



BECOMING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN A REFUGEE CAMP: STORIES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN DADAAB, KENYA



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ABSTRACT

This research provides insight into the pedagogical narratives of refugee teachers enrolled as university students in a teacher education diploma program based in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camps. Through interviews with 25 refugee teachers, we explore the challenges and contributions experienced during their teaching practicum in Dadaab schools. The majority of teachers interviewed reported increased awareness of diverse teaching strategies, use of collaboration with colleagues, and strengthened relationships with students.

OBJECTIVE

- To explore refugee teachers' experiences in a teacher education diploma program offered in the world's largest refugee camp, Dadaab Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Dadaab is the largest refugee camp in the world, hosting close to 350,000 refugees; the majority (95%) is from Somalia (UNHCR, 2016). Dadaab is located in North-Eastern province, Kenya. Most Dadaab refugees fled from adversities of civil war and drought in their home countries. Refugees consider education a great asset to overcome the challenging situations of refugee life. Until 2014, refugees had limited opportunities for post-secondary education, especially teacher education. The establishment of Dadaab campus resulting from the collaborative efforts of Canadian and Kenyan universities, enables Dadaab refugee teachers to enrol as university students in a teacher education diploma program. In 2014 the first cohort of 76 refugee teachers were enrolled as secondary teacher candidates.

Dadaab Refugee Population

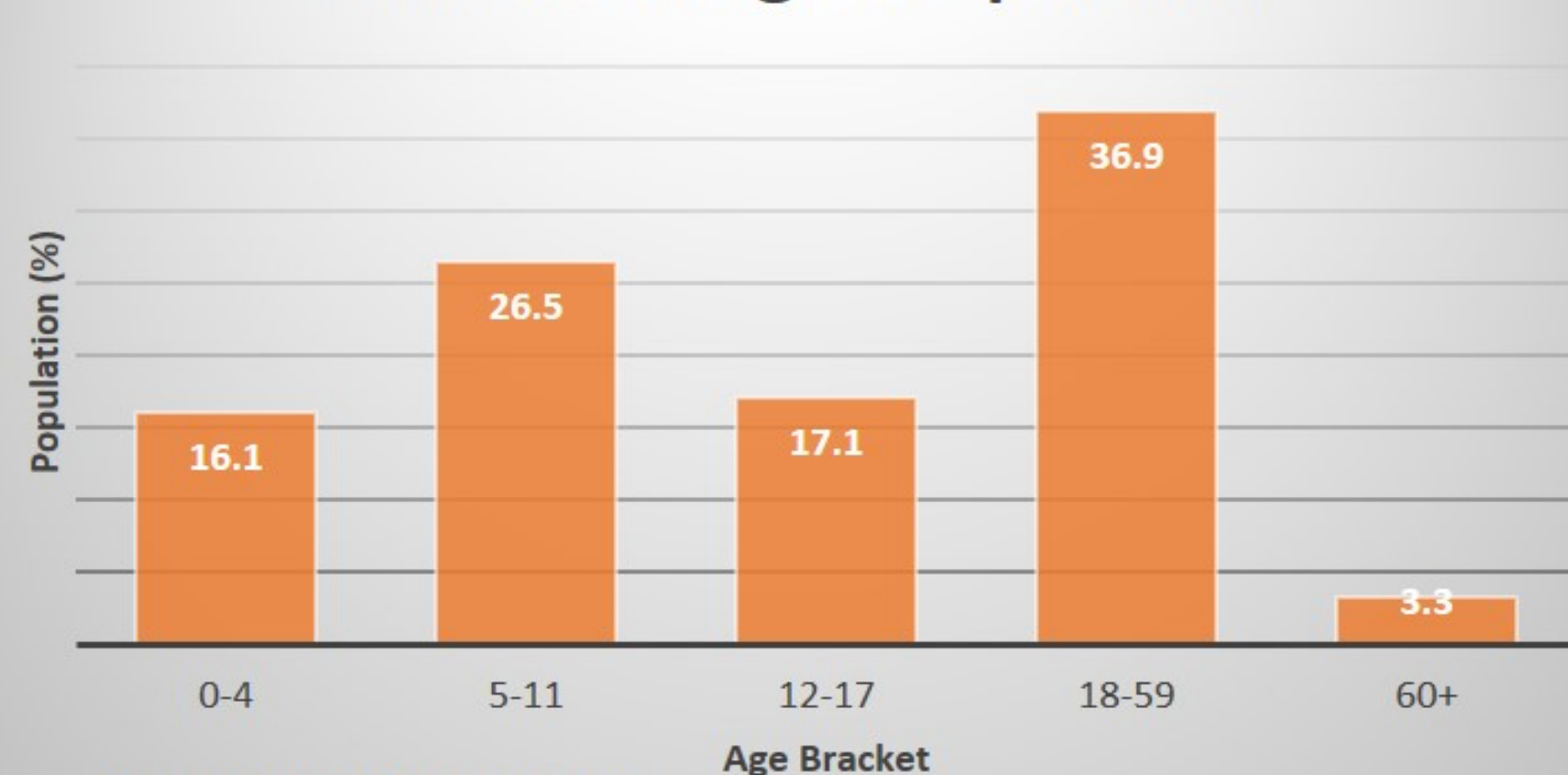


Figure 1: Dadaab Refugee Population by Age Bracket

RESEARCH METHODS

- Phone interviews with 25 student-teachers enrolled in the teacher education program in Dadaab refugee camp who were involved in their teaching practicum.
- Interviews were 25-50 minutes long and conducted in English and sometimes in Somali.
- Interview questions mainly focused on student teachers' expectations and experiences as university students in the program.
- All interviews were transcribed using *Transana* software and later coded and analyzed by the research team.

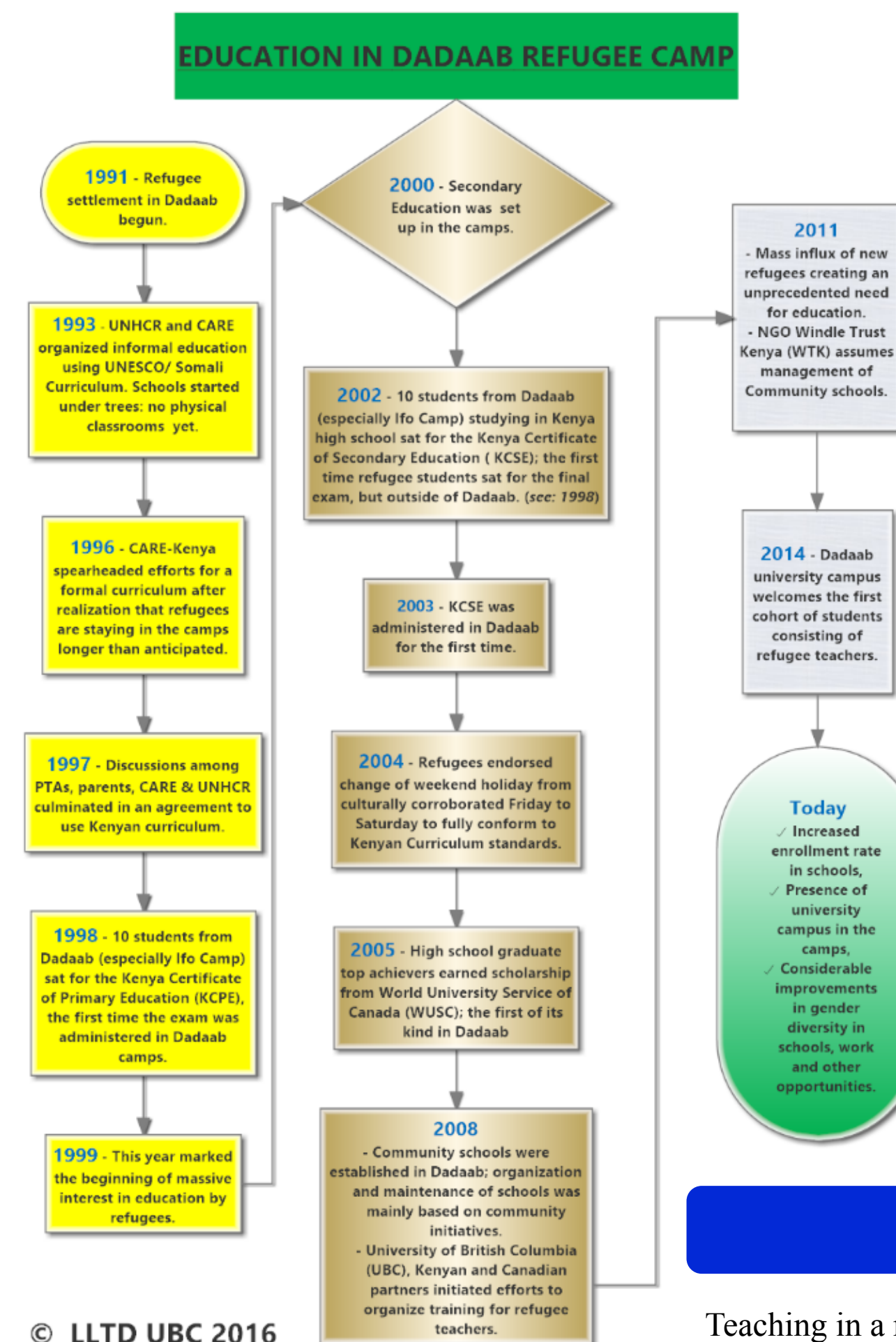
RESULTS

The study's analysis indicated the following themes:

- ❖ **Increased teaching confidence.**
 - "I feel fully confident as a teacher."
 - "I gained more confidence now, I feel like I am a teacher a qualified teacher"
 - "Before I used to copy my previous teachers' style of teaching, now I try different approaches and choose which one is effective- I make my class interactive by dividing students into groups."
- ❖ **Gathered an awareness and ability to use different strategies to address diverse student needs.**
 - "We actually learnt how to organize learners to share the little resources that they have..."
 - "Now, I pay attention to my class diversity.. some have low vision...and accommodate all my students by slowing my speed and asking frequent relevant questions."
- ❖ **Acquired new strategies to improve students' performance.**
 - "Before one of the things that I have seen previously in the life of a student is, I used to produce B- or C+ One of my students got an A in mathematics and a lot of A minus, so am very happy."
- ❖ **Created collaborative teams with fellow colleagues and friends.**
 - "We also discuss on how we can give advice to learners and also we discuss issues related to development of the school, For example, We divide ourselves according to area of specialization like, language teachers discuss issues together and math, chemistry and biology discuss the same way too. For example, if student has a mathematics question and [then the teacher] presents it to other teachers, we, the teachers first discuss and give a final answer to the student."
- ❖ **Inordinately increased student-teacher relationship.**
 - "Before I went into this program, students were not friendly with me...but now I have seen that students coming to me in my office in my free time, they come to me, they bring questions., and we are now more friendly."



Figure 3: Aerial Photo of Dadaab Camp Source: pressroom.co.ke



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Figure 2: Dadaab Education Timeline



Figure 5: Map Showing Dadaab Camp

Source: Spiegel Online (www.Spiegel.de)

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching in a refugee camp is challenging. Classes are large; there are few resources; students have limited access to textbooks and labs; and teachers have few opportunities for continued education. Before 2014, Dadaab refugee teachers had no opportunities for teacher education within the Camps. They taught mainly as they were taught when they were in school themselves. Now in year one of their teacher education program, the teachers report increased confidence in their teaching, use of diverse teaching approaches, collaboration with colleagues, and improvement in student performance. Although these results are promising and add to the long list of ongoing ameliorative efforts to transform Dadaab education, we wonder how the teachers will be able to sustain such changes over time!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

As a research team and the authors of this work, seven of us grew up in the Dadaab camp, became teachers in secondary schools there, and currently are studying on scholarships in Canadian universities. Four of us who have taught secondary teachers in the camp within a Teacher Education Diploma Program are curriculum researchers in a Canadian university.



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