UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

PERCEPTION ON COMMUNITY CAPACITY, ENGAGEMENT, AND PARTICIPATION AMONG URBAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AT COMMUNITY-BASED SCHOOLS IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA

ANG PENG HOE

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By

ANG PENG HOE

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the of Degree of Master of Science

November 2016
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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November 2016

Chair: Associate Professor Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, PhD
Faculty: Human Ecology

The community being researched on in this study are children of urban refugee
dwellers attending primary level education in Klang Valley, Malaysia. As
education for refugees in Malaysia is outside the ambit of the national
education system, refugee children do not have access to national primary
level education institutions.

This research seeks to specifically describe community-based schools located
in the Klang Valley, and the respondents of these schools. On top of that, the
research will also determine the levels of student engagement (comprising of
behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement), the types of participation
(voluntary and involuntary), the levels of participation (student attendance), the
levels of perception and the levels of community capacity in English literacy
skill and knowledge (student achievement) of the respondents at the
community-based school. Subsequently the research examines the relationship
between student engagement, level of participation and the level of perception
with level of community capacity. The research also compares the difference
between the types of participation with level of community capacity and
examines the relationship between the student's age and the number of years
in school (duration of participation) with level of community capacity. Finally the
research seeks to determine the unique predictors of community capacity
among urban refugee children living in Klang Valley.

The study design was approached quantitatively using survey questionnaires
with a small descriptive portion of the study utilising qualitative approaches of
informal interviews and participant observation. The study was carried out at
the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee ("UNHCR") recognised schools of El Shaddai Refugee Learning Centre ("ERLC"), and the Chin’s Children Education Centre ("CCEC"), both being community-based schools located at Klang Town and Sungei Besi respectively. The sample size of the respondents from both these community-based schools is 241, out of a combined population of 499 refugee students.

The findings of this study indicated that student engagement and students’ level of participation had a positive correlation to community capacity. Upon analysing the differences between the types of participation (involuntary and voluntary) in relation to community capacity, the results show that there is no significant difference to report in this comparison. Further analysis also shows that there is no significant relationship between the respondents’ level of perception in learning English, their age as well the number of years they have been in ERLC and CCEC with their community capacity. When the correlated predictors were regressed against community capacity, both level of participation and emotional engagement were the most significant predictor variables.

Therefore this study shows that refugee students who are attending community-based schools, and who are emotionally engaged, have a higher tendency to develop community capacity, as seen in their achievement of better grades in their English Language Literacy assessment.
Abstrak tesis yang dikesanakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sains

PERSEPSI KE ATAS KAPASITI KOMUNITI, PENYERTAAN DAN
PENGLIBATANDI KALANGAN KANAK-KANAK PELARIAN BANDAR
YANG MENGHADIRI SEKOLAH KOMUNITI DI LEMBAH KLANG,
MALAYSIA

Oleh

ANG PENG HOE

November 2016

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, PhD
Fakulti Ekologi Manusia

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Kajian ini mengesahkan hubungan positif antara tahap penyertaan pelajar dan tahap penglibatan pelajar dengan kapasiti komuniti. Dengan membandingkan jenis penyertaan pelajar, sama ada secara sukarela ataupun tidak, untuk menentukan kapasiti komuniti, kajian ini menunjukkan tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam perbandingan ini. Analisis lanjut turut memperlihatkan bahawa tiada hubungan signifikan antara tahap persepsi mempelajari bahasa Inggeris oleh para responden, umur responden, dan tempoh penyertaan responden di ERLC dan di CCEC dengan kapasiti komuniti mereka. Apabila pembolehubah peramal diregresikan dengan kapasiti komuniti, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa hanya tahap penyertaan dan tahap penglibatan dari segi emosi sahaja yang menjadi pembolehubah peramal yang signifikan.

Oleh itu, kajian ini membuktikan bahawa kanak-kanak pelarian yang sedang menghadiri sekolah komuniti, dan yang mempunyai tahap penglibatan dari segi emosi yang tinggi, adalah lebih cenderung untuk membina kapasiti komuniti yang lebih tinggi, seperti yang dilihatkan oleh pencapaian mereka yang lebih bagus dalam ujian literasi Bahasa Inggeris.
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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL SHEETS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction  

1.2 Refugees and the UNHCR  

1.3 Refugee Education in Urban Malaysia  

1.4 Engagement and Participation at Community-Based Schools – the Essence of Community Development  

1.5 Statement of Problem  

1.6 General Objectives  

1.7 Specific Objectives  

1.8 Research Hypotheses  

1.9 Limitations of Study  

1.10 Significance of the Study  

1.11 Conceptual & Operational Definition  

1.11.1 Participation  

1.11.2 Student Engagement  

1.11.3 Student’s Perception in Classrooms  

1.11.4 Community Capacity  

1.12 Summary  

2 LITERATURE REVIEW  

2.1 Introduction  

2.2 Community Development  

2.2.1 Definition of Community  

2.2.2 Community Development Approaches  

2.2.3 Community Development and Education for Refugees  

2.3 Community Participation  

2.3.1 Definition of Participation  

2.3.2 Type of Participation  

2.3.3 Participation and Community Development in Refugee Communities
4.2 Community-Based Schools

4.2.1 General Background of Elshaddai Refugee Learning Centre (“ERLC”)

4.2.1.1 Student Population of ERLC

4.2.1.2 Profile of ERLC and the Organizational Leadership Chart

4.2.1.3 Learning in Class and Syllabus Implemented at ERLC

4.2.2 General Background of Chin Christian Education Centre (“CCEC”)

4.2.2.1 Student Population of CCEC

4.2.2.2 Profile of CCEC and the Organizational Leadership Chart

4.2.2.3 Learning in Class and Syllabus Implemented at CCEC

4.3 Background and Demographic Profile of the Respondents

4.3.1 Background of the Respondents

4.3.2 Demographic Profile of All the Respondents

4.3.3 Academic Status in ERLC & CCEC and Duration of Participation

4.4 Respondent’s Level of Engagement, Type and Level of Participation, Level of Perception and Community Capacity

4.4.1 Student Engagement in Community-based Schools

4.4.2 Type of Participation by Students in the School

4.4.3 Level of Participation

4.4.4 Level of Perception of Teaching English in School

4.4.5 Community Capacity

4.5 Relationship between Student Engagement, Level of Participation and the Level of Perception with Community Capacity

4.5.1 Relationship between Student Engagement and Community Capacity

4.5.2 Relationship between Level of Participation and Community Capacity

4.5.3 Relationship between Level of Perception and Community Capacity

4.6 Difference between the Types of Participation with Community Capacity

4.7 Relationship between the Students’ Age and the Number of Years in School (Duration of Participation) with Community Capacity
4.8 Unique Predictors of Community Capacity 79
4.9 Summary 81

5 CONCLUSION 84
5.1 Introduction 84
5.2 Conclusion 84
5.3 Recommendation for Future Research 86

BIBLIOGRAPHY 88
APPENDICES 105
BIODATA OF STUDENT 121
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Pimbert and Pretty’s Participation Typology</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Tosun’s Typology of Community Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Type and Level of Community Participation in Schools</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Summary of Developer of Instruments</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Pre-test results of reliability</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Diagnosis of Multicollinearity</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Demographic profile</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Education Level &amp; Duration of Participation</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Distribution of Respondents’ Engagement Levels at Community-Based Schools</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Level of Engagement</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Type of Participation</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Level of Participation</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Distribution of Respondents’ Perception of Teaching English at Community-Based Schools</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Level of Perception</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Community Capacity</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Correlation between Student Engagement &amp; Community Capacity</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Correlation between Level of Participation &amp; Community Capacity</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Correlation between Level of Perception &amp; Community Capacity</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Differences between Types of Participation &amp; Community Capacity</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Correlation between Student’s Age &amp; Duration of Participation with Community Capacity</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Multiple Regression of Unique Predictors for Community Capacity</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Research Framework</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>St Barnabas Church classroom layout</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Tamil Methodist Church classroom layout</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Wesley Methodist Church classroom layout</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>CCEC Organizational Chart</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly enshrines the right to education as one of the rudimentary human rights afforded to all (UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1948). This right encompasses the right to compulsory primary education, an obligation to develop secondary education as well as a responsibility to improve access to obtain tertiary education (Article 26). In Malaysia, access to education at all levels is readily made available to its citizens. The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) has been proactive in sourcing for valuable information on underprivileged children, including refugee children and children of asylum seekers to enable them to promote relevant programmes advancing education rights of these marginalised children (Boon, 2015). Such convenient access to education which is afforded to the local citizens is however not made available to these communities in Malaysia.

This chapter seeks to discuss on refugee education and the role of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (“UNHCR”). The role of UNHCR in refugee education will also be deliberated together with the state of refugee education at community-based schools here in Malaysia. There will also be a discussion on the statement of problem, aims and objectives, significance of study together with its limitations, conceptual and operational definition and the research methodology framework.

1.2 Refugees and the UNHCR

Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states that one has the right to seek and to enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries they deem safe. It is from this provision that the refugee convention was codified in 1951, which is the advent of the United Nations treaty that not only defines a refugee, but also spells out the rights of individuals seeking asylum and also the responsibilities of a country that grants asylum. The 1951 Refugee Convention (hereinafter known as the “Convention”) was enforced from 22nd April 1954, and it has been amended once in the form of the 1967 Protocol. As the Convention was legislated after World War Two, its original scope was limited in that it only applied to persons escaping the turmoil in Europe before 1 January 1951. The 1967 Protocol therefore seeks to remove such limitations and since then the Convention has taken on an all encompassing coverage.

Article 1 of the Convention spells out that a refugee is “someone 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 nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

The underlying principles of the Convention attempts to prevent discrimination, penalization and the-refoulement of refugees. For a start, the Convention must be applied sans discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin. Subsequently, the Convention also provides that refugees should not face punitive punishment for their illegal entry or stay. This goes as far as to recognize that an asylum seeker with a rightful claim to the status of a refugee may be required, and is therefore justified in breaching immigration rules. Finally, the Convention contains important check and balance on the expulsion of refugees back to the exact place of conflict that they have fled from. The Convention clearly states that no one shall expel or repatriate refugees against their will to a territory where their lives and freedom are potentially under threat. The principle of non-refoulement is so well entrenched under customary international law that even States who are not signatories to the Convention are still obligated to observe this principle judiciously.

In essence, the Convention purports to set the minimum standards of how a refugee should be treated. Such fundamental rights include access to the judicial services, to basic education, to sustenance, and also the provision for travel documentation. Refugees fall under a sub category of immigrants and it has been generally acknowledged that there is limited educational research done on this subgroup thus far (McBrien, 2005, Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Compared to immigrants who usually can decide on their country of residence, refugees often leave their home country under extremely compelling circumstances (Fong, 2007). On top of that, immigrants usually have time to learn the language of their new country in preparation of settling down, but, refugees are often seeking refuge in countries where they have limited amount or no knowledge whatsoever of the host country’s language (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008)

As Malaysia did not accede to the Convention, the UNHCR was instead left with the task to search for partners from the civil society to safeguard the welfare and well being of these refugees as they seek temporary asylum in Malaysia. This collaboration is imperative since their presence in Malaysia is considered irregular in the same manner as an illegal immigrant, rendering them in contravention with the immigration laws of Malaysia (Azizah & Ragayah, 2011). Most refugees choose to reside in urban areas as it usually makes economical sense in terms of job seeking and livelihood sustenance.

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1.3 Refugee Education in Urban Malaysia

Public policy pertaining to refugee issues has always been complicated and controversial. The social fabric of a nation is always conflicted between rendering protection and rights on humanitarian ground, and balancing it with the preservation and advancement of citizen rights. Refugees may have the right to seek for refuge and a right to education during their interim stay in Malaysia, but Malaysian citizens are also concerned that their own fundamental rights enshrined by the Federal Constitution may be jeopardised should exorbitant resources be allocated towards addressing refugee issues (Boon, 2015).

Refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia are mostly urban dwellers, living in the poorer locations in and around the city, with minimum recourse to help and assistance, unless provided for through the limited resources of UNHCR or civil societies and NGOs (UNHCR, 2012a). Since Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention and its Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, it is not bound by its provisions and the term “refugee” itself is not a status legitimately recognised by the government. Therefore, even though the Malaysian government has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (albeit with certain reservations) by the enactment of the Child Act 2001, which makes it an obligation to all signatory countries to create a platform to ensure education for all primary-aged children, refugee children living in Malaysia are still disallowed from attending Government schools due to the non-ratification of the 1951 Convention and its Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2012a). Hence, the refugee community have resorted to the most viable option for their children, which is to send them to community-based education institutions at their locality, which are usually set up by the UNHCR or civil societies and NGOs together with the refugee community members themselves. This may not be the most ideal method of providing education due to its informal nature of existence, but this is the only readily available recourse afforded to the refugee community seeking education for their children here in Malaysia.

1.4 Engagement and Participation at Community-Based Schools– the Essence of Community Development

Community engagement within the refugee population becomes essential in light of the present state of affairs. Refugee children must actively be engaged in the informal education process they are undergoing at these community-based schools in order to ensure the best possible outcome in meeting their basic needs. Therefore, resources within the community must be identified, mobilised and used for education programs and related activities. Community engagement has a paramount role to play in the implementation of an education process, and can thus be experienced and gauged through factors such as skills, participation/interaction, emotional attachment, and overall performance (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005). Specifically, participation in the education process can be engaged
through five various categories, mainly “preparation, contribution to discussion, group skills, communication skills, and attendance” (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005). Therefore, the different types of participation in the education process can plausibly be measured by school attendance, preparedness for class and lessons, completing homework and being involved in extra-curricular activities.

In order for a community to develop itself, it is imperative also to identify the capital or capacity within a particular community, which can be harness to produce desirable development outcome. Building community capacity, as it relates to UNHCR’s concerns, infer the reinforcement of human, institutional or community performance, skills, knowledge and attitudes on a sustainable basis (UNHCR, 1998). Such performance, skills, knowledge and attitudes can usually be acquired through an education process and must continuously be built on and enhanced upon in order for it to be fully maximised for overall advancement of the community. Such considerations clearly indicate that community development is both a process and also an outcome. Therefore the process of community development leads to an increase in human capacity which in turn leads to the outcome of a developed community (Phillips & Pittman, 2008).

1.5 Statement of Problem

As a result of the contemporary immigration climate and policy in Malaysia, the refugee community remains sidelined in every socio-economic aspect, including limited access to employment, healthcare and most evidently education. As such, the outcome of building community capacity seems too difficult to be accomplished by the refugee community, especially the younger school-going generation. The reality is that refugees in Malaysia are unable to access any kind of formal education within the local national system, leaving them to set up their own community-based education hub system through their own partnership and participatory initiative to ensure community development leading toward capacity building is somehow achieved, regardless of how insurmountable the task.

There is limited information on the effectiveness of the education policies set up for refugees globally in accordance to the present strategy as propounded in UNHCR’s 2012 – 2016 Education Strategy, as we are still within the purported time frame set for implementation. This latest strategy highlights a new resolve to ensure that refugee education does not remain as an ancillary after thought but a core and imperative component of UNHCR’s mandate to provide both protection and a durable solution to refugees as quality education builds relevant skills and knowledge that enables refugees to live healthy, productive and self-reliant lives (UNHCR, 2012b). UNHCR places great importance on the provision of quality education and the organization has developed this 2012-2016 Education Strategy with the aim of developing refugees’ skills and knowledge. The first objective and expected results respectively of the Education Strategy, amongst a comprehensive list, is to improve learning achievement in primary school by ensuring that primary schools are made
accessible to both girls and boys and that at least 70% of these students are able to achieve the required standards of primary school education.

Quality primary level education entails providing a good foundation in language literacy, which is the basis of learning empowerment for children, youth, and adults to continuously enhance and build their knowledge, skills, and competencies to not only survive, but thrive in their everyday lives. However, due to the fact that refugees are not afforded any form of legitimate status under Malaysian immigration law, the refugee community continues to live in deplorable conditions, with their safety and security constantly threatened by unscrupulous parties, and with limited opportunity to earn an honest living, makes it even more challenging for their children to receive the best kind of education at the make shift community-based schools. This predicament translates directly to the state of affairs for most community-based refugee schools in Malaysia, which are inherently underfunded due to lack of resources, conveniently over populated due to the high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers and grossly mismanaged due to lack of expertise and knowledge that is available within the refugee community themselves.

The community being researched on in this study are children of urban refugee dwellers attending primary level education in Klang Valley, Malaysia. As education for refugees in Malaysia is outside the ambit of the national education system, the assumption is that the age of these refugee students may not be correspondent to our local counterparts going through national primary level education institutions. The official UNHCR statistics shows that there are a total of 9540 students that are classified in the 6-13 years old group, and out of that 4518 are enrolled in primary level community-based schools³.

This research attempts to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What is a community-based urban refugee school?
2. What are the levels of student engagement (behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement), the type of participation (voluntary and involuntary participation), the level of participation (student attendance), the level of perception and the level of community capacity at the community-based schools?
3. Is there a relationship between student engagement (behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement), level of participation (student attendance) and the level of perception in community-based schools with the level of community capacity at the community-based schools?
4. Is there a difference between the types of participation on the level of community capacity at the community-based schools?
5. Is there a relationship between the student’s age and the number of years in school (duration of participation) with the level of community capacity at the community-based schools?

³http://www.unhcr.org.my/Education-@-Schools_For_Refugee_Children.aspx
6. What are the unique predictors of community capacity among urban refugee children at community-based schools in Klang Valley?

1.6 General Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine participation, engagement, perception and community capacity amongst urban refugee children studying at community-based schools in the Klang Valley.

1.7 Specific Objectives

This research seeks to specifically describe, measure, compare and examine the following:

1. To describe community-based schools located in the Klang Valley, and also the respondents of these schools;
2. To determine the level of student engagement (comprising of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement), the type of participation (voluntary and involuntary), the level of participation (student attendance), the level of perception and the level of community capacity at the community-based schools;
3. To examine the relationship between student engagement (behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement), level of participation (student attendance) and the level of perception with level of community capacity at the community-based schools.
4. To compare the difference between the types of participation on the level of community capacity at community-based schools;
5. To examine the relationship between the student’s age and the number of years in school (duration of participation) with level of community capacity at community-based schools;
6. To determine the unique predictors of community capacity among urban refugee children studying at community-based schools in Klang Valley.

1.8 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were constructed from the research objective of examining whether students’ engagement, age, perception, type, level and duration of participation in community-based schools can influence or contribute to the level of community capacity as measured by their achievement in English literacy skill and knowledge.

H01: There is no significant relationship between behavioural engagement and the level of community capacity.
H02: There is no significant relationship between emotional engagement and the level of community capacity.

H03: There is no significant relationship between cognitive engagement and the level of community capacity.

H04: There is no significant relationship between level of participation (student attendance) and the level of community capacity.

H05: There is no significant relationship between level of perception and the level of community capacity.

H06: There is no significant difference on community capacity between voluntary and involuntary participation.

H07: There is no significant relationship between the student’s age and the level of community capacity.

H08: There is no significant relationship between the number of years in school (duration of participation) and the level of community capacity.

H09: For all the selected independent variables, the regression coefficient is not significant when regressed against the level of community capacity.

1.9 Limitations of Study

The sample in the study is collected from the total student population of two community-based schools located in the Klang Valley. Thus, the findings gathered from the participants may not encapsulate the urban refugee population living in the Klang Valley. The limited access to community-based schools are due to the fact that refugees in Malaysia are rendered as undocumented migrants, as such their immigration status remain precarious. The community therefore lives in fear of arrest and deportation, and have not always welcome researchers into their society and milieu.

Community-based schools for urban refugees in the Klang Valley are also quite diverse due to the different ethnicities represented in the refugee population. Recent statistics from UNHCR Malaysia in 2016 (UNHCR, 2016a) indicates the majority of refugees in Malaysia are from Myanmar, comprising of some 50840 Chins, 40660 Rohingyas, 12040 Myanmar Muslims, 7520 Rakhines, and other ethnicities from Myanmar. There are also another 11160 refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, including Sri Lankan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Afghanistan and Yemen. In the Klang Valley itself, it is estimated that there are approximately 70 community-based schools for refugee children (UNHCR, 2016b). For the purpose of this research, two community-based schools with a majority of Myanmarese refugee children were chosen. While this may not be reflective of the entire ethnic distribution of the refugee population in the Klang Valley, most community-based schools in the Klang Valley experience similar challenges such as the informal set up, the lack of teachers, volunteers, equipment and available funds, with the only support
coming from UNHCR and other NGOs.

1.10 Significance of the Study

In light of the significant number of refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia, a number which in all likelihood will only continue to increase in the foreseeable future, with further unrest in the region, especially with regard to the state of affairs in the Rakhine state in Myanmar[^4], this research hopes to measure and examine the engagement and participation amongst refugee students who are undergoing their primary level education in the community-based schools, and also further determine if it contributes to the community capacity for overall community development of the refugee.

The collation of such information can then be translated into the effectiveness of the overall quality of education that is being implemented through community-based primary school. If community participation, engagement and perception through community-based primary level schools are shown to be essential towards the adding of human capacity for community development of the urban refugee students, then relevant parties are at least justified toward matching resources to the need of setting up of such schools and running it well. Such knowledge on the refugee community is important as the most durable solution for their welfare is sought upon for their overall betterment.

1.11 Conceptual & Operational Definition

1.11.1 Participation

Participation is a process where members of a community or organization are involved in and have influence on decisions related to development activities and programmes that will inevitably affect them and this can be seen through an active involvement of the people, together with all relevant stakeholders (Bessette, 2004). Participation in education is basically learning to see new, more life giving choices and developing the skills and confidence to act on them (Campbell & Burnaby, 2005). In this study, levels of participation are operationalised as the attendance level of the refugee students at the community-based schools. Types of participation are operationally defined as voluntary or involuntary participation at the community-based schools, where voluntary participation comprises the category of spontaneous participation, and involuntary participation comprise the categories of induced participation and coercive participation at the community-based schools.

1.11.2 Student Engagement

The concept of engagement in the context of immigration and ethnic minorities must be examined in light of social and structural barriers preventing certain social groups from fully participating in their communities (Lai & Hynie, 2010). In this study, student engagement is operationalised by the behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement of the refugee students in the community-based schools. Student engagement is defined through behaviours that can be observed such as participation and time on task (Brophy, 1983; Natriello, 1984). Subsequently researchers incorporated emotional aspects into their concept of engagement (Connell, 1990; Finn, 1989), which essentially encompasses a sense of belonging, enjoyment, and attachment. In recent times, some researchers have gone on to study aspects of cognitive engagement, which can be seen through students’ investment in learning, perseverance in the face of challenges, and use of deep rather than superficial strategies (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

1.11.3 Student’s Perception in Classrooms

Students’ perception on teaching and learning English in the classroom emanates from the subconscious emotions and attitudes towards the acquisition of that language per se (Despagne, 2010). Despagne (2010) further elucidates that perceptions towards a particular language can be influenced by amongst others, teachers and peers and even the cultural make up and social milieu of the students. Students’ perception can also be conceived by perceived teaching quality, determined by student feedback questionnaires or even through personal interactions (Smimou & Dahl, 2012). In this research, student’s perception in the classroom is operationalised as the way the refugee students perceive teaching of the English language in the community-school.

1.11.4 Community Capacity

Community capacity is the end product of an interactive process of knowledge, attitude, skill and practices as confounded in the community development mechanism as developed by the individual and community members themselves (Rahim & Asnarulkhadi, 2010). These societal relationships are illustrative of the subsistence of community capacity only “insofar as they can be connected to a collective agenda or the realization of collective well-being at the community level” (Chaskin, 1999). Capacity describes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individuals. At the individual level, the focus is on the skills, knowledge, and resources of individual residents in the community, also known as ‘human capital’. Chaskin (1999) iterates that human capital contributes to community capacity not only through its availability as a collective resource, but also through specific, individual contributions. The students at community-based schools are essentially learning how to read, write and converse in English, all of which are basic literacy skills and knowledge in the linguistic sense. Where the standards of achievement in the
core skills of individuals such as literacy are increased through learning, the community’s capacity is essentially being built and developed (Scottish Executive, 2004). In this research, community capacity is operationalised by the refugee students’ achievement in English literacy skill and knowledge through their final year assessment at the community-based schools.

1.12 Summary

As Malaysia currently provides temporary refuge to both refugees and asylum seekers, it is imperative that the issues regarding the access to education of urban refugee students be thoroughly evaluated and necessary steps taken to ensure that the right to education afforded by community-based schools are properly administered. Malaysia will remain an attractive option to asylum seekers due to its geographical location, vibrant economy and stable socio political environment. An education platform that focuses on community participation, engagement and perception with the aim of building capacity for community development, albeit informal, still allows every refugee child to acquire the knowledge, skill and confidence in the English language, becomes necessary to shape a sustainable future, whether in hope or in lieu of resettlement.
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