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STUDENT-REFUGEES EXPERIENCES IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO ACCESS EDUCATION IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Refugees experience a number of constraints given the fact that they are in a foreign land, notably, access to education and health among others. Refugees are confined within the camps hence limited access to higher education. Technology has been embraced in all spheres of life including education. It has enabled access to education regardless of geographical location. In this regard, Kenyatta University has embraced use of technology via e-learning to promote access, inclusivity and equity in higher education among the refugees in Kenya. The survey was carried out to establish students' refugees' experiences in the use of technology to access higher education to inform policy. Data was collected from a cohort student's refugees enrolled in Bachelor of Education (Arts) Program. A questionnaire and documentary evidence were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approach. The study revealed the main challenges as lack of technological support and interaction with the faculty members. Major benefits listed included access to education by female students and chances of employment in their country. The study recommended use of enhanced technological tools to support e-learning such as video conferencing facility and mobile application to access learning materials.

Keyword: E-learning, Higher Education, ICT, Refugees, Student Experiences, Technology,

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology has been embraced in all spheres of life including education. It has enabled access to education regardless of geographical location. Ferris and Winthrop (2010) and Kirk (2011) observe that education is a priority for refugee families across the globe where children are disrupted through violence. Refugees experience a number of constraints such as proper health, opportunity to express their feelings, wishes, experiences and access to education, unequal gender relations, lack of sufficient resources, ICT skills, lack of basic human rights, language barriers (Hek, 2005 Zeus, 2009; Bher Report 2011); among others. In Kenya, access to basic education is a human right. This lays foundation in transitioning to higher education. However, Refugees in Kenya are unable to transit from basic levels of education to institutions of higher learning which are hardly available in the refugee camps. Sustainable development goal number 4 hopes to ensure inclusivity and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. This cannot be achieved without meeting the educational needs of vulnerable populations by 2030. According to UNHCR report the vulnerable population includes refugees, forcibly displaced people and stateless persons (UNHCR, 2016). In this regard, Kenyatta University has embraced use of technology via e-learning to promote access, inclusivity and equity in education among the refugees in Kenya. The study therefore focused on the refugees experiences in accessing education through e-learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education is key in the production of skilled manpower for economic growth and development of a nation. According to UNHCR (2016) report, it acknowledges that there are 16.1 million refugees worldwide under UNHCR mandate. More than a half are children and 6million are primary and secondary children school going –age (UNHCR, 2016). This means that there is a dire need for higher education for refuges for continuity. As the number of forcibly displaced by conflict and violence increases, naturally demand for higher education upsurges and the resources in the country are overstretched. Therefore e-learning fills this gap. In addition, the report ((UNHCR, 2016) acknowledges that out of the 6million primary and secondary school-age refugees that are under UNHCR'S mandate 3.7 million do not go to school and only 50 percent access primary school education as opposed to a global level that is at 90 percent. Only 22 percent of refuge adolescents attend lower secondary school while 84 percent of their counterparts' non-refugees attend the same level of education. This therefore shows high level inequity in access for secondary education by the refugees who later joins the university. This group of refugees need not be wasted. Instead, online learning has opened doors for higher education to refugees.

According to a work shop conference report held in Kampala Uganda on the provision of higher education for refugees in Dadaab camps based on education Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) in 2011, the project overall goal was to design an on-line or on-site higher education courses and degree programs for refugees in the Dadaab refugee camps, as well as for Kenyan students in the remote Dadaab area (BHER Workshop Report, 2011). It also aimed at improving access to higher education for refugees in the Dadaab camps and citizens of the host country who live in the region. It brought together 23 stake holders who recognized that education is not only a right but that it supports the production of the higher-order capacity necessary for promoting peace, security and development in sites of historical and current geo-political and cultural conflict (BHER, 2011). The partners included: York University (YU), the University of Alberta (UA), University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), Windle Trust Kenya (WTK), the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), the African Virtual University (AVU), the Refugee Education Trust (RET), the UNHCR (Dadaab, Kenya), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), the Ministry of Education (Kenya) and Kenyatta University (KU). The provision by Kenyatta University ODEL campus at Daadab enhances access to, quality of, education of both local Kenyans and to a large population of the refugees. This is due to the mode of study that is open and flexible to a larger population of the refugees and to BHER partners.

This workshop had been preceded by another work shop that had been hosted by Centre for Refugee Studies at York University in 2010 that was entitled 'Borderless Education: The Provision of Higher Degree Programs to Long-term Refugees" funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC) and York University'. It was meant to bring together all the stakeholders who were all committed to issues of higher education for refugees. The stake holders included international and interdisciplinary researchers, academics, practitioners and graduates students. As a result, this workshop became the promoter for activity and collective action around this important issue BHER report 2011. Refugees face a lot of challenges and huge risks despite the fact that they have skills, ideas, hopes and dreams. Some of these challenges include: Language barriers, sustainability, lack of sufficient resources and infrastructure, limited access to rights and un-equal gender relations. Others include lack of ICT skills and language requirements (BHER 2011).

Besides, others concerns includes pedagogical deficiencies on the side of the teachers which include, lesson planning, teaching skills and curriculum. Despite the fact that universities are associated with freedom i.e academic freedom or freedom of thought and speech, refugees are 'unfree' for many spend most of their time camps or exile where restrictions are placed on their basic rights and freedom (Barbara Zeus, 2009).This study focused on establishing the challenges experienced by student refuges in accessing education through e-learning mode, A case of Burmese Refugees study was carried out in Thailand on Exploring Paradoxes around Higher Education in Protracted Refugee Situations**.** The study explored three main paradoxes underlying Higher Education in Protracted Refugee (Barbara Zeus, 2009).Some of the paradox included basic relief for refugees on the one hand and developmental efforts for higher education on the other. Besides, another paradox revolved around ways refugees are commonly perceived as victims of war and conflict who are unable to cope with the challenges of higher education. The study concluded that higher education could be both a means and a refugee empowerment. To this end, the current study agrees on the same but focused on refugee students experience on the use of technology in learning.

According to UNHCR report (2016) more than half of the world's out-of-school refugee children are located in just seven countries: Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Pakistan and Turkey and Kenya. This means that the vast majority of the world's refugees 86 per cent are hosted in developing regions, with more than a quarter in the world's least developed countries. However, besides primary and secondary education, Kenya has opened doors for higher education for the refugees where Kenyatta University is one of the leading actors in the use of technology to gain access. The report (UNHCR, 2016) notes that some of the countries like Chad, Lebanon, Islamic republic of Iran, Lebanon, Rwanda and Uganda refugees' inclusion is well established. For example either camps, community schools or national schools administered by the relevant ministry of education. To this end, Kenyatta University has opened doors to the refugees in higher education for inclusion purposes.

According to UNHCR report (2015) as quoted in UNHCR (2016), only 1 percent of refugee youth go to university as opposed to 34 percent of the youth around the world who go to the university UNHCR (2014) as quoted in UNHCR (2016) report. Yet, highly educated refugees can become leaders in their communities. However, this number may increase given that Universities around the world are increasingly using the internet and technology and facilitate online learning where refugees can study from any part of the camp or country. A study carried out in Australia in 2011 on Hard Yards and High Hopes: The Educational Challenges of African Refugee University Students in Australia. The study gathered the experience of a small group of young adults, who were born in Africa. They had entered Australia under the humanitarian entry program. They were enrolled in tertiary education. The study was carried out at a South Australian university where it investigates the expectations and experiences of these

students and the associated teaching staff (Vandra Harris, RMIT University and Jay Marlowe, 2011). The student's body comprised of a diverse group of individuals. Their educational success was equally varied. However, in focus groups many of the students revealed a range of pressures such as challenges adapting to new educational contexts, difficult home environments for study and high community expectations. In addition, the respondents (students) narrated a mixed educational experience with staff as they interfaced with practical issues of seeking academic support, studying in another language and accessing study materials. Notably, they reflected the determination and self-reliance that has brought them to a point; they could primarily speak of academic success as their own responsibility, besides, their best support being other students from the same background. This study focused on the level of use of ICT in interactivity by the student to their instructors. It also established other challenges and possible solutions (Vandra et al., 2011).

Another study that was carried out in the University of Manitoba investigated the Educational Needs and Barriers for diverse African Refugee Students in two inner-city high schools in Manitoba in 2008.The respondents were two principals, four parents, eight teachers Forty African refugee students and four community leaders. There were five focus groups, school and classroom observations and individual interviews that were used to collect data. The findings revealed that economic psychosocial and academic challenges facing African refugee students poorly affected their ability to integrate and cope well in school. As a result, this significantly reduced their socioeconomic opportunities. The study recommended policy implications and urgent reform measures such as forgiveness of refugee resettlement loans and better housing in safer neighborhoods are suggested (YattaKanu, 2008).

A study conducted by Arar et. al., (2018) on Arab World Refugee challenges in Higher education; The Case of Syrian Refugee Students in Jordan Arab World refugee challenges in higher education: The case of Syrian Refugee Students in Jordan analyzed how higher education institutions particularly in Jordan in the Arab world dealt with challenges of higher education provision. Models, approaches and trends related to the various attempts of coping up with the challenges mainly hindering higher education access to refugees. The findings showed that Syrian Refugee Students coped with many difficulties in Jordan as did to those student refugees in Arab different communities in Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. However, the study recommended the need to improve student refugees access higher education institutions and provide academic success and optimal assimilation.

In North America and Europe, a study was done by Stretwieser et.al.,(2018) that established the interventions that can be put in place to reduce barriers to higher education for the refugees living there. This involved the examination and analysis of the various interventions host governments, non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions among others have put in place. The diversity of the interventions were different in terms of the method of delivery ,the size, the focus, limited online learning opportunity or language for the higher education credited programs. Further the extent of support was examined. The study revealed that there were significant problems that included credit transfer, lack of living expenses even where full scholarship was provided.

In Kenya a study was conducted on the Influx of Somali Refugees and State Security: Kenya as a Case Study (2002-2012) by Ali (2013).The study sought to answer several questions: to establish key features of influx of Somali refugees and state security. To determine whether Kenya government policies are guided by principles of international law in its relations refugees, to investigate the security issues caused by Somali refugees in the country and to assess how and why the Somali refugee are connected to terrorism. The study recommends further research on governments need to develop effective regulation in curbing the influx of Somali refugees into the country, as they are proving to be a security nuisance. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The targeted population consisted of refugees themselves, host communities and government officials. Data was collected primarily via interviews. However, this study used questionnaires and respondents were bachelor of education students in Dadaab campus in the year 2017.

In addition in Kenya, a study conducted by Muhammed (2010) sought to establish the challenges faced by the refugees and their influence on socio-economic development of the local community Daadab camps in North Eastern Kenya in Garrisa with a view of suggesting intervention measures Kenya and non-governmental organizations would put in place. The study revealed that the major problems faced by refugees were insecurity, inadequate supply of food, lack of income, diseases and congestion among other factors. The study concluded that the major problems were high population and lack of income. This high population has a population eligible to access higher education and that the same time lacked income. The study failed to address the education access factors which this studies paid attention to.

3.   RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research has shown that there exists a positive relationship between education and development of a country. Development may be economic, social, political, agricultural, health and technological and innovation. Higher education is a focal point of knowledge where skilled human capital highly contributes to economic growth. Highly knowledgeable and skilled individuals get employment opportunities that allow them to earn higher incomes leading to better living standards. Sustainable development goal 4 hopes to ensure inclusivity, access and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. The refugees are not exceptional. Based on the feedback that this cohort of students gave while the researchers acted as the monitoring online teachers ,the survey was conducted to explore and establish the various challenges students experience with a view of informing policy makers in order to device ways of preventing these challenges, and to look for a lasting solutions. To this end, the study sought to establish refugee students' experiences on usage of technology, economic issues and student –teacher interaction levels. Studies on student's refugees have been carried out globally. They have mainly focused on the general challenges that refugee's face, for example socio-economic and language problem and the intervention that host countries have put to support the refugees. However, they fail to major their focus on Kenyan support for higher education online access. Further, other studies have majorly focused on the quality of primary and secondary education but giving little attention to higher education, the gap this study filled in.

4.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

4.1   Research Objectives

i.   The survey was carried out to establish Daadab's students' refugees' experiences in the use of technology to access higher education
ii.   Assess the Daadab's student refuges experiences in regards to economic issues and access to education
iii.   Assess the Daadab's student-teacher interaction in teaching and learning through e-learning as a mode of delivery
iv.   Find out challenges experienced by Daadab's student refuges in accessing education through e-learning mode,

4.2   Research Questions

i.   What experiences do Daadab's student refugees have in the use of technology to access education?
ii.   How do Daadab's students perceive the student-teacher interaction in delivery of education through e-learning mode?
iii.   What economic factors influence access to education by Daadab's student refugees?
iv.   How Daadab's students' refuges are affected by family and institutional factors in accessing education through e-learning?

5.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The exploratory study utilized a descriptive survey design. Data was collected from students refugees enrolled in Bachelor of Education (Arts) program where questionnaires were distributed to the students. A total of 43 questionnaires were distributed to the cohort of students. . Documentary evidence was also used to complement collect data. This was from Emails and short message service (SMS) notes arising from the interactions between students and the teacher. Data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approach and bar graphs were used to represent the data. The study area was in Daadab Centre of Kenyatta University which is a satellite campus near where refugee camps are based in Northern Kenya.

Results from the data collected were analyzed as per themes drawn from the objectives of the study. These were learner-teacher online interaction, economic factors, family issues, institutional issues and challenges. Other factors such as gender, age, marital status, employment status and monthly income of the student refugees was analyzed to enhance understanding of the refugees characteristics and draw conclusion about their experiences in use of technology for accessing education.

6. RESULTS

6.1 Participants' Characteristics

Respondent's characteristics as per gender, age, marital status, employment status and monthly income is as shown in Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4,
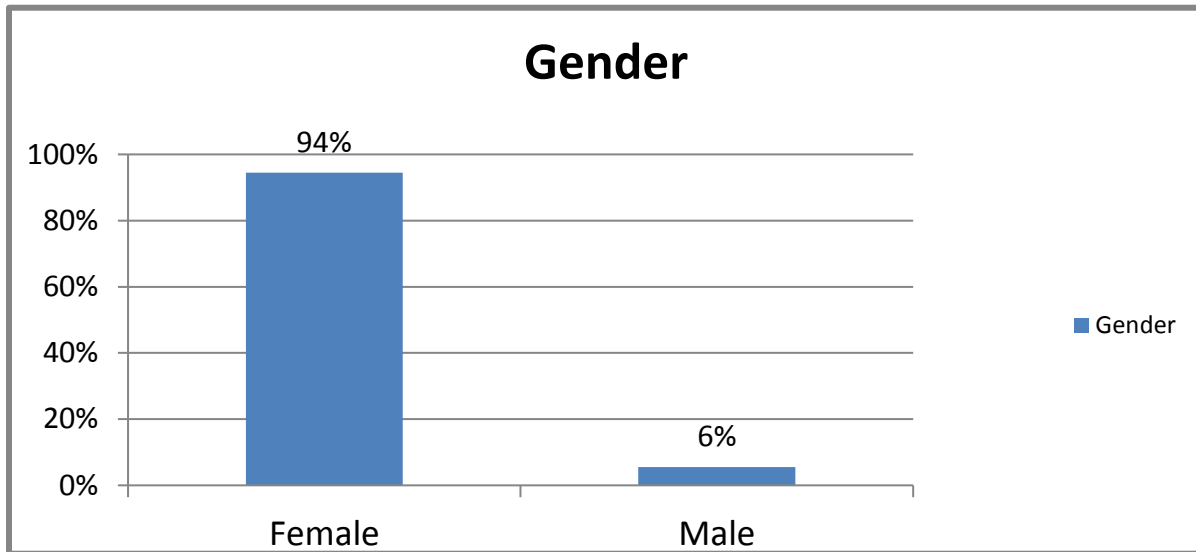
Figure1: Respondent's by Gender

From the data collected, 94% were male and only 6% were female. This therefore means gender equity and access to education is far from being realized among the refuges accessing education. This is in agreement with Republic of Kenya (2012) on gender inequity in marginalized arrears in Kenya.
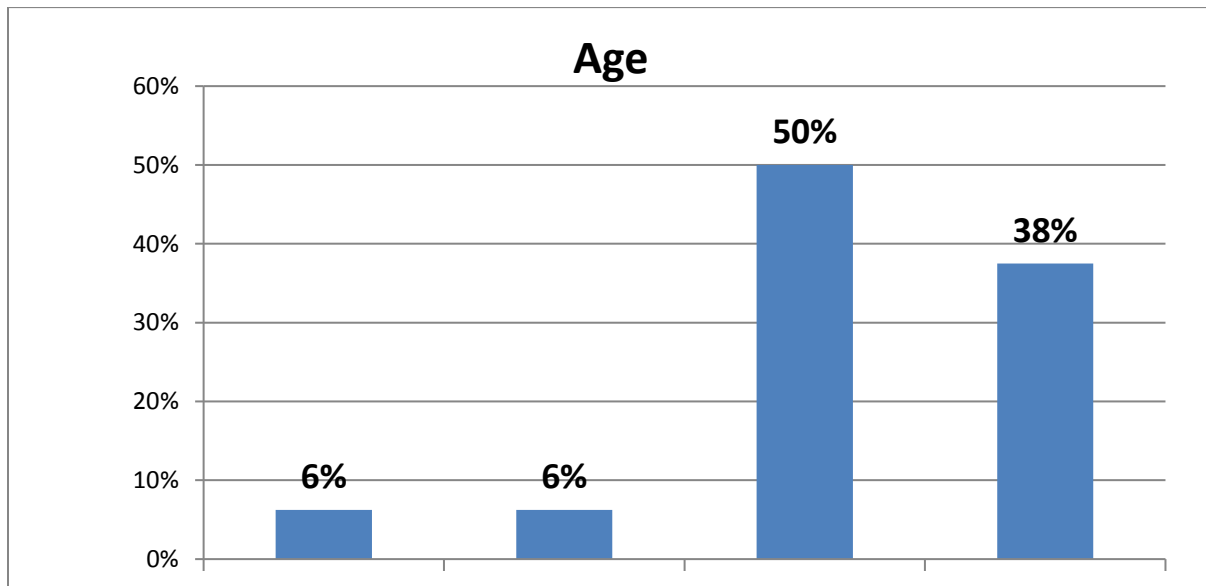
Figure 2: Respondent's by Age

Collected data revealed that majority at 94% were above the normal range of basic education going school learners. This could be explained by the fact that refugees face challenges in accessing basic education. In Kenya,

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the general legal age for university students is from 19-24year. However, due to challenges refugees face some may be over age. At the same time, the study observes that technology provided an opportunity for them to access higher education in Kenya.
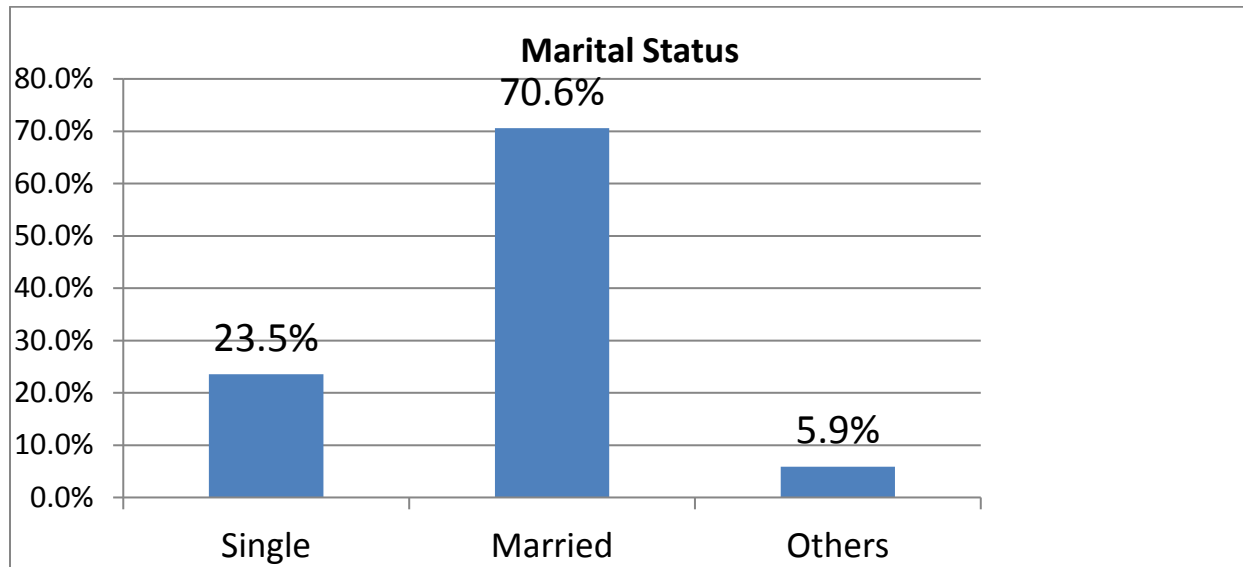
Figure 3: Respondent's Marital Status

Marital status has been cited as a factor that influence access to higher education (Egwualu , 2007, Amuda, 2016). Family responsibilities bring with it challenges to persons furthering their education. Despite the refugees having been given an opportunity to access education through e-learning, majority of them are married and therefore, this adds onto other challenges the refugees experience in accessing education.

6.2   Economic Status
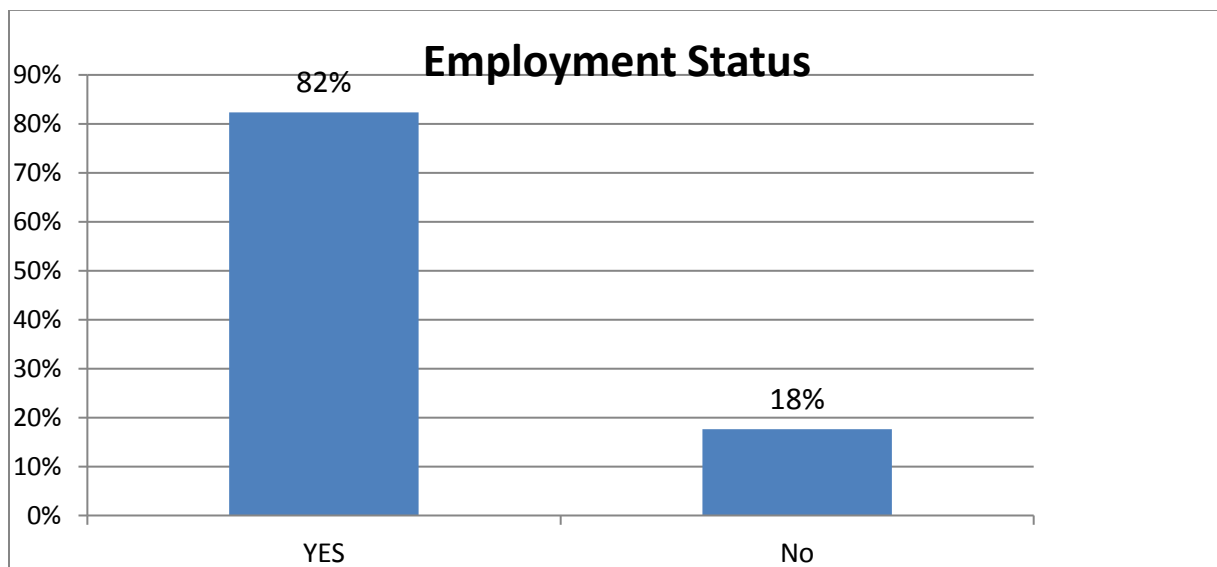
Figure 4: Employment Status

The study sought to find out whether the refugees have any form of employment. Majority, at 82% indicated they were employed and only 18% indicated they were not employed. Although majority was employed, majority at

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76.4% earned less that Ksh. 20,000. This income is hardly enough to sustain a family as majority of the students were married as sown in Figure 3. This meant majority relied on well-wishers to support their education as shown in figure 6.
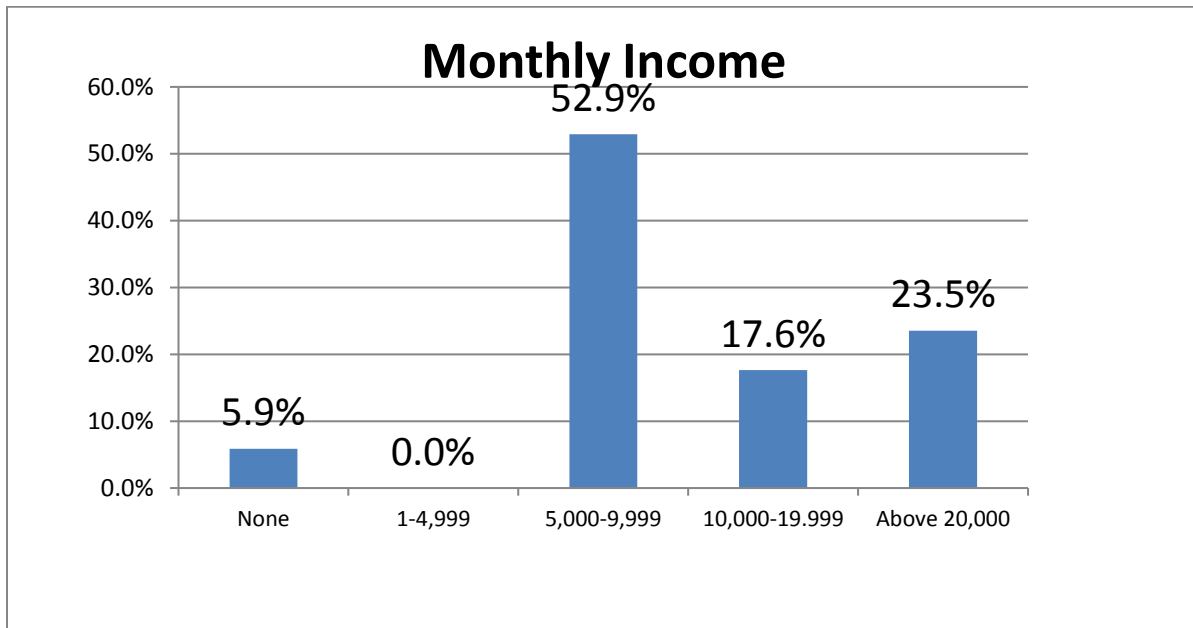
Figure 5: Monthly Income

Source of funds to support education determine to a great extent achievement of education goals. Without funds where education is not offered free, or where a learner may need financial support to take care of education needs, then many of those who would be willing to gain education may miss out this opportunity. Besides, this challenge, refugees are faced with a myriad of other challenges such as lack of support from extended families and other government bodies to support education. Thus, majority at 82% had scholarships to support their education and only a few at 12% indicated they supported education from their own salary.
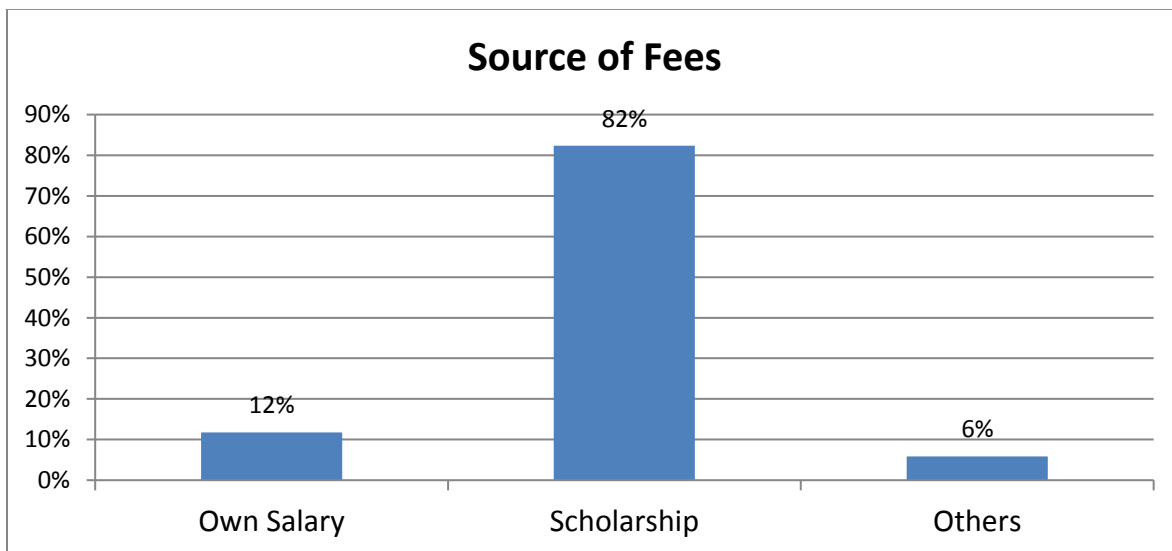
Figure 6: Source of Fees

6.3   Online Interaction

An effective e-learning environment requires the learner and the teachers to have regular interactions. The findings are as shown in Figure 7
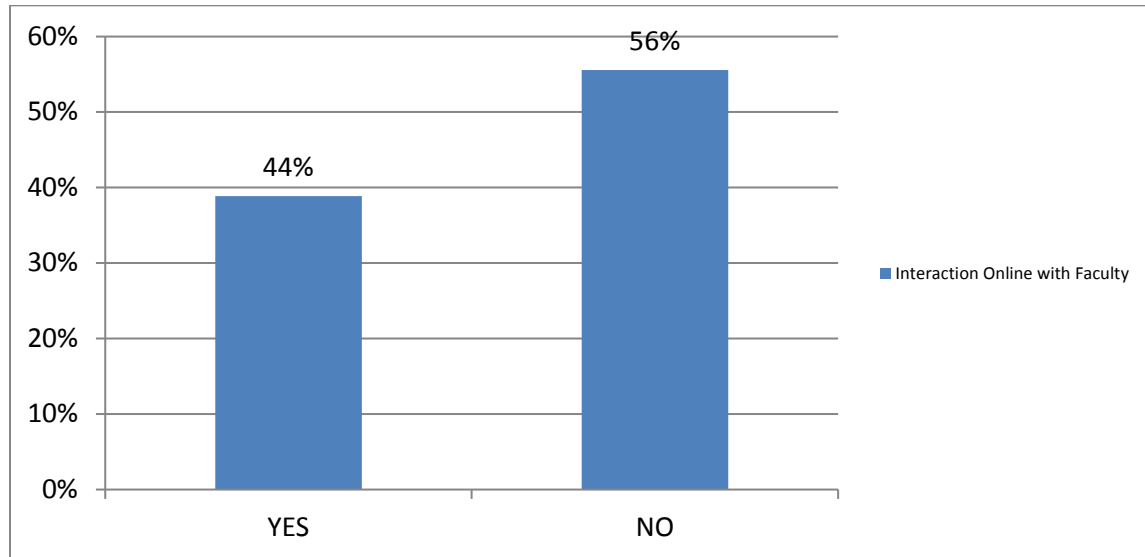
Figure 7: Online interaction with Faculty

The study sought to assess the frequency of interaction between the leaner and the teacher. The study revealed that majority 56% of the students do not interact online with the teachers and only 44% interacted with the teachers as shown in Figure 7. This raises the question of the effectiveness of the learning by the student refugees who do not even meet their teachers face-to-face. Although, 44% indicated they interacted online with their teachers, 39% of these students rarely interact online with their teachers and only 6% interacted often with their teachers, while 16% of the students did not answer this question which may translate to non-interaction with the teachers (See figure 8 on frequency of interaction)

Figure 8: Frequency of Interaction

7. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Refugee students had varied forms of experiences in their pursuit to access higher education. These ranged from, technological, economic, teacher-student interactions, family and institutional among others. The following were experiences given by students' refugees from who the researchers collected data from;

7.1   Technological

Technology has enables learners to access education across borders and has also facilitates access to education for people who are not available to attend regular face to face classes. The benefit technology brings with comes along with various challenges as well. The student refugees were coupled with a myriad of these challenges which they listed as follows;

7.2   Network

These included, network failure, poor internet connection in the region, hardship in accessing internet, expensive data bundles, lack of computers to access internet (Dadaab center is too far from our residence)

7.3   Tablets

Students' refugees are provided with tablets given by the institution free in order to facilitate access to technology and offer seamless access to class modules. The tablets brought with them various challenges as well which included; faulty/ malfunctioning tablets therefore unable to use them effectively, synchronization problems (tablet take too long, fail to synchronize and sometimes content disappears) and lack of electricity to charge the tablets
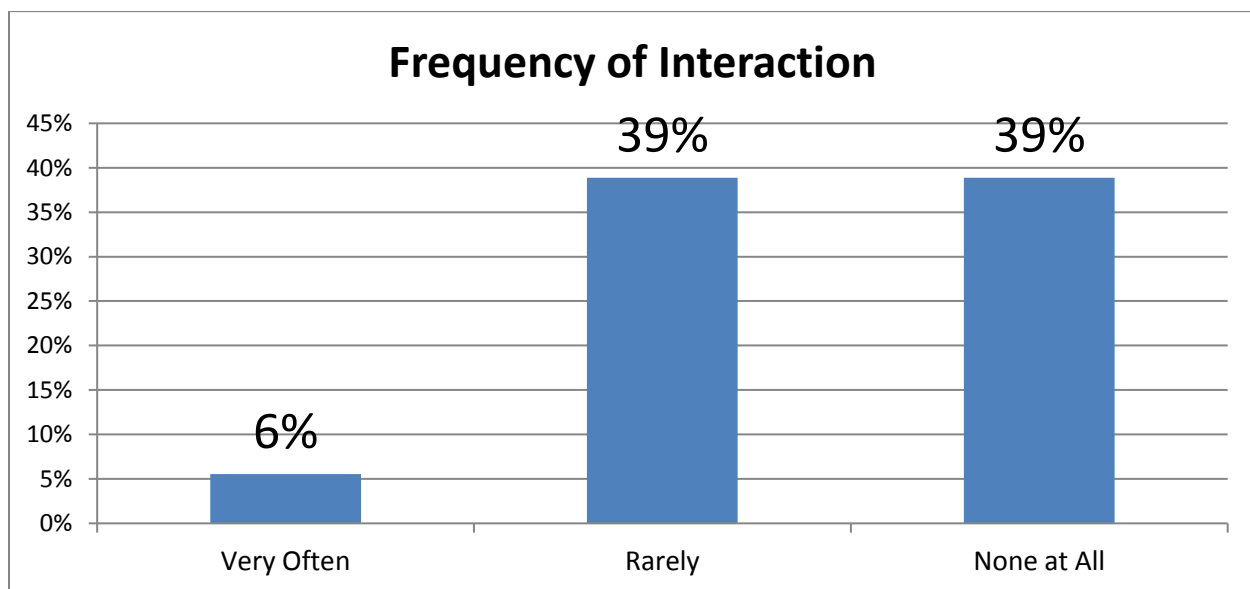
i.   Economic

* Cost of internet bundles is high
* Lack of bundles to use for interaction and synchronization of the tablets
* Fear that the tablets can get technical problem which will require more than Kshs 5,000 charge by the university
* Low allowances (stipend for transport to the center)

ii.   Teacher- Student Interaction

Refugees were meant to continually interact with their teachers in order to benefit from distance and e-learning mode of learning delivery. This method of interaction brought with it various challenges which included the following; lack of bundles to use for interaction, short due dates of the assignments, times Scheduled for online chat are not suitable, time of online interaction is irrelevant in our setup, problem of receiving and sending assignment, lack of content in the tablet, some subjects like Mathematics and Chemistry cannot be taught online, lack of lecturers' contacts, units and notes missing in the tablets and lack of response from lecturers

iii.   Family

Refugees are people living away from the home country and also from their extended families. Some are married with children and these factors play a major role in their pursuit of education. Some issues listed by refugees include; relocation and repatriation, being far away from the family (who are in homeland), financial problems (other commitment in homeland), family chores, lack of transport to the Dadaab center from residential area/camps, lack of lamp or power(electricity) in the camp, job duties, lack of enough food, long distance to the Dadaab center, culture (girls discouraged from going to school) and lack of time to do assignment

iv.   Institutional

Institution plays a major role in supporting student to access quality education and ensure smooth flow of communication to students who are separated by distance. Refugees in Daadab had a few challenges which included the following; tablets taking too long to be delivered back after repair, sometimes modules were not available, lecturers were not available for face to face explanations for practical units, lack of face to face tutorials, and lack of e-learning support in Daadab center.

v. Dropout Rates

Numbers that dropped out of the course ranged from 1 to more than 15 students in duration of 1 year. Students were asked to indicate how many students they knew that had dropped out of the course and the figures were as shown in figure 9. In the course of the study, students dropped out of the course due to various reasons such as lack of school fees, medical problems, change of course, hardship in internet access, lecturers not responding to students' concerns, high cost /fees, family issues (demand from the family), lack of interest by some students, uncertainty of completion and mode of learning was not favorable to many
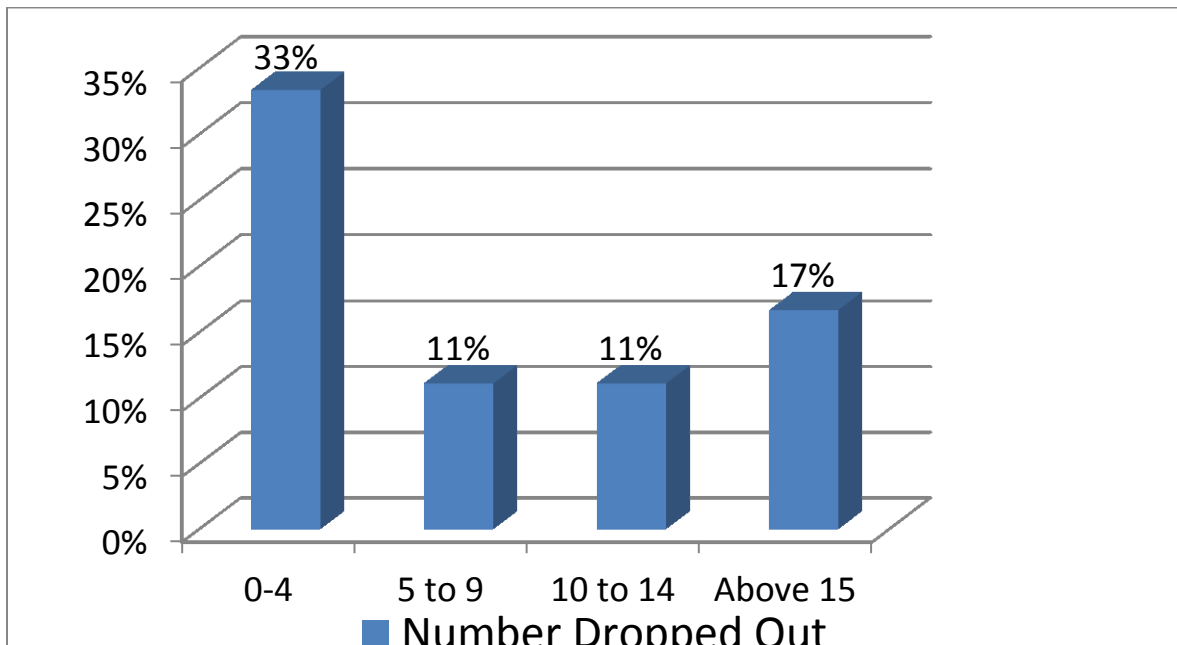
Figure 9: Number of Students Dropping Out

8. SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY STUDENTS

Students were asked to suggest solutions to the challenges that they experienced. The following list includes solutions proposed: Changing tablets or repairing free of charge; Chats should be at appropriate time ; Extend assignment dates; Lecturers to be courteous ;Spreading the days of exams; Lecturers should allow telephone conversation with students to clarify issues; Students should be allowed to hand in hand copy assignment during exams ; Teachers to go to Dadaab for face-to-face tutorial; Have more face to face sessions ;Allocate funds for internet bundles; Interaction should be set at night ; Giving adequate tutorials ;Changing tablets to quality tablets; Provide career counseling ;Advocate for frequent student transportation to the Dadaab Center; Provide airtime for communication to students and to provide laptops

9. CONCLUSION

In as much as there were many challenges in offering education to refugees in Daadab center, this mode of learning has enabled refugees access education which has come with its own advantages such as; access to education by female and equity in access to education, opportunity for employment in home country, opportunity to further education in the west and a means for eradicating poverty. These challenges outlined above are not peculiar to refugees only but also affects to a great extent other learning accessing distance education through e-learning mode. These challenges could be termed as 'teething' problems as this s the first cohort of refugees that have been enabled to access education through e-learning mode by the institution. Therefore, these findings form a basis for fact finding or an assessment of the program in order to provide solutions and improve on the areas that need improvement. In addition, the university management will be able to make decisions on the area to intervene so that the next cohort of student refugees are likely graduate a 100 percent.

10. RECOMMENDATION

The researchers recommend came up with the following recommendations to enhance support for equitable access to education by the refugees; review of financial policy /funding for the refugees to facilitate facilitators to go for face to face tutorials more often, equip Dadaab center with technology such video conferencing facility to facilitate one on one communication with refugees, higher module payment to motivate writing of modules, employ a technician who has skills in the use of learning management system to be situated in Daadab center to offer technical support to these students.

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ASSESSMENT SURVEY OF THE EFFICIENCY OF KU BHER PROGRAMME

The purpose of carrying out this survey is to find out the challenges BHER students of Kenyatta University face with a view of suggesting ways of improving the efficiency of the program for policy decisions making. It's carried out by Dr Purity Muthima and Dr Josephine Gitome

Please do not write your **Name**. This information will be handled with great **Confidentiality**

Kindly **tick (** ✓ **)** the **best option** or **write** the correct response where possible

A) Bio Data

❖ **Gender:** (A**)** Male   (B) Female

❖ **Your age: --------------**

❖ **Marital status: a)** Single (B) Married (C) Others, Specify-------------------------------

❖ **The program I am undertaking**: (A) Certificate (B) Diploma (C) Degree (D)Others----------------

❖ A**re you employed?** A) Yes B) No C) Others ,Specify -----------------------

❖ **Where do you get money to pay for your school fees**? (A) Own salary (B) Scholarship, (C) Others , Specify--

❖ **If you are employed, on average, what are your monthly earnings**? --------------------

B. *Online Interactivity (Teaching and Learning)*

❖ **Do you interact on line with your unit lecturer through the KU online platform**?

   o **(A)**Yes (B) No

❖ **If so, how often?** : (a) Very often   (b) Rarely   (c) None at All,

❖ **Are there challenges in interacting online? (A)** Yes   (B) No

❖ Please list **FIVE** digital online interaction challenges you face as a student---
----

▪ **How do you think the problem you have stated above can be solved**? (List FIVE solutions to the challenges stated---
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C. Assessing Efficiency using Cohort flow

❖ **Which year did you enroll in the university -------------------------------**

❖ **Are there students you know that have dropped out of the program?(**A) Yes (B) No

❖ **If yes , how many have dropped out ---**

❖ **Please list FIVE reasons why you think they dropped out** -- --- --- --- --- --------

   ❖ **What do you think should be done to ensure nobody drops out of the program** ------------------------ --- --- --- --- --------

D) what are the home related factors (issues) that affect your academic studies------------------------------- --- --