

Refugee Education in Bangladesh: A Nation-State Paradox

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Abstract

This article critically analyzes the politically driven exclusion of Rohingya refugees in the national education system of Bangladesh. By employing realist humanitarianism theory, this study examines the inducement of discrimination against refugees in education and the political factors that have influenced such policy choices and formulation in Bangladesh. Qualitative research involving 35 semi-structured interviews produced in-depth information on key informants' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions on refugee education in Bangladesh. This study revealed that excluding refugees from education was a politically plotted decision, and the reason for such exclusion persisted until now because prolonged discrimination against the refugees created local myths about refugees' eligibility for their human rights to education. The findings of this study provide insights into both academic research and policy analysis in the field of refugee education by highlighting a protracted refugee situation in Bangladesh that political exclusion can create the ambiance to nullify refugees' human rights to education. The study recommends weighing refugee voices in refugee program design, broader consultation among humanitarian agencies, and policy review to allow refugees to receive formal, official education.

Keywords

Development; nation-state; realist humanitarianism; refugees; right to education

Introduction

With the emergence of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a new era of international recognition evolved that showed the necessity of acknowledging the persecution of particular groups of people and thus introduced a definition of refugees. However, this also distinguishes the refugees and citizens within a territory (Chimni, 2000). While the latter is regarded as a legitimate category for obtaining civil, political, and social rights under the authority of a state system, the former is too often considered utterly devoid of legitimacy, rights, or voice despite being eligible for human rights. However, it is critical to understand that the Refugee Convention is over sixty years old, one of the least recognized international treaties. Human rights standards have evolved significantly since the refugee convention, and they now provide a much broader scope of human rights protection to refugees. So, refugees' rights are human rights that cannot be denied due to their political, social, cultural, or other identities (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Goris et al., 2009; Lister, 2013).

The human right to education for refugees is one of the fundamental human rights that extends beyond the bounds of the refugee convention (González Fernández, 2017; Goren & Yemini, 2015; Loescher, 2001). If a country is a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (United Nations, 1966) or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989), then refugees are guaranteed the right to an education, and state parties must adhere to the principle of non-discrimination. However, the reality is that the plight of the refugees cannot be understood solely in legal terms (Coleman & Harding, 1995). Their local condition, in particular, context redefines their 'rightlessness' and denotes exclusion from the political community and expulsion from the global biosphere of humanity (Ganesan, 2007; Gündoğdu, 2015). Hence, the political identity of the refugees and the determinants of their rights depend on the local political structures.

The UNHCR Education Report 2021 showed that around two-thirds of global refugee children are out of school. This report indicated that most refugees worldwide receive minimal education, managed through an "uncertified parallel system," and persists as a temporary response to refugee emergencies. In many countries, such provisional education continues for decades, and refugees are denied formal schooling by the host government (Lippert, 1999; UNHCR, 2021b). These educational arrangements are usually poor in quality, far less likely to follow the formal curriculum, and remain officially unrecognized (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack [GCPEA], 2020; Mundy, 2007). Refugees' claim to educational access is at the crossroads of the state's obligation to the principle of non-discrimination because it is caught among the global promise of universal human rights, the definition of citizenship rights, and the everyday practice of this right (Habermas, 1998; Mundy & Murphy, 2001).

Analyzing the educational arrangement for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, this study examined how refugees' human right to education is at the center of this debate while also demonstrating how the primary actors in refugee management, such as states and humanitarian organizations, are caught in a tug of war between global commitment to international protection and restraining their institutional images locally and internationally. This study probed how the key actors politicize the concept of human rights to education, influencing local understanding, and, in contrast, how the actors should ideally strategize their interventions toward creating equal opportunities for the refugees. This analysis situated

these questions theoretically and empirically by investigating the condition of Rohingya refugees' educational access in Bangladesh.

To do so, the study first provides the background of the refugee education program in the refugee camps in Bangladesh; second, the paper presents the political analysis of how refugees' human rights to education are determined by the state. It discusses the local implementation complexity of the international human rights standards relating to the right to education in the refugee context, particularly how states structurally decide this by using domestic legislative and policy measures as an analytical framework. In connection with this, the study discusses the process of socio-political exclusion of refugees by presenting the accounts of key informants. It examines how state structural exclusion affects refugee and host community sentiment, complicates the role of humanitarian actors, and causes a compromise of their mandated responsibility to protect refugees' human rights to education. Finally, the study critically analyzes the flaws and challenges of the widely used refugee education model and the possibilities of a new paradigm to address educational access for refugees.

Rohingya refugee education in Bangladesh: Overview

The passage of Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law set the Rohingyas on the path to statelessness and the gradual abolition of other citizenship rights (Olney et al., 2019). State-patronized suppression resulted from the Rohingyas fleeing to neighboring countries, and Bangladesh is one of the countries hosting the highest number of Rohingya refugees. Although historians argue that the movement of Rohingyas in and out of Bangladesh went back to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Rohingyas were first officially registered as refugees in Bangladesh in 1991–1992 (Leider, 2017). However, most refugees of this batch were repatriated by 1994, except around 20,000 who remained in Bangladesh. This number later reached approximately 36,000. Notably, these 36,000 are the only group of registered refugees in Bangladesh (Farzana, 2017).

Bangladesh's government restricted registering the Rohingyas as refugees in 1994. Recently 906,686 Rohingyas registered in Bangladesh were called Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) (UNHCR, 2023). The government of Bangladesh does not publicly explain the legal meaning and implication of FDMN, but clearly, it does not mean having "refugee status." Hence, there is ample scope for multiple interpretations, one of which can be "illegal migrant," who has violated state law on passport control and immigration. This means Rohingyas can be considered criminals and held captive in detention, and therefore their "rights to access services" may wholly depend on the domestic legal provisions on this matter. Studies on Rohingyas' legal identity in Bangladesh suggest that denying legal identity to the Rohingyas is the root of the deprivation of most other rights (Dupuy et al., 2022; Equal Rights Trust, 2014). However, this study argues that the human right to education cannot be limited due to someone's migration or political status.

Between 1992 and 2005, there was no official education program in the refugee camp. In late 2006, for the first time, the Bangladesh government allowed non-formal education in refugee camp schools (Rahman, 2020). By 2007, these schools were operational, teaching no curriculum but Burmese, English, and Math (Prodip, 2017). In 2008, the Bangladesh government allowed Bangladesh's national curriculum for non-formal education inside refugee camps but did not officially recognize it. The 2016–2017 influx significantly impacted the refugee education policy in Bangladesh. In 2018, the government announced the policy of

“refugee-specific education.” This means a policy of separate curricula and educational arrangements for refugees.

As part of this policy, in 2019, the Bangladesh government withdrew the national curricula that were functional in the two registered camps since 2007. Official orders restricted teaching, learning, and the use of Bengali in all education activities in refugee camps. In 2018, the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) was established for FDMN, currently led by UNICEF, SCI, and BRAC as co-lead. These agencies started building Temporary Learning Centers (TLC) in all camps. By the end of 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Bangladesh issued a new policy on non-formal education for Rohingyas, which mandated the creation of a non-Bengali education curriculum for refugees (Severijnen et al., 2018). In 2019, ISCG developed a non-Bengali refugee-specific curriculum, Learning Competency Framework Approach (LCFA). Since then, this curriculum has been modified several times and is functional in refugee camps. In 2020, the Bangladesh government announced the plan to introduce Myanmar curricula in Bangladesh refugee camps. This plan was due in July 2022 but was delayed due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (Brugha et al., 2021; Rahman, 2020).

Of the total refugee population residing in Cox’s Bazar, 55% or over 540,000 are children, including separated, unaccompanied, and child-headed households (Codec et al., 2017). The urgency of educational interventions for refugees is assessed by various humanitarian organizations suggesting education as ‘one intervention addressing multiple problems’ (Severijnen et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2021b; United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2018). The UNHCR Education Report 2021 indicated that 6,000 Learning centers in 34 camps could accommodate 203,316 children, leaving 47% of children aged 3–14 out of access to primary education and 97% of adolescents and youth aged 15–24 out of any learning opportunities (UNHCR, 2021b).

Theoretical interpretations of refugee exclusion in education

As part of the research objectives, analyzing the politics of refugee education within a nation-state, this study focused on realist theory, or realism and humanitarianism. This section will discuss how refugees are perceived and their human rights are addressed by analyzing “realist humanitarianism” or “realist strategies of humanitarian intervention” (Snyder, 2010). Numerous studies on refugees are deprived of their fundamental human rights, particularly the barriers to refugee education in host countries. However, it is much less clear why refugees are not given access to national education in general or whether the restriction on national education is part of the political management of refugees in nation-states. Only a few studies show the link between state politics and refugee exclusion in education (Bobo & Licari, 1989; Cummings, 1997). But realistic handling of humanitarian intervention for refugees helps us to explain the problems in addressing refugees’ human rights.

This study uses realist theory to explain the political management of refugee education in a nation-state. Some key concepts are involved in this explanation, such as: ‘nation’ refers to the citizens who form the state or government (Lee, 2006). The idea of a nation-state is generally imagined as a compilation of citizens. This means nations are made up of people who consider themselves to share a common identity (Anderson, 2016). Such imagination and communication are only possible when people are exposed to a standard education system that indoctrinates a common nationalist identity and ideology, which every modern nation-state seek to establish. In sum, the purpose of public education is not only to create citizens who are the member of a political and economic community and therefore have legal relations

with the state but also to give an impression of “we,” the citizens, and “the others,” to the non-citizens (Benhabib, 2004b; Waters & LeBlanc, 2005).

The position of refugees and the debate on the educational access of refugees in a nation-state by default becomes complicated. The prime identity of the refugees is “non-citizen,” which presents a political and philosophical paradox in nation-state formulation. Refugees who are forced to flee their country have already disconnected from the community of “we,” and in the asylum country, they do not have any imaginary “we” (Benhabib, 2004a; Straehle, 2017). The position of refugees in nation-states often remains an unsolved paradox because, with refugee status, they do not cease to identify themselves as part of any nation. Due to such contradiction, realistic handling of humanitarian intervention for refugees helps us to explain the problems in addressing refugee education in nation-states.

The realist approach has a state-centric perspective that argues state interests are above all other factors. Humanitarians adopt a strategic realist perspective for similar crucial reasons simply because the perpetrators (states) of forced migration typically act realistically. They drive certain people to confiscate their land, create a refugee crisis for the neighboring states, and intimidate them into granting access (Holborn et al., 1975). Classical humanitarianism presents the idea of a humanitarian space to operate humanitarian action guided by neutrality, impartiality, and humanity. A classical humanitarian approach suggests addressing humanitarian needs with objectivity, but in reality, strategies of humanitarianism pay close attention to power and the strategic interest of actors. Therefore, when a realist state admits refugees, it adopts a realist approach of humanitarianism or realist humanitarianism, meaning states allow refugees in its territory (humanitarian system) but do not allow equal access to services like citizens (realist approach).

Some scholars deny calling it humanitarian at all, arguing that blocking services and depriving the rights of refugees cannot be a humanitarian approach. This is because humanitarianism, in its classic form, suggests a neutral approach where states do not segregate people (Fassin, 2012; Fiott, 2013). But in realist states promoting national interest seems to be the moral priority rather than the impulse of assisting those suffering gross human rights abuses (like refugees). In sum, realist humanitarianism, or when a realist state practices humanitarianism, remains self-consciously political and consequentialist in its ethics (Betts & Loescher, 2011; Snyder, 2010).

The scholarly debate on refugee education correctly suggests that it is maintained within nation-states through dual existence strategies dictated by the nation-state’s internal political and economic interests and promoting its external image by providing service provision for the refugees (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). For the latter interest, states do not entirely stop education services for the refugees, but for the earlier interest, states arbitrarily limit refugee education. Such segregation is made possible by the creation of refugee camps. While humanitarian organizations such as the UNHCR supported this idea for the sake of efficient management of humanitarian services to the refugee population, states insisted on such arrangements to keep refugees separate from the national population and pass the financial responsibilities of refugee maintenance to the global community and most importantly intend to justify limited state services to the refugees (Reilly & Niens, 2014).

States could present refugees as unfit for national education by isolating them from nationals and keeping them under prolonged limited education services, leading to a structural policy for refugees to attend education separate from residents (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Such policies leave the refugee solely dependent on humanitarian agencies, which remains

complicated in most refugee-hosting states. States refer to the “risk” of refugee assimilation into the host society by educating the refugees in the host country’s education system (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Rösch & Lebow, 2018). Therefore, states have strategies and policies to keep refugees from national education. Refugees are then allowed only informal primary education to prepare them for a quick return to their country of origin.

Realist management of refugee education in Bangladesh

Refugees, by definition, usually do not have the necessary documentation to establish their identity or possess valid travel documents. However, they are eligible for international protection according to international laws due to their well-founded fear of persecution. But in practice, state authorities generally ignore these conditions and rob refugees of their rights because they lack proper documentation (Carens, 2016; Kukathas, 2016). In modern state systems, accessing formal education requires identity documentation, which many refugees do not have, making them illegal in the host state and ineligible for formal education (Milton et al., 2017).

According to the Constitution, education in Bangladesh is reserved for citizens and those with legal residence only. However, the Rohingyas are structurally made ‘illegal’ by denying refugee status and also blocked from accessing Bangladeshi identity documents. Rohingyas are not given official birth certificates, a mandatory document for local school enrollment. In Bangladesh, citizenship provision is lined with human rights to refugee education. There is a possibility that refugees’ human rights to education are interpreted differently by the state’s political system, which may influence the Bangladeshi government’s policy decisions (Langlois, 2001). These assumptions need to be researched.

Haddad (2008) rightly described the situation as one where “refugees are generally both within and outside of the nation-state” (p. 7) to explain the tension between global international norms and local implementation strategies of the right to education. On the one hand, refugee education symbolizes global influence on nation-states. States admit refugees within their territory and then hand them over to multilateral organizations like UNHCR and UNICEF, which seek funds from international donors. But on the other hand, such arrangements exclude the refugees from a more comprehensive national mechanism. Meaning within the nation-states, mechanisms, and enforcement of refugees, education is circumvented by keeping the refugees out of such state systems. As a result, even though they remain within the nation-state system, refugees are frequently regarded as non-existent or out of state (Coleman & Dionisio, 2009; Davies, 2004).

Refugee education in Bangladesh is one of the ideal examples of such a situation. The whole refugee program in Bangladesh is under the administration of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR), which also includes refugee education. Refugees are not included in the national education planning prepared by the Ministry of Education (MoE), nor is the MoE involved in designing education for refugees. Therefore, the alternation of camp-based refugee education remains without national-level mechanisms and institutional enforcement and will continue to be unable to meet the national education standard and remain officially unrecognized (Davies, 2006; Mahmud & Mehelin, 2020).

Humanitarian organizations have been ‘tolerating’ such discrimination against refugees until now. Under state ignorance of human rights to education, humanitarian actors play a crucial role in protecting refugees’ rights; they also collaborate with donors and other relevant non-

state actors that patronize humanitarian support for the re refugee. However, this is not happening in the case of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, particularly regarding their right to education.

When refugees are managed under the guise of realistic humanitarianism, states tend to enact specific policies and laws that limit services to refugees while adhering to the bare minimum objective (D'Costa, 2012; Shohel, 2022). These political tactics are also used in Bangladesh. Applying realist humanitarianism, this study examines the factors that may influence state policy on excluding refugees from national education. It concludes that refugees' exclusive is purposely plotted by the state. Conversely, prolonged exclusion has generated local misunderstandings about refugees' human rights to education in Bangladesh and weakened the advocacy plans of humanitarian organizations.

Research Methodology

Research design

This study is built on interpretative phenomenological qualitative analysis. As one of the qualitative research methods, phenomenology was first conceptualized by Husserl in 1931 as a way of understanding the context through the lived experience of the people (research participants) and the inner meaning of their experiences (Husserl, 2012).

Scholars gradually found this method helpful in medical and social science studies, particularly chronic and consistent research problems. One of the best-known theorists in the field of phenomenology, van Manen (2016), explained this theory as gathering the lived experience of the research participants (phenomenology) and their interpretation (text). In other words, it is a process of extracting relevant text from the research participants' statements and converting it into data (Alase, 2017). This study was based on one of the most recent interpretative phenomenological qualitative research methods Smith et al. (2009) described as a "participant-oriented" method. Smith et al. argued that human experience is more than just a statement; it must be examined in light of the participants' backgrounds and context to determine the meanings people impose on it. How this examination is done largely depends on researchers' analytical skills; Smith et al. stated, "Making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretative engagement on the part of the listener or reader" (p. 35).

The study conducted an in-depth analysis of the research problem with a method that combines situation analysis (phenomenology) to explain why a particular problem (refugee exclusion in education) is occurring and knowledge analysis (epistemology) to explain how it is happening (which factors or individuals are influencing the problem). Through a qualitative research approach, this study examined the phenomenon of the violation of human rights in the education of Rohingyas refugees in Bangladesh while unpacking the perceptions and lived experiences of key informants. Given that this research sought to investigate "how the policies on refugee exclusion in education formulated and persist in the context of Bangladesh," it was appropriate to explore the key decision-making factors and how they work. This was challenging, as this research was not intending to prove that "refugees are excluded from education," but rather "why" they are excluded. To find an answer to this question, the study had to first understand how people (individuals, organizations, and

states) perceive refugees, education, and the relationship between refugees and education. Answering this question is not straightforward. Therefore, it was necessary to apply a method that allows analysis using perception, interpretation, subjectivities, and opinions, and research “objectivity” (non-bias) is reflected in the research findings (Iosifides, 2018).

Data generation and analysis are essential research techniques in qualitative research on forced migration. This technique allows the researcher to use their analytical skill of the subjective nature of the study, which refers to the ‘interpretation skill’ (Feldman, 2011; Luttrell, 2000). Within this study, after the data were collected from the key informants, the study explained the data, or, in other words, the study generated data by using the researcher’s intellectual assumptions, contextual knowledge, and political and personal perspectives on the world. This author’s professional experience working in the refugee camp for over 15 years was the ground for creating this reflexivity in the data generation process.

Data collection and analysis techniques

The study used two research tools for data collection: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis research refers to reviewing the literature with relevant information recorded in texts, media, or physical items. This research reviewed and analyzed documents like policy briefs, journal articles, local and international organizations’ reports, human rights organizations’ reports, newspaper reports, statistics, charts, etc. The researcher attempted to extract relevant concepts and theories explained in the texts through this review. In the management of literature and the analysis of its documents, coding approaches (coding the keywords in the text) and analytical methods (cognitive approaches such as who noted and what organizational perspectives) were used (Geddes et al., 2018; Thomas, 2006). This analysis then helped the researcher validate some of these findings through further interviews.

The study purposively selected thirty-five key informants who had either direct involvement in policymaking, such as policymakers, political leaders, and government staff, then the group who may influence government policy decisions, like local political leaders, community leaders, humanitarian organizations, and the local host community, and finally the group who are impacted by or the sufferers of state policies, which are the refugees. This study gathered views on refugee education from each set of these key informants and analyzed how they create links and influence policy decisions.

After gathering the required data, the researcher carefully reviewed all interview transcripts, additional notes, recordings, and other referral documents. Recurring features in the interviews were highlighted, sorted, and grouped into sections. An interpretative method was used to analyze the research problem through the unique interpretation of each subject’s experience in their world. By analyzing the interviewees’ views, experiences, and arguments together with the context, condition, and circumstances of their lives, the research attempted to interpret the research findings to explain the research questions – what factors have shaped the policies of the Bangladeshi government towards refugees and why those factors are influential.

Table 1: Profile and Number of Key Informant Interviews

No	Profile	Number of interviews
1	Government officials, Policy makers/Politicians	5
2	Host community (local village leaders)	5
3	Humanitarian Organizations (UN, I/NGOs)	9
4	Civil Society (Academia, Human rights organizations, Journalist)	5
5	Refugees	11
	Total	35

Table 2: Refugee Participants' Profile

No	Profile	Age /years	Gender	Education (informal/ community/ refugee camp school)	Country of Origin	Current Location refugee camp in Bangladesh	Length of stay in Bangladesh
1	Community leader	45	F	Grade 10	Myanmar	Kutupalong RC	29 years (Since 1992)
2	Refugee parent	40	F	Grade 10	Myanmar	Camp 24	21 years (Since 2000)
3	Community leader	62	M	Grade 10	Myanmar	Nayapara RC	29 years (Since 1992)
4	Refugee youth	24	M	Grade 10	Myanmar	Nayapara RC	24 years (Born in a refugee camp in 1997)
5	Refugee teacher	40	M	Grade 10	Myanmar	Kutupalong RC	29 years (Since 1992)
6	Community leaders	45	M	Grade 10	Myanmar	Camp 4	4 years (Since 2017)
7	Community leaders	42	F	Grade 10	Myanmar	Nayapara RC	29 years (Since 1992)
8	Refugee teacher	26	F	Grade 10	Myanmar	Nayapara RC	26 years (Born in a refugee camp in 1995)
9	Refugee parent	52	M	Grade 5	Myanmar	Kutupalong RC	29 years (Since 1992)
10	Refugee parent	28	F	Grade 8	Myanmar	Nayapara RC	28 years (Born in a refugee camp in 1993)
11	Community leader	42	M	Grade 10	Myanmar	Camp 23	5 years (Since 2016)

Limitations

One of the limitations of the research design can be the small sample size, which cannot be presented as a rational representation. Still, as the study moved on and I kept reviewing the data gathered from the respondents, I realized that I needed to seek the opinion of diversified

sources rather than more people from the same source. For example, the nuance of all refugee informants was similar but quite different than the host community. Hence as a process of seeking answers to research questions, I focused more on diverse data sources than measuring the quantity.

Ethical considerations

Primary data collection commenced after the ethical research protocol developed for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Mahidol University under Protocol No. IPSR-IRB-2021-170, as this study was part of a Ph.D. thesis. Key informants were informed of the research rationale and objectives and the potential risks and benefits of their participation through informed consent conducted before interviews. The informed consent was collected in a written consent form. To safeguard the identity of participants, sometimes fake names were used in the interview process. Interview questions were asked in Bengali, Rohingya, and English as appropriate for the participants. No interpretation service is required as the principal researcher was proficient in all three languages.

Positionality statement

As mentioned before, in interpretative analysis, the research holds the critical task of understanding the statements made by each data source and generating philosophical meaning from them. This is a challenging task. To make the data set relatively flawless and meaningful, I tried to provide as much detail as possible about the data sources to make the study authentic and credible. To reduce biases toward data and results that only support their hypotheses or arguments, I conducted a validation exercise with some participants and with some new participants before putting the data in the study. This validation procedure helped to eliminate authors' bias in the most comprehensive way possible.

Research findings and analysis: Refugee education paradox in Bangladesh

Refugees' position within the nation-states is the conceptual starting point of this research because it defines the limits of their opportunities to access education and ultimately keeps them suppressed within the humanitarian biosphere. This study identified four key aspects of the policy of refugee exclusion in education in Bangladesh:

The divergence between the refugees and service providers

The key informants discussed why Bangladesh's government formulated such policies on refugee education. It was found from the field research that government policies on refugee education have influenced most of the other stakeholders, including the host community, and vice versa.

The political ideology of upholding nationalism through citizens has been a noticeable reflection on the voice of government representatives and local politicians consulted for this study. This narrative recognizes that Rohingyas are discriminated against, suppressed, and

persecuted inside Myanmar. In parallel, they present their prejudices, labeling the Rohingyas as economic migrants who have fled persecution and imposed undue pressure on Bangladesh's job markets and social structure. Such narratives indicate the realist fear of considering refugees as victims and opportunists, a burden and security threat to the host country (Mahmud & Mehelin, 2020; Shohel, 2022). This narrative is convenient to the pragmatic humanitarianism that empathizes with the suffering of the Rohingyas as long as they stay inside Myanmar but defames the needs of the same group of people when they seek asylum at the state border. Such a realist (or contradicting) attitude ultimately generates unfair policies and practices for refugees. Policymakers argue that denying refugee status to the Rohingya is the right approach to control migration influx. Giving the Rohingyas shelter is enough to save their lives and what they seek. There is neither clarity nor a shared understanding of refugees and human rights.

This group of key informants expressed three key concerns: 1. Refugees are non-citizens, so they should not demand similar services as citizens; 2. They are temporary residents. It will not be helpful for them to get access to Bangladesh's national education; and 3. If Rohingyas are given access to formal education, it can be a pull factor to bring more Rohingyas to Bangladesh and send a message to the world that Bangladesh is locally integrating the Rohingyas, and repatriation may be hindered. One senior government official stated that,

"Rohingyas are the world's burden, not Bangladesh's alone. So, there should not be any formal services like education for them in Bangladesh."

(GO-02, September 9, 2021)

In Bangladesh, political parties come with specific 'party ideology' influences state education policy, which works as a 'push factor' for the government to practice its 'realistic' refugee management strategies by keeping the refugees away from the overall nation-building process. Therefore, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are kept out of national education structurally in every possible way, such as by preventing access to a birth certificate and Bangladeshi citizenship and restricting the use of national curricula in the refugee camp education program.

Politicians' and bureaucrats' narratives on refugee education suggest that including refugees in formal education in Bangladesh can threaten the state. Therefore, this is a careful political decision of the state. The state claims that Rohingyas are "ineligible" for formal education to justify this political philosophy. Critically though, political sentiments flow both ways, from bottom-up and up-bottom, meaning local anti-refugee sentiment can influence state decisions, and simultaneously, government decisions and policies can build specific beliefs among the masses. This has been happening in maintaining refugees in Bangladesh. The following section providing the narratives of other key informants, will help us understand how these narratives are linked, influence policy decisions and hamper refugee education.

The local host community narrative plays a significant role in policy decisions, particularly in protracted refugee situations such as the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. The host community is the one who faces the brunt of the refugee influx. They sometimes radically express themselves. This narrative, in a way, informs "national narratives and policies" as an intricate body of politics, as mentioned above, such as how prolonged government policies may transform into public belief or vice-versa (Guhathakurta, 2017).

While comparing the host community narratives and government strategies, it is evident that the government and the public attitude towards refugees reciprocally influence each other, ultimately developing discriminatory policies and local myths about refugees. Seeing the government's restriction on refugee education, local people tend to believe that "refugees have different human rights" or "the government has fulfilled refugees' human right to education by allowing minimum education."

Academics within Cox's Bazar district support the government's prejudice against Rohingyas mingling with the local Bangladeshi community, and allowing national education may increase security risks for the state.

"Giving Rohingyas access to national education means that we will train them to become citizens of Bangladesh. This could be particularly risky."

(AC-01, November 19, 2021)

Humanitarian agencies seem to be in a dilemma between government policies and the mandated duties that they are committed to. This researcher talked with some senior staff working in various agencies on refugee education programs in Bangladesh. They concluded that prolonged government restrictions have developed "a sense of acceptance" among agencies. The head of curriculum development of the refugee education program of one of the INGOs stated that,

"Refugees are international citizens, so we are trying to develop a curriculum that they can use anywhere in the world."

(HO-02, October 12, 2021)

In response to the question about official recognition, staff stated that they have no plan to seek Bangladesh government recognition for refugee education, as they must follow government guidelines to develop refugee-appropriate curricula. Some staff seems to be influenced by the concept of minimum education for refugees as one NGO staff stated,

"Refugees should get refugee-appropriate education, and that is why we are developing education in Burmese curricula."

(HO-06, November 30, 2021)

In response to a question about how they manage donors for such temporary education while the global funding appeal has failed to raise funds for education due to the temporary nature of education, one United Nations staff member stated,

"We must first secure that we are allowed to work in the refugee camps, and we are trying to negotiate with donors that globally it takes ages to get refugees into national education."

(HO-04, October 23, 2021)

All of the statements above make one thing clear. At the same time, it is ideal for humanitarian organizations to influence the government on refugee human rights, as most organizations

choose to go with the flow of government, which is nothing more than a realist humanitarianism strategy.

Discussing the refugee narrative at the end would now help us understand the real divergence between the perception of the refugees and the service providers. The following are the most striking opinion of this study, which sums up this divergence.

"We are deprived of education in Bangladesh just because we are refugees. I believe that the fear of accessing Bangladeshi citizenship through Bangladeshi education does not make sense; it is just a political statement to make the world muddled."

(ROH-03, October 2, 2021)

In response to the current arrangement of refugee education, one of the female refugee community leaders and mother of four said,

"Education is one of the programs for which we are never consulted. The agency staff ask us where to install a tube well to access surface water, but they never ask what education I want for my children."

(ROH-01, September 25, 2021)

While answering a question on appropriate education for refugees, one refugee teacher said,

"We need official education. The Bangladesh government wants to introduce Burmese curricula here, but the Bangladesh government would not be able to recognize education in other countries curricula. This is not to prepare us for return but to prove us illegal in Bangladesh. We cannot access education here because we are illegal here."

(ROH-05, October 18, 2021)

Reacting to the government's fear of refugees attempting to integrate locally if educated in Bengali curricula, other refugee leaders said,

"Refugees are biometrically registered here. So, we cannot be integrated by ourselves unless there is corruption in the system. If you ask about mingling with the local Bangladeshi community, then it doesn't matter whether refugees are getting an education or not. We speak the same language, practice the same religion, and even prepare the same cuisine. Who can stop mingling refugees and the locals when they share food and cross by the same road every day?"

(ROH-02, September 30, 2021)

From the refugee narrative, it is evident that refugees are aware of their inferiority and inability to claim education as a right and conscious of the importance of education in their life, which may also enable them to contribute to the host state.

Education and reification of refugee status as separate from the nationals

According to the findings of this study, the most critical aspect of the refugee education problem in Bangladesh was the lack of general agreement or understanding of education as a human right for refugees, just as it is for nationals. There seemed to be some denunciation, confusion, and dilemma surrounding understanding human rights to education and refugees' claim of this right. Among the key informants, refugees raised their concerns about being deprived of education as one of their human rights. Still, the policymakers denounced the idea of equal educational opportunity for the refugees.

Two key arguments defend the state's position on limiting refugees' access to education: 1. "Refugees are receiving the education to which they are entitled, so their right to education is being met"; and 2. "Refugees should not have equal access to education as nationals." However, fundamental contradictions were observed between state policy and practice because if refugees are already "ineligible" for national education, why do additional measures, such as denying refugee status, blocking birth registration, and changing citizenship laws, are needed to be developed to prevent refugees from attending national education? Such an attitude indicates that calling the refugees "ineligible" is one of the purposive state strategies, and therefore additional policy measures are adopted" to validate this viewpoint.

Such state policy then generates some "confusion" among the masses. Almost all of the individuals interviewed in this study from the host community refer to government policy and argue that refugees cannot or should not be integrated into national education. In explaining the reasons behind this belief, the host community argues that as a non-citizen, refugees are not eligible for national education, and there prevails a local belief that "the refugees will be Bangladeshi citizens if they study in Bangladeshi school." Host community opinions are invaluable. They are generally socially constructed and influenced by public policy and vice versa. Particularly in the refugee context, the adjacent local community faces the actual effect of the influx.

The host community represents the state political body, and their reaction informs the overall national narrative, policies, and strategies. Local beliefs developed through their lived experience and the general information available to them, and on the other hand, their collective opinions influenced state policies. This is precisely what has been found in this study. The data gathered in this study from the host community members indicated that local people lacked an understanding of human rights to education and their link with refugees, whom the locals prefer to call "non-citizens." While state policy practices influence public belief, public opinion also exerts pressure on state policy over time. Host community opinion indicates that some anti-refugee sentiments are developing that impact social cohesion and state policy decisions, particularly on educational access for the refugees.

Finally, the role of humanitarian organizations presents another problematic horizon, as they seem to struggle to balance global commitment and local pressure. The data gathered from humanitarian organizations indicated a "dilemma," as they were neither firm enough to build on strong advocacy for equal education opportunities for the refugees nor argue that the currently limited education is effective. One critical observation of this study was that there is divergence among the humanitarian organizations. Some agency staff thought that the quality of alternative education should improve as the refugees need to prepare for repatriation. Still,

some interviewees felt that, although merging refugees into national education is the most feasible solution, such a thing is very complicated.

This study concludes that humanitarian organizations make insufficient efforts to protect education as a human right for refugees. Humanitarian organizations have failed to generate awareness that refugees are a set of individual human beings. They are not anonymous people; instead, they are vibrantly visible due to their cause of persecution. Refugees are made unique by the reification process, where they are called “special,” “extraordinary,” or just “the others,” but that cannot change their fundamental right to education. So, the outcome of providing education to the refugee children will be the same as for the national children; they should develop their individual lives and contribute to society.

The proliferation of the humanitarian response model paradigm

Education for refugees is seen as a humanitarian response in Bangladesh, thus designed based on the pre-migration experiences of the refugees, referring to violence and discrimination that caused trauma among the refugees. But scholars have argued that segregated education can increase post-migration experiences like racism, poverty, isolation, and violence, which refugee children are forced to experience due to arbitrary state policies (Adelman et al., 2019; Rutter, 2006; Zino, 2019). In Bangladesh, refugee education programs lack sustainability in planning and future aspirations. There seems to be no connection with any durable solution plan, with no initiative to merge into national education and no prospect of repatriation or third-country resettlement. Furthermore, humanitarian organizations have struggled for decades to agree on a standard informal education curriculum for refugees and provide a humanitarian response education model.

Refugees, humanitarian agencies, academics, and host community leaders have highlighted two significant flaws in the current humanitarian response education model for refugees: 1. Complete ignorance of each child’s potential. As such, the ethos of refugee education design is the traumatic portrait of the refugee, who is provided education support to eliminate trauma but not as an opportunity for gradual individual development. 2. Camp-based education certainly fails to make any positive impact on pupils’ lives. As a refugee parent said,

“My son does not want to go to school, and I can see why, as he does not learn new things from the school. This education is not for us to develop; it’s for the agencies to show their work.”

(RO-10, December 15, 2021)

Ignorance of education as a tool for development

Refugees almost rely entirely on aid services, as they are not formally permitted to engage in income-generating activities. Moreover, due to illiteracy and low skills, most refugees are only eligible for physical labor and related income opportunities (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2019). It can be assumed that if no concrete measure is taken, it will be even more difficult for Bangladesh to maintain refugee populations, which is already referred to as a burden by the government (The Business Standard, 2021; Post et al., 2019).

As indicated in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh 2018 study, one of the critical considerations was that in Bangladesh, the service need of the refugees and the local host community in Cox's Bazar district were almost similar (United Nations Development Programme, 2018), because Cox's Bazar district holds the poorest illiteracy rate in the country (Inter Sector Coordination Group [ISCG], 2019). According to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education Bangladesh Report, the school intake rate of the district in 2017 was 73% boys and 69% girls, compared to 98% nationwide. Still, the district showed the highest school dropout rate at 31.2%, compared to the national average of 19.2% (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education [MoPME], 2017).

In conjunction with the poor quality, current refugee management has impacted the local education system. Several thousand learning centers have been built inside camps for separate education arrangements, and the largest proportion of teaching staff is taken from the local community. This has exacerbated the challenges already facing the local education system. While considering the current education situation in Cox's Bazaar district, it is undeniable that its education needs special improvement support. Merging refugees into the national education system can be the most efficient way to simultaneously address the education needs of the locals and the refugees. The government, development investors, and humanitarian forces must join and collaborate. If the government allows refugees access to national education, development donors can help improve the infrastructure, and humanitarian donors can support providing training to teachers and education staff, and refugees. Such humanitarian-development coherence can result in a win-win situation for state governments.

Conclusion

Bangladesh has been persistently declining formal education for refugees. Therefore, it is critical to understand the state politics behind such a stand and the factors that may influence state policy on excluding refugees from national education. This article intended to analyze the political management of refugee education and concludes that the current refugee education arrangement has generated local misunderstanding on refugees' human rights to education in Bangladesh. This has therefore provoked a state policy of exclusion that has been static for decades, weakening the advocacy planning of humanitarian organizations. When refugees are managed under the prevue of realistic humanitarianism, states tend to adopt specific policies and laws through which the state can limit the services to the refugees and follow its objective of the bare minimum (D'Costa, 2012). These political tactics are also applied in Bangladesh. To block the refugees in national education, the state has blocked the refugees from accessing documentation that is the standard requirement to access education. Refugees are purposely denied "refugee status" and made illegal so that the state finds ways to argue in favor of limited educational arrangements for refugees.

Education is directly linked with development, and excluding refugees in national development planning in protracted situations can affect the overall development in any context (Lee, 2013; Zeus, 2011). The data referred to in this discussion indicates that refugees are utterly detached from national development plans in Bangladesh. Refugees are isolated and forced to prepare for repatriation as the only solution suggested by the government (Karim, 2020). Refugees under alternative education cannot merge into mainstream education, generally do not continue long-term systematic education, and, ultimately, cannot contribute to the overall development (Lerch & Buckner, 2018; Shuayb, 2019).

Refugees in Bangladesh should be included in the national education policy. The provision of additional preparatory support to make refugees fit for national education should also be considered in policy decisions. Bangladesh needs other financial aid to ensure the refugees and the local community have access to quality education. Therefore, a collaborative approach combining humanitarian assistance with a national development plan may help develop the infrastructure of national education facilities in the locale. This will not only aid in the more systematic management of refugees, but it may also improve the general perception of refugees, which was found to be negative in the study. However, it is also necessary to investigate more about what may be the significant challenges for incorporating refugees into national education in Bangladesh. In achieving this, we will gain more clarity on key requirements for refugees and be able to design policy provisions more efficiently, including estimating additional support that the state may require if we listen more to refugee opinions. As one refugee stated:

"We are teased as 'human burden,' but this can only be lessened if we are allowed to transform ourselves as 'human resources' by education and training."

(RO-11, December 20, 2021)

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