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Great Expectations: African Youth from Refugee Backgrounds and the Transition to University

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ABSTRACT

Engagement in post-compulsory education is a means by which resettled refugees can gain social and economic mobility. Given the importance of education in shaping the futures of both individuals and societies, understanding the challenges facing students from refugee backgrounds and those involved in their education constitutes an important area of research. While such issues have received attention in primary and secondary school contexts, very little research has addressed these issues in higher education. This chapter examines the educational experiences and challenges associated with the transition to university for African youth from refugee backgrounds. It presents the perspectives of educators, social service providers, African students and African community leaders who participated in a qualitative investigation of the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. The chapter invites academics to reflect upon their experiences and challenges in teaching these students and to consider their own professional development needs with a view to better supporting these students. Recommendations are offered in an effort to identify key areas of support for academics and students in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The educational experiences of children and young people from refugee backgrounds is a relatively well-established research area in the fields of education and refugee studies (e.g., Miller et al. 2005; Rah et al. 2009; Roxas and Roy 2012). There is limited research, however, which examines such experiences in higher education. While key educational challenges facing students from refugee backgrounds have been identified, little is known about their experiences of transition from secondary school to university. This chapter seeks to address this gap in the literature by presenting findings from a recent qualitative investigation of the education and career pathways of African

youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia (King 2017). It presents the experiences of six African students who transitioned to university, and the educational challenges facing both students and educators. The recommendations provided invite academics to consider these challenges and to reflect upon the support provided to African students.

REFUGEES AND EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

In order to qualify as a refugee, individuals must meet the criteria outlined in the definition that was developed during the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Council of Australia 2006b):

... any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.

A small proportion of the population of displaced people (i.e., less than 1%) is afforded a 'second chance' through resettlement. Between 2003 and 2009, Australia – one of the top 10 resettlement countries (Refugee Council of Australia 2006a) – received 95,841 humanitarian visa entrants through its humanitarian pro- gram (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2013). Nearly half (n = 43,236) originated from Africa, with 66.5% aged 24 years or younger upon arrival.

During periods of civil conflict, educational provisions are often haphazard and non-compulsory. Refugee camps typically lack the resources to provide more than a basic education due to infrastructure problems such as poorly qualified teachers and limited access to learning resources (Bethke and Braunschweig 2004). Consequently, refugee youth often have a history of disrupted schooling (Bonfiglio 2010) which impacts upon their educational participation in resettlement countries. Conceptual gaps in students' understanding (Brodie-Tyrrell 2009) can affect their ability to access mainstream curricula, ultimately restricting academic achievement. Furthermore, not all newly arrived young people have had opportunities to develop English language and literacy skills prior to migration. This is because education in emergency situations (e.g., refugee camps) is often provided by international organisations where the language of instruction varies according to the source countries of this aid. Language challenges associated with educational participation are then further compounded by difficulties in developing subject-specific jargon (Brown et al. 2006; Grant and Francis 2011; Miller and Windle 2010; Windle and Miller 2012). Consequently, disrupted

schooling and language difficulties can limit students' post-school education and career options (Banks and MacDonald 2003; Harris and Marlowe 2011; Joyce et al. 2010).

In addition, young people from refugee backgrounds often have traumatic personal histories involving, for example, the deaths of family members, the destruction of personal property, and physical violence. Some young people are forced to participate in civil conflicts as child soldiers, which sometimes leads them to commit atrocities themselves (Betancourt et al. 2011). Traumatic experiences can have lasting effects (Figley 1986) which manifest in the classroom (Stevenson and Willott 2007), affecting concentration, social adjustment and academic achievement (Grant and Francis 2011).

When individuals become refugees, the social fabric of their lives is often disrupted. Limited social networks in resettlement countries can make it difficult to learn new systems and cultural norms, including what is required in educational institutions such as universities (Banerjee and Verma 2012; Banks and MacDonald 2003; Zufferey and Wache 2012).

Given these wide-ranging experiences, it is unsurprising that refugees suffer profound losses of personal, social, cultural, material and financial resources (Kinzie 2007; Ryan et al. 2008). As demonstrated, these losses can impact upon various aspects of resettlement including education. In their study of African Australian women in higher education, for example, Harris et al. (2015) identified a tension experienced by these students between the personal gains from higher education participation, and the losses of traditional cultural roles and identities.

The notion that individuals occupy multiple social contexts is the central tenet of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of the ecology of human development which recognises that people live as members of families, communities, and other social groups. This theory is applicable to refugee students given that, as Cooper (2011) explained, immigrant youth are engaged in an ongoing interplay between the multiple cultural worlds they occupy.

Successfully navigating educational systems within those worlds requires context-specific cultural capital (Valtonen 2004) (i.e., knowledge of cultural assumptions that operate in institutions). Social capital is a means by which people can acquire cultural capital and involves the use of social networks to facilitate access to practical and emotional resources (Duberley and Cohen 2010; Ramsden and Taket 2013). Accessing social capital can facilitate key developmental transitions (Billett et al. 2010; Pettit et al. 2011), enhancing educational aspirations, academic performance, and retention (Semo 2011). This research draws upon the work of social capital researchers (Putnam 2011; Woolcock and Narayan 2000) who identified two types of social capital: (i) bonding social

capital (formed through interactions with people who share similar characteristics, such as family); and (ii) bridging social capital (formed when individuals establish networks with those who are more distant, such as colleagues). This recognises that the existing social networks of those who are marginalised constitute a protective factor, where “outside agents ... need to find ways to complement these resources, rather than substitute for them” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, p. 242).

Given the importance of acquiring social and cultural capital for new migrants, it is clear that social capital theory has applicability in refugee studies. Indeed, this theory has been applied in a number of refugee studies (e.g., Boateng 2010; Deuchar 2011; Ramsden and Taket 2013).

As discussed, little is known about the experiences of refugee background youth as they transition to university. This chapter presents findings from a study examining the education and career pathways of African youth.

STUDY DESIGN

This chapter presents data collected from interviews with African students from refugee backgrounds, educators, social service providers, and African community leaders. These findings form part of a larger qualitative study examining the post- school transitions of African youth from refugee backgrounds. The research sought to better understand the experiences, needs and challenges of newly arrived African youth as they transition from secondary school to education and employment.

Multiple, semi-structured interviews were conducted over a 12 month period during 2012–2013 with African students (n = 14), secondary school teachers (n = 7), Technical and Further Education (TAFE) staff (n = 4), university academics (n = 5), social service providers (n = 3), and leaders from South Australia’s new and emerging African communities (n = 5). Student participants were asked to share their experiences of education in Africa, refugee and resettlement experiences, education and career aspirations, and university transition experiences. Stakeholder participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences and challenges in working with African youth from refugee backgrounds.

Data analysis was a recursive process involving the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of data, utilising Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis guidelines and case study approaches to analysis (Stake 2005). Data analysis resulted in the identification of key issues affecting educational participation amongst African students from refugee backgrounds.

Analysis was guided by a theoretical framework consisting of a series of assumptions that were developed from a range of existing theories (see King 2017; King and Owens 2015). The data presented in this chapter aligns most closely with the assumption that education and career pathways are shaped by access to educational, economic, cultural and social resources including social support and relationships.

Embedded in this assumption is the notion that acquiring such resources facilitates the development of social and cultural capital, which is framed by the contexts of people's lives. This assumption is, therefore, informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development, bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2011; Woolcock and Narayan 2000), and Cooper's (2011) bridging multiple worlds theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 14 student participants, six made the transition from secondary school to university. Four students identified as Somali, three of whom were born and raised in Kenya. The other two participants originated from South Sudan and Liberia. All students experienced some degree of trauma and upheaval prior to migration including the deaths of family members, destruction of property, inadequate access to food and water, and threats of physical violence. Most participants lived in a refugee camp for a period of time, ranging from a few months to many years.

All six students had a strong history of formal schooling in which they learnt English. Despite this, students reported challenges in making the transition to the Australian education system. They were, however, able to overcome these challenges to successfully transition to university. All students had lived in Australia for at least 4 years prior to attending university and were enrolled in courses including health science (2), laboratory medicine (1), tourism and event management (1), criminology (1) and business (1).

Students reported strong family support for pursuing further education. Indeed, for many, education was a primary motivator in the decision to apply for resettlement. Luol (South Sudanese elder) described his own motivation for resettlement: "I wanted [my kids] to have a better education ... That's my top priority."

In connection with motivation for resettlement, the study reported here examined participants' migration and resettlement histories. It explored the impact of these experiences on students' education and career pathways in terms of their aspirations and goals, and the challenges encountered as they transitioned to university. Educators, African community leaders and social

service providers were invited to reflect upon their own experiences and challenges in working with African youth from refugee backgrounds.

Data analysis revealed a range of influences affecting the education and career pathways of African youth including difficulties in achieving aspirations, meeting family and community expectations and obligations, and successfully navigating educational systems. This chapter outlines two key overarching themes that emerged from data analysis: (i) African students' education and career aspirations; and (ii) the development of cultural capital in the transition to university.

Aspirations to attend university: status, respect, and family and community expectations and obligations

As noted in previous research (Walker et al. 2005), status and respect were considered key measures of success amongst African youth and their families, with educational opportunities and career pathways as the means by which to attain this. Of particular importance was the status of the university. Laura (TAFE educator) suggested that for African students, "university is seen as glamorous ... It's like the glittering goal." According to Mark (university academic), the status of the university is evident and visible amongst African students: "You definitely sense the pride that they're at uni ... You can see it in the clothing ... they'll have formal jackets on."

Consistent with other research (Anjum et al. 2012; Cassity and Gow 2005; Oliver et al. 2009), many African youth aspired to become doctors, lawyers and engineers. Family and community played a significant role in formulating these aspirations. For example, Habsa reported: "If my mum chose something for me and I chose the other thing, maybe she would be disappointed ... I would leave what I wanted to do for my mum, I think." Darren (youth worker) also cited an example of conflicting aspirations between African youth and their parents:

One of my former clients got the marks to study psychology but her mother refused to let her because she'd seen ads ... there were lots of jobs in *nursing*¹ and that the pay was good. So, she had to become a nurse and she had no say in it. Even though that's something that she had *no* interest in doing.

These examples illustrate the difficulties that African youth can experience in negotiating multiple cultural worlds that correspond to different contexts of their lives (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Cooper 2011; Cooper et al. 2002).

¹ Italics denote words emphasised by participants during interviews.

Another dimension of African students' aspirations is a desire to contribute to community development, both in Africa and the diaspora – findings which are reflected in Swedish research which examined West African refugee resettlement (Anjum et al. 2012). All six participants described an aspiration to contribute to community development. For example, Angel planned to complete her nursing degree and return to Africa to open a family clinic. Similarly, Fatuma reported a desire to return to Africa as a gynaecologist. These findings were reflected in stakeholder interview data. For example, in Lillian's (career counsellor) experience: "When they're talking about what job they want, it's always got a purpose ... They're value driven ... They want to go back and help." Rachel (youth worker) suggested that this desire to 'give back' may be derived from family and community expectations:

I have lots of clients that want to go to university ... They want to have the skills to help in the community or go back to their country in the future and help there ... It is their own personal goal, but I think it's also an expectation from the family and the community ...

The desire to give back to the community may derive from the core elements of African culture (i.e., kinship, spirituality, and collective practices and beliefs) (Theron et al. 2013). It may also be a means by which to maintain ties to the country of origin (Gifford et al. 2009; Udo-Ekpo 1999).

The desire to maintain a geographical cultural connection may act to strengthen African students' bonding social capital, not only for themselves, but also for their families and communities, in both Africa and the diaspora. Similarly, the utilisation of knowledge and skills acquired in Australia for community development efforts in Africa can aid in strengthening students' own bridging social capital. In this sense, African youth are located at the intersection of African and Australian cultures.

Bridging Multiple Worlds

African students were seen to engage in an ongoing process of bridging multiple worlds (Cooper 2011; Cooper et al. 2002), continually crossing boundaries between family, community, and broader societal contexts including education and employment. In this study, Sean (university academic) observed the difficulties of bridging these worlds in relation to multiple topic failures amongst African students from refugee backgrounds:

They are persistent and I know some people who have been in the same, in the first year of legal studies, for the last six years. They keep on repeating ... That's a cultural issue. They would be alienated from their social group if they fail.

Traditional gendered roles were also found to shape educational success and opportunity amongst African youth, as Will (Congolese bilingual support officer) explained:

For some parents ... they think that housework, it's a girl's job ... I can see, sometimes, a boy and a girl, same household, but the boy's excelling at his schoolwork, whereas the girl, she's just regressing ... In my mind, I just think, 'Oh, maybe she got home and she had to look after the baby, she had to wash, she had to cook. And by the time she finished all this, it was 10:30 ... she is knackered, just go to bed. So, no time to read or to do her homework.' ... I think most of the girls, they're very disadvantaged because of their cultural background ...

These findings, also reflected by other participants, demonstrate the notion that female African students can struggle to integrate their identities as university students and as family and community members. This is consistent with Harris et al. (2015) who found that African Australian women are entangled in a binary between academic achievement for themselves, and self-sacrifice of their cultural and gendered identities.

Financial Resources: The Challenge of Meeting Family Obligations

Many newly arrived African families are responsible for financially supporting kin who are overseas (Akuei 2005; Hammond 2010; Johnson and Stoll 2008; Lim 2009). Will (Congolese bilingual support officer) explained the importance of supporting family and kin:

You have a lot of people who rely on you ... I'm not just my mother's kid. I'm not just only my father's kid ... My aunty has a right on me, my uncle has a right on me. So, if me studying will make them starve, I'm not doing the right thing. I should stop studying and work in order to support them.

The need to make regular financial contributions to family and kin overseas carries significant weight for some African students, as Amanda (university counsellor) explained:

A student said, 'They've said to me that they'll put ... a hex on me if I don't ... continue to contribute.' ... They're not the only student that's said that to me. So, that level of obligation is really enforced.

Financial remittances can place pressure on families who are struggling to meet their own needs in Australia. For some, financial hardship can limit post-school opportunities to seeking paid employment, effectively prolonging or eliminating the possibility of attending university. As Darren (youth worker) explained:

If you're the eldest sibling, and ... your mum is a single parent and you've got five or six younger brothers and sisters ... a spread of ages ... education's not seen as something that's

going to be a pathway to making money in the short term. A pathway to making money is to find a job doing whatever to contribute, to try and support.

Limited finances can also shape the university experience by, for example, making it difficult to purchase learning resources (e.g., stationery, textbooks and Internet access) and accessing transport. As Tracey (university academic) explained:

If you don't have internet at home, if you're living at Paralowie and ... getting to [university on the other side of town] on public transport ... and they don't have a computer at home ... you're probably not going to be accessing your emails every day. You're not going to be Facebooking with other students ... those things are obstacles which make it up against them.

As with the desire to maintain a connection to their homelands, financial remittances can be viewed as a practical means by which to maintain and strengthen students' transnational bonding and bridging social capital. The act of making remittances maintains a cultural identity (bonding social capital) while the acquisition of financial resources facilitates integration into the Australian culture through paid employment (bridging social capital).

Developing Cultural Capital: Understanding the University Culture

Cultural capital was considered critical to successful transitions from secondary school to other education and employment contexts. Cultural capital is the means by which people develop an understanding of the Australian tertiary education sector and the university learning culture, and thus aids in "[defining] positions and possibilities for individuals engaged in education" (Naidoo 2009, p. 264).

Success and Failure: An Ethical Dilemma

Participants described ethical dilemmas associated with notions of success and failure. Educators were concerned that some African students are inadequately prepared for university, having attended university bridging courses which, following successful completion, guarantee university admission. This was considered problematic and particularly detrimental for students with significant educational challenges. Luol (South Sudanese elder) suggested that such courses require review:

They have to look into this thing called bridging course that is taking everyone to the university ... There has to be something that will make it a little bit hard to go, you have to

sweat for it to go rather than just getting in because you've just got... [TAFE Certificates] one, two and three.

Ethical issues associated with limited preparedness were also concerns for academics working with enrolled university students, findings which are consistent with previous research (Harris and Marlowe 2011). As Rebecca (university academic) explained:

I do feel sad because ... somehow they've got in, and their hopes are raised ... For some people, I just think, 'You're not going to make it through first year.' And I think it's really cruel to raise their hopes and to put them through that anguish and to dash their hopes.

Educators reported dilemmas associated with assignment marking and providing feedback to African students with academic difficulties. As Rebecca (university academic) explained, these dilemmas are common amongst academics: "... a lot of staff are feeling really frustrated ... 'We really want to help them, but we can't ethically, we can't pass this assignment.' ... [It] is an issue for a lot of people."

Amanda (university counsellor) reported cases in which tutors award 'encouragement' marks for African students who are struggling, which can have negative implications for the student/teacher relationship:

I've had instances where a lecturer may say, 'It's not really a pass,' but they'll give them an encouragement mark ... like 47 or something. But then they're like, 'Well, what do I do for my three marks ...?' So, they'll be trying to get the three [marks]. But really, it was like, 30 ... It's a bit of a dilemma ... Sometimes in fostering hope, you give people an unrealistic expectation

Such marking approaches not only affect the student, but can also create difficulties for other educators who do adhere to academic standards and assessment criteria. Furthermore, individual teaching philosophies can critically affect students' ability to achieve academic success. Laura (TAFE educator) explained that students who are not deemed to be adequately prepared for university bridging courses require counselling into other educational pathways. She acknowledged the difficulties associated with this, but also cited the importance of the individual teacher's perspective in these circumstances:

[For those with] significant learning, literacy issues ... we try and counsel them into considering other vocational training perhaps, instead of university, or language classes, but it doesn't go down well ... Not all teachers are great at it, most are good at it, but there's some teachers who don't bother ... It comes back to the professionalism of the teacher ...

The notion of adequate preparation was considered a key issue associated with the acquisition of cultural capital needed to achieve academic success. Notions of success and failure relate to conflicting expectations between academics and African students who lack knowledge of relevant cultural assumptions. Limited opportunities to develop cultural capital can, therefore, affect university participation.

English Language and Academic Writing Conventions

Educational experience and English language proficiency were considered key resources that contribute to cultural capital development. African students with a strong educational history and English language proficiency were considered better able to adapt to the university learning culture. Yet, as this study found, students can still struggle with Western academic culture through, for example, the difficulties associated with developing two types of language – conversational English, and the discourse of academic disciplines. As Tracey (law lecturer) explained:

I just don't know whether they've had a really strong foundation in critical reading ... All of our texts essentially are difficult and long ... The language is often quite archaic ... If you're reading something and English is your third or fourth language, this is a different sort of English altogether.

Educators noted the difficulties of marking some African students' work in terms of language comprehension. Integral to these issues is the need for educators to provide constructive feedback. As Mark (university academic) explained:

Quite often, tutors would say, 'Your ... English isn't university standard,' or something like that, which is useless! [laughs] ... Telling someone that isn't going to make them magically improve. It's just going to discourage them ... The other complication when *marking* the work is that it would take *literally* twice as long ... and there's a tendency to correct *everything* ... and even sometimes just trying to understand what's being said, that's quite time consuming, too ...

He also recognised that students must feel disenchanting by such feedback:

They must have felt quite frustrated ... at some of the feedback about their language and ... there'd be an awareness that their English isn't as ... advanced as the other students', so that *must* make them doubt their own abilities ... it would be very hard ... putting things in your own words ... and some of them, you can see they really try to express something, but ... quite often, it just doesn't ... make sense ... they must lose confidence ...

Academic writing conventions were also a key concern for educators. As Daphne (TAFE educator) explained, African students can struggle with “the structures and rigours of writing academic essays and they become agitated about what they see as petty, that what I’m trying to explain is required.” In particular, referencing and plagiarism – which were considered to have both cultural and language dimensions – are key challenges for many African students, as Denise (TAFE educator) explained:

Plagiarism is a huge issue ... but you do have the cultural issue where some people say, ‘In my culture, if you agree with something, you can use the source because it’s your idea, too. It’s not just their idea.’ And so, we have to say, ‘Well, in Australia, it’s slightly different.’ And explain how serious it is to plagiarise ... Because their English is so poor, they can’t not copy and paste. They don’t know how to paraphrase. They don’t have the English skills ...

Help-Seeking Behaviours

Associated with the academic difficulties encountered by African students from refugee backgrounds were help-seeking behaviours. Cultural capital was found to facilitate the development and utilisation of adaptive help-seeking in the Australian university context. Participants noted reluctance amongst African students from refugee backgrounds to seek help from educators across educational contexts. Lillian (career counsellor) suggested that “they don’t want to appear like they need help. They always want to appear they’re coping and they’re successful no matter what.” This was considered an African cultural norm of needing to ‘save face’, demonstrating that help-seeking behaviours are strongly influenced by students’ cultural patterns of interaction. For African students, there is a “learning style preference which is person to person ... They respond to contacts” (Rebecca, university academic).

Central to facilitating adaptive help-seeking behaviours is “building a relationship” (Linda, school teacher) based upon trust: “You need to ... gain their trust before they are ... able to open up and tell you exactly what they need and what they don’t need” (Sean, university academic). Participants noted, however, that once relationships are established, some African students can become very persistent.

Social Support: Facilitating Access to Cultural Capital

Recall that social support is an important means by which to develop social capital (Feighery 2013; Holland 2009; Kuusisto 2010). Access to such support can aid in developing the cultural capital (Portes 1998) needed to understand educational systems, structures and processes.

Study participants identified various sources of social support, emphasising the importance of a strong family network to ease the transition to higher education through the provision of emotional

and practical support. For example, Fathia was able to seek information and advice from family members who had previously enrolled at university: “My sisters and my brother came before me, so it was easy ... I could just go ahead and ask them any questions.”

Peers were another identified source of support. Daphne (TAFE educator) explained that students are better able to settle into the educational environment “when they work together ... They seem to be very good at supporting each other.” Participants did note, however, that students’ peer support networks are often limited to fellow African students; but this was considered typical of any ethnic minority group, as Daphne (TAFE educator) explained: “If you’re a minority group in a dominant culture, you are drawn to other minority groups.” Denise (TAFE educator) also noted this, suggesting that it reflects that students are “not integrating ... In a sense, they’re a support, but I think it’s, in a way, negative support ...”. Tracey (university academic) acknowledged that cross-cultural interaction requires the participation of both parties:

I think other students don’t include them as well as they could ... And I think this is not just the case for African students but other international students as well, where students have difficulty understanding each other, they’re less likely to really engage with them in groups.

Support networks were seen as a key means by which to understand the cultural assumptions that operate in the university environment. As Mark (university academic) suggested, support networks can aid in “getting through the red tape. That’s a big part of success at uni ... knowing how [and] knowing when to actually put in a request for an extension and knowing how to ... word the request.” Similarly, Amanda (university counsellor) recognised that African students require support to develop knowledge of the cultural assumptions that operate in a university:

That stuff about giving them information about the bureaucracy and ... everything’s got a process, it’s not personal ... You need to know in advance what you need to do ... General stuff ... Seeking help and how important it is, having a plan ... because it’s all assumptions. And I think they are disadvantaged by not knowing it.

She went on to suggest that universities could provide additional assistance to African students to better support them to navigate higher education contexts so that they “don’t become a reason that they don’t succeed.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of the infancy of this research area, there is limited literature offering strategies to address the needs of students from refugee backgrounds in higher education. This was evident from an Australian symposium, led by the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the

University of Newcastle in 2015, which sought to address the lack of specialised support for Australian higher education students from refugee backgrounds (University of Newcastle 2015).

Nevertheless, responding to the discussion above, several recommendations are offered with a view to better supporting African students from refugee backgrounds. These include: cultural awareness training for academic staff; inclusive social support; ongoing cultural mentoring for African students; and academic support to address African students' learning needs. Where possible, examples are provided from universities and other organisations which have implemented strategies that are consistent with these ideas.

Cultural Awareness Training

Australia has an official multiculturalism policy (Commonwealth of Australia 2011), emphasising the centrality of cultural and linguistic diversity amongst the Australian people. Cross-cultural communication is an important element of social interaction where cultural awareness and sensitivity are important pre-requisites to effective cross-cultural interaction (Quappe and Cantatore 2005). When educators are culturally aware, they are better placed to understand students' knowledge, skills and capabilities in order to support their learning. Cultural awareness can also promote positive student/teacher relationships, in turn fostering adaptive help-seeking behaviours that contribute to effective teaching and learning.

The University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University) together with Western Sydney high schools and the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation established a homework program with a view to supporting African high school students from refugee backgrounds (Vickers 2007). This program involved Master of Teaching Students who adopted tutoring roles. School students benefitted from practical homework support while university students were able to develop valuable and critical cultural awareness, thus honing their teaching skills. In developing this and other programs, Western Sydney University has collaborated with African community leaders and other external organisations to consider ways to best support African students from refugee backgrounds. The challenge for universities is to reflect on effective ways in which to involve knowledgeable people who work with individuals from refugee backgrounds through the various support services that are available (e.g., Australian Migrant Resource Centre, Australian Refugee Association, Government Multicultural Departments, New Arrivals Programs, and Departments of Education).

Inclusive Social Support

Integral to cultural awareness is the need to ensure that educational institutions create a culture of inclusivity. This is evident at Flinders University, wherein researchers supported African students to develop their own student club, the African Students Association of Flinders University. This was based on an idea developed during a project funded by a 2007/2008 Diversity Initiative Grant to explore the perceived educational challenges of African students from refugee backgrounds in higher education (Harris and Marlowe 2011). This student association was designed to create a mechanism for social support, and continues to operate.

The African cultures represented amongst participants emphasise collectivism, in which group associations and connectedness are critical (Triandis 1995), and family and community are pivotal in the lives of African youth. Universities are, therefore, invited to consider the opportunities available for African families to develop a greater understanding of the university system and the culture of higher education. For example, universities could establish 'experience days' in which African youth and their families are invited to participate in campus activities to facilitate understanding about what it means to sit in a lecture theatre or participate in a tutorial. This type of activity could assist families to better understand and appreciate the university environment, enabling them to provide greater support for their children.

Cultural Mentoring

Newly arrived African youth from refugee backgrounds may lack the social and cultural capital needed to facilitate engagement in higher education because they often have limited social networks that may not include individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Walker et al. 2005). Every university has its own unique culture that is embedded within a broader academic culture. When students lack knowledge and understanding of university expectations and requirements, they are disadvantaged. The current study found that effective cultural mentoring is vital in supporting African students in the post-school transition. Mentoring was considered essential in equipping students with cultural capital that facilitates integration into educational systems and Australian society more broadly.

Participants suggested that universities could establish mentoring programs to support African students to develop the social and cultural capital that is needed to better understand these cultural assumptions. Macquarie University (2015) established a mentoring program for high school students from refugee backgrounds called 'LEAP' – Learning, Education, Aspiration, Participation. This program, in partnership with 10 high schools in West and South West Sydney, involves university

students as volunteer mentors to support high school students to build their knowledge of higher education (Macquarie University 2015). Peer and academic-led mentoring could also be provided to students who have enrolled at university, to assist them to develop knowledge of university policies and procedures.

Academic Support

Academic support provisions for students from refugee backgrounds in higher education are intricately linked to the development of social and cultural capital. The earlier discussion revealed that understanding academic writing conventions, including the importance of referencing and citations, was a key challenge. Educators also noted that 'show and tell' approaches to teaching these conventions is largely ineffective. The challenge for universities, then, is to consider innovative approaches to teaching academic writing skills to students who struggle with these concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident from recent global events that the world's extensive history of forcible displacement will continue into the future. As countries like Australia continue to provide refugees with a 'second chance', it is imperative that we learn more about how we can support these people to gain social and economic mobility through participation in education and employment.

This chapter presented key factors that were found to shape the post-school transition to higher education amongst African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia. In doing so, it invited universities and academics to consider provisions to better support African university students from refugee backgrounds.

Understanding the challenges facing students and academics alike will aid in ensuring that universities and other educational institutions develop strategies to address these needs. These strategies need to identify ways to support students to develop the social and cultural capital they need to achieve academic success. Increasing our knowledge and understanding of the issues facing students from refugee backgrounds will enable us to fulfil our social and moral obligations to support these individuals to become active and productive citizens in their new country.

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