

# The Role of Teachers in Building Resilience of Refugee Learners: A Case Study of Primary Schools in Nakivale Settlement, Isingiro District- Western Uganda

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**Abstract:-** The study investigated the role of teachers in building the resilience of refugee primary school learners in the Nakivale settlement in Isingiro, Western Uganda. Specifically, the study sought to assess how the role of teachers affected the building of resilience in terms of classroom teaching, creative arts / extracurricular activities and provision of refugee psychosocial support (collaborative problem-solving activities). This study was conducted using a qualitative case study and its paradigm position was interpretive. Rutter (2013) resilience theory was used as a theoretical basis. Thirty-five participants, including head teachers, teachers, Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), School Management Committee (SMC) members from Kashojwa, Nyarugururu, and Nakivale primary schools. Included in the study were the Development Partners and Education Officials from Isingiro District. The study found that the teachers' roles that included classroom teaching, creative arts/extracurricular activities and refugee psychosocial support were not adequately contributing to the resilience of refugee learners in primary schools in Nakivale settlement. The study concluded that the role of teachers in building resilience of refugee learners in three primary schools in Nakivale settlement was inadequate as a result of ineffective classroom teaching, lack of creative arts/extracurricular activities and insufficient refugee psychosocial support. The study recommended a need to put in place a teacher management framework that specifies the roles and functions of teachers applicable in refugee contexts, the primary teacher education training refugee curriculum should be reorganized and aligned to cater for the training of specialized teachers in refugee education and lastly the terms and conditions of service for specifically refugee teachers should be developed if their roles are to contribute to the building resilience of refugee primary school learners in Nakivale settlement.

**Keywords:-** Teachers Roles, Resilience and Refugee Learners.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a noble profession in society globally which requires disciplined teachers. A teacher is an important person designed to facilitate learning. Therefore learning will not be possible until teaching takes place. And teaching is a deliberate structuring of an environment to facilitate learning in schools, colleges or universities. According to Sesnan, et al (2013) learning is a process by which we acquire and retain attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills and capabilities that cannot be attributed to inherited behaviour patterns or physical growth. Therefore, learning is not complete until teaching has taken place. Equally, teaching is not complete until there is a teacher place. Similarly, Kilonzo (2009) contends that teachers are supposed to be role models behaving in parents all the times. Teachers matter more than any other single factor for the quality of learning in schools and are the central aspect of refugee education. Sometimes there is no building, no administration, but there is a teacher. It is these teachers who determine the effectiveness of refugee education: "while schools can provide safe environments where structure, stimulation and opportunities for learning healthy socialization with peers and adults can help mitigate the trauma of war, it is teachers who determine the availability and quality of these programs daily (Howard and Johnson, 2002). That is why Simatwa (2010) studies on "Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among teachers in Kenya" found that the relationship between high performance of schools and the nature of how they work and the kind of discipline exhibited by these schools was a critical factor for the success of these schools.

Effective teaching and learning is critically important for all pupils, and especially for refugee learners. For this to critically happen, teachers must teach in stimulating and supportive classroom environments where they are respected and valued. In fact, no education can take place without teachers and no education can be better than the quality of its teachers. Teachers have the first-line responsibility for the education of all learners in their classes. Accordingly, classroom teachers should ensure that they plan their lessons carefully to address the diverse needs within the classroom (Farrant, 1997). They need to adapt their teaching approaches for some pupils, especially those in primary schools in Nakivale settlement

whose individual progress, application, motivation, communication, behaviour or interaction are causes for concern. This may require targeted interventions to develop relevant adaptive skills related to this needs. Beyond simply being present to teach, teachers play several critical roles in providing education to refugee children and youth. First, teachers provide a source of continuity and normality for children, attending to their physical, cognitive and social needs (Sommers, 2002). Second, their direct work with children and their families is critical in helping restore a sense of stability and confidence (Sinclair, 2001). In addition, teachers can help support recovery and transition post-conflict and after emergencies, can promote security, peace and human rights, both in their home countries upon return and in host countries, where they may stay indefinitely (Daresh and Playko, 1985). While schools can provide safe environments where structure, stimulation and opportunities for learning healthy socialization with peers and adults can help mitigate the trauma of war, it is teachers who determine the availability and quality of these programs daily” (Bobek, 2002). Poor quality of teachers reduces the demand for education and thus enrolment and persistence. Therefore investment in the supply of quality teachers is critical to achieving the goals of access and quality outlined in the (UNHCR, 2015) Education Strategy. Teachers working with refugee children may be the only literate adults in a community ravaged by the effects of war (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Many argue that in such contexts that are permanently without teachers, there can be little effective schooling (Sesnan, Allemano, Ndugga and Said, 2013). Although the UNHCR Global Education Strategy 2030 acknowledges that teachers matter more than any other single factor to learning, the role of teachers in building resilience of refugee learners and needs to be effective (Seyfarth, 2005).

However, recent assessments on Uganda refugee education have identified a number of serious challenges affecting the building of resilience of refugee primary school learners. These include shortage of trained teachers in refugee education, absence of a refugee teacher management framework, continuous professional development schemes and motivation of teachers; lack of infrastructural capacity, including classrooms and teaching and learning materials; the presence of aged learners in early-grade classrooms; and the need for psychosocial and emotional support among refugee learners who have suffered trauma (UNHCR, 2019). Despite these drawbacks, teachers can have an immense influence on (refugee) children’s learning. Teachers can both enhance and hinder conflict. While teachers have great potential to positively affect children’s lives, in some contexts their limited professional orientation and support may hinder such possibilities (UN, 2016).

Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda is the oldest refugee settlement in Africa, and benefits from what is often lauded as the most progressive refugee policies in the world (UNHCR, 2022). There are 57 primary refugee-hosting schools

in Nakivale refugee settlement. There are 10 primary schools under government aid, managed directly by the District Local Government, and 47 private primary schools. These schools host a total of 34,150 refugee learners. Of that number, 24,299 are learners in primary schools while 8,809 are enrolled in secondary schools (Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities for Isingiro District, 2019). The increasing number of refugee learners as a result of an influx and high birth rates has created pressure on the education facilities and teachers in these schools. Resultantly, UNHCR and NGO Partners are providing of additional financial support to teachers in Nakivale refugee settlement (ERPRHC, 2019). Although Uganda primary education is free, attracting and retaining teachers in refugee primary schools remains a challenge.

Although education is said to contribute to resilience of refugee learners through quality teaching, the contribution of teachers in building resilience of refugee primary school learners is not known since a majority of refugee learners fail to complete school as they dropout before primary six and seven. In fact UNHCR (2019) estimates that 90% of these learners who drop out of school are due to shortage of teachers, overcrowded class rooms, limited psychosocial support programmes, language barrier, lack of feeding programmes, violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, rape, and torture, among others, as evidenced by learners’ continued exhibition of violence, distracting other learners from their studies, failure to observe school rules and regulations (UNHCR Reports, 2016 and 2020). Past studies have also reported that the current education provided to refugee learners is not adequately contributing to building of resilience among primary schools in Nakivale settlement (Akello, 2021). If this situation is not addressed, then refugee learners will not be able to recover from adversity in order to build resilience.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Rutter (2013) resilience theory. This theory states that the ability to withstand adversity, bounce back and grow despite life’s downturns is affected by risk factors which are associated with elevated probabilities of undesirable outcomes for specific groups. Rutter (2013) contends that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it. According to the study, when refugee primary school learners face adversity (i.e. misfortune, or frustration), the curriculum used for teaching them helps them to build resilience. The theory assumes that the 7C’s of resilience; learning competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control help learners bounce back to their normal conditions. In fact, as for the primary school learners in Nakivale refugee settlement, Rutter (2013) posits that education using a well designed curriculum and its quality implementation can lead to academic resilience. When some learners have relatively good outcomes (class room resources, supportive school environment and

learners' wellbeing) despite having experienced serious adversities, their outcome will be better than that of other learners who suffered the same experiences" (Rutter, 2013).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The approach was ideal because it allowed the researcher to collect data by interacting extensively and closely with participants during the study. Qualitative research enables a researcher to interact with participants in order to gain insight about the nature of a particular phenomenon (Leedy et al, 2001). The paradigmatic position was interpretive. Every qualitative research has an interpretive perspective, which focuses on uncovering participants' views (Lapan et al, 2012). The paradigm was chosen because it allowed the researcher to acquire information by engaging in dialogue with participants. The study was conducted in the form of a case study. A case study was preferred because it provided an in-depth description and exploration of a specific subject that was under study (Lee et al., 2010). The study was conducted in Kashojwa, Nyarugururu and Nakivale primary schools in Nakivale settlement. These schools have both the refugee learners and learners from host communities. The schools offer two curriculums-the formal and the AEP.

In almost all qualitative research, purposive sampling is adopted in which researchers use their judgement to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information that will provide the data they need (Fraenkel et al., 2007). In this study, purposive sampling was used to select 35 participants: three head teachers, two chair persons of PTA & SMC, six classroom teachers, eighteen refugee learners, two district education officials and two representatives of development partners. Data were collected using documentary reviews, semi structured interviews with each of the participants and focus group discussion with all refugee learners. Data were analysed using thematic analysis from the themes derived from the research objectives. The themes were arranged into categories and sub-categories while ensuring that the identity of participants was protected, and comments were made accordingly. Ethical issues were observed by obtaining clearances from the University, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and office of the Prime Minister. The purpose of the study was explained to all the participants. They were informed of that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Consent forms were signed and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Validity, reliability and trustworthiness were ensured by the study, which was done to test the instruments. Feedback was taken back to the participants to show how they responded. This was done to enhance trustworthiness of the study.

### IV. FINDINGS

The study found that the teachers' roles that included classroom teaching, creative arts/extracurricular activities and refugee psychosocial support were not adequately contributing to the resilience of refugee learners in primary schools in Nakivale settlement. The role of teachers in building resilience of refugee learners in three primary schools in Nakivale settlement was inadequate as a result of ineffective classroom teaching, lack of creative arts/extracurricular activities and insufficient refugee psychosocial support. Operationally the head teacher of Nyarugururu primary school explained that they implement teaching approaches and methodologies that facilitate the inclusion of learners including those with special educational needs by way of cooperative teaching and learning within mainstream classrooms, collaborative problem-solving activities, heterogeneous group work, differentiation, interventions to promote social and emotional competence in teaching, learning and assessment. It's clear from the description of teachers roles they are key to success in any education system. In refugee settings, the role of teachers is particularly significant, as they provide crucial continuity and socio-emotional support. They are sometimes the only educational resource available to refugee learners. Therefore in a nut shell, to implement the curriculum with fidelity, teachers' roles must be clearly defined to align with the curriculum as well as support their individual needs and those of the refugee learners. This is because a school is the setting where curriculum implementation takes place with the teachers as the agents, learners as the consumers of the curriculum.

### V. DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study exemplified the central role of teachers as resources in quality curriculum implementation and in building resilience of refugee learners. Notably, as UNICEF (2000) advocates for quality in education based on the competence or training of teachers, their role in refugee resilience building was not well defined. The study noted that there were inconsistencies in the participant's responses that lacked coherence and configuration on the exact roles of teachers in resilience building. However, after refining the responses from the participants, the roles of teachers were identified as classroom teaching, creative arts/extracurricular activities and refugee psychosocial support, a finding that was consistent with studies conducted by UN (2016) and the UNHCR Global Education Strategy 2012–2016). Indeed there is no doubt that teachers facilitate learning through curriculum implementation and wholesome development of learners. It's therefore clear that teachers are the key to success in any education system (Winthrop and Kirk, 2008). In refugee settings, the role of teachers is particularly significant, as they provide crucial continuity and socio-emotional support. They are sometimes the only educational resource available to refugee learners. There are other studies such as that by (King, 2011) and Musikhe, (2014) that support the above findings. In

fact they observed that the teacher as an educator has an important role in educating learners. As such, the teacher becomes a role model that is often imitated by learners, so the teacher should set a good example. Notably, as Kumi-Yeboah. (2016) observes, teachers are the central aspect of refugee education. Sometimes there is no building, no administration, but there is a teacher. It is these teachers who determine the effectiveness of refugee education: “while schools can provide safe environments where structure, stimulation and opportunities for learning healthy socialization with peers and adults can help mitigate the trauma of war, it is the teachers who determine the availability and quality of these programs daily.

The study found that the role of teachers in the building of resilience of refugee primary school learners in primary schools in Nakivale settlement was affected by ineffective classroom teaching, a finding that is consistent with (Wambede and Oruru, 2021). In refugee settings, classroom teaching is particularly significant if all learners can attain language proficiency, as it provides crucial communication and facilitates learning. Although effective classroom teaching is critical for the building of learners’ resilience in primary schools in Nakivale settlement, teachers must possess a deep mastery of English language and pedagogy. Besides, the number of teachers in every school should be adequate too depending on the learners’ population (UNHCR Global Education Strategy 2012–2016).

Lack of creative arts/extracurricular activities was identified as one of the factors that hindered the building of resilience of refugee primary school learners in primary schools in Nakivale settlement. The participants observed that creative arts/extracurricular activities offered learners an opportunity to improve their skills in English by acting and interacting in different didactic situations which mimic their social contexts. This finding is in agreement with (UNESCO, 2003). The finding was supported by statements from participants, “When creative arts are pursued along with education they teach learners lessons that they remember for a lifetime. These pursuits’ help them understand and eventually develop their personalities. Hours spent playing a sport or learning an instrument is often looked back as enjoyable. Further, such activities instill personality traits and key skills in learners that will help them across all walks of life. For example, learning an instrument helps build focus and enhances creativity. Sports help children value teamwork, respect and above all, accepting defeat with grace” Academic success and engagement have been linked to participation in extracurricular activities. Any academic program’s effectiveness is determined by learners’ achievement in all activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Classroom activities and co curricular activities are usually mixed into an academic curriculum. Co-curricular activities extend classroom learning by assuming previously acquired materials for various challenges (UNHCR Global Education Strategy 2012–2016). However, as teachers of refugee learners, they should value creative arts because they help the refugee learners to adapt to the curriculum. When

refugee learners like creative arts that is when they keep at school and continue with their education. At the same time it sharpens their minds with exposure of their talents. Therefore the role of teachers should be to help support recovery and transition as they provide immense support towards refugee children’s learning that can build on their resilience

The study also found that refugee psychosocial support was insufficient. Participants stated that “We provide psychosocial support to refugee learners at school that aims to promote or protect their well-being. However it is not really adequate in as far as language proficiency is concerned. But where necessary we sometimes have interpreters who come in our aid especially when we follow them up to their homes” This finding is consistent with past studies (Carlos-Guzmán, 2016). Refugee psychosocial support builds internal and external resources for refugee learners to cope with adversity. It also supports families to provide for children’s physical, economic, educational, health and social needs. Psychosocial support also helps build resilience in children (Kiyaga-Nsubuga, 2005). The researcher observed that psychosocial support services are still wanting in primary schools in Nakivale settlement given the overwhelming number of learners with social emotional difficulties in these schools. These learners have wounds of traumatic experiences as a result of the crisis faced in their countries of origin and hence the need for psychosocial supports. Guidance and counseling is a crucial psychosocial support service that schools in Nakivale should provide to enable learners achieves academic adaptation to thrive and regain their emotional and academic competences. Although there are other simple practical ways through which psychosocial support services can be provided to refugee learners, they have not yet been adopted by schools in Nakivale. These ways include: behavioral modification, cognitive skill restructuring, social skill training, and painting among others. The challenges experienced by the primary schools in Nakivale settlement in the provision of psychosocial support services included; inadequate knowledge and skills of teachers on psychosocial support provision, differences in cultural beliefs, lack of interest of teachers in psychosocial provision, inadequate space in schools for child friendly spaces where play activities can be conducted, inadequate funds to recruit psychosocial workers in schools, lack of enough time to provide psychosocial services by the teachers and NGOs, rigid curriculum, inadequate funds to purchase psychosocial support materials in schools, stigma in the society and unsafe learning environments. The integration of psychosocial support into educational activities is premised on several key concepts and principles that are referred to frequently in that it reduces school dropouts and enhances completion of the primary school cycle and progression (Brown, 2001, Burns and Lawrie, 2015 and Shah, 2017). The reports from the three schools agreed with the findings that class the role of teachers i.e. classroom teaching, creative arts/ extracurricular activities and refugee psychosocial support was a corner stone in the building of resilience in terms of language proficiency, curriculum adaptation and completion



of the primary school cycle of refugee primary school learners in Nakivale settlement.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the role of the teachers in building resilience of refugee learners in three primary schools in Nakivale settlement was classroom teaching, creative arts/extracurricular activities and refugee psychosocial support, and that the contribution of teachers to the resilience of refugee primary school learners in primary schools in Nakivale settlement was inadequate due to ineffective classroom teaching, lack of creative arts/extracurricular activities and inadequate refugee psychosocial support.

## RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended the need to need to put in place a refugee teacher-management framework to enhance their roles in the building of resilience of refugee learners. The primary teacher education training refugee curriculum should be reorganized and aligned to cater for the training of specialized teachers in refugee education. Those factors that enable teachers to build resilience of refugee primary school learners should be strengthened and enhanced if the teachers have adequately contribute to resilience building of refugee learners in primary schools in Nakivale settlement.

## STUDY IMPLICATIONS

The practical research recommendations from this study should be utilized by relevant to develop those frameworks and policies that can effectively guide in refugee primary school education as far as the role and contributions of teachers are concerned. This study holds that if indeed Uganda has to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the goals of Education for refugees as well as the goals of Vision 2030, we must address any negative influences emanating from the roles of teachers and the implications it has on resilience building of refugee learners.

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