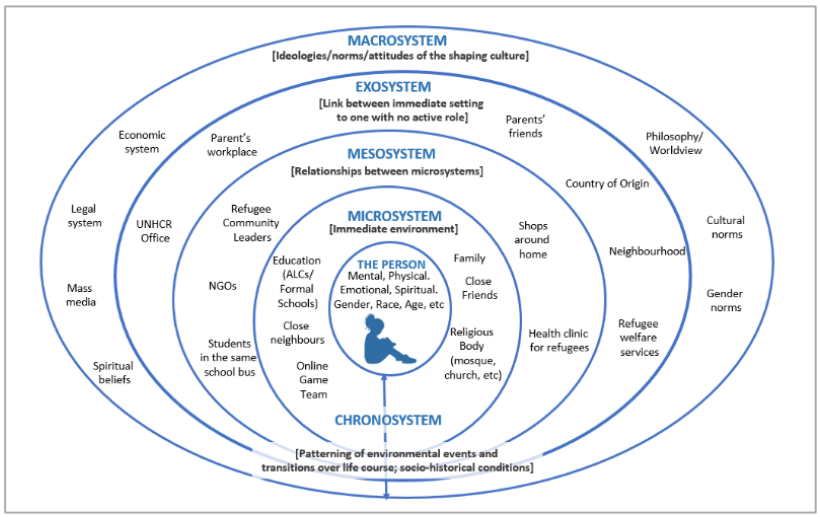

Figure 3: Refugee Students' Socio-Ecological Systems in ALCs in Malaysia
(Note: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model; Source: Authors' illustration)

This transition, from the typical bioecological model of a refugee education provider's setting (Figure 3) to an improved microsystem and mesosystem based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, (Figure 4), is proposed for adaptation by any refugee education provides. This implementation may include public education system, should school-going-aged refugees be integrated into this system in the future.

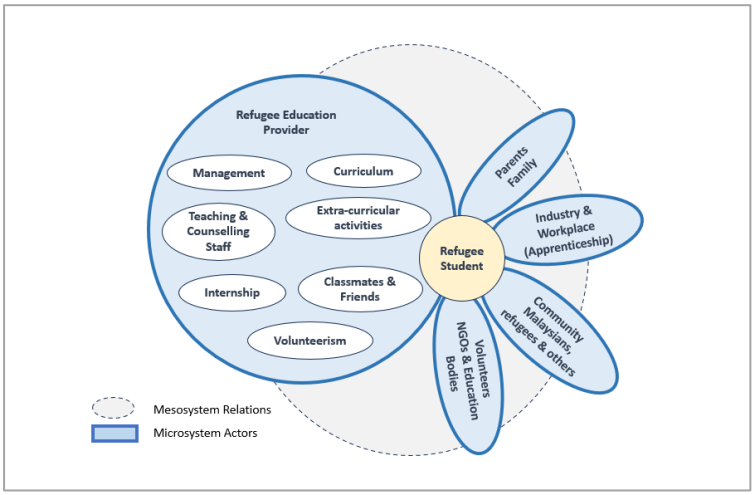

Figure 4: Proposed Social Relations Model for Refugee Education Provider
(Note: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model; Source: Authors' illustration)

Table 2 offers a condensed summary of recommendations and facilitators for refugee education, extracted or quoted from the literature review's references. They are a mix of recommendations at all socio-ecological levels. Those that require macrosystem level actions are marked with three asterisks; two asterisks for changes at exosystem level; and one asterisk

for mesosystem. The rest, without asterisk, are recommendations for microsystem level. This paper summarizes the findings on facilitators for refugee education, including those listed in Table 2, and offers recommendations for advancing refugee education tailored to each socio-ecological system.

Table 2: Summary on Facilitators and Recommendations for Advancing Education for Refugees

References	**Recommendations and Facilitators for Advancing Education for Refugees**
Diode and Wan (2022)	(1) Legal and policy - create pathways to academic or vocational certification*** - allow refugees and asylum seekers to participate in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM)*** - increase access to registration with UNHCR** (2) Financial sustainability, quality education, and capacity building of the ALCs - foster collaboration on fundraising activities among ALCs* - leverage on community leaders to identify and map out areas and communities* - upskill online learning providers to expand the reach - provide more comprehensive and accredited teacher training - continue effort to distribute learning devices to students - provide targeted support to ALCs - provide quality online learning for children that cannot attend classes physically - provide capacity building for teachers (3) Enhancing awareness and demand for education - provide financial aid and assistance - educate and increase the awareness on the importance of education among refugee parents and children - conduct gender-transformative positive parenting interventions with parents and communities (4) Partnership and engagement - expand partnerships and coordination between ALCs and community leaders* - Strengthen networks and connections between ALCs and donors** - Engage with industry actors and private sectors**
Thuraisingam et al. (2022)	Research method: Systematic literature reviews on 14 literatures. (1) Tolerance and relative acceptance*** (2) Accessible refugee community learning centres across Malaysia*** (3) Support programs for teachers and students. (4) Use of social media platforms for advocacy and volunteerism
Loganathan et al. (2023)	Note: Research focuses on non-citizen children, i.e., including refugees. (1) Legislative and policy*** - learning centres do not require legal documents for enrolment*** - UNHCR protection letter to allow operation for learning centres for refugees. - option for international school-leaving examinations in preparation for resettlement (2) Individual and family - borrowing money from the community, part-time work, and private sponsorship - provision of transportation and proximity of learning centres to community - learning local languages and the ability to blend in by adopting a more 'Malaysian' identity. - early countermeasures applied to sensitize children on cultural differences. (3) Community and educational institution - dissemination of information on available learning centres among the community*

	- investment in teacher's training and salaries - availability of MOE teaching materials, flexible syllabus, and vocational training** - financial support from the government, embassies, employers, and philanthropists** - rapid assessment, placement tests, and catch-up programmes
Letchamanan (2013)	Reference: Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies for quality education (INEE, 2010). (1) Access and learning environment** - academic, vocational, SPM - increase location and method for UNHCR registration (2) Teaching and learning (3) Teachers and other educational personnel (4) Education policy*** (5) Coordination and community participation*

Note: Microsystem – no asterisk; mesosystem – one asterisk; exosystem – two asterisks; and macrosystem – three asterisks. Source: Authors' compilation

Microsystem Level

This level represents the immediate setting where students have direct interactions within their learning community. Loganathan et al. (2023) focused on improving these lower socio-ecological levels, particularly addressing three key meso-system actors: family, immediate community, and ALCs. Similarly, the 14 papers reviewed by Thuraisingam et al. (2022) and the paper by Letchamanan (2013) place significant emphasis on recommendations at the microsystem level within the context of ALCs. However, given that this research concurs that the ALC model is currently the most effective educational approach in Malaysia, and that gradual integration into the public education system is necessary due to the prolonged stay of refugees, this sub-section provides recommendations for both models.

Alternative Learning Centres

Based on this research's findings, it is recommended that ALC deliverables be aligned with the following objectives: (1) attaining minimum proficiency levels in literacy and mathematics; (2) preparing secondary students for tertiary education; and (3) providing training for livelihoods and employability. Meeting objective (1) is mandatory. ALCs that lack the capacity to prepare students for tertiary education should focus on objectives (1) and (3). ALCs that have met objective (2) should also emphasize objective (3) to encourage primary students to progress to secondary levels while retaining secondary students. This roadmap will help address the basic needs of the majority of refugee youth in 'earning and learning,' as discussed earlier in this chapter.

This study highly recommends ALC management evaluate their current curriculum and extra-curricular activities to better the needs of students facing prolonged stay, resettlement, and repatriation. For the former, improvements might include incorporating vocational and technical skills, and work-based services. These enhancements should be aligned with potential employability within the informal job sectors of their community. Although this transformation will not occur overnight, having a clearer roadmap to meet the needs of the majority refugee youths will significantly enhance the overall well-being of all stakeholders in refugee education.

Additionally, equipping ALCs with IT learning devices for both students and teachers is also important for keeping the community aligned with societal progress. It will also prepare them to use technology to connect with tertiary education providers, both locally and abroad,

should they decide to pursue higher education. This provision will further advance their Social Actualization dimension.

Other improvements in management area include registering with UNHCR and working towards (1) UNHCR's minimum registration criteria; (2) capacity building of ALC academic and operational staff; (3) increasing the awareness among refugee students and parents on the importance of education; (4) cross-cultural training for ALC learning community; (5) improvement in meeting the ten criteria listed for UNHCR registration; (6) providing safe transportation; and (7) engaging students with counselling service.

There are numerous spill-over benefits for ALCs to be registered with the UNHCR Education Department. Meeting and improving the registration criteria stated at UNHCR's Guidelines for Refugees Learning Centre would naturally guide ALCs to achieve specific and minimum academic and operational performance standards. Additionally, having a UNHCR protection letter would enhance the safety of their operations, which is fundamental for reassuring students about the ALCs' commitment to providing a safe learning environment.

Enhancing teachers' capacity may include providing comprehensive and accredited teacher training through UNHCR's education implementation partners. This training should cover skills for online learning and cross-cultural understanding, sensitizing teachers to cultural differences. Additionally, this will enable them to better relate to students' parents regarding their children's academic progress and well-being, convey the importance of education, and effectively conduct parenting and community interventions on issues like financial management and gender-transformative issues, such as early marriage.

It is crucial to convey that education progress will enable their female children to develop self-reliance and personal qualities that help rebuilding their families and homes. For example, UNESCO's report highlights that if all refugee girls completed primary education, child marriage rates would fall by 14 percent. This reduction would escalate to 64 percent if they completed secondary education (UNESCO, 2019). The report elaborated further that girls are often disadvantaged in term of perceived losses in incomes and domestic duties, and sadly contribution in this area is outweighed to their education.

Costs incurred by parents such as school fees, uniforms, transportation, and learning materials also create significant barriers to the student enrolment. As mentioned earlier, securing reliable funding is one of ALCs' main difficulties in establishing and running their educational programs. Additionally, UNESCO (2019) also suggested direct monetary support to the students' families to help cover their basic needs and reduce the probability of children being forced into child labour and forced marriage.

In conclusion, this paper recommends implementing improvements in seven areas for ALCs: (1) curriculum; (2) extra-curricular activities; (3) management; (4) teaching and counselling staff (5) engagement among students (6) volunteerism; and (7) internship programs (Figure 4).

Public Schools

It is important to note that UNICEF's (2015) recommendations on advancement in refugee education did not put much consideration in integrating refugee learners into the public education system. Similarly, for this study's literature review, out of the 15 selected literatures, only Yunus (2023) explored the integration of refugee education into the national education system. Learning from the experiences from other first asylum countries, refugee enrolment in public education can have both positive and negative impacts on local and refugee learners. Hence, a benchmark study is key to allow Malaysia to learn from the experiences of other refugee host countries before scaling up the refugee education program. There is a need for a clear and strategic roadmap that brings all stakeholders onto the same page, initiated at the

national level. Active engagement from public schools can accelerate and enhance the efficiency of this process. However, it requires a great length of preparation.

The study by Block et al. (2014) on 'School Support Programme' conducted among a network of schools in Victoria, Australia, for example, may provide a good model on employing a whole school approach on learning, social, and emotional needs of the students of refugee backgrounds. The process began with School Support Programme inviting schools that may benefit from the program to participate. Upon the schools' management evaluation on their needs and confirmation to participate, participating schools are to commit on these areas: (1) Identifying and supporting a Refugee Action Team made up of key staff; (2) Refugee Action Team attendance to professional learning workshop together with other schools and workshops per term based on five key programs (school policies and practices; school curriculum and programs; school organization; ethos and environment; partnership with parents; and partnerships with agencies); (3) Supporting and enabling professional learning workshop for all staff at the school; (4) Completing the Refugee Readiness Audit covering the five key programs; and (5) Developing an action plan for whole-school approach to improving support for refugee background students based on audit results.

The program results were evaluated by independent researchers from University of Melbourne, Australia. Although the contexts between Australia and Malaysia differs, the thorough process of 'School Support Programme' can be emulated, as it enhances the program's credibility and engagement from the wider school community. This engagement is fundamental when bridging and building trust among social actors.

Besides the five points from the 'School Support Programme' that can be considered for Malaysia's context, this study proposes seven parallel improvements to minimize destabilization at public schools: (1) pre-enrolment to Malay and English language courses; (2) placement tests; (4) accreditation to ALCs for key education levels, e.g., primary, mid-secondary and upper-secondary (5) cross-cultural workshop for students and teachers, both locals and refugees of pilot schools; (6) acceptance of UNHCR card and Refugee Status Determination letter for registration; and (7) mandatory program for enhancing understanding on the importance of education among refugee parents.

It is also recommended that all ALCs wishing to participate in this long-term program register with Malaysian government and UNHCR, or another governing body appointed by them. This partnership requires centralized coordination, for example through UNHCR office, utilizing its existing webpage "Guidelines for Refugees Learning Centre." To streamline the logistics and minimize use of resources, some tests provided by the endorsed examination body can be administered via an online test platform, coordinated independently by the ALCs with their students.

Refugee students that have been attending high secondary education level should also be granted permission to take SPM as private examinees (Loganathan, 2022; Diode and Wan, 2022). The lower SPM examination fee (RM25 per paper), as compared to IGCSE fee (RM600 to RM2800 per paper) and General Education Development fee (around RM150 per online module) will make education more affordable for the refugees. This accreditation can support gradual inclusion of non-citizen school-going -aged to public tertiary institutions. Acceptance of UNHCR identity cards for registration to the formal education system must be approved so that there is a clear continuity in the refugee youth's pursuit of education.

For refugee students' enrolment or engagement with public schools, the progress could begin with selecting and preparing only a few public schools for pilot projects and the possibility of establishing double-shift schools. This approach needs careful consideration as the population of refugees born in Malaysia, familiar with the local language and culture, continues to grow. The experience gained from this initial pilot project can provide public schools and ALC management, as well as Malaysian and refugee children, enough time to adapt to their differences.

Mesosystem Level

Figure 4 illustrates potential new actors in microsystem that can collaborate within the mesosystem. These are different microsystems influencing one another, impacting students' well-being at specific time. Typically, two groups of microsystem actors interact with each other, ALC management and staff, and parents. This paper recommends inclusion of four additional categorical groups: (1) volunteers, NGOs, and other education bodies; (2) wider communities both refugee and nationals; and (3) industries and the job market.

Partnerships among volunteers, NGOs, and other education bodies can offer resource mobilization in funding and man power, sharing of expertise and experience, broader community engagement, and comprehensive support. An exemplary initiative in this regard was the three-month Vocational Internship Programme jointly organized by The Blue Ribbon Global, an NGO; UCSI University; and several ALCs in Kuala Lumpur (Morozova et al., 2023). The program served as a launchpad for refugee youths to explore their talents and competencies, with ongoing mentoring provided by the collaborative team.

However, engagement with many parties may pose some challenges. Examples include fragmentation of services and duplication of effort, communication gaps, funding instability, high volunteer turnover, regulatory hurdles, inconsistent quality of education, and challenges in aligning ALC's curricula and teaching methods with public education standards. By anticipating the challenges that may surface when microsystem actors collaborate and leveraging their strengths, such partnerships can enhance the success of advancing refugee education.

Establishing partnerships between ALCs and industry players and private sectors (Diode and Wan, 2022) is especially crucial for developing vocational training opportunities (Loganathan et al., 2023). This initiative can potentially evolve into internship or apprenticeship programs, equipping them with practical and employability skills, enhancing job readiness, and providing career counselling and guidance from industry professionals. Additionally, industry players and private sectors can also provide funding and in-kind resources and become potential donors supporting teachers' training, and investing in school infrastructure and supplies (UNHCR, 2019).

One strategic partnership could be the implementation of virtual learning platforms which would serve as a national solution through collaboration among multiple parties to better prepare students prior to entering the job market. For example, a collaboration between the Ministry of Education, UNHCR, and local and refugee community leaders could provide a self-directed online learning platform for attaining minimum proficiency in Malay language and culture, English, and Mathematics. Certificates of completion would be provided to ensure recognition of achievement.

For instance, in Indonesia, UNHCR offers language classes, and its Ministry of Education has initiated issuing a 'Graduation Letter' since May 12, 2022, for refugees who have completed education at all levels (UNHCR Indonesia, 2024). This approach ensures a more uniform and comprehensive language and cultural education for refugees across different ALCs.

Other than the forementioned recommendations, engaging industries, however, may have some disadvantages. Without a proper registration and monitoring system in place, there is a risk that industries may exploit refugee students as cheap labour rather than providing genuine development opportunities. They could also be unpaid or under paid. There would also inevitably be instances of discrimination in the workplace, affecting their experiences and well-being. Unequal access to industry partnerships among refugee students will lead to disparities in training and employment opportunities.

Other potential challenge is ensuring that industry engagement complies with labour law and aligns with the students' expected learning outcomes. Hence, careful management is

required to avoid potential exploitation and to ensure quality education that addresses the cultural context of refugee youths and Malaysians, as well as in balancing the advantages and disadvantages in engaging these mesosystem actors.

Exosystem Level

This level involves social structure that do not affect the children directly but influence the microsystems they interact with. Examples of the actors at this level, as given in Figure 4, include UNHCR's office, parents' workplace and friends, country or origin, neighbourhood, and refugee welfare services. Some recommendations for improving refugee students through their education, engaging these actors include collaboration with UNHCR to strengthen support system for counselling and community activities; engaging local community organizations to provide mentorship, volunteer program, and community events to foster cohesion and mutual partnerships.

Through ALCs, workshops that can leverage refugee welfare services can be conducted to provide students to resources such as legal aid, health care, dentist check-up, and nutritional programs. During the COVID 19 lock down, for example, this collaboration involved food bank and distribution of tablet for online learning at home. Diversifying the usage of ALCs' premises for community purpose brings community to the learning centre, and through this social relations and training opportunities of the students can also be enriched.

The challenges that may be faced by ALCs from these partnerships are straining of resources for already under-resourced ALCs and potential communication difficulties, leading to gaps in support. Neighbouring communities may also resist engagement with refugees due to prejudices or lack of understanding, while employers may be unwilling to offer flexible work arrangements for refugee parents to be involved with ALC matters.

Macrosystem Level

This level includes broad social conditions that indirectly influence the students' social well-being, and some examples, as given in Figure 4 include legal system, economic system, mass media, cultural norms, world view, and gender norms. Improvement on legal system related to refugee education can be pursued through advocacy movement and awareness campaign for the rights of refugees, including their access to quality and equitable education. This includes involving legal experts to educate refugees about their legal rights and available resources, helping them navigate legal difficulties more effectively.

Partnerships with international organizations and teaching 'Global Perspectives' subject can help create greater awareness on global issues, understand different worldviews, and promoting cross-cultural understanding. This learning is important in preparation for resettlement in the third country, predominantly within the Global North region. Currently, a few ALCs are teaching 'Global Perspective' as subject for IGCSE.

Implementation of programs at ALCs that promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender norm, such as underage marriages and male child labour, can catalyse shifts in cultural norms that are detrimental to students' social well-being. Additionally, providing support services such as a national hotline and counselling can address their emotional needs and positively impact their social relations.

Thus far, improvements at macrosystem level occur concurrently at ALC through initiatives and advocacy with appropriate parties. To effectively implement these recommendations, the formation of a refugee education steering committee is crucial. This committee should include representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Department of Statistics Malaysia, UNHCR, and ALCs. A partnership between UNHCR's Education Division and Malaysia's National Education System can establish a centralized refugee education

governance framework. This would serve as a starting point for identifying other key players and evaluating recommendations.

CONCLUSION

The literature review of education models from six first-asylum refugee countries shows a shift toward integrating refugees into public education, driven by their prolonged stay in transit countries. These models are context-specific and require careful consideration of available resources and policies. This paper found that the ALC model is currently more effective in Malaysia's context. However, given the prolonged stay of refugees, there is a need for a gradual shift toward integrating other models, such as the double-shift model and the host community model. The latter will become increasingly relevant as more refugee children are born in Malaysia. For ALCs, a key challenge is the lack of resources, especially financial support. Engaging new social actors can help ALCs access social capital through these relationships. These actors, from the micro to the macro level, play important roles in supporting education for refugees. Their continued involvement will help improve the ALC model and contribute to a long-term solution that benefits both refugee and local students.

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