Dreams and Participation in Education: A Narrative Inquires into the Life Experience of Myanmar Refugees in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this research is to explore how refugees from Myanmar in Malaysia make sense of their life experiences. A narrative inquiry approach is chosen as it is a way to get in touch with the internal landscape of the participants. A five day camp was held with a group of twenty refugee teachers and two in-depth interviews were conducted with two groups of refugees in Kuala Lumpur. The findings reveal an overarching theme of the importance of education. The participants believe in the value of education for their young and constantly involve themselves in the learning and teaching of English language. The refugees interpret their present life experience as meaningful based on dreams and hopes they hold firmly on education. However, a few humanitarian issues related to education were revealed and discussed against the backdrop of the Malaysia context and the right of refugee children to education.

Keywords: Narrative inquiries, dream, refugee education, refugee children participation in education.

1. Introduction

As defined by the UN Refugee Agency (2010), refugees are people who “Owing to 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.”

As of 2010, it was reported that there are about 81,516 documented refugees residing in Malaysia with 93.3% (76,120) from Myanmar (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee, 2012a). Among the various refugee residing countries, Malaysia was found to have the third highest number of Myanmar refugees after Bangladesh and Thailand (UNHCR, 2012a).

Although Malaysia has a large number of refugees from Myanmar, but the government does not provide an asylum system to regulate their status and rights in Malaysia as Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Hence, these asylum seekers
and refugees are considered illegal immigrants in Malaysia (Immigration Act 1959/63, UNHCR Global Appeal, 2012). So, according to the Malaysian Immigration Act 1959/63, Section 6(3), 15(4), 34(1) and 34(3), these asylum seekers and refugees may be subjected to a fine (≤ RM 10,000), imprisonment (≤ 5 years) or whipping (≤ 6 strokes) for illegal entry and overstaying. Some are spared from being whipped because lawyers or UNHCR representatives speak out for them. However, there are also times when refugees have been wrongly convicted for crimes they did not commit because without a lawyer, or even an interpreter, they did not have a chance to defend themselves.

When seeking refuge in Malaysia, refugees have to be self reliant and meet their own needs of housing, jobs, education, etc, to survive. There are no official refugee camps in Malaysia. Refugees are scattered throughout the country, but most of them live in Klang Valley. They stay in low-cost apartments, near construction sites, and in make-shift camps in the jungles (SHELTER, 2012). As they are there illegally, finding work is always a challenge. Most of them work in restaurants, construction sites, plantations and will do almost any kind of job to earn a living. As for education, some charitable organizations and refugee communities set up informal schools for refugee children.

2. Some Positive Development in Malaysia

Despite the challenges faced by the Myanmar refugees in Malaysia, UNHCR reported that there had been some positive developments in 2010 and the first quarter of 2011. The Malaysian government now allows the provision of assistance to refugees – the right to work and improved access to education and health care, while they take refuge in Malaysia before a durable solution is found for them (UNHCR Global Appeal, 2012). In fact, many Myanmar refugees from Malaysia have been resettled to third countries such as the USA, Australia, Canada, Norway and Denmark (UNHCR, 2010).

As Myanmar refugees mainly speak their own dialect or their country’s National Language (Burmese), one of the main challenges faced by refugees being resettled in third countries is the language barrier. They have limited exposure and understanding of the most widespread language – English. Education for underage and adult refugees was very limited while they were in Malaysia. Hence, it became “one of the greatest challenges in their integration” in third countries (UNHCR, 2010). As UNHCR rightly pointed out, “The absence of basic education among refugee children in Malaysia will become a handicap for them as they grow up. It inhibits their opportunities to better their lives, creating a possible second generation of an illiterate or unskilled community” (UNCHR, 2012c). Although, international assistance for refugee has decreased over the years, UNHCR continues its efforts to work with the Malaysian government to improve the social prospect for refugees such as access to employment, better education and health care. UNCHR, local NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) and refugee communities also co-operate to provide access to essential services that focus on health, education and community development. They run mobile clinics (eg. A.C.T.S, an NGO) to provide medical aid, open informal schools for refugee children, provide basic needs for refugee children (eg Shelter, Home for Children) and assist refugee women or families to start small businesses. Also, through the UN refugee agency’s new small grants project – the Social Protection Fund - it provides some financial
assistance to support the refugee communities own solutions. This is in line with the perspective that education is a tool for healing and development especially for refugee children who have suffered traumatic experiences (Yule, 2002).

3. Education Needs and Education Rights

UNESCO has declared that the right to education is a basic human right. Like all children, the Malaysian Myanmar refugees’ children should also have the access to education which is the pathway for development and survival. However living in exile, these refugees’ children are not only denied a normal childhood but also do not have access to any form of formal education. In Malaysia only 40% of some 13,800 refugee children of school age have access to some kind of education and 60% of the rest of the refugee children are not in schools. (UNHCR, Malaysia 2012). These Myanmar refugee children attend either education projects organised by UNHCR and non–governmental organisations (NGOs) or community based education where classes are organised and conducted by refugee committees themselves.

In Malaysia only 20% of Myanmar refugee children attend structured education projects run by UNHCR partners with NGOs (UNHCR, Malaysia 2012). Thus, this means that 80% of refugees’ children attend community based schools which are conducted in resource-scarce conditions. In Malaysia, the eight structured education projects under the care of UNHCR partners with NGO are assisted by UNHCR volunteers and refugee teaching staff who are paid a small salary. The 80% of Myanmar refugee children attend community based schools which are conducted by the refugee communities themselves with little support from the public. These communities based schools which are normally located within the refugee population are accessible to the large number of school age children. In Kuala Lumpur and Selangor there are about 70 such community based schools attended by 4000 refugee children. Since these communities based schools are self supported, dependent on public donations, they are restricted by a lack of educational resources and qualified teachers.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) advocates for human rights-based approaches in education. According to UNESCO, education is for all without discrimination inclusive of poverty, learning difficulties, gender or other issues (UNESCO, 2007a). There should be no discrimination in the development of education policies and programmes. However, this concept of inclusion normally refers to children with special needs, so that pupils with learning challenges or differing educational needs will be embraced as enriching learning opportunities, instead of presenting learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2005). People may argue that education “For All” refers to the citizens of a specific country. That point of view excludes the non-citizens, the stateless children. However, this right of access to education includes refugee children. UNESCO, (2007b, p.44) states that it is necessary to provide protection and assistance to ensure respect for the rights of children who are refugees or seeking asylum. The right to education has been recognized as basic human right by UNESCO. Therefore, refugee children should be included. Malaysian Government has agreed to improve the access to education for refugee children but it is left to chances and the mercy of the community.
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNESCO, 1999, 2007a) has also broadened our understanding of children rights to education by stipulating four more core principles: “non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development of the child to the maximum extent possible etc”. Therefore it is evidence that the right to education relates not only to access to education, but also to minimize, ideally eliminate, discrimination at all levels, especially in the areas of providing good quality education and enhancing positive environments in which education is being provided, meaning education requires a respectful and conducive learning environment. This will further relate to the bigger civil, political, economic or social context. At the 2000 World Education Forum, the educational needs of children and young people were highlighted (World Education Forum 2000).

The purpose of education, according to UNESCO, is to promote development in children and young people so that they can “participate effectively in a free society, and promote understanding, friendship and tolerance” (UNESCO, 2007b). Delors (1999) describes four dimensions of learning as pillars in education: The dimensions of “To Know”, “To Do”, “To Be” and “To Live Together”. “To Know “and “To Be” will help to establish the learner identity. How would these aspirations of education be possible for refugee children when their basic need of education is not met. Will we be able to live together where there are so many “strangers” around us, include asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants (Bauman, 2007)? Our treatment of them is a test of our humanity.

4. Method

The objective of this research is to find out the meaning participants make from their life experiences living in Malaysia as refugees. Narrative inquiry is adopted as when participants share their life experience in storytelling, they will “re-member, re-visit, re-visualize, re-cover, re-new” (Metzger, 1992) in order to make sense of their lives. This is supported by Bruner (1991) who describes the “human capacity to process knowledge in this interpretative way (Brunner, 1991). Using narrative approach to find out how meaning is constructed has been widely supported by many authors (Duff, 2002; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Ospines & Dodge, 2005). Pavlish (2007) investigated the life experiences of refugee women and men, based on an African refugee camp study, to make recommendations to improve the health care provision. Not much is known about the internal world of refugees from South East Asia. It is hoped that through these emerging narratives and two-way interactions with the research participants, the ways in which this group of participants make meaning from life experience can be better understood.

The three researchers and six student facilitators were totally immersed in a 5-day intensive English Camp with a group of 20 community-based teachers from the UNHCR. Through the creative English teaching, researchers and the student facilitators serve as participant observers in the process of data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted. The intensive 5 days interaction with the participants has provided a platform for communication and clarification. Further in-depth focus group interviews were scheduled 4 months later with two groups of research participants in their educational centres to find out more about their narration.
At the start of the English camp, almost all the participants were strangers to each other as they came from different refugee communities. Ice-breaking games were used to speed up the process of overcoming shyness and developing friendship. The teaching of English language adopted an engaging-activities based learning approach. Instead of using the traditional rote learning of memorizing grammar or vocabularies, we used a Watching video clip to learn words/phases about places/events; Treasure Hunting to learn directions, role play and drama presentations to construct sentences. Students learnt to make/ accept offers, apologies and requests, respond to and express thanks/ greetings and farewells by happily immersing themselves into the learning activities and storytelling. During the final group presentation, the participants involved themselves in drama, preparing teaching materials and presenting their teaching plan in a big group. Some of them had already learnt English in their own country but most of them started to learn English when arrived in Malaysia. We met a few refugee teachers who could speak very fluent English, with only occasional grammatical errors or inconsistencies of tense. The participants were not afraid to make mistakes. With their newly learnt English they engaged themselves in role play and games. During break times we got to know the participants more by conversing in English.

The data presented in this paper was mainly from a “dreams” (hopes for the future) sharing session when the participants were encouraged to draw their dream using different colours on a piece of paper and later shared them in a big group. They used the past tense to share their best memories, and the future tense to describe their dreams. Additional personal narration was collected during the follow-up in-depth interview sessions 4 months after the language camps. The relationships established during the camps were amazing. The participants were happy to meet the researchers as if we were long missed friends when we returned 4 months later. Two focus group interview sessions were conducted in two educational centres. Three participants were present at each of the centers. Two of the participants did not attend the English camp but they were friends and colleagues from the two centres we visited.

Participants were briefed about confidentiality and the purpose of this research. They all agreed to have the interview sessions taped. All the interview scripts were transcribed. Overarching themes emerging from the data were identified. The verbatim statements were quoted without any changes to retain their original voices. Data analysis followed Chase’s suggestion of multiple lenses and voices (Chase, 2003) which include the voice of the refugees. Attention was given to the themes which emerged from the narration.

5. Findings
5.1 Dreams Related to Education

While recognizing that they were refugees in Malaysia, the participants revealed their hopes and dreams for the future. The dreams they shared were intimately interwoven with their love for their country and community. However, as refugees, they may not be able to return to their home country, but they do not think they will be in Malaysia forever either. Their present misery thus becomes bearable in the light of their hopes and dreams of the future. As one of the participant commented, ‘One month one family successfully applied to leave Malaysia. They normally got the opportunity to relocate to American, Australia, or
European countries such as Denmark, Norway’. Having already obtained a university degree in her own country, a full time teacher in this centre still aspires to learn more when she gets to the new country, ‘I want to continue my study...this is my dream’ Their dreams look big and some of them are very ambitious. Here are some of the examples: ‘I want to be the most famous author in the world’ ‘I want to be a famous motivational speaker to encourage people, to fight for the right of children’.

A 26 year old young man shared that he dreams to attain his PhD when he is 45. It is a common characteristic that their ambitions are often unselfish and full of altruism, and always show concern for their community. ‘One day when I go to a third country (USA), I will be fine and I will make a lot of money. I want to share my money with asylum seekers’. They used metaphors from nature and this revealed their cultural values. Very frequently they use the metaphors of trees and soils to describe their dreams. ‘I want to climb to the top of a tree, I want to see the world’ (The top of a tree).

Another 28 year old male who came from Myanmar, used climbing up to refer to a high Business Management position and he used returning to zero to denote his life philosophy. He would like himself to the numerical number ONE, and people could witness his contribution to society by adding as many zeros as possible. He would be then proud of his life. The spirit of taking pride in contributing to his community is prominent. ‘I would like to learn and grow step by step like a tree, it is like when I die, people can add any number of zero to me and my value will increase.’ ‘I would like to stand firm on the soil and wherever I go in the future, may be Australia or USA, I will work hard so that the soil will bear fruits for me.’ These metaphors were used by a few participants and they reflected their love for the soil and a less materialistic disposition.

Despite being badly treated by their own country (most of them fled their country due to persecution) they still want to return and serve their people. ‘I want to go back to my own country and I want to help my own people.’ The thematic force of “my country, my people, my community” is very strong throughout their sharing. One of the refugees aged 22, a Masters Degree holder in Zoology shared that he was hopeful because he planned to get a loan from UNHCR to further his studies in one of the European countries. This hope keeps him going. He is currently writing articles for his community centre. Hope keeps people moving on despite hardships and helps them to survive. To continue learning is a dream for them even under desperate situations.

5.2 Present Participation related to Education

All of the participants in this study actively participate in teaching the children in various educational centres located in Kuala Lumpur. Some of the centres were sponsored by UNHCR, receiving books, provisions, and rental. Some were helped by NGOs. However, they have to manage the teaching themselves. Most of the participants we interviewed enjoyed teaching. They feel happy to be given the opportunity to teach their mother language because it was prohibited in their own country.

This young lady, in her late 20s, just got her application to resettle in the United States approved. She had been teaching the Chin children for more than two years. She made a choice to teach the children because she values education for children very highly. She shared
her dilemma in having to sacrifice the chance of a job elsewhere in order to teach the children their own mother tongue. One of the participant commented, ‘If the children stay here for 5 or 6 years and one day they get to go back to their own country they are not able to continue their education. They will miss out education, and if they don’t have any certificate, they are not able to continue with life’ (she means the quality of their future will be at stake).

Even as temporary residents of Kuala Lumpur, they constantly think of the future of the children. Learning their native language, English, Mathematics and Science are the main four subjects offered in most of the refugees’ educational centres, partly sponsored by UNHCR and some local charitable organizations. They aim at educating the children so that they are able to make good lives for themselves, and will have a good future. ‘When some of the children go back to their home country, they have been then staying out of their country for many years. They are not able to catch up with their own language …and if they don’t learn English, they are not able to survive if later they have a change to be relocated to a new country like American or Australia. The teacher refugees repeatedly explained the importance of education, and reasons they want to teach their children both their native language and English. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) ‘explanation’ is part of the negotiation process of meaning. The more the participants explain, according to this perspective, the more the participants are convinced of the way they choose to live their lives and the deeper they feel committed to the course they have chosen. It seems to make their own identity clearer. They develop a sense of self. This is what Bruner (2001) meant by “meaning making” by engaging in teaching. Engaging in teaching made their lives hopeful and meaningful. It makes life worth living, so to speak, in a foreign land as refugees. They will keep educating their children as long as they live in Malaysia as refugees. Learning and teaching English seems to be the only hope for them. According to Ricoeur (1988) analysis, every narrative finally has to do with reversals of fortune, for better or worse - from the action they engage themselves at the moment. ‘We will not be stuck here forever, there will be a time, we will be located elsewhere...there is why learning English is very important for us, especially for our children’.

5.3 Present Life Experience

The social conditions in the places where the participants lived were revealed. Participants disclosed their fears and anxieties about living in a society in which they do not have an Identification Card (ID) or legal status. They felt themselves to be outcasts, being taken advantage of and without access to formal education or health care services. The dominant story depicted the fate of those stripped of identity as beings less than human, however the participants strove to make meanings out of their life experience. The themes of who they are as refugees, being located temporarily in Malaysia, were found to be closely related to their actions, especially holding on to the importance of education for their children.

The wider environment in which the education is provided: the refugees find themselves in an environment in which their human rights are not respected and they are exploited. For examples: ‘The landlords charge us more rental because they do not trust us’. ‘When we work, we get little payment and we have to hide in a kitchen, sometimes, our boss does not
pay us, and we cannot say anything...’ ‘Taxi drivers do not take us as they are suspicious of us’. ‘We were robbed as the robbers recognized our faces as refugees and they were very sure that we dared not report as we do not have an ID’. ‘Even police will catch us and ask for money, they will ask for 200 ringgit. We were so scared because policemen can put us in jail’.

Refugees are not called refugees until they are identified by UNHCR and been given an UNHCR ID number, which means they are genuine refugees, properly registered under UNHCR. Therefore being caught or detained by police with no status is a nightmare that the asylum seekers dread, because they will face jail or whipping. As one participant lamented ‘It takes very long to apply for an UNHCR ID. Without an ID we cannot go anywhere’. ‘The school children told us, their parents are not able to go out because there have no ID card’. ‘There was one time, my ID card was robbed. Normally I put I ID card in my pocket when I go out, but that day I wore a skirt without a pocket so I took a handbag but my hand bag was robbed and I cried so much. I was so scared and I reported to UNHCR, then the officer only gave me this temporary paper’. That temporary paper is her ID, she still felt sad about losing a real UNHCR card and having to use a temporary paper. ‘The robbers knew that we dare not report’. According to the participant, ‘There was a time, a young boy in our centre desperately need to be sent to a clinic, but he didn’t have UNHCR card, without a UNHCR card, they cannot get discount. Cannot discount half, It was really difficult’.

One lady told us about a visit she made to Cameron Highland recently. She was so shocked to find many of her people working in the farms. She noticed their skin looked black and dry. She felt so helpless when she saw their children also working on the farms. The children grew tall but black and dry ‘Some of them were ill, but they cannot see a doctor’. Seeing a doctor costs money and they did not have an ID card. UNHCR card provides 50 percent subsidized medical costs. It would be impossible for those who do not have an UNHCR card to seek medical assistance. She continued to explain the devastating situation: - ‘They are hard working, but they don’t get money. He is not registered. So, this man he really wanted to die. He told me he didn’t want to live anymore’ This old man she described was not registered which means he didn’t have an ID and he had already committed suicide. She continued ‘I was so scared and shocked...we are also human. I fully understand him. He was feeling frustrated because he got no money to help the family’.

The refugees were being bullied. They are being treated as if they had no identity, no voice, no feeling. However, the participants struggle to give themselves a voice. They stressed that they have feelings like everyone else. ‘We are also human, we feel sad’ Facing exploitation and bullied by heartless bosses, misunderstood and discriminated against by local people, working endlessly day after day in dark. No identity for them means statelessness and working far away from a police presence. ‘Sometime we don’t have enough money, we cannot buy toothpaste...we need to pay the electricity, utilities and food and paper to teach the children’, ‘But this lady helps us. She let us use her bank account. So we put the handicraft money into her account. And when we need money, we withdraw from that account’.

The dominant discourse for the refugees is no access to public services as they are not able to produce an identity. However, identity can be borrowed. UNHCR ID is not good enough to be included for bank services. But there are always some people around to lend a
hand like the above mentioned lady who allowed them access to the bank services by using her ID.

5.4 Community Involvement Relates To Education

The refugee’s teachers assist each other financially as one of them mentioned, ‘Those who are paid 600 Malaysia ringgit a month share half of the salary with another colleague’ One male participant revealed that he got a monthly payment of 600 ringgit per month for teaching the children, but he would give half of his payment to another unpaid worker. ‘Working full time we get 600 ringgit. Some of our friends are not registered with UNHCR so we have to share with them. We have altogether 30 full time teachers but only 15 teachers are sponsored by UNHCR, so we share with our friends. The same thing happened to me, for example, I work here for almost four years, but they didn’t pay me until now.’ (Meaning previously he was not paid officially but his friend shared half of his salary with him).

They feel like they belong to the same family, those getting monthly payments will half it immediately as they feel sorry for their friends sharing the same teaching load but not getting payment due to delay or the long process of applying for a UNHCR ID. They were happy to work together for the benefits of the children. They felt that they were being useful and contributing to the community and they were proud of it. These narratives give a strong sense of the community bond. Most of them aspired to teach English; they were trying to “live up to” the ideal of “an honorable life” by making a contribution to the community.

We as interviewers wondered how the refugee teachers survived with just 300 ringgit per months in Kuala Lumpur, a cosmopolitan city in Malaysia. Their commitment to education and community seemed to be the explanation. A strong concept of honor and shame is deeply rooted in their culture. This reveals the relational aspect of their identity. Somers (1994) described the peoples’ sense of identity which emphasis on the importance of community is rooted in their culture. They often mentioned how meaningful and honorable it was to be a teacher because of the importance of education for the children. They felt sorry and ashamed when people from their own community, doing the same teaching job could not get paid because they had no ID. Therefore they practiced community spirit by halving their salaries.

6. Discussion

This discussion section will relate the research findings with the three important educational concepts highlighted by UNESCO (1999). The three concepts include: (1) access to education, (2) quality of education, and (3) the wider environment in which education is provided and, where the children are being molded.

6.1 Access to Education

In our findings, the Myanmar refugee children were marginalized and were being denied access to local government education. They were being helped by NGOs and UNHCR to have community-based education. The educational environment is poor as classes are held in rented flats or shop houses with no proper chairs and tables, lacking in basic facilities and are largely over crowded. These classrooms are also used as bedrooms by the refugees during the night. Due to poor educational resources and family poverty, many adolescent refugees
dropping out of school to find work to supplement their family’s income. The participants in this study revealed that they were happy to be able to keep their own language, which is Chin, which they are not allowed to learn in their own country.

Learning English reinforces the dream of resettling in a third country in the future. Education is seen as a tool for healing especially for the refugee children who are being viewed as at risk children (Lese & Robbin, 1994).

6.2 The Quality of Education

The two communities based educational centres we visited displayed similarities: lack of basic funding and shortage of resources. Half of the staff was unpaid; therefore those who had wages shared them in the widely practiced community spirit of Myanmar refugees. Both of the centres had 6 teachers to teach up to 130 pupils ranged from ages 5 to 18 and were located in levels 2 and level 3 of a shop house. There was a lack of sufficient manpower or training for teachers. Rote learning or corporate punishment might be employed to manage big classes of students as children can become noisy, sitting crammed side by side on a long wooden bench. Resources are scare. Qualifications of teachers were very diverse, some with university education, some with high school education. Some spoke very good English as they were graduates from their own country, whereas some did not speak so well but they involved themselves in education, probably using their own mother language in teaching non-English subjects such as Science and Mathematics.

Furthermore, there was not enough money for materials; there were no Arts or Physical education facilities. Classrooms were cramped with up to 130 pupils in two levels of a shop house. There were no Arts or Sports courses, no after school curriculum provided except girls stayed back after school to help make craft items for sale so that they could fund their education. Boys are left playing football or running around the streets, where they often attract the attention of people only too ready to call attention to their apparent aimlessness.

6.3 The Wider Environment

The conditions within and around the educational environment are potentially negative and risky for the refugee children. Although there is some sort of access to education for Myanmar refugee children, they are obviously living a separate life style and experiencing a separate standard of education. They do not enjoy equality of access to education and quickly become aware that neither they nor adult refugees have equality of access to employment, health care services etc. Discrimination, rejection, exclusion and violence are part of their daily life experience. They witness the marginalization, of their parents, their exploitation by local employers or police, their worries about health care, the lack of basic safety and security. This makes us wonder what sense of self these children grow up with and what kind of values the whole educational and social environment bestows on them?

One encouraging phenomenon was the refugee children were able to be educated using their own mother tongue which they were not able to do in their own country. English is learnt as a second language. This is cost saving and more effective in learning as pupils learn best using their own language. UNESCO (2003) has supported this mother tongue instruction as a means of improving education quality. However, the teaching of mutual understanding
among different groups and respect for others’ fundamental rights was absent as there was discrimination among different communities, even within the Chin tribe, and lack of mutual understanding led them to compete with each other. Malaysia is a multicultural society, the Myanmar refugee children learn only Chin language and English, although the living environment of this group of refugees means that they have to interact with Malays, Chinese and Indians in their community. Although adaptation and acculturation are some the main aspect of the role of education for refugee children (Weinstein et al, 2007; Taylor, 2008; Smith, 2008), it was found to be absent from our research participants.

Since currently in Malaysia there are no legislative or administrative provisions in dealing with the situations, and most of the refugees are hoping to be settled in other countries. Much abuse of refuses arises from the difficulties and length of time getting a UNHCR ID. Efforts should be made to speed up the process. The longer the refugees remain in Malaysia the more their exploitation will become a routine cheap labour option for some employers. While refugees are temporarily staying in Malaysia, perhaps, there should be more public awareness and more help be available in assisting UNHCR in the provision of educational facilities to children of these people who have been “displaced” by adverse political and environmental conditions in their native country (Vernez, 1991; Dane, 2006).

It is hoped that there will be more political dialogue between various human rights groups and policy makers of the country so that education for children and young people for refugee can be improved. There is a need to have more coordinating community services or partnerships among various sectors to help with the education of this group of special refugee children. To develop a strong civilized society, various communities can commit themselves by doing volunteer work, donating books for the library and teaching materials; NGO or NPO can play their role in promoting a more caring and civilized society such as reducing discrimination to those less advantaged children, and to ensure adequate support for them to sustain the community-based education.

7. Conclusion

It is impossible for refugee children to access the local government educational system due to political reasons. A few concerns and humanitarian issues remain unresolved. Refugee children are a potentially vulnerable group of in the population. Safeguarding their basic right to education is what a civilized society should do. Our participants fled from their home country where cultural linguistic diversity was prohibited, only to find themselves in the midst of an isolated educational environment. The participants in this study hold a dream for their future based on the hope they have in education for their young. As refugee children may reside in a country for many years before their parents finally get a resettlement to a third country or being deported back to their home country, it is our responsibility as a civilized society to provide and to improve the education for the vulnerable children.

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