

Paper Title: Provision of quality education in the context of Syrian refugee children in the UK: Opportunities and challenges.

Roda Madziva¹ and Juliet Thondhlana²

¹School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham,
Roda.madziva@nottingham.ac.uk

²School of Education, University of Nottingham, Juliet.thondhlana@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract

While existing research has shown the importance of the three interrelated domains of the wider policy, the school and home/community environments in the development of quality education for learners, this literature does not fully capture the experiences of the refugee population. In this article we focus on a group of Syrian refugees that came as part of the first large cohort that was welcomed in the UK in December 2015. We adapt Tikly's quality education frameworks and develop a model that highlights not only the importance of the three intersecting environments, but also the specific inputs/processes that are critical to achieving quality education for refugees. In so doing, we stress the critical role of English as a tool for refugee children's inclusion and integration in schools. Consequently, the contribution of the paper is an understanding of the inputs/processes that are key to the development of quality education for migrant/refugee children.

Keywords

Quality education; refugee children; Syrian refugees; English as an additional language; refugee integration.

Introduction

The rapid increase in complex refugee flows in recent years has been described as ‘the worst refugee crisis since World War II’ (Amnesty International 2015). As UNHCR (2016, 5) states “we are facing the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. Above all, this is not just a crisis of numbers; it is also a crisis of solidarity”. UNHCR’s reference to a ‘crisis of solidarity’ aptly captures the European Union’s (EU) struggle to get its member states on board to agree on burden/responsibility sharing within the context of the current refugee crisis. With the exception of Germany and Sweden, European countries, particularly the UK, have been reluctant to engage with the transnational project of coordinating access and settlement, even before the UK’s vote to exit the EU (Gower and Cromarty 2016; Ostrand 2015). Against the backdrop of both its increasingly more securitised immigration policies, and the Conservative government’s pledge of bringing net migration down to tens of thousands by 2020, the UK has traditionally adopted an attitude of hostility rather than hospitality when it comes to admitting refugees. This is not surprising given that net migration has been consistently on the rise instead of dropping and the target also includes refugees. Given the pressure to meet the net migration target, committing to resettle a large number of Syrian refugees could be perceived as contradictory to this political goal (Ostrand 2015).

However, in response to both pressure from the British public and international criticism, especially after the images of the drowned Syrian boy, Aylan Al-Kurdi, had gone viral, in September 2015, the then Prime Minister David Cameron, committed to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees, under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPR), within a five year period (Gower and Cromarty 2016). Meanwhile, VPR is a highly controversial scheme, not only because of its selective approach of ‘particularly vulnerable’ Syrians but also due to its disregard of those Syrian refugees at the borders of the UK or in other European countries, as refugees who need protection. Arguably, the category ‘vulnerable Syrians’ entails the rejection of all other refugees including those from the Middle East and North Africa region, fleeing violence and persecution. At the same time, the focus on those in camps infers that Syrians travelling on their own cease to be refugees the moment they cross the borders into Europe. For this group, their plight continues even when they arrive in a comparatively safe environment. Indeed, the current UK policy creates a two-tier system in which the experience of Syrians who have come through VPR differ significantly to those who have taken more dangerous journeys to reach the UK as asylum seekers, despite them having been displaced by the same civil war (Nottingham Citizens Commission Report on Sanctuary [NCCRS] 2017).

Specifically with regards to children, the UK government has continued to be criticized for its refusal to take in more of the most vulnerable child refugees in Europe under the Dubs amendment to the Immigration Act 2016. Among other things, the UK government has adopted an extremely restrictive selection criteria whereby resettlement is only offered to three categories of children: those aged 12 and under, who have been identified to be at high risk of sexual exploitation or those who are 15 and under and are of Sudanese or Syrian nationality and/or under 18s who are the accompanying sibling of a child meeting either of the criteria outlined above (McGuinness 2017). Meanwhile, such a restrictive policy has been undertaken against the backdrop of an overwhelming sympathetic response from the UK civil society and communities to help refugee children and in sharp contrast to other countries such as Germany

that has opened its doors to huge numbers of both unaccompanied and accompanied refugee children (Ostrand 2015). The UK resettlement scheme is therefore unlikely to offer a substantial solution to the plight of massive numbers of vulnerable children in Europe.

In this article, we engage with the concept of quality education focusing on a group of Syrian refugees that came as part of the first large cohort that was welcomed in the UK in December 2015. We draw insights from Tikly's quality education frameworks which show the interactions between three key environments of wider education context, the school and the home/community as well as the role of language. In our quest to understand quality education for Syrian refugees, we noted that it is not possible to measure quality education in terms of outputs/outcomes as our study was conducted only 6 months after the Syrians' resettlement in the UK. However the contribution of the paper is an understanding of the inputs and processes that are key to the development of quality education for the refugee population.

The article is structured as follows: section one engages with the notion of quality education with section two exploring the migration-education nexus to help contextualise our study within the broader UK education and migration contexts. We then present findings in four sections, starting with Syrian children's pre-migration and trans-migration education experiences, followed by an exploration of their enrolment in the UK schools, then an analysis of the importance of language as an integration tool. Finally we provide an understanding of quality education from both the teachers' and parents' perspectives before turning to conclusions.

The Study and Methodology

This article is based on an ethnographic pilot research we conducted between May and November 2016 with 57 participants. The study was designed to explore how Syrian refugees that were resettled in Nottinghamshire in December, 2015 (as part of a large cohort of 81 individuals) were integrating into their new community, drawing on the perspectives of both the Syrian adults and children as well as the different agencies involved with their integration, including schools.

Information about the research and an invitation to participate were presented to Syrian refugees in face to face meetings at a local migrant support organisation. Methodologically, the original plan was firstly to conduct three focus groups with Syrian refugee men, women and young people respectively and then afterwards select a sub-sample from each category for in-depth interviewing. However, individuals, due to privacy and security reasons, were unwilling to share their personal experiences in the presence of others, but were happy to speak to us as families in their homes.

Through the help of an interpreter who is an academic from a Syrian background, we were able to interview 8 Syrian families (16 adults [aged 30-55] and 15 children [aged 7-21]). Adult, children and parent/guardian letters outlining the project and guaranteeing confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any point were translated into Arabic to ensure that participants fully understood the research. Recognising the limitations of conducting research with children within an adult space (Punch 2002) interviews

with children were complemented with a focus group, organised by two schools and with 5 Syrian children of high school age.

The remaining 26 participants included: school teachers, council authorities, representatives of faith-based and migrant support organisations as well as members of the Syrian society in Nottinghamshire. We engaged with 6 teachers in 5 schools (2 primary and 3 secondary). Such diversity in participants helped us to gain insight into how Syrian refugees were being supported to integrate in a community that was involved in a government refugee resettlement programme for the first time.

Research encounters were recorded and transcribed before analysis. Data were then sorted and coded thematically. This involved the two researchers reading the interview transcripts both separately and collectively to derive and agree on the key themes. The final coding stage involved further organisation of themes in terms of establishing the connections between them and allowing the data to guide the researchers in the process of theoretical development. The accounts provided in this article relate to the key theme of Syrian children's integration in schools.

Understanding Quality in Education

While quality is a concept that is widely used, it remains highly contested due to its lack of a universal definition (e.g. Galloway and Ho 1996). Its vagueness and fluidity is highlighted by Tsinidou et al (2010) who observe the difficulty of measuring education services because the outcomes are reflected mostly in the transformations of individuals in terms of their knowledge, characteristics, and behaviour.

Education quality has been much debated in the literature with the dominant approaches being identified as the human capital approach; the human rights approach; and the social justice approach (e.g. Barrett 2011; Tikly 2011). Within the human capital approach, for example, education quality is viewed as contributing to economic development focusing on economic gains (Hanushek and Luque 2003; Heyneman 2004) in terms of "supporting livelihoods, generating income and reducing human insecurity" (Tikly 2011, 10). This approach has influenced the development of input-output models for understanding education quality such as the Global Monitoring Report (2005) which suggest a linear relationship between inputs including material and human resources; learner characteristics and teaching and learning dimensions and educational outputs. The approach has been criticised for both its lack of engagement with the underlying complex processes and interrelationships of these factors and over-reliance on standardised assessments of cognitive learning which do not fully capture outcomes; thus neglecting human rights issues that are critical for learners' success in the global contexts (e.g. Barrett 2011; Tikly 2011).

The human rights approach which has been found dominant in discussions about education quality particularly in low-income contexts (e.g. Hartwig 2013) views education as a basic right that a learner is entitled to. To this end, governments and institutions are expected to work towards creating conditions for a quality education for all. Specifically, in marginalised communities, the rights-based approach has been found to encourage a bilingual approach whereby both the mother tongue and global language are supported (Tikly 2016). However, in

as far as the approach broadens the conceptualisation of education quality, it has been critiqued for being a somewhat narrow, top-down and legalist approach which does not fully address the socio-political contexts that impact human rights and education thereby limiting its usefulness (Unterhalter 2005; Robeyns 2006).

The social justice approach proposed by Tikly and Barrett (2009) and further developed by Tikly (2011, 2016) is an advance on the human rights approach which emphasises far more strongly substantive rights such as giving ‘voice’ to all, especially the marginalised and also a recognition of the capabilities perspective seen as “... the opportunities that individuals and groups have to realise different ‘functionings’ that they may have reason to value” (Sen 2009 in Tikly 2011, 9).

As Walker (2006) argues, capabilities relating to a good quality education vary depending on context. This highlights the importance of localised research to identify the kinds of capabilities that are critical within particular socio-economic and political contexts and the barriers that can hinder development in those contexts (Fraser 2008). Three key principles underpinning a quality education therefore emerge from this work, that is, inclusivity (access to enabling resources); relevance (learning outcomes resulting in sustainable livelihoods for all learners and their communities and the wider society) and democracy (stakeholder involvement in determining valued capabilities) (Tikly 2016).

In his earlier work Tikly (2011, 10) defines a good quality education as

... one that enables all learners to realise the capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance wellbeing. The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context but at the end of the basic education cycle must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy and life skills including awareness and prevention of disease.

Tikly’s view of quality education framework is based on the African context (see Figure 1) and highlights the need for policy makers to consider, when thinking about policy options, changing national development needs, the types of schools attended by different learners and the educational disadvantages faced by different groups of learners. However this framework seems to fit contexts where student populations are homogenous, in terms of ethnic and social background. In the case of refugees, which is the focus of this paper, children often find themselves in schools and classroom environments that are not only totally new, but very diverse in terms of ethnicity, social background, and lived experiences, which in turn impact on the learning needs, processes as well as outcomes.

However we find Tikly’s (2011) framing of education quality as arising from interactions between three overlapping environments, namely the wider education context, the school and the home/community environments helpful. As Tikly shows, the enabling environments result from the right mix of inputs and processes relating to each and the interaction between environments which culminate in desired outcomes over time. See figure one below.

Figure 1. (HERE)

However, not all of Tikly's quality inputs and processes within each environment apply to our Syrian refugees. Consequently we have modified Tikly's frameworks to reflect what could be seen as the key indicators to quality education for refugees as reflected by our findings. Furthermore, Tikly's more recent conceptualisation of quality education (see Figure 2) is particularly relevant as it incorporates the notion of linguistic capability. Focusing on language-in-education policy in low income post-colonial countries, Tikly (2016) argues that language and in particular the host language is a critical capability for disadvantaged groups such as migrants which enables them to access goods, services and the labour market in the host country. In the context of education, the medium of instruction is considered to be an essential human capability that is closely linked to educational outcomes and which consequently promotes well-being (Tikly *ibid*).

We find this relevant to our study, not only because the model positions linguistic capability at the core of the interactions of the various enabling environments, but also shows the complex symbiotic relationship it has with these environments in that it enables their interaction in much the same way as they enable its development. Further, the model suggests the need for not only the children to develop linguistic capability but for all stakeholders (e.g. teachers, parents, community) to develop a range of capabilities to be able to provide appropriate pedagogy to support the children's linguistic development.

Figure 2: (HERE)

In conceptualising education quality for our Syrian refugee children we therefore foresee a model that highlights not only the importance of intersecting enabling environments, but also the specific inputs and processes that reflect our research group's circumstances within their particular UK context and the critical role of English as a tool for their inclusion and integration (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: (HERE)

Drawing on this model, we seek to explore the interaction between learners' characteristics, including their pre-migration and trans-migration education experiences and language skills, the wider learning environment, and the home/community, from the perspectives of the learners, teachers, parents and other community agencies. Our study seeks to show that for refugee children quality education is developed through the interaction of various elements, from the time of enrolment to delivery of learning activities as well as the impact of the related environments.

Migrant and refugee children in the UK education system

With the increase in global migration flows, the integration of migrant children into schools and their access to quality education especially in liberal countries has been the subject of academic and political enquiry (e.g. Osadan and Reid 2016; Rutter 2006; Adam and Kirova 2006; Reynolds 2008; Bourgonje 2010). In the UK, research has highlighted the challenges that migrant children face in making the transition to the host society, including problems with understanding the host community language and/or culture (Rutter 2006). Such concerns have gained renewed currency in the context of EU migration. There are claims that the UK's primary and secondary schools are "stretched to breaking point" by immigrant children of Eastern European origins who do not speak English as their first language (Levy 2014; Tereshchenko and Archer 2014) leading to concerns about the impact of English as an Additional Language (EAL, see explanation below) on the education of particularly indigenous children within the context of the UK's 'inclusive education' system (Reynolds 2008).

While inclusion is itself a problematic term due to its lack of a universal definition, we do not have the space to engage with this debate in a paper of this nature. However, we acknowledge Tikly's (2011, 51) important argument that:

...inclusive education is not limited to the inclusion of those children or young people with disabilities. Inclusion is inclusion of all regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, language, socio-economic status, and any other aspect of an individual's identity that might be perceived as different.

In the UK, besides language issues, questions have continued to be raised in relation to the capacity of the education system to cater for children with a diverse range of needs such as asylum-seeking and refugee children. It has been observed that asylum and refugee children's lives are often fashioned by complex pre-migration and trans-migration experiences which require schools to tailor their teaching strategies to meet these children's complex needs (Stevenson and Willott 2007; Taylor and Sidhu 2012; Rutter 2006).

Indeed the ways in which schools work to address refugee children's needs has been the subject of academic enquiry (e.g. Rutter 2006; Taylor and Sidhu 2012; Pinson et al 2010; Arnot et al. 2014). For example, Arnot and Pinson (2005) (also see, Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010) have examined the different approaches being undertaken by LEAs and schools in the UK. Among other things, they found that 'good practice' schools are those that adopted 'an ethos of inclusion', a 'celebration of diversity' and 'a caring ethos and the giving of hope' (Arnot and Pinson 2005,51). These authors have further highlighted the importance

of parental involvement as well as the support of the community and other agencies in promoting positive images of refugees. However, Rutter (2006) has noted the tendency to treat refugees as a homogeneous group, which as she argues, has the danger of masking individual group experiences, particularly pre and post-migration experiences that are critical to both the identification of needs and the development of appropriate interventions.

While we do not expect Syrian children to necessarily have distinct needs to those of other refugee and/or other migrant children, their migration trajectories are critical to the contextualisation of their integration needs in English schools. Moreover under the VPR scheme, Syrians are on arrival, provided with furnished accommodation and, particularly in Nottingham an effort has been made to place children in schools that are closer to their homes. Also, families are supported to access services through assigned caseworkers (NCCRS 2017). This is an improvement to previous resettlement schemes (Gelsthorpe and Herlitz 2003). While in Nottinghamshire, Syrian families have received considerable support from different agencies across the county (NCCRS 2017) the impact of community support on Syrian children's integration in schools is not known. The remainder of this article seeks to answer the following two questions:

What does quality education mean for Syrian children given their pre and trans-migration experiences? How do the inter-related domains of the wider policy, the school and home/community environments as well as the role of language intersect in the development of quality education for Syrian refugee children?

Syrian children's pre-migration and trans-migration education experiences

With the intensification of the Syrian civil war, schools have been destroyed while others have been converted into shelters for displaced families (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015). As UNICEF (2013) argues, Syrian children risk being 'a lost generation' whose dreams and opportunities for the future in their own country of birth have been eroded by the civil war. Indeed, the Syrian refugees we interviewed not only shared painful experiences of how their children's education was disrupted, but also miserable stories of displacement including the dangerous journeys they had to undertake in order to escape to neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, it has been observed that on arrival in countries of first reception such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, many Syrian children have further faced considerable challenges. As Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015, 1) argue

upon arrival in countries of first asylum, Syrian children have encountered various disruptions and barriers to receiving an adequate education. ...the enrolment rates of school-age Syrian children are an estimated 20 percent in Lebanon, 30 percent in Turkey, and 68 percent in Jordan.

Indeed, almost all the families we interviewed noted that their children could only either attend school sporadically or could not enroll in schools at all. As the mother in family 6 explains:

Once we left Syria both of our children didn't continue their studies for the two years we stayed in Jordan (mother, family 6).

The conditions were said to be worse in cases where children had disability and/or other distinct health issues:

Our son has mental health issues and his education both in Syrian and Jordan has been erratic because of shortage of resources. We lived in Jordan for three years and our son was in school for only two months in these three years... (mother, family 3).

This not only highlights the challenges of accessing education but also poses challenges in trying to understand quality education for Syrian children in the face of resettlement uncertainties in transit countries. However in interviews parents increasingly mentioned children's appalling conditions as one of the qualifying selection criteria for their resettlement in the UK. This raises the questions of how the UK schools that are the recipients' of Syrian children are going about addressing these past disadvantages once children are enrolled. Below we explore the specific interventions and strategies adopted by the schools we engaged with, paying attention to issues of quality.

Syrian children and the UK school environment

The struggles associated with the integration of migrant children into the UK education system have been noted to include the challenges of adapting to new ways of learning in a context where they increasingly face exclusion and discrimination (Reynolds 2008; Tereshchenko and Archer 2014). For the Syrian refugees, the initial challenge was that of timing in relation to their arrival, with the first big group arriving a few months after the start of the academic year. Moreover, the first group of Syrians to be resettled in Nottinghamshire consisted of a large number of people (81) which unsurprisingly, could have signaled a threat to housing and social services, at least initially. As one male council representative recalled

Houses and social services are the areas where we came under the most fire, really, from local people, in terms of 'Hang on a minute, it's not fair that they're taking our services' was how some people viewed it.

Our findings resonate with Pinson, Arnot and Candappa (2010) who have argued that political views that characterise local communities often permeate the school gates. For example, interviews with caseworkers have revealed that schools in Nottinghamshire have shown different reactions when enrolling Syrian children, depending on their prior experience of working with refugee children. As one female caseworker explains:

The attitudes have been different, depending on where. If schools have the experience of taking refugee children the attitude is completely different...there's a lot more leniency there and understanding that the children are going to struggle and will need extra support... but one school had a really bad attitude and they were saying "what

do we do with these children?”

However, targeted awareness by multi-agencies across the county has helped to both consolidate public support and sympathy and promote positive images of Syrian refugees (NCCRS 2017). In our study, interviews with teachers have revealed their commitment to support Syrian children, which was noted to be in line with schools policies of promoting equal opportunities for all children. In conversations teachers demonstrated awareness of the need to create a welcoming environment and addressing children’s psycho-social needs, as the initial and important steps toward ensuring a quality education for refugee children. As one male primary school teacher (school 1) explains:

...so when they come into the class, it's all about visually being able to see what mood they're in, or how they act, and then as a teacher you act on that instantly. So if you can see that they're quite comfortable you go along with that, or they look confused, or you can see any signs of discomfort, that's when, personally, I look to put her with comforting students, or I'll comfort her with the TA, so they'll work one-on-one. ...once they are settled they can begin to engage with learning...

However, enrolment itself took a bit longer for some children, especially the disabled ones, as Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had to work with different schools to ensure that children were placed appropriately. Placing children correctly was noted to be critical to the process of developing quality education, especially for children with special needs. This was the case in one family where two of the children (boy aged 13 and girl aged 15) were noted to be very deaf and were now enrolled in a new specialist school with a deaf unit. For these particular children their needs were described as complex because of the following reasons:

These children have never been in school in their entire life... They came here, and they'd clearly got no spoken English, they'd got no British Sign Language. They'd got no written Arabic to speak of; they'd got no spoken Arabic. They'd got Arabic Sign Language, which was a language that was developed with their parents. So first of all, we had to establish that they had no additional learning needs. ... I'm now completely confident that neither of them have additional learning needs, so they are just both profoundly deaf...(female teacher, school 2).

Under such a situation, teachers had to develop appropriate intervention strategies peculiar to the needs of the children they were dealing with, of which language was critical. As the teacher of the two deaf children further explains:

We're using a scheme called Racing to Language, which has got a lot of visual material. So using pictures, using videos, getting them to go around and video each other, teaching them sign language for the words that we're doing. And very quickly, they have started to try to communicate...

From the above quote, it is clear that language is one of the capabilities that schools had to develop to enable children to understand the curriculum, communicate with others and engage in interactive learning. This was not only noted to be a critical stage in the development of quality education for refugee children, but teachers also needed to use appropriate strategies and routines. In the case of the deaf children, their routine was described as follows:

So they have their own timetable, but they also have lessons in the mainstream for things like PE, technology, art... So they do the practical lessons in mainstream, with support from one of our workers, and then the time that they're in the deaf unit, they work on language.

Overall, we have noted that integrating Syrian children in schools has mainly involved full placement in mainstream schools and occasional withdrawal from mainstream classes for targeted group activities (see section below on language).

We also noted that unlike some groups of EU children that have been noted to face discrimination in school (Tereshchenko and Archer 2014), Syrian children, perhaps because of the ways in which the Syria refugee plight was widely publicised, appear to have been more generally welcomed in schools. In interviews children noted that they were accepted by both teachers and peers who always offered to help. In the context of this welcoming school environment, Syrians were often described as children who were 'free' to approach their teachers if they needed help, making it easier for teachers to interact with them. As stated in one student report:

X has developed very positive relationships with many members of staff and is not afraid to seek advice or clarification.

These findings reflect the role of schools in defining their approaches to inclusion, equal opportunities, awareness raising for the other children and their parents, and motivating the newcomers which, as Tikly (2016) argues, are key building blocks to achieving quality education.

While it is too early to pass a precise judgement of the quality of education that the Syrian children are receiving, it is clear that Syrian children are so far making good progress. For example we noted that two students won the "Beating the Odds" award of the Nottingham Post Student Award 2016. According to the students' teacher, the achievement was enabled by a combination of factors including the enabling school environment, teacher efforts in developing the necessary capabilities and most importantly the students' positive attitude to learning and great determination.

...whenever anyone has asked me what they won a prize for, I tell them it wasn't because of their status as refugees, but rather because they've got something to teach us all about attitude and determination...(female teacher, school 4)

For teachers, pupils' positive attitude to learning and determination were seen as important capabilities in the development of quality education.

Below we explore the role of English language as an important capability in attaining quality education for refugees.

The role of language in the development of quality education

Our quality education for refugees framework situates linguistic capability at the core of the interactions of enabling environments in the integration of Syrian children in schools. According to the model, all key stakeholders especially children, teachers and parents need to develop a range of capabilities (e.g. EAL pedagogy training for teachers; linguistic capability for parents) to ensure children's success in schools.

In school settings the teaching of English to migrants and refugees is commonly known as English as an Additional Language (EAL). English offered to older children (nearing 16) and adults is called English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and may be stand alone or integrated with vocational courses (Mallows 2014). In terms of the teaching of EAL, research on language provision for migrants/refugees has revealed the use of diverse learning approaches and strategies (Arnot et al. 2014; Ryan et al. 2010). Two commonly used strategies include the total immersion strategy (exclusive use of the target language and the partial immersion or bilingual approach (the use of mother-tongue support and other languages). Of the two, bilingual instructional strategies are argued to offer cognitive and pedagogic benefits with the mother tongue being viewed as supporting the development of the target language (Garcia and Wei 2014) thereby enabling them to accomplish their learning (Arthur and Martin 2006).

For our Syrian refugees the critical role of language in education is reflected in the challenges faced by the children. Similar observations are made by Arnot et al (2014), who argue that, while all children who arrive in the UK with little or no English language encounter barriers, those enrolling in secondary school may face additional challenges, as this stage of education demands a high level of English proficiency. In our study children noted the critical role of English in developing friendships or peer relationships which in turn facilitate the integration and learning processes. As one 12 year old girl puts it:

... the education system here is good but at the beginning I didn't know anyone here, and without English it took me a long time to make friends... now that I can communicate with others, there is an English girl who helps me, and she stays with me in the classes...

Indeed, the teachers in our research confirmed the role of English in developing such relationships, which aid effective learning. Talking about the journey he had travelled with one particular Syrian pupil, one teacher said:

Initially she went in, she sat down, she couldn't speak, she didn't know anyone or the right thing. Now, she can say sentences, words, she knows what things look like, she can count upwards and backwards. ...when they start feeling comfortable, that's where the communication comes in with the other students. She can ask another person in the

class, instead of coming to an adult. ...you see them out in the playground and then they get the respect of the other children, and fun, bubbly, their personality just starts to show (male teacher, school 3).

These small but significant steps attest to the commendable efforts of schools to create a conducive environment for migrant children to acquire the much needed English language proficiency, as also noted by Pinson, Arnot and Candappa (2010). These efforts are however not without significant challenges in terms of, for example, impacting on the workload. As the teacher of the deaf children, we cited earlier, notes:

I have to say that the workload has increased massively, because everything has to be from scratch. There's nothing you can go to that you've used before, recently, and just say 'Oh, I'll use this.' It's quite difficult to do that with deaf children anyhow, but it's even more with them. So it has meant a massive increase in workload (female teacher, school 2).

Such findings suggest the critical need for schools to be well prepared to deal with varied and complex needs and to be flexible in terms of workload and resource allocation. In our study teachers raised concerns about the inadequacy of financial and human resources, given the unique nature of some of their Syrian learners' needs.

Their efforts however highlight the importance of tailoring language provision and requirements to the needs of specific groups (DfE 2013). One of the learning opportunities mentioned in our study and which has received considerable attention in the second language pedagogy literature is the use of the mother tongue. As noted above, mother tongue support in the learning of an additional language provides foundation for supporting the development of the second language.

Our study has shown that some schools are taking advantage of bilingual teachers and students within the school and using them as a resource for supporting the newcomers. One teacher (school 3) related to us that:

Our student (name) has helped out today when we were showing a new student around. Dad could speak Arabic so (name) showed them around the school and answered the questions. She was very confident and reassuring to the family.

In two secondary schools, Syrian children reported benefiting from the help of an Arabic speaking teacher. However, one 13 year old boy noted both the advantages and disadvantages of learning separately from and together with others:

Doing things in a smaller class in Arabic helps to understand because you picture things in your own language first... but you can learn more things in a bigger class because you pick new words everyday...

Pinson, Arnot and Candappa (2010) also observed the advantages and disadvantages of separate versus integrated learning support systems. However, it has been noted that focusing

only on the language of the receiving country undermines the reality that language acquisition in the course of integration is defined by many socio-cultural factors including the historical contexts and the preferences of both the students and their families (Tikly 2016).

One observation in our study that points to the relevance of the mother tongue is that some schools were offering opportunities for Syrian children to take national examinations in their home language. As stated in one student's school report:

[x] has been given an Arabic exam paper with a view to her doing GCSE Arabic ... when she is in Year 11. The papers were marked recently and she is doing well.

Within the context of the wider education policy, the UK system encourages schools to ensure that class teachers are well equipped to support children whose first language is not English. However, as Tikly (2016, 3) argues:

a key barrier to the development of linguistic capability at a school level is the capability of teachers to implement appropriate language supportive pedagogy. This relates both to their own multilingual capabilities and to their pedagogical knowledge of how to develop multilingual capability in learners.

We noted that, perhaps due to the current austerity policies that are characterised by significant cuts and reduction in education budgets some teachers are not being properly trained in this area. As one teacher noted:

I haven't had any training as such (*English as an additional language*). . . But I definitely think it would be of benefit to be trained in it, just to learn new strategies of how to implement new things, how to progress further, how to encourage more independence, how to encourage independent reading and spelling (Male teacher, School 3)

This highlights the need for the UK education system to improve on resource allocation in order for schools to be able to enhance professional development for teachers to ensure that the process of education delivery is not hampered by teachers' limited skills and capabilities as noted in the Tikly (2016) study.

Our study has also revealed the critical role of language in facilitating a strong relationship between teachers and the parents of the students they teach within the context of home-school partnership. In the following section we look more closely at the home-school interaction and the role played by the wider community in enhancing this partnership and how this builds towards quality learning.

Partnership between home/community and the school

Existing research has shown that a strong relationship between schools and the parents of the children that attend the school is of mutual benefit (DFE 2010; Christie and Szorenyi 2015). In the absence of universal standards of a positive parent-school relationship, emphasis has often been put on the quality of communication, school reporting system on children's progress,

mechanisms for helping parents to support their children's learning, parents attending meetings in schools and schools contributing to the community and vice-versa (DFE 2010).

A common theme in all our interviews was the Syrian parents' lack of English linguistic skills which invariably prevented them from initiating communication with their children's schools. However with the help of caseworkers parents could maintain minimum contact with schools. Also, given the short time the Syrian children had been in school, many parents expressed a lack of understanding of the UK education system (also see similar findings in e.g. Christie and Szorenyi 2015 in the context of EU migrants). Indeed the teachers we interviewed were acutely aware of the challenges:

The barrier that I found quite tricky, is that the family I deal with, they're lovely... but then again, when you have to relay messages and try and communicate with them, it can be confusing, because they don't understand English... (male teacher, School 3).

To mitigate the effects of parents' lack of linguistic capabilities, teachers had to employ diverse ways of communicating with parents when they come into school as well as adjusting their approaches to homework. As one teacher explains:

In terms of homework we do have little tasks that we set her to take home. ...because of parents' language problem, every task has to be achievable. To work with the parents, it's verbal communication as well as visual. ...we also use our additional language resources (*an Arabic speaking teacher*) to make sure that they're settled with what's required for children outside of school time (male teacher, school 1).

This situation echoes Tereshchenko and Archer's (2014) argument that with the increase in EAL students, schools need to seriously consider employing bilingual staff to help improve the home-school partnership.

However, in the case of the Syrian refugees, we observed some good examples of school-home partnerships. One example was provided by the teacher of the deaf we cited earlier, who noted that:

A key factor in achieving progress with children has been the mother... I send homework for them, a lot of homework to do every week, and Mum is absolutely brilliant, and clearly spends a lot of time with them, helping them to learn. So that's where we are, that's how we do it.

The strength of this partnership lied in that it did not only involve the mother helping with homework at home and/or attending parents' meetings in school as is generally expected, but the visits were said to be reciprocal as the teacher would also visit the mother at home to find out more about the children's lives and previous experiences in the country of origin. As the teacher recalls:

I've been round there (children's home) I think three or four times now. And that has been so important, because they (children) can't tell us anything about their own lives, and mum has been brilliant. When I go round to mum, she's always got loads of questions for me, and I've always got loads of questions for her...

As the above excerpt illustrates, working with refugee learners and their families in their own home environments can be a great resource for all parties involved, which is one of the key elements in the development of quality education for this group of children.

Interview with the mother pointed to the fact that, unlike other refugees, Syrian refugees have access to a wider network of support in the development of their linguistic skills. As Tikly (2016, 421) argues 'where parents are empowered to develop their own linguistic capabilities... this can lead to more positive outcomes'.

One of the key findings in our research is the involvement of the wider community with a view to enable effective integration for Syrian refugees. Several families reported neighbours helping with children's reading and homework. Also we noted the existence of a Saturday school for Syrian refugees to help complement the English lessons that families were getting from mainstream organisations. This highlights the benefits of multi-agency working in the integration of refugees. For example, we witnessed coordinated efforts towards supporting Syrian children with their language skills over the 2016 summer holidays. As noted by a compassionate pastor from one local church:

There are worries across stakeholders about the resettled families, and the children picking up English in school, and then over the six weeks holiday they won't have interaction with school, so their English could regress a little bit. ...so we are putting on five Wednesday afternoon sessions, 2-4 across August...

As the NCCRS (2017, 2) argue, the coordinated approach to support Syrian refugees "has thrown into context the often very different experiences of the wider refugee and asylum seeker community...". This means that the ways in which refugee families are supported to integrate within communities can be the very key to their children's ability to both integrate in schools and achieve quality learning.

Our theoretical starting point was to understand how quality education is conceptualised and how it is important to understand quality education within the current refugee context. To this end, we have tried to establish teachers and parents' understandings of quality in the Syrian context. Below we present some of the emerging views.

Understanding of quality learning

As noted earlier, at the time of this study, the Syrian children had not been in school for long, making it difficult to measure quality education in terms of outcomes. However, in line with Tikly's conceptualisation of quality education as involving specific inputs and processes, our analysis has been informed by how well schools were able to identify children's needs; deliver different activities including awareness raising; create a welcoming environment; support children to develop their linguistic capabilities; undertake training in order to effectively meet

children's needs; engage with parents; report on students' achievements, and include children in mainstream activities. We have considered the interaction between the school and the home/community environments.

In relation to school environment, we for example, learned from one school, through one Syrian child's progress report that training for teachers to cope with the EAL demands of the newcomers was being offered:

Staff have been given a number of different training sessions (at both campuses) to support them in how to adapt their teaching to make it suitable for EAL students... (Report 1)

Progress reports from another school also show that schools' efforts to meet the specific needs of Syrian children were paying off. Children were noted to be generally making good progress, for example, with their English language learning in varying degrees:

Y is making excellent progress. He is able to make himself understood about most things and his natural exuberance means he is very sociable and thereby hearing a great deal of new language, which he is soaking up. He is onto Stage 3 of the Biff, Chip and Kipper books. He can read CVC words largely by sight (enlarged to 40+) and is able to work out the pronunciation of more complex words using quite sophisticated blending and segmenting skills.

In their narratives however, teachers were realistic about what is achievable given their Syrian students' education background. They saw quality as being defined by issues of their learners' levels in terms of prior learning and English language proficiency, available resources and the time available to achieve goals. One teacher aptly expressed what he saw as critical considerations:

I think quality comes when you first are able to see where your kids are at when you're given them. And then it's about plugging the gaps, what do my students need to reach that goal? What do I have to do? What resources do I have? What support staff/parental input is needed, what technology, what can I use to make sure that they reach the desired end? So as a teacher, it's about having short-term goals, intermediate goals, but making sure that we achieve that future goal over a set amount of time. To work with migrants and kids that haven't got the English background, the quality is in the steps that they take to reach the goal (male teacher, school 1).

With regards to parents, research has shown that migrant parents naturally have high parental ambitions, expectations, aspirations for their children to excel educationally and go to university irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, home environments, and the neighbourhood and school contexts (e.g. Schnell Fibbi, Crul and Montero-Sieburth 2015). Similarly, Syrian refugee parents had high expectations of their children's educational achievements despite their crippling challenges. For example, parents with older children expected their children to be placed in schools or colleges on the basis of the level attained

before coming to the UK, rather than a focus on firstly giving them important capabilities such as language. In this regard, parents' expectations of their children's schooling appear to clash with those of the teachers and/or UK school system. As one mother related:

I am very worried about the future of my older son. In Syria he was in high school and then he would go into university... since he has been here he has been attending language classes at a college. They are telling him that he has to attend this college for two years... why don't they make him study at the university and at the same time study language... (Mother, family 4)

While in some cases the difference in perspectives of teachers and parents could be amplified by poor communication and inadequate school-parent cooperation (Christie and Szorenyi 2015) there is evidence that in the Syrian context, some schools are striving to create dialogue with parents in order to develop a common understanding regarding children's education progress. As one female teacher (school 3) explains:

Mum was worrying about 'Oh, are they going to get exams?' I'm saying 'Don't even think about exams. You can't do anything if you haven't got language... You can't just suddenly do maths.'

It is clear that the schools' focus is on giving children the pre-requisite capabilities as the initial step towards the achievement of desired outcomes, whereas for most parents, quality education is about achieving desired outcomes within a 'reasonable' period of time. We hope that, in time and with improved school-parent communication and cooperation, these tensions will be resolved.

Conclusion

Our theoretical starting point was to understand how quality education is generally conceptualised and the extent to which existing models capture the lived experiences of disadvantaged groups such as refugees. In this quest, we have drawn insights from Tikly's frameworks which conceptualise quality education as resulting from the interactions between the wider education context, the school and the home/community environments, taking into consideration the issue of linguistic capability. These environments, as Tikly argues, can only be enabling when the right mix of inputs and processes are met, making possible the culmination of desired outcomes over time. However, we have noted that this literature's main focus is the developing countries context, which as we have argued, does not fully capture the lived experiences of forced migrants such as the Syrian refugees in the UK schools. We have therefore modified Tikly's quality education frameworks and provided a model which we see as relevant for the refugee population, as demonstrated by our research findings.

However, in our quest to understand quality education for Syrian refugees, we noted that it is not possible to measure quality in terms of outputs/outcomes as our study was

conducted only 6 months after the Syrians' resettlement in the UK. Thus, in line with Tikly's frameworks which show the centrality of inputs and processes to the development of quality education, our study has revealed the inputs and processes that are fundamental to the development of quality education for refugees within the context of the three interrelated environments.

In this way, our findings have revealed a range of elements, including schools' ability to: promote inclusivity; address specific needs (e.g. in relation to disabled children); meet psycho-social needs (especially on arrival); provide adequate training for teachers (e.g. EAL); develop peer relationships (as a way of facilitating effective learning); promote multi-agency support (key stakeholders and community agencies working together to support refugee integration including language learning) and reciprocal home-school interaction (see fig 3). We have referred to participants' narratives, reports of students' achievements as well as provided examples of the initiatives taken by schools and how these are benefiting the learners. In so doing, we have also noted some challenges, for example, in relation to teacher training and resource provision, highlighting the need for the UK education system to improve on resource allocation in the context of the current austerity policies.

Our analysis has also shown the major role played by the community in creating a welcoming environment for Syrian refugees on arrival, supporting families in their integration process (including language learning and assisting with children's homework) and how these initiatives, in some cases, have helped to strengthen the home-school partnership. In this regard, we have argued that cooperation between different agencies is critical to refugee integration in communities in general and the integration of refugee children in schools in particular.

Overall, we see our study as making a significant contribution towards understandings of quality education in relation to migrant/refugee children.

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