

**Digging Deeper than Access: COVID-19 and the
Importance of Culturally Relevant Education for
Rohingya Refugees in Cox's Bazar**

by
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Abstract

A key challenge faced by refugee children around the world is accessing quality education. The denial of the fundamental human right to education has immense repercussions on development and the ability to achieve fulfillment in life for refugee children and entire generations of refugees. The core question guiding this study is: *how has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated issues of accessing education for refugees in the camps at Cox's Bazar?* The results of the study revealed that the pandemic pressed on core faults in the ability for Rohingya refugee children to access education; these faults were the inadequate and informal options for learning imposed by INGOs providing top-down education programs. The Rohingya community has advocated for culturally relevant education, but they have not been meaningfully given a voice in determining the educational curriculum they are offered. Refugees deserve to have autonomy over their own education.

Keywords: Education in emergencies; Rohingya refugees; COVID-19; Culturally relevant education; Cox's Bazar; Refugee education

*To my family, for instilling in me the importance of learning and giving me the gift of education -
a gift I will work to use in service of others.*

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List of Acronyms

CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
EFA	Education for All
EiE	Education in Emergencies
GIEP	Guidelines on Informal Education Programming
GCR	Global Refugee Compact
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LCFA	Learning Competency Framework Approach
MCP	Myanmar Curriculum Pilot
NGO	Non-governmental organization
TLC	Temporary Learning Centre
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

Chapter 1.

Introduction

The uncertain and precarious nature of life for refugees has numerous consequences on their opportunities to create more fulfilled, meaningful, and secure lives. A key challenge faced by refugee children around the world is accessing education and securing the ability to receive quality schooling. Education is a fundamental human right and it is integral in the development of the individual as it provides the basics of literacy, numeracy, problem solving, hygiene, and global awareness. In addition, it serves as a key tool in global development because we cannot start to solve state issues, or global issues without generations of educated people at the helm. Given this, access to high quality, culturally appropriate education is an important global priority.

The COVID-19 pandemic drew the world's attention to the impacts of lost education for children and kickstarted the global community into gear for finding solutions to providing children with ways of continuing to learn outside the traditional classroom setting. However, the alarm that ensued of how to ensure this generation of children and youth did not fall behind because of the COVID-19 pandemic was one only newly felt in the developed world – for refugees, this reality of falling behind and becoming a 'lost generation' due to an inability to access education is a constant reality (UNICEF, 2021a). For the Rohingya refugee children in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh, accessing quality, culturally relevant education has been a decades long battle and only when the rest of the world turned its focus to securing access to education for all children did a spotlight seem to fall on these children as a case of how precariously a generation can teeter on the edge of becoming 'lost' in respect to their ability to become educated in the basic skills of literacy, math, and writing (Olney, et al., 2019).

The culturally relevant aspect of education for refugees is key because this differentiates a 'one-size-fits-all' educational approach with one that aims to provide content that is both familiar and relevant to the population, while acknowledging the importance for connections to one's culture and past all while acclimatizing to a new situation. Culturally relevant education is defined in this context as educational content

that promotes the alignment of curriculum with students' cultural identities and the provision of a tailored education that connects students to their home country or culture. This model of education can also serve the vital purpose of preparing a refugee population for repatriation if that is their intent. With continued low attendance and enrolment rates of students of all ages, the central research question guiding this study is: how has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated issues of accessing culturally relevant education for refugees in the camps at Cox's Bazar?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, options for education for Rohingya refugees were already limited, precarious, and often criticized. Before the 2017 influx of Rohingya refugees entered into Bangladesh, some registered refugees were able to enter the national education system and receive education in Bangladeshi schools, but with the influx, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) severed access to its schools for Rohingya and forced them to resort to informal learning opportunities within the refugee camps (Floven, 2022). The resulting options for Rohingya refugee children to access any kind of education were international non-governmental organizations (INGO)-led schooling in temporary learning centres under UNICEF's Learning Competency Framework Approach (LCFA), informal religious education at madrassas, or informal community-led education from Rohingya volunteers in the camps. None of these options provided Rohingya children with formalized education or the option to achieve any level of certification, and the quality of content they learned from each kind of provider varied immensely. A core problem was that the LCFA, a program designed to be a tailorable emergency measure to provide interim education to refugee children ages 4 to 14 based on their location, was designed to be universally applicable, so there was no locally relevant content to Myanmar for Rohingya. There is much debate over the purpose of refugee education and some scholars and experts in the field of Education in Emergencies (EiE) are wary of aiming education at preparing a population for repatriation. However, the Rohingya were specifically voicing their desire to be taught the Myanmar curriculum so that they would be equipped for repatriation, yet they were not given that opportunity by the main INGOs active in the region until 2021.

Why did the international community not provide better quality education to the Rohingya for so long and why was the education provided not what the Rohingya wanted? Some scholars have argued that the original purpose of refugee education was to prepare refugees for repatriation and that with the current climate of global problems

and increasing prevalence of protracted refugee crises, education for repatriation is a disservice for refugees (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Floven, 2022). This field of thought aims at shifting our understanding of the purpose of education to one where we focus on the perceived futures of refugees in relation to their options for education (Floven, 2022). Another field of thought around the purpose of refugee education argues that most research and policy action aimed at refugee education focuses on the emergency phase and that consequently, long-term solutions for securing access to education have not been examined as deeply (Prodip & Garnett, 2019).

I believe that focusing on the futures of refugees is imperative when seeking solutions to refugee education situations, but that ultimately, the solution should be one that reflects the desires of the refugee population themselves – be it repatriation or seeking settlement in a different country. Therefore, I analyzed the roles of community actors and the international community in providing education to refugees with a focus on how INGOs hold the power in determining what content refugees can access in formalized systems. I argue that one of the biggest challenges in education for Rohingya refugees is not simply the result of COVID-19, but their lack of access to culturally relevant education. COVID-19 exacerbated the approach to refugee education in Cox's Bazar that is top-down and isolating for refugees – and critically one that has not been aimed at providing culturally relevant education to students. When reacting to the pandemic, the international community continued to refrain from consulting adequately with community stakeholders in planning for how to provide education to the Rohingya. They took a top-down approach to the problem when it should have started at the grassroots level and worked bottom-up. Consequently, attendance of Rohingya children in schools is lower than it should be because the content being taught is not what Rohingya parents want their children to learn. Now, as I will expand upon later, due to the delays in rolling out the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot project in addition to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rohingya refugee children are at a greater disadvantage than they would have been had the international community made more responsible and ethical choices in their actions as they provided educational opportunities in Cox's Bazar.

There are two main theories around the provision of education grounded in the literatures of education in emergencies and human development that have provided a theoretical foundation for the approach of this study: a capabilities approach (outlining

what education should provide), and a human-rights approach (outlining why education should be provided). The capabilities approach refers to the benefits of education for youth and proposes that education is integral to human development because it equips people with the capabilities necessary to grow, and expands their freedoms through that growth (Mkwanzani, 2019). The idea that education should be provided because it is a human right fleshes out the 'why' of education as it views access to schooling as a fundamental component of peoples' rights as citizens and human beings (Bajaj & Kidwai, 2016). The rights-based approach recognizes that marginalized and hard-to-reach populations are the most at risk of not receiving an education and thus focuses on creating solutions to fill this gap. Combined, it is these lines of thinking and theories that position education as a necessary tool for achieving fulfillment in life – but also, these theories recognize that education is a subjective entity and accordingly, what it means to be educated and through what content is a personal decision. This idea and belief that a person – any person, refugees included – should have self-determination over what they characterize as 'educated' to gain freedoms in life, are what drive this study.

As a case study, this project examines the Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar District of Bangladesh because as a stateless population who now number over one million with over half the population being below the age of 18, the Rohingya refugee crisis is arguably one of the most significant humanitarian emergencies of this time (Shohel, 2022; UNHCR, 2020; Vincent, 2020). INGOs and NGOs, with UNICEF and Save the Children leading the charge, have been active in Cox's Bazar since the initial flows landed in 1971, but increased their efforts in 2017 when the most recent influx of Rohingya refugees arrived (Global Education Cluster Bangladesh, n.d.). These organizations consistently publish weekly, monthly and annual reports and operational updates on the humanitarian developments in Cox's Bazar, which provided a solid foundation of data from which I conducted a document analysis for this project. The data from these reports provided an image of the statistical components of attendance, enrolment, and educational provisions in the camps, which covered one portion of the data needed for this study. To understand the situational context, underlying themes and debates around education in Cox's Bazar, and personal perspectives of Rohingya refugees, I examined secondary sources of academic articles, grey literature, and news articles. Using trends formed from the statistical data in conjunction with themes drawn

out from a qualitative analysis of the secondary sources, I formed my examination of the situation.

This case study aims to contribute to the literature on EiE and the specific body of research on the purpose of education, as well as providing nuances to existing debates on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of education for refugees. One element of the broader conversation around the purpose of education that this study seeks to engage with is the focus on access to education rather than content and pedagogy in the classroom. While traditional narratives have highlighted access as the key issue in securing education in states of emergencies, counternarratives led by Sarah Dryden-Peterson (2016) are emerging that argue the focus needs to be on what is taught instead of simply having children taught. My theory that the content of what is taught plays a large role in determining attendance rates of Rohingya refugees in educational facilities substantiates arguments that in order to successfully engage refugee children in schooling, what is taught must be prioritized alongside access to education rather than as a secondary or tertiary issue.

What follows in Chapter 2, is a summary of the historical and present status of refugee education policy, and an overview of the Rohingya refugee crisis, highlighting the historical and present day situation in Myanmar, the history of Rohingya people, the violent exodus of that population because of the genocide committed by the Myanmar government, and the situation of life in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, in addition to the impacts of COVID-19 on the Rohingya case. A literature review of the field of EiE follows as Chapter 3, focusing on key debates among scholars over formal and informal education, the provision of refugee education and responsibilities on this front, privatization of education, and responses to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 4 presents a review of the theories, research design, and methods of this study, in addition to describing the obstacles and readjustments that occurred throughout the research process. After the chapter on theory and methods is Chapter 5, my analysis of the situation, outlining the findings of my research on Rohingya's perspectives around education and the faults in how the international community has approached education for Rohingya. The analysis also uses the capabilities approach to examine how the implementation of different curriculums and education paths has impacted refugee children. Chapter 6 outlines recommendations for how to provide Rohingya with better quality content and key take-aways for the conversation of what quality education means

for refugees. A summarizing chapter concludes the paper after the presentation of recommendations (Chapter 7).

Chapter 2.

Background

2.1. Contextualizing Refugee Education

Under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, access to primary education is listed as a basic right that must be granted to all refugees (UNHCR, 2010). Since the ratification of this convention, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, other international actors, and many refugee-hosting governments have prioritized creating policies and programs that facilitate access to education for refugees; however, data from 2021 suggests that nearly 68 percent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school, but only 34 percent of secondary-school aged children are enrolled in schooling and in some countries enrolment on both accounts is in the single-digit figures (UNHCR, 2021b). Looking further down the path of education, statistics show that barely five percent of refugee youth are enrolled in tertiary (post-secondary) programs, showing that the drop-out rates and lack of access opportunities for higher education are incredibly bleak. These statistics illustrate how refugee education may be a priority in policy discussions at the international level, but on the ground, opportunities for access are minimal and progression is difficult to attain. This is in part because there are numerous issues common in most cases of refugee education that must be addressed to solve this problem. They include: limited access to resources, the exclusion of refugees from national education systems in the country of asylum, inadequate educational facilities, materials and educators in the camps, insufficient instruction in refugees' language, a lack of documentation/certification of educational attainment levels, and an absence of higher-level educational institutions with little or no access to secondary or university institutions (UNHCR, 2021b).

The UNHCR is the main body responsible for the creation of refugee education policies and the implementation of programs globally. Their strategies for supporting education have historically been focused on primary education and viewed higher education (secondary and post-secondary/tertiary programs) as extraneous, expensive, and a peripheral issue (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). The logic behind a focus on primary education is self-explanatory because it is evident that without a base of primary

education, there cannot be growth into higher levels of education, and children who are beyond primary levels of schooling have a more robust ability to retain learning and maintain their knowledge during prolonged gaps in schooling. Yet this short-term planning neglected to consider the realities of life for refugees as not all children and youth who become refugees do so as primary-school aged children, and there is no substantiated reason why refugee children should not have access to continuing their education at a higher level or having the ability to attain greater academic goals.

Recently recognizing the gap in their policies and acknowledging the multitude of reports and publications highlighting the need for a shift in policy toward prioritizing post-primary education, in 2019, the UNHCR unveiled a new policy strategy geared towards inclusive education at all levels. UNHCR's 2019 publication of "Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion," states that they do not believe short-term approaches to education are sufficient. This is because the new reality of protracted refugee situations demonstrates that temporary measures do not suffice in protracted situations. We see this in the case of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar as insufficient opportunities for education at levels beyond primary education and barriers to accessing the Bangladeshi national school system has impeded Rohingya children's ability to progress in schooling.

2.1.1. History of Education Policy

The rise of EiE as a field brought along the rise of education policy as the main framework through which EiE work occurs. Policy coordination at the global level has become much more prominent as a wide range of actors, primarily the UNHCR and UNICEF, and multi-stakeholder networks like the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) are now involved in collaborations to develop education policy (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). For the last few decades or so, the UNHCR has published an annual 'Education Report' outlining the biggest challenges, issues, and problems facing refugees and the UNHCR's policy aims or plans to combat these challenges. Until recently refugee education was largely overlooked at the international level with policy not going below the surface level of 'education should be accessible for children,' because conflicts and issues of forced displacement were seen as temporary situations that would eventually resolve. Now however, with the three-fold increase in the average period of forced displacement over the last 30 years, the need for education to be

prioritized before conflict ends has been fully realized (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021).

The need for education has never been more crucial than it is today. According to 2022 global estimates, approximately 222 million crisis-affected children and youth need urgent educational support (Education Cannot Wait, 2022). Numerous organizations are trying to fill this need by establishing programs to provide education, such as ‘No Lost Generation’ (UNICEF), Back-to-Learning Campaigns (UNICEF), ‘Every Child Learning’ (Pearson and Save the Children), and many more – yet the vast majority of these programs only provide informal, generalized, basic education and not culturally relevant education (Badrasawi, et al., 2018; Wagner, 2017). They also provide substantially different levels of education, breadths of curricular content, languages of instruction, and access. Evidently, while the discourse is united in believing education should be provided to all, how it is provided, who should be responsible for providing it, and what kind of education students receive are all debated factors among scholars and invested actors in the field of EiE. Though these debates are crucial in forming scrutinized policy recommendations and action plans, the counter side is that this often results in far more discussion than action, which is an area that needs improvement in this field.

2.2. Protracted Refugee Situations and Education

Protracted refugee situations are defined by the UNHCR as scenarios where 25,000 or more people from the same country of origin have lived for 5 or more years in a refugee situation after their initial displacement, “without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions” (Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, 2009). Due to the prolonged nature of these refugee situations, they require substantially more long-term action and support than short-term refugee crises because additional systems like education are required on top of the provision of basic living necessities. However, while the international refugee regime shows a clear recognition of the need to address refugee education, there is still a lack of consensus on how to ensure education is facilitated on the ground and how to standardize education – and a critical, but separate discussion exists around the need for standard certification so children can achieve upward mobility within education systems (Banki, 2013). Refugees must have access to basic, primary, and secondary education because without those

attainments, they are halted from attaining any further level of education and stripped of the ability to develop into educated people and to find fulfillment in their lives.

To address protracted refugee situations, the UNHCR and international community have over time adopted two major frameworks that seek to implement solutions to these refugee crises. The first was the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), created in 2016 and otherwise known as the 'New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.' The CRRF was adopted by the UN and had four main goals of easing the pressure on countries hosting refugees, enhancing refugee self-reliance, increasing third country solutions, and supporting repatriation (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). To implement the CRRF, in 2018 the UN General Assembly affirmed the Global Refugee Compact (GRC), which serves as a guide for countries to pursue equitable responsibility-sharing of action towards the solutions forwarded in the CRRF (United Nations General Assembly, 2018).

The goals of the CRRF and GRC are built on three 'durable solutions' that the UN and international community believe are best suited to addressing protracted refugee situations. These solutions are voluntary repatriation, the resettlement of refugees in third countries, and the local integration of refugees into the host country (UNHCR, 2019a). Voluntary repatriation is the most preferred option among refugees, but it is a highly complicated matter because the political situation that caused the refugee crisis must be resolved or at least in a state of sufficient peace and institutional stability to allow for refugees to return safely (Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2020). Resettlement efforts have historically been unsuccessful because refugee populations can be very large and host or third countries may not be willing to integrate populations of hundreds of thousands of refugees into their state. Lastly, local integration is a complex process that is demanding on the local population, and although it has the greatest potential for success among the three durable solutions, the UNHCR estimates that from 2011-2021 only 1.1 million refugees were integrated into their host countries, suggesting success has been marginal thus far (UNHCR, 2021a).

Understanding the context of the solutions to solving protracted refugee situations is key to understanding the situation of refugee education in Cox's Bazar for Rohingya refugees because the Rohingya crisis is protracted in nature and the durable solutions have influenced the aims of education. From the start of the most recent flood

of refugees into Cox's Bazar in 2017, educational programming shifted as systems could not handle the influx and the GoB refused to allow access for Rohingya to formal education systems in Bangladesh (Floven, 2022). While education pre-2017 had been less unified, but in ways more robust as children had been allowed to learn in the national system, the post-2017 programs were aimed at short-term fixes and were a result of increased refugees and exclusion from the Bangladeshi school system. The details of this shift will be expanded upon in greater detail later in this paper, but for the purposes of this discussion, it is sufficient to say that the current, promoted, durable solutions are not the quintessential frameworks for solutions to solving protracted refugee situations that support proper, equitable, sustainable education.

2.3. The Rohingya People

2.3.1. History of Arakan state

The term 'Rohingya,' is derived from word Rohang, which is the ancient Muslim name for Arakan. Arakan state (known as Rakhine state as of 1989), is the region where the Rohingya originated as a diverse community of Burmese, Arabs, Moors, Persians, and Bengalis, all connected by their dedication to the Muslim faith (Basu, et al., 2018; Floven, 2022). Records show this Muslim population originating in the region as early as 1430, but it is possible they emerged even longer before this time (Basu et al. 2018). The geographical location of Rakhine state is on the Northwest edge of Myanmar, bordering Bangladesh on the north side and separated from the rest of Myanmar on the south side of the state by the Arakan (Rakhine) mountain range (Farzana, et al., 2020). This physical separation has played an important role in fueling the Myanmar government's 'outsider' rhetoric of Rohingya and allowed Rakhine state to be seen as the junction between Islam and Buddhism in Asia, further supporting the government's claims that the Rohingya are not indigenous Burmans.

In addition to the Rohingya Muslims, there is a population of Buddhists residing in Rakhine state. According to Arakan Buddhist history, these people have an unbroken history of Buddhist presence in Rakhine state going back over 2500 years (Druce, 2020). They believe the Rohingya population originated in Rakhine state in the 1950s from a group of Bengali immigrants (Druce, 2020). This telling of history paints the Rohingya as an illegitimate ethnic minority in Myanmar who migrated purely to steal

Burmese land. However, Rohingya voices have been working to construct a historical account that proves their Burmese connections and denies or rather limits their Bengali connections, despite a neighboring population of Buddhist communities in the state spreading the illegitimate narrative about their history (Druce, 2020).

These two different understandings of the history of Arakan state serve to polarize the country and pit Muslims against Bamar Buddhists, while also attempting to discredit Muslims claims to Burmese identities (Druce, 2020; Floven, 2022). The version forwarded by the Buddhists is that Rakhine state has always been strictly Buddhist and they refuse to acknowledge the presence of Rohingya Muslims in the region. The counter narrative is the Muslim perspective, where the Rohingya have existed in Rakhine state since the creation of the state. These opposing interpretations of history opened the door to the questioning of Rohingya's claims to Burmese nationhood and this would prove to be critical in allowing intense discrimination to come from the government to the Rohingya population until today.

From the start of British colonization in Myanmar (then Burma), the Rohingya began facing opposition from all fronts at home. In a country with 13 major minority ethnic groups, they were not favoured by the British and this led to many conflicts as the Rohingya fought to keep Arakan state out of British control. With a loss in the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-1826), they ceded control of the region to the British and proceeded to be discriminated against as the Muslim minority in the state (Farzana, et al., 2020). After securing independence from the British in 1948 after WWII, a more deeply engrained 'us versus them' conceptualization of populations within Myanmar began to develop and the people of Arakan state were seen more and more as outsiders by the government and other ethnic groups.

2.3.2. A Stateless People

In the wake of Myanmar's independence and the reorganization of the state, there was hope for mutual respect between the Muslims and Buddhists in the form of a separate zone in Arakan to be designated as a Muslim-majority area (Druce, 2020). However, the Bamar- Buddhist dominated government did not allow this to happen and instead pushed to have Arakan's Muslim-majority areas absorbed into Pakistan (Druce, 2020). This plan was rejected by Pakistan and did not pass through the Myanmar

parliament, but it caused increasing tensions between communities as other minority groups took the opportunity to rebel against the government as they saw the Muslim minority Arakan (Rohingyas) pushing back against the Buddhist majority in power. To combat the increasing divisions within Myanmar, the government created the 1948 Union Citizenship Act to determine who counted as 'indigenous' versus 'non-indigenous' to Burma and who would be granted citizenship accordingly (Druce, 2020). Residents of the country had to apply for citizenship, and at this point all applications were accepted, but for groups like the Rohingya who had battled against the government for their own autonomy, it was a relinquishing of power to self-determine (Basu et al., 2018).

From 1948 to the 1960s, Rohingya were recognized as a separate race of the Myanmar state and enjoyed a degree of representation in the government and parliament (Zahed & Jenkins, 2022). Tides changed though in 1962 when the military junta took control of the state, and they began questioning Rohingya ethnicity and citizenship (Zahed & Jenkins, 2022). The new military government led by General Ne Win sought to create a Bamar-Buddhist state with no space for outsiders and the Rohingya were not deemed to be an accepted minority group in Myanmar; rather they were seen as migrants and various military abuses began to be directed against Rohingya people (Druce, 2020; Zahed & Jenkins, 2022). This sparked the start of large-scale exoduses of Rohingya across the border to Bangladesh to escape military abuse (Druce, 2020).

Over the next 20 years, state-sanctioned violence against the Rohingya continued and the xenophobic vision of Ne Win's Burmese-Buddhist state promoted the spreading of false rhetoric about the roots of Rohingya ethnicity and the creation of policies to drive Rohingya out of the country (Druce, 2020). The culmination of these discriminatory policies came in the form of the 1982 Citizenship Act, which narrowed Burmese citizenship into three categories: national, associate, and naturalized (Basu et al., 2018). This system allowed people whose national ethnic groups were accepted by the state to receive full citizenship (Basu et al., 2018). People who could prove their ancestors resided in the state could achieve naturalized citizenship, but all others could only attain associate citizenship status, which is what happened for most Rohingya (Basu et al., 2018; Farzana, et al., 2017). Since the government disavowed Rohingya and Muslim history in Myanmar, it was nearly impossible for any Rohingya to gain citizenship. This fell in line with what appeared to be a large-scale plan to drive Muslims

and the Rohingya out of Myanmar (Basu et al., 2018). With the revised Citizenship Law of 1982, the Rohingya population effectively became stateless, losing their rights as citizens and instead were categorized as 'non-state persons' by the government, which provided legal justification to pursue exclusionary programs (Basu et al., 2018).

2.4. The Rohingya Refugee Crisis

Major military operations began against the Rohingya in the 1970s with the official dialogue referring to them as missions targeting illegal immigrants and insurgency activities, but this was a cover to target the Rohingya population (Druce, 2020). Successive operations in 1975, 1977, and 1991-1992 led to an approximate total of 260,000 Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh by 1992 (Floven, 2022). These operations were brutal and involved the razing of villages, killings, rape, and land confiscations (Floven, 2022). The widely televised account of the 2017 influx of refugees to Bangladesh truly started in 2012 when violence broke out between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities. In October 2012 there was a targeted attack on Rohingya people in Rakhine state by Rakhine Buddhists, causing 150,000 internally displaced Rohingya in the state (Floven, 2022). Over the next few years smaller scale conflicts broke out and people continued to flood into Bangladesh as refugees, until August 2017 when a Rohingya resistance group (the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) organized an attack on a Rakhine military base, killing 12 officers (Druce, 2020). Retaliation from the Rakhine army and Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) was fierce, unrelenting, and incredibly violent. Over the course of the next few months, tens of thousands of Rohingya were killed, tortured, and raped, forcing hundreds of thousands of other Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh (Rae, 2018; UNOCHA, n.d.).

The masses of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar largely travelled northwest up into the southern region of Bangladesh. From the initial waves in the 1970s to today, over 900,000 Rohingya refugees have fled from the Rohingya home-region of Rakhine State, across the border into Bangladesh (OCHA, n.d.). Specifically, many of these refugees have landed in Cox's Bazar, a coastal district in south-west Bangladesh, near the border of Myanmar. As of January 2022, approximately 918,000 people were housed in 34 extremely congested refugee camps in the Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazillas of Cox's Bazar (UNICEF, 2022a). These refugee camps are the largest and most densely populated in the world (UNICEF, 2022a).

Since the Rohingya lost their status in Myanmar, globally they are regarded as a stateless people, so they are unable to benefit from protections and legal status as refugees in states not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention (de Chickera, 2021). Lacking legal status, the right to move freely, work, or access formal education, Rohingya in Bangladesh are forced to rely on humanitarian aid for all their basic needs (Vincent, 2020). Since Bangladesh is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, they do not have a legal structure in place to protect refugees. This has not only forced Rohingya refugees to be even more wholly dependent on humanitarian actors, but they have also been criminalized and treated as irregular immigrants by their host country (de Chickera, 2021). A major consequence of this situation concerning education is that Rohingya refugees are excluded from entering the Bangladeshi national education system – so informal education in the camps is their only option to access education (Olney, et al., 2019). These factors illustrate how the Rohingya are a unique case and how there are intricacies and additional complications present in their situation that are absent from other refugee crises.

2.5. Life and Education in Cox’s Bazar

2.5.1. Context Prior to 2017

There are important elements around the actions of the GoB, the host community, and the international community that illustrate the context of life in Cox’s Bazar before the 2017 influx of refugees and help to lay a foundation of understanding what changed post-August 2017. Though not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, Bangladesh has accepted the flows of Rohingya since the initial refugee flights in the 1970s. In the late 1970s, Bangladesh strongly supported repatriation efforts and worked collaboratively to organize the return of Rohingya to Myanmar to resolve border security issues (Farzana, et al., 2020). However, the repatriated Rohingya refugees returned to an ongoing conflict, so the efforts were unsuccessful. Since that point the GoB has attempted to engage in repatriation efforts, but they have not been successful - in part because the Myanmar government has no interest in welcoming back Rohingya people, and most Rohingya refugees who were repatriated have returned to Bangladesh (Basu et al., 2018; Bhatia et al., 2018).

In 1977 the UNHCR established 2 refugee camps in Cox's Bazar for the Rohingya (Bhatia et al., 2018). These camps are located in Nayapara and Kutupalong, with Nayapara being located south down along the coast in the Teknaf Upazilla and Kutupalong, which is more north in the Ukhila Upazilla. They are both now packed with numerous formal and informal camp settlements. As a non-signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, the GoB never officially recognized Rohingya refugees, but it did so unofficially until 1992 when it stopped recognizing the refugees at all (Bhatia et al., 2018). The refusal of Bangladeshi authorities to grant Rohingya formal refugee status has caused immense problems for this population and put them in a terrible state of humanitarian and legal flux (Bhatia et al., 2018). Without refugee status, Rohingya who are not registered with one of the UNHCR camps cannot access formal services and have no legal rights or protections (Bhatia et al., 2018).

A large disparity between registered and unregistered refugees has resulted from these actions by the GoB since 2017. Registered refugees enjoyed the provision of services from the UNHCR and other UN bodies, which includes shelter, water, health care and hygiene supplies (Bhatia et al., 2018). By no means was there complete security of food, water, health care, or other supports for registered refugees as supplies were still limited, but they were more plentiful than what unregistered refugees were able to access from NGOs and other humanitarian organizations (Bhatia et al., 2018). However, in terms of education, registered refugees were at an immense advantage over the unregistered because they were allowed to access formal primary education. Yet only five percent of Rohingya refugees at that time were living in registered camps so the number of children capable of accessing formalized primary education was very marginal (Prodip & Garnett, 2019).

Key notes to recognize about this refugee population are that by the end of 2017 the total Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh was nearly one million people, and that included a flow of approximately 671,000 additional refugees from August on as a result of the upsurge in the conflict (Rae, 2018). Prior to 2017 the GoB was dealing with nearly half a million refugees that it did not want, and the burden of care was thrust heavily on the UNHCR, UNICEF, and local and international humanitarian agencies who have continued to play a vital role in supporting these refugees.

2.5.2. The Situation From 2017-2020

From 2017 to 2019, the refugee population nearly doubled, with 55% of the population being children under the age of 18 and this massive leap caused huge strains on existing systems and resulted in extremely congested camps (Shohel, 2022; UNHCR, 2018). Without the ability to secure refugee status, intake of these new flows was very difficult for humanitarian actors and resulted in many being forced to join or create informal camps (Basu et al., 2018). Due to the horrific situation they fled from in Myanmar, the new refugees also had additional needs such as psychological support, in addition to the basic needs of shelter, food, water, hygiene supplies, and more. The new trauma-centered needs and massive child population consequently created new situations for humanitarian actors to address.

Cox's Bazar is a region with an interesting socio-political dynamic as it is the most popular tourist destination in Bangladesh while also being the most impoverished area in the country. The presence of sprawling refugee camps in this same region is another point of frustration for the GoB and as a result, as an intermediary plan to repatriation, they have begun discussing the idea of moving the refugee camps to an island called Bhasan Char off the west coast of Bangladesh (Floven, 2022). The island already houses approximately 18,000 refugees, and a few thousand Bangladeshi nationals, yet it only has the resources to house 100,000 people total. In addition to being a remote island with no access to bigger networks, there are many disputes around how safe an option this would be and whether it violates rights (Floven, 2022). This highlights how settlement in Bangladesh is not an option from the GoB's perspective.

The depth to which the GoB went to make life less easy for Rohingya after the 2017 influx was expansive as education was limited to what could be provided within the camps, but government regulations also prohibited the use of Bengali curriculum and Bangla language of instruction (Floven, 2022). As of 2017, unregistered Rohingya children were barred from attending Bangladeshi schools and this was part of the GoB's efforts to not encourage more Rohingya refugees to land in Bangladesh (Floven, 2022). Education is seen by the GoB as a 'pull-factor,' a factor that could provide Rohingya with a reason to come to Bangladesh or stay there because it provides them with better opportunities than what they had in Myanmar (Floven, 2022). The government

rationalized those restrictions by stating that if they are offered a better life in Bangladesh than what they had in Myanmar, then they will not want to leave or participate in voluntary repatriation (Olney, et al., 2019).

2.5.3. Informal Curriculums

To combat the vacuum of educational options for Rohingya children in the wake of the GoB's denial of formalized education for Rohingya, the collaborative education-focused NGO co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, the "Education Sector," established temporary learning centres (TLCs) to offer informal education for refugees (Floven, 2022; Vincent, 2020). The education provided through TLCs used the 'Learning Competency Framework and Approach' (LCFA), a curriculum-adjacent emergency program initially created by UNICEF and then adopted by the GoB under the title, "Guidelines for Informal Education Programming" (GIEP) (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021). The LCFA/GIEP cannot provide formalized certification to students, but it is touted as a guide of learning materials that allows for progressive learning as it was designed to be a multi-level program with levels one and two being approved by the GoB in 2019 (Floven, 2022). Moreover, the key success of the LCFA was that it was sanctioned by the GoB, meaning that finally there was an option for a degree of coordinated, structured education that humanitarian actors could provide in the camps (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021). However, only two levels were approved: level one is equivalent to a generic, western conception of pre-primary education with introductions to writing, reading, math, and 'life skills,' and level two is aimed at taking students from a Kindergarten to a second-year primary level, enhancing education in the areas of English, Burmese, Math, and 'life skills.' Critically, the program was still informal, meaning no level of certification could be achieved by students who complete it, it was severely limited in terms of the progression students could achieve in it, and it was not culturally relevant at all for the Rohingya (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Enrolment levels for primary aged children in TLCs following the LCFA was quite successful, but by 2019 only three percent of youth above 14 years of age were enrolled in any kind of learning facility (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021; UNICEF, 2019). This speaks to the limited effectiveness of this program, as it hits a ceiling at the level of instruction provided to 8-10 year olds in a traditional Myanmar school, so anyone needing higher levels of instruction had no avenue to pursue in the camps. There are

many critiques of this program from NGOs and the Rohingya refugees themselves. An 11-year-old Rohingya child was quoted calling education based on the LCFA, “playtime for little kids,” highlighting how unenthused Rohingya on the ground are with the education they are receiving (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The Education Sector recognized by August 2019 that although enrolment was high for children ages 4 to 14, retention of students and academic performance was very low (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021). This was reported by Rohingya refugees to be due to frustrations with the scope of education provided (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021).

In response to the shortcomings and criticisms of the LCFA, the Education Sector created the ‘Myanmar Curriculum Pilot,’ (MCP) in 2020 – a program designed to equip Rohingya children and youth under the same curriculum as students in Myanmar (Vincent, 2020). The shift to Myanmar-focused curriculum to match what Rohingya would have learned at home was a result of clear reports from the Rohingya refugee community themselves that they wanted to learn from the Myanmar curriculum and be ready for repatriation if and when the opportunity arose (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021). The MCP program, however, was not able to come into force at its original scheduled time because of the COVID-19 pandemic; it was scheduled to be rolled out in early 2020 but was delayed until November 2021 due to the pandemic (UNICEF, 2022b). Reaching its initial target in May of 2022 of enrolling 10,000 students in grades 6 to 9, the program seeks to scale up operations massively and enroll all 400,000 Rohingya children ages 4 to 17 by 2023 (UNICEF, 2022b). A more in-depth examination and critique of the LCFA and MCP programs will follow in Chapter 5.

2.5.4. Legal Frameworks

To illuminate more of the specific hinderances to education that exist for Rohingya children, it is important to discuss the legal frameworks on education that encompass and inform the situation in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. The two countries are each signatories to key international human rights instruments aimed at upholding the principle of non-discrimination: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy,

2021). This means that under UN conventions, refugee children in both countries are entitled to all the rights listed within each of these conventions, including as stated under Article 28 of the CRC, making “primary education compulsory and available free to all; [and to] take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, p. 8).

Since effectively denying Rohingya citizenship rights in 1982, Myanmar has violated the CRC by restricting the rights and abilities of Rohingya children and youth to attend schools – primary, secondary, and post-secondary (Shohel, 2020). In 2018, Bangladesh endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), signaling a potentially encouraging step towards greater rights for Rohingya refugees. Yet in fact what we have continued to see are restrictions to many basic rights for refugees, including access to education (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021). With the rhetoric from Bangladesh’s government stating that the Rohingya are Myanmar’s responsibility, and they must return home to receive support, and with neither country providing assistance to this refugee population, the strength of these international conventions and their ability to force action needs to be seriously questioned (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

2.5.5. The COVID-19 Pandemic 2020-2022

In March 2020, when the world shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cox’s Bazar also confirmed its first COVID-19 case and access to Rohingya camps was restricted to critical services only (UNICEF, 2020a). Education was not deemed an essential service by the GoB, so as of March 2020, humanitarian actors supporting educational initiatives in the camps were either reassigned to other duties or barred from entering the camps (Pillai & Zireva, 2020). As a result, in-person education was completely halted as of March 24th, 2020, and the over 325,000 children who had been attending education facilities in the camps no longer had access to learning centres or other educational facilities (Pillai & Zireva, 2020).

UNICEF reported that caregivers in homes throughout the camps tried to provide home-based educational programming to allow students to continue learning, but these attempts were limited in scope because caregivers quickly ran out of materials and had no access to technological solutions because internet services had been cut off to the camps long ago by the GoB (UNICEF, 2020b). UNICEF attempted to develop a radio-

based education program throughout the camps and started airing a radio broadcast of lessons in November 2020, but it took until 2021 to have radios widely dispersed throughout the camps and radio signal was very limited in some areas (Floven, 2022; UNICEF, 2020b). While there were attempts to provide some semblance of education in the interim during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were not nearly sufficient to adequately make up for the lost instructional time caused by school closures.

The education blackout in Bangladesh due to the pandemic was one of the longest shutdowns globally as students were without consistent access to education for over 18 months (Floven, 2022). The government announced the re-opening of educational facilities in September 2021, but it was a short-lived return to learning as another shut down occurred from January to February 2022 due to virus outbreaks (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2022). Lacking the necessary tools and technology to access digital education and without the presence of educational facilitators and teachers, children and youth in Cox's Bazar were extremely disadvantaged throughout the pandemic and people now fear that the lost instructional time will never be made up, resulting in foundational education setbacks for this generation. UNICEF published a report in 2021 called "Preventing a Lost Decade," which urged the international community to take action to reverse the damage caused by COVID-19 on children and youth, and the need to build back learning opportunities in refugee communities, like the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar, is vital in order to save this generation's education and future from being lost as a consequence of the pandemic.

Chapter 3.

Literature Review

This case study has relied on both academic and grey literature to inform discussions and provide sources for analysis. While academic literature refers to peer reviewed journals and academically focused books, grey literature covers all other material from reports by NGOs, to news articles, to UN publications, to blog posts by academics and many other sources in between (Shohel, 2022). To best understand my research question, it was essential to consult materials related to education in emergencies, and the core debates around the provision and purpose of refugee education. This section provides a summary of that literature.

3.1. Use of Grey Literature

Due to the ongoing nature of the Rohingya refugee crisis and barriers to accessibility for researchers to conduct on-the-ground research, much of our current understanding of life in the refugee camps comes from reports by local NGOs or INGOs and actors publishing from non-peer reviewed platforms (i.e. grey literature). This material has been vital to my study and provided access to information that may have been overlooked in academic publications, allowing a more nuanced analysis to occur. However, working with grey literature has some inherent problems that must be acknowledged. Largely, issues with grey literature stem from the source as details of the author or publisher cannot always be found. When using grey literature, it is necessary to be critical of where your sources come from, potential biases, and potential issues with credibility or quality of evidence (Shohel, 2022). Conducting background searches on authors or publishing organizations, checking sources and references, and not relying solely on unverified grey literature sources are all ways researchers can combat the problematic nature of using these useful and informative documents.

3.2. Education in Emergencies

Education in Emergencies (EiE) is a coalescence of discussions and debates from the academic fields of political science, education studies, international studies,

conflict studies, and the voices of individuals and organizations from the humanitarian development world. Conception of ‘emergencies’ are often split along the lines of emergencies caused by violence and emergencies caused by natural disasters (Burde, et al., 2017). EiE research predominantly looks at education in emergencies as situations brought on by violence and armed conflict (Burde, et al., 2017). Within the realm of EiE, there are different foci that the scholarship takes, ranging from questions regarding access to curricular content to the impact on students’ futures. Within these broad categories, scholars pose questions such as ‘does inequitable access drive conflict,’ ‘how does distance from schools impact attendance for boys versus girls,’ ‘what promise do peace education programs show,’ and ‘what are the impacts of schooling on emotional and behavioral development for refugee children (Burde, et al., 2017)?’ Focused research questions pair with policy dialogues at the international, national, and organizational level, demonstrating the global reach of EiE studies.

With nearly 2 billion people living in countries affected by conflict, humanitarian intervention efforts are occurring constantly in different regions around the world (Burde, et al., 2017). In states where the bureaucracy is weak or nonexistent, at stated before, foreign actors like the United Nations or other nongovernmental organizations often step in to provide support for basic needs like shelter, food, water, and healthcare (Prodip & Garnett, 2019). In these times of crisis and conflict, education is often seen though as secondary to other priorities (Prodip & Garnett, 2019). However, with growing interest starting in the 1990s, international aid workers began promoting the need for education to be included under the umbrella of humanitarian aid crises (Burde, et al., 2017). The concept of ‘education as a humanitarian response’ gained traction as more discussion occurred around the need for refugee and internally displaced children to have access to education no matter where they are (Sinclair, 2007).

Now referred to as Education in Emergencies (EiE), the rhetoric positions education as a priority alongside traditional necessities in humanitarian intervention efforts (Vermesse, et al., 2017). In 2000 the field of Education in Emergencies was institutionalized through the creation of the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), a coalition of different international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other actors – examples of which are UNESCO, UNHCR, the World Bank, Save the Children, and UNICEF (Vermesse et al., 2017). In that same year the Education for All (EFA) conceptual framework was ratified at the EFA

conference in Dakar, marking 2000 as a pivotal year of progress for education policy at the global level (Floven, 2022). Over the last two plus decades, with the support of the international community, the field of EiE has centred itself as a core of the humanitarian crisis response and now efforts to restore access to education in the wake of conflicts and crises like the pandemic are gaining greater attention from humanitarian actors (Vermesse et al., 2017).

However, despite the optimistic rhetoric surrounding the importance of refugee education, some proponents of EiE are critical of the international community, the UNHCR and international aid bodies as they argue that refugee education only became a priority approximately five years ago, and that consequently little concrete action occurred to establish solutions for facilitating EiE before then (Le, 2019). Many critiques are aimed at the idea of EiE being more rhetoric and less action. Some aim their criticisms at the UN and fault a lack of action on their part, however, I find those criticisms weak and antagonistic as they focus on the failings that are due to lack of funds, rather than the numerous successes that have come based on available resources.

3.2.1. Education as a Force of Good or Bad?

One difference in the field of study on education in emergencies is a divide in the belief that the notion of education is inherently a force for good (Prodip & Garnett, 2019). Education is seen as possessing two faces: a constructive one and a deconstructive one, wherein good quality education can stabilize a population or region and draw people together, but that same system can be used to manipulate and entrench certain power dynamics (INEE, 2010; Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008). Since education inevitably has a societal impact, some argue that it is whether that education is committed to peace, or complicit in the conflict that will influence the society at large and society's role in that conflict (Vermesse et al., 2017). Following suit, scholars of this mindset believe that education systems must be rebuilt rather than re-instated to reflect the need for change to achieve peace and it is often in this process of overhauling a system that scholars find the system fails (Vermesse et al., 2017).

Where critics of education's façade as a force of pure good and supporters of education's optimistic potential realign tends to be around the role of policy in creating

the environment for education to serve either positive or negative aims. The consensus is that an analysis of the conflict, fragility of the region, and societal context must occur in the planning of education policy and programming to ensure situationally appropriate action is being taken – including situationally appropriate curriculum (Vermesse et al., 2017). The INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility state that “a thorough examination of the drivers and dynamics of conflict” (2010) must be made in order to analyze education’s interactions with the contextual factors of a conflict as the goal is for education to not exacerbate a conflict.

Rather than perceiving education in a good or bad dichotomy, my study looks at education as a tool of potential. Building on the core tenets of Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach, which are elaborated on in Chapter 4, we look at education as facilitating a goal of providing people with the necessary skills and abilities to live a fulfilling life. Instead of focusing on the ways education perpetuates certain power dynamics or the political aspects of preparing refugees for a certain path of resettlement, this study strikes at a more fundamental level of the issue of providing refugee education: the content taught. I argue that ensuring curriculum and content is chosen by refugees to prepare themselves for the future they desire is more important for securing long term success of educational attainment than simply providing learning spaces with the most basic of lessons taught. Top-down decision-making by INGOs that impose education systems on refugees are not destined to succeed the way systems that are built in consultation with the population in question will. This study explores on-the-ground learning needs of Rohingya children and removes the abstract political aspects of these conversations around education to fill in the gaps in what has been the focus of EiE and refugee education research thus far.

3.3. Purpose of education

Critiquing the purpose of refugee education, Dryden-Petersen is a main leader in the school of thought that believes education for refugees is focused primarily on preparing them for repatriation, rather than providing them with opportunities for alternative paths. Proponents of this critique argue that the goals of refugee education articulated at the international level of enabling refugees to achieve meaningful, quality lives and futures exist mostly in theory and are not being worked towards on the ground (Dryden-Petersen et al., 2019). While many refugees do support repatriation as their

ideal option as a post-conflict solution, the reality of safe and successful repatriation is bleak for most (Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2020). It is in light of this fact that scholars critique education aimed at repatriation (an education paralleled to the one refugees would have received in their home country) as limited, which disadvantages refugees by pigeon-holing their educational opportunities and restricting their future opportunities in their host country (Floven, 2022).

However, the gap that this study seeks to fill is the counter to this argument by stating that while in past situations, education for the sole purpose of repatriation has certainly been a disservice to refugees, I believe that the lens of examination must be widened to acknowledge that sometimes education for the purposes of repatriation can be a good option for refugee populations – if they see fit. I will argue that it is not the aim of education in a refugee's home country curriculum to force them back into a dangerous situation or limit their options, but rather it is culturally-relevant education to them because it connects the population to their roots, their home, and their culture, and when they want those linkages to stay alive, they should be given every right to continue pursuing that kind of education.

3.3.1. Formal vs Informal Systems

A key debate in the literature on refugee education centres on formal versus informal education systems and the integration of refugees into local schools. Many scholars agree that inclusion in host country systems would be more beneficial to refugees and stateless persons than focusing on providing education from the country of origin (Floven, 2022). Receiving education from the host country would provide refugees with the skills necessary to participate in that country, access services, gain jobs, and it provides them with access to a formalized schooling system which allows for the chance to gain certification (Floven, 2022). Homing in on the formalized aspect of host country education systems, the key benefit is the ability for refugees to receive certification through a formal system which the informal systems do not provide (Dryden-Petersen, et al., 2019). However, this option of integration in national education systems is rarely given to refugee populations.

While the consensus is that refugees should have access to formalized education systems because it provides them with better quality education and more

opportunities, there are numerous examples showing that this access is not being secured and that current refugee situations are not given these chances (Dryden-Petersen, et al., 2019). A gap exists here where there is a disconnect between the goals presented at the international level, the beliefs of scholars and key actors over the opportunities that should be provided, and what is happening on the ground. There is agreement throughout the scholarship of the importance of education, though plans and the rhetoric lack actionable ways to sustainably provide their ideal kind of education. What is needed are plans on how to secure formalized educational opportunities for refugees inside camps and beyond the host country's system – certification and standardization can exist beyond that singular avenue. This is where the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot (MCP), presented later in this paper, serves as an example of the kind of program that could fill this gap.

3.3.2. Responsibility to Provide?

A core debate around education for refugees and stateless persons revolves around who is responsible for providing education: the state in which they are taking refuge, or humanitarian actors. There are a number of complicating factors that inform the context of each situation: whether or not the refugees have refugee status, whether or not the host country is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and accepts refugees, whether or not the host country's education system can support an influx of refugees, whether or not the language of instruction would be fitting for the refugees, and whether or not the host country wants to allow refugees into their schools. All these factors influence what education may look like for refugees and scholars are divided on where responsibility should lie for securing educational opportunities.

Beyond the fact that certain refugees flee to countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and therefore do not have protections as refugees, there are also grey areas in international law that allows states who are signatories to the 1951 Convention to avoid their responsibilities in providing refugees protections. One factor that blurs the lines of responsibility for actors to provide education is the protection gap that exists for children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Pobjoy, 2021). Under international law, all refugee children are afforded certain protections and economic, social, political, and civil rights that align with their special circumstances (Pobjoy, 2021). However, there are certain issues inherent with these

protections – a primary one being who is considered a child. Article 1 of the CRC defines a child as anyone below the age of 18, but it does not specify if this means until the age of 18 or until they are no longer 18; moreover, for many refugees it is difficult to provide proof of their age (Pobjoy, 2021). The grey area created here has allowed countries to skirt responsibilities of providing education to refugee children and youth at the margins of this age bracket.

In terms of the conventions surrounding precisely who is responsible for providing education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires governments to promote a compulsory primary education, with access to secondary and tertiary levels as is appropriate (Sinclair, 2007). However, in reality, in many situations governments have been seen to fail at providing these opportunities and NGOs and the UN have proved to be both better equipped and readily willing to step in and take over the provision of schooling (Sinclair, 2007). This has led to a reality wherein refugee education is caught in a state of flux in many circumstances and refugee children receive uneven, uncertified, and often insufficient schooling because there are no standards for the provision of education, let alone consensus on who is responsible for ensuring they receive that education. This gap is recognized by the international community within the field of EiE, and solutions have begun to emerge from certain discussions, such as those around the privatization of refugee education. However, the lack of urgency in these discussions is a point of criticism this study will make and in the recommendations section I will elaborate on possible solutions for assigning responsibility in this case.

3.3.3. Privatization of and in Education

The urgency of the need to secure funding and responsibility for providing education to refugees has been at the forefront of international discussions around EiE for nearly a decade. Recognizing the inability of governments and NGOs/INGOs to provide adequate funds, in the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the UN General Assembly added an article (Article 15) that specifically invited private actors to participate as stakeholders in multi-stakeholder alliances to support governments in providing services to refugees (Le, 2019). The involvement of private actors in this field was a new step, but one welcomed by both sides with the UNHCR calling on businesses and individuals to step into the conversation and help bring innovative and sustainable solutions to supporting refugee education (Le, 2019). Le

(2019) suggests that the partnering of the public and private sector for refugee education aligns with the broader trend of engaging alternative solutions to solve the issues of funding and financing humanitarian development worldwide.

Addressing the involvement of private actors in the solution-making side of refugee education issues, in 2012 Stephen Ball published *Global Education Inc.: New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*, an introduction of the idea of privatization in and of education – wherein private actors can partake in the assumption of what are traditionally state responsibilities of providing education for refugees by creating a new space (a new market) for private actors that is the field of education. Ball's premise is that there is a new era of global education policy forming that breaks the mold of the typical boundaries of education being under the auspices of the welfare state and instead suggests that policies are being influenced by private and philanthropic figures based on "the neo-liberal imaginary," which he explains as an ideology that promotes free markets and individualism over state regulation and the common good (Ball, 2012, p. 2).

This is what Ball describes as 'Philanthropy 3.0,' or 'Philanthrocapitalism' which is an off-shoot of the neo-liberal imaginary where philanthropy takes on a market-based approach and starts resembling a capitalist economy of giving matched with outcomes for the donor (Ball, 2012, p. 69). At face-value, this reimagining of philanthropy seems questionable, if not dangerous to any liberal or socialist minded thinker because of the removal of any sense of altruism in philanthropic endeavors. However, Ball goes on to explain how Philanthropy 3.0 is based on three working principles of "bringing non-profits to scale, emphasizing evaluation and performance management, and fostering 'investor-investee' relations" (p. 70). Ball argues that these aims form the basis of 'silver bullet' solutions which are near magical answers to problems because they have three main components: a technical application, generic use, and they are scalable (2012, p. 71). Here is where Ball attempts to make his case that this new philanthropic approach can provide 'silver bullet' solutions to the Millennium Development Goals agenda around the provision of education to all by creating affordable private schools (2012, p.71).

Ball's proposition certainly has merit and there are some common elements of praise around Ball's work regarding his success in demonstrating the complex interwovenness of governments, individuals, and companies in the sphere of education

policy (Le, 2019; Walford, 2014). Some scholars like Soudien, Apple and Slaughter (2013) who published a glowing review of Ball's work praise him for bringing to light the important trends that are emerging in the governance and management of education at the global level. Others however, like Geoffrey Walford (2014) critique Ball's work by arguing that his work is overly influenced by one singular and controversial scholar, James Tooley, and that accordingly, Ball's claims are not widely cited or supported. Walford (2014) does concede that Ball's (2012) work should make education policy theorists consider the many changes that have taken place in education policy in recent years and acknowledge the degree to which private providers have entered the scene of education provision in many countries. Whether influenced by it or critical of its claims, Ball's work remains a highly influential piece in discussions around the privatization of education.

Building on Ball's work, Hang Le (2019) proposes a potential solution to the unresolved tension over who is responsible for refugee education. Le (2019) posits that since both host-countries and the UNHCR have failed to sufficiently fill the gap of providing education to refugees, that the realm of refugee education in its entirety should be privatized. Le's (2019) core argument is that currently, the private sector is only engaged in refugee education issues when the label 'crisis' is added – because until that point it is a state matter. However, the private sector has seen immense successes in providing education to refugees when they have been included in the process, so what Le (2019) suggests, is the involvement of the private sector in refugee education policy making and action all the time rather than when it reaches the point of 'crisis,' as arguably, all circumstances where refugee education is necessary are crises.

The space Le (2019) creates in the discussion around solutions for finding bodies to take responsibility for the provision of refugee education is where this study also seeks to enter the discussion. Seeing the gaps left by the Bangladeshi government as they refuse to allow Rohingya refugees into their national education system and the struggles of NGOs to fill the needs on the ground, measured against the success of groups like the Education Sector which have private actors funding their activities, this study will likewise propose greater roles and responsibilities for the private sector in providing access to refugee education. The specific suggestions on how this responsibility could be taken on come in Chapter 7.

3.4. Responses to the Impact of COVID-19

As of 2020, the total enrolment of refugees in education was 68 percent for primary, 34 percent for secondary, and five percent for higher education (UNHCR, 2021). These statistics are up five, ten, and three percent respectively from 2019 and show slow, but positive growth in each category of enrolment for refugee children and youth (UNHCR, 2019c). Though this growth seems quite marginal at face value, we must be cognizant of the deeply damaging effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on education for refugees and acknowledge that from 2020 on enrolment levels dropped substantially. COVID-19 restrictions and shutdowns had incredibly damaging effects on policy plans as initiatives to support education efforts were halted and policies to support filling the gaps left by the pandemic were only just beginning to appear at the international level (Floven, 2022). There is a strong sense of urgency in the rhetoric of the need to get children back to school, but what is missing is a concerted effort to address the intersection of pre-existing issues that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently, multifaceted approaches are required to solve these new, complex issues (UNICEF, 2021a). The discussion around policy approaches to repair damaged systems and make up for lost education time is in its nascent stages and that is where this case study aims to position itself within the discussion by adding to the dialogue of presenting possible solutions and actionable steps forward.

Chapter 4.

Research Design

This research study uses the refugee camp of Cox's Bazar as a case study for examining how the purpose of refugee education and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected education for Rohingya children. The core research question of this project began as: how has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated issues of accessing culturally relevant education for refugees in the camps at Cox's Bazar? A great deal of evidence is emerging showing that interruptions to education have caused negative impacts on all populations, globally, but refugee populations started off at a greater disadvantage because their education systems are already fragile and are built to try to fill in the gaps of missed educational time these children and youth have already suffered because of their circumstances as refugees (Badrasawi, et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2022). Therefore, this analysis seeks to probe deeper into the specific consequences that have been experienced by the Rohingya refugee population in Cox's Bazar, with particular attention to how the pandemic may have impacted access to culturally relevant education aimed at connecting this population to their home and preparing them for hopefully, a return to Myanmar.

4.1. Case Selection

The Rohingya refugee population serves as a rich case. A major problem in securing education for this population stems from the fact that the conflict in Myanmar has resulted in a protracted refugee crisis, involving multiple generations of refugees with no end in sight. As such, it is not simply a matter of providing interim education to one generation of children and then sending them back home in a process of repatriation. To be successful, an education system for these children and youth needs to be flexible and provide both standard and catch-up-style teaching to children and youth of all ages, while also providing options for continuing their studies at the post-primary and intermediate levels. Moreover, beyond simply providing access to any kind of education, as we can see in the Rohingya case, the content and curriculum provided plays a critical role in the success of a refugee education system to meet the needs of refugees and secure high levels of attendance.

Despite the development of nearly 6,000 temporary educational/learning facilities (TLCs) in Cox's Bazar, as of 2020 there was an estimated 514,522 school-aged (children and youth between the years of 5 and 17) refugees requiring education (UNHCR, 2020b). Each facility averages only one to two classrooms where in some cases up to 60 students are crammed together in one classroom (Olney, et al., 2019; UNHCR, 2020b; Vincent, 2020). However, while resources are still very limited, there have been efforts made by NGOs and inter-governmental organizations to provide a semblance of a structured educational program in these facilities. The Cox's Bazar Education Sector (the Sector) is the main leader of humanitarian action for education access in Cox's Bazar. The Sector is staffed by a coalition of UNICEF and Save the Children humanitarian actors, serving as a joint project between the two major NGOs and this has resulted in coordinated, international efforts to increase access to education for Rohingya refugees through the creation of programs like the LCFA in 2019 and the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot (MCP) in 2020 (Global Education Cluster Bangladesh, n.d.). The LCFA however, is an informal education system as opposed to a formal education system, such as national education systems that are bounded by a standard curriculum, testing requirements, and other factors. Informal education systems offer no path to certification, and can range from community-based teaching environments to imposed systems from outside bodies like the Education Sector.

Preliminary data has shown that by the start of April 2020 almost all the 6,000 educational facilities in Cox's Bazar had been closed to minimize the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus (Vincent, 2020). Over a year and a half later, learning facilities began to reopen with approximately 80% of facilities gradually opening starting in September 2021; however, in December of 2021 Bangladeshi authorities banned schools that had been established in the camps by Rohingya teachers in an attempt to crack down on unsanctioned, non-NGO run education facilities (Human Rights Watch, 2022; UNICEF, 2022a). As a result, Rohingya over the past six years have transitioned from being enrolled in to banned from: Bangladeshi national schools, their own informal community-led classes, and madrassas that provide Islamic religious education (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The only option left in 2021 was the LCFA programs at TLCs - which as an informal system, prohibited Rohingya from accessing anything beyond a basic, primary level of informal education (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

In 2020, the MCP was introduced by the Education Sector and approved by the GoB for implementation in the refugee camps, but the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the MCP's start until December of 2021. Even though the MCP was a positive response to the desire of the Rohingya refugee community to be educated in culturally relevant, Myanmar-based content, the Education Sector continued to take a top-down approach to implementing both the MCP as it did with the LCFA. Compounded by the disruptions to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these factors have resulted in limited Rohingya attendance at schools. This study aims to shed light on how the quality and purpose of the education given to Rohingya students has impacted their attendance and what roles community members and the international community play in providing the right education to fill Rohingya's needs.

4.2. Theoretical Framing

This study is grounded in the work of two predominant theories of education in the field of EiE: the capabilities approach and the human-rights approach. These two approaches frame perceptions around the right to education, the reason why humanity should have the right to education, and what this education should entail. The core argument that will be made in this study, as supported by these two theories, is that refugee-driven, culturally relevant education is more important to have than simply the right to loose-fitting, universally applicable basic education. To have an education that is holistic, appropriate, and equips a person both individually, and as an entity within their community, with the skills necessary to secure a future of their choosing, they must have the right to determine their educational content. Refugee communities must have a voice in determining what kind of education they are given access to and should not be subjected to the consequences of top-down political choices of powerful stakeholders.

The capabilities approach (CA) was introduced by economist and political philosopher Amartya Sen in the 1980s as a way to evaluate inequalities (Floven, 2022). The approach is grounded in the core concepts of 'functionings' and 'capabilities,' with the understanding of 'functionings' referring to "the various things that [a person] manages to do or be in leading a life," and 'capabilities' representing "the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be, the various 'functionings' [they] can achieve" (Sen, 1993, p. 30-31). Sen (1993) states that 'functionings' range from basic aspects of life like finding food, to more complex actions like becoming socially

integrated, and that capabilities are the abilities of people to achieve functionings. In summary, Sen (1993) defines the CA as an “approach to well-being and advantage in terms of a person’s ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being” (p.30).

This approach introduced a fundamental shift to the narrative of defining success in development as it promoted quality of life and success as being measured by the freedoms and capabilities a person had rather than their monetary successes (Mkwanzzi, 2019). While this approach was created as a tool of analysis for human development, many scholars have applied it specifically to education because of the cross-cutting themes of the CA and the goals of education. In defence of using the CA in the context of education to evaluate development, Mkwanzzi (2019) stipulates that education “forms peoples’ existing capacities into developed capabilities and expands human freedoms” (p.70), thus inserting education as a critical tool in the centre of the CA. Seeing education as a means to fostering successful human development, and the CA as the ideal framework to achieve human-centred, freedom and capabilities-based success, I argue that education and curriculum should provide the necessary tools and knowledge to foster capabilities that allow a person to have freedom in their life choices. This should be the path available for Rohingya refugees as they grow up – they should be equipped with an education that allows them to have freedoms and choice in their lives because of the capabilities they have developed. However, this kind of a future is contingent on their access to consistent, quality education and on their access to culturally relevant education that connects them to their home country.

The other theory that in tandem with the capabilities approach has provided the theoretical framing of this study is the human-rights approach. With the rise of the modern human rights movement in the post-World War II era came a shift in the discourse around education to codify the right to access primary education as a fundamental human right (Baja & Kidwai, 2016). The right to education was enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then reiterated in numerous, subsequent conventions and agreements, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and others (Baja & Kidwai, 2016). Previous understandings of the purpose of education had been centred around economic development and the ‘rate of return’ schooling had for society, but the shift to the human-rights based perspective of education recognized the benefits it has to the individual and human development (Baja & Kidwai, 2016). The rights-based approach also specifically highlights the need for

marginalized groups to be guaranteed education as it is “a fundamental component of their guarantees as citizens and human beings,” so we can apply this theory refugee communities in vulnerable situations as marginalized groups (Baja & Kidwai, 2016, p. 206).

Education, now understood to be a core human right and the key to development, is prioritized in policy discussions and appears constantly in the rhetoric of the international community. However, there arose a substantial degree of what some might call ‘conceptual confusion’ around what exactly is entailed in the right to education, what is defined as ‘access to education’ and why the discussion stops at access to elementary education (Kotzmann, 2018). Current scholarship working with the human-rights approach to education engages with these gaps and many scholars argue that higher education should be included in the right to education, and others have sought to define access and develop policy frameworks to promote standardized conceptions of access (Kotzmann, 2018). Analyses in this study subscribed to the evolving understanding of the human-rights approach to education where access to both primary and higher education should be enshrined as rights and that all people, especially those most marginalized and vulnerable should have access. Rohingya refugee children as stateless people are an at-risk population in this regard as they are unable to hold anyone accountable to providing for them without citizenship to any country.

The codification of education in the UDHR opened the door to a new way of conceptualizing education in a rights-based sense rather than needs-based (Prodip & Garnett, 2019). Whereas a needs-based approach looks at education as a service that needs to be delivered to certain populations, the rights-based approach, as forwarded by Amartya Sen, looks at education as the key to giving all individuals the capacities they need to live a life of value and opportunity (Prodip & Garnett, 2019). The needs-based approach is widely disregarded now as views of education overall have shifted away from the economic, capital-raising based perceptions of education and towards the widespread belief that education is a right for all. The rights-based approach informs policy makers and sets the ideological foundation for policy around EiE. What I focus on in this paper, is the vital nuance in the discussion around the right to education that it is a right to culturally relevant, refugee-driven education that empowers a community through the CA lens and is connected to the future they aspire to have.

4.3. Methodology

4.3.1. Method of Data Collection

In order to understand the complex impact of COVID-19 on learning in Cox's Bazar, I felt it was important to gather information from pre-pandemic times through the pandemic, to the current day as the information presented in this chronological arc would be relevant not only to understanding the role the COVID-19 pandemic played in interrupting education, but also because this period of time from 2018 to 2022 saw the most drastic changes in education provision to Rohingya refugees since the start of the crisis. Of the documents I gathered and analyzed, some provided broad data markers on attendance and enrolment rates of Rohingya children from 2018 to 2022 while others were situational reports that outlined the local factors influencing educational programming in Cox's Bazar. Through analyses of these documents I was able to track changes in attendance and enrolment and overlay reported actions from the international community to see how changes in curriculum impacted learning.

This project started off with the intent to gather primary data results from surveys sent electronically to humanitarian actors working in Cox's Bazar who could report on the state of education access in the camps, and then compare that data to secondary documents published by scholars and reputable NGOs working in Cox's Bazar to uncover the baseline statistics for enrolment, attendance, and resource access. Following the necessary steps of planning a research project with human participants, I completed an application with the Research Ethics Board at SFU (Office of Research Ethics (ORE)) and received approval to move forward with the study. The surveys asked participants to respond to a series of 11 questions regarding changes they had seen in the education system in the delivery of service, attendance rates, and enrolment rates of boys and girls from the start of the pandemic in April 2020 to the initial reopening stages starting in December 2021. Thanks to a string of contacts from Dr. Susan Banki at the University of Sydney, I was able to make contact with Animesh Kumar Biswas Atal, an education program coordinator for PRANTIC Unnayan Society's Humanitarian Assistance Program, who kindly agreed to pass my survey along to people he knew on the ground in Cox's Bazar.

Unfortunately, the hope of receiving data back from the surveys began to fade as no submissions were made in the first few weeks after the initial disbursement. I attempted to reach out again to Animesh, but to no avail. So after two months without feedback on the survey submission page, I resorted to 'Plan B' and refocused on gathering monthly operational updates and statistics on enrolment numbers, and materials distribution in the publications from "The Education Sector," (the Sector) a collaborative group supported by UNICEF, UNHCR, and Save the Children (Education Sector, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, 2022). Most of the raw data that comes from on-the-ground research in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp comes from the UNHCR and is then dissected and examined by other actors. The core of all publications around refugee education statistics is then drawn from similar sources and used to inform different works.

In addition to update-report and statistical based sources, for this study I also collected policy papers and reports from UNHCR, scholars, and working groups like Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) to supplement the statistics and reporting data. These documents put the statistics into context and provided insights into the situation in Cox's Bazar that I could not have found on my own without being on the ground in the refugee camps. Another vital reason why I sought to gather sources from bodies like the Education Sector and PRIO was that they published numerous reports that included testimonies of Rohingya refugees as evidence. I am cognizant though, that without seeing the full context of any quotes or receiving the testimonies firsthand, I had to approach them with a degree of hesitation and not lean wholeheartedly on these accounts.

4.3.2. Method of Data Analysis

This project uses case study document analysis, drawing from secondary documents and raw data to create the data set informing the analyses. To create the baseline understanding of what the situation of education in Cox's Bazar entailed, what pre-COVID-19 service delivery looked like, and what attendance and enrolment rates averaged, the reports and documents gathered during the research stage were added to NVivo, the coding software, and coded for themes and re-occurring key words. The goal of coding these documents was to reveal data to inform a thematic analysis of the

literature so that a deeper engagement with the intricacies of the wider context within which changes to these aspects of the education system could be understood.

Approximately 15 documents were analyzed, mostly operational reports from the Education Sector and UNHCR, policy reports from reputable education-focused NGOs, and some academic articles. The terms and themes I coded for to find patterns were 'enrolment,' 'attendance,' 'education,' 'Myanmar,' 'recommendations,' 'Rohingya perspectives,' 'curriculum,' 'Community-led vs NGO education,' and 'barriers.' When these terms were flagged by NVivo, I assessed their context and if deemed relevant (not an obscure reference or use of the term), then they were added to a codebook collated by term to gather insights on how each was used throughout reports and documents.

Specifically, in coding for 'enrolment' and 'attendance,' my goal was to find every relevant statistic outlining how many children were attending or enrolled in schools in the reports pulled from 2018 to 2022. I found consistent age brackets dividing children into the age categories of 3-5, 6-14, and 15-18. There was also little deviation between reports from different bodies (such as UNICEF versus academic articles), so I trusted that the statistics were being drawn from the same source. I graphed the enrolment and attendance rates to compare trends and see how attendance compared to enrolment, and to see how the overall trend of students in school changed over the course of pre-to post pandemic times.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

In this study, although in the end there was no direct contact made with human participants, there are other ethical considerations that must be made when dealing with a humanitarian topic such as refugee education. As a researcher seeking answers to issues that prevent refugees from accessing their desired education and seeking solutions to implement more grassroots educational programming initiatives to achieve this autonomy, I have an ethical responsibility to share my findings with the broader EiE community. The results of my study will hopefully contribute to the larger discussion on securing rights for refugees, providing them with dignity and autonomy in their situations, and facilitating access to quality, culturally relevant and continuous education for all refugees.

In conducting this research, I also remained cognizant of my position in the global sphere of power dynamics as I remained keenly aware that I come from a privileged position as a researcher at a well-resourced university in the global north, and that my area and population of research was in the global south. I kept the implications of these different dynamics at the forefront of my mind as I created the surveys, read reports, and analyzed data, because the lens I was looking from did not inherently consider the factors that it might have had I been approaching the project from a different vantage point - specifically one from Bangladesh, if I was conducting the research on the ground. Though my voice is the one heard in this study, the voices I am using this platform to highlight are those of the Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar, fighting to have their children provided with the culturally relevant education they deserve for the next generation.

Chapter 5.

Analysis

The title of this study starts with “Digging Deeper than Access,” because the reality of needing to look deeper into the issue of providing refugees education beyond simply securing access is paramount to truly addressing inequalities in educational access for refugees around the world. Having access to a classroom, a teacher figure, content to be taught, and supplies to facilitate that learning are integral elements of an education system. Access to education through such a system is a fundamental right of all people, and yet I argue that stopping at securing this foundational access constitutes no more than scratching the surface of what it means for people to experience the right to education. Accessing education means nothing if the content of what a person will learn is irrelevant to them or per Sen’s (1998) capabilities approach, secure their “ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being” (p. 30). Despite options for education being available, the findings of this study show that Rohingya parents and children have been disillusioned with the options provided and either attended only because it was the only choice or opted for their children to not attend at all because they did not support what their children were taught in the programs available. The main findings will be divided into four following points, ultimately leading to the argument that formalized, refugee-driven, culturally relevant education is what the Rohingya desire and what must be provided to secure better attendance, and achieve potentially life-changing education for the next generation of Rohingya refugees.

Finding #1: Attendance and Enrollment

Attendance and enrollment data are not accurate measures of assessing the number of Rohingya refugees receiving education.

Published enrolment and attendance figures are not an accurate measure of determining how many Rohingya are receiving education. The data available from NGOs (the Education Sector, primarily) looks solely at enrolment in NGO led TLCs and this fails to cover enrolment in community-led education networks, which constitute a key part of education provision for refugees in Cox’s Bazar. The publications from this body

show a narrow vision of education and perspectives on education in Cox's Bazar that are top-down. Enrolment may show children are in classrooms, but because of the lack of educational options, it says nothing about the satisfaction of the community regarding the quality and kind of education children are receiving. Also, there is currently no evidence of a substantial path for progression for students in these programs. There appears to be successful enrolment for ages 5 to 11, and then no options beyond that.

Enrolment and attendance rates show large variances between certain age groups attending any kind of TLCs, but the lack of enrolment and attendance are not solely caused by a lack of available facilities or access barriers. Rather, for the older children (11-14 and above) there is a stark lack of any educational opportunities available for them at the level they require, and for younger children, those who are not enrolled are largely not attending TLCs because their parents or guardians do not see the offered programs as useful. The Rohingya community greatly values education and fear that if their children are not educated, they will become a 'lost generation' (Olney, et al., 2019). However, this tension between a desire for education and insufficient options has led to a situation where Rohingya are forced to either accept the limited, or misaligned programs available to their children, or have their next generation not receive any kind of education. These options are not good enough. The substandard reality offered to Rohingya must be changed to truly reflect what the population desires in an educational system.

In November 2017, when the latest flow of refugees landed in Cox's Bazar, initial estimates predicted 453,000 Rohingya children in need of educational assistance (Education Sector Bangladesh, 2017). Initially, there were significant infrastructural barriers to the newly landed refugee children due to a lack of classroom space, teachers, and materials (Education Sector Bangladesh, 2017). A year later, in October of 2018, Education Sector Dashboard reports showed 185,454 children having access to NGO-led schooling: 66,490 aged 3 to 5, 115,387 aged 6 to 14, and 3,577 aged 15 to 24 (Education Sector Bangladesh, 2018). Although it appeared to be a good start, 185,454 represented a 38.97% non-enrolment rate for children aged 3 to 14, and a 96.9% non-enrolment rate for refugee children aged 15 to 18 due to limited opportunities (Education Sector Bangladesh, 2018). By September 2019, the overall number of refugee children enrolled in NGO-run educational facilities was 301,550, with a 14.38% non-enrolment rate for refugees aged 3 to 14 and an 81.8% non-enrolment rate for refugees aged 15 to

24 (Education Sector Bangladesh, 2019). As of 2019, the specific breakdown of enrolment by gender and age group was 66% each for boys and girls aged 3 to 5; 72% for girls and 78% for boys aged 6 to 14; and 5% for girls and 14% for boys aged 15 to 18 (REACH, 2019). Overall from 2017 to 2019 the enrolment and attendance rates showed substantial progress in getting children into learning programs, but I believe this speaks more to the desire for the Rohingya children to have their children educated than a satisfaction with the programs offered.

To illustrate more nuance behind these statistics, the REACH (2019) report also included survey data from questionnaires and interviews held with Rohingya from the refugee community. The REACH (2019) report states that the biggest reason for non-attendance over the age of 11 is not an issue of retention, but of non-enrolment because of a lack of options for older children. The report also shows a high demand for education services for boys aged 15 and up with approximately half of them stating they wanted an education (REACH, 2019). Finally, from this report we also see that 22% of boys and 16% of girls not enrolled between the ages of 6 and 14 were not in school because their parents or guardians believed “what is taught is not relevant or age-appropriate,” and among those 15 and up, this was the most commonly stated reason for non-enrolment (REACH, 2019). As evidenced above, the situation is clearly more complex than simply a matter of a lack of attendance and enrolment due to limited options for space in classrooms. If access to education was the only factor holding refugees back from attaining educations, then the problem would have been solved with the LCFA, but the clear failures of that system to provide learning opportunities useful enough to secure high rates of attendance for all age groups show that the provision of culturally relevant content in an education system is equally, if not more important, a factor in this equation.

Finding #2: The LCFA/GIEP

The LCFA/GIEP program was not created in consultation with the Rohingya community and did not serve the needs of the community; instead, it highlights the failings of a top-down system imposed on a refugee community by NGOs and stakeholders.

Rohingya refugees are unhappy with informal education programs and the role NGOs have played as an education provider, and they have a strong desire to be

consulted and involved in education planning (Olney, et al., 2019). The LCFA, implemented under the name of the Guidelines for Informal Education Programming (GIEP) illustrates the problems that occur when an education program is imposed from a top-down approach on a population, without consultation with the community. Fundamentally, the GIEP contradicts what Rohingya value and have been asking for: formalized and relevant education (Olney, et al., 2019). When the GIEP was announced and touted as a new curriculum for the Rohingya, comments from respondents as reported in the 2019 PRIO publication showed a clear opposition to the GIEP. One respondent from the Rohingya Community Development Campaign stated, “[w]e want to suggest to please not make this new curriculum. We have no other comment on it” (Olney, et al., 2019, p. 37), and a member of the Popular Computer Learning Centre in Cox’s Bazar commented that “[i]f our students learn this curriculum there will not be progress or changes to our situation. We don’t know how this curriculum would be useful” (p. 37). These comments highlight that there was a fundamental disconnect between what the Education Sector created, pitched to the GoB, and implemented and what Rohingya sought for their education system.

A noteworthy point is that in none of the publications and reports by UNICEF or the Education Sector was there any mention of discontentment with the GIEP, instead it was the PRIO study and a handful of reports from external NGOs that voiced Rohingya concerns with the program (Olney, et al., 2019; Magee, et al., 2020). With no direct quotes from Rohingya refugees, or mention of their feelings towards the GIEP, the Education Sector’s reports showed a very one-sided roll out of this new curriculum plan, and although I can only speculate on the intentions behind not including Rohingya voices in their publications to stakeholders and the wider international community, the lack of Rohingya voices speaks for itself. This reaffirms how the Education Sector and its UN collaborators took a damaging, top-down approach to creating and implementing the GIEP, which does not truly serve the Rohingya population and their desires.

Beyond the issue of the GIEP being an informal system, another fundamental problem with this program is that it is hugely limited in the scope of educational content it is permitted to provide. Being restricted to providing content no higher than that of a second-year primary classroom meant the GIEP was overly limited in its scope from the start (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Opportunities for progression in schooling are imperative for Rohingya refugees to allow them to achieve full education and not simply

basic, fundamental understandings of literacy, numeracy, and life skills. A respondent in the 2019 PRIO study report stated, “There are so many high school students – at least 5,000 – in the camps. There are at least 20,000 middle school students. No one is planning for their education or thinking of doing anything for them. We know that education is for all human beings, so why not for our children?” (Olney, et al., 2019, p. 42), which clearly shows that Rohingya youth have a strong desire to continue learning and see their lack of opportunities as unacceptable.

Active discontent and frustrations with the options provided by the GIEP through the Education Sector is also evidenced by the strength of community-led education networks throughout the camps in Cox’s Bazar. With 27 community education networks running across the camps, educating approximately 8,000 students ages 3 to 18, and being run by mostly volunteer teachers whose pasts range from principals of schools in Rakhine state to professors, to high school educated Rohingya community members, these community-led education programs show that Rohingya refugees did not passively accept the limited educational opportunities presented to them by NGOs, but instead through passion and dedication to their community took matters into their own hands (Olney, et al., 2019). Some key details about the Rohingya-led community education networks are that they have faced forced closures by the GoB and prosecution from authorities, have very few resources, and do not receive support from NGOs or have trust in the NGO systems (Education Sector Advocacy Strategy, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2022; Olney, et al., 2019). These community-led networks have persevered through the numerous political and economic barriers put in front of them to continue serving their community because they deeply believe in the need for refugee-led, culturally relevant curriculum that will prepare their next generation to return home to Myanmar (Olney, et al., 2019). Yet despite the opposition of educators and volunteers from the community-led network to the GIEP, they were not granted a voice in its creation, suggesting why they have such little trust in NGOs. These are the people who should be having the greatest voice in determining what kind of education their community receives because they have the knowledge of how to bring curriculum and learning from their home to the camps, and yet they had none in this process.

Finding #3: COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic strained existing faults and failures in the education system in Cox's Bazar, and emphasized the strained dynamics between the Rohingya and Education Sector through the Education Sector's handling of the pandemic.

When all TLCs and educational facilities, including community-led network operations, were closed due to the pandemic in March 2020, education essentially ground to a halt because no online or virtual learning opportunities existed and alternative methods introduced by the Education Sector continued to be top-down in their approach, resulting in limited effectiveness (UNICEF, 2020b). The impact of COVID-19 and the resulting inability of the GoB and NGOs to implement fitting solutions to securing some degree of education, in addition to the immense delays caused to the rollout of the MCP proved to be detrimental to the Rohingya children. Moreover, the pressure the COVID-19 pandemic put on the already fragile education system in Cox's Bazar and resulted in exceptional loss of learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how internet and technology access is severely lacking in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, so technology-based solutions for education access were not viable (Pillai & Zireva, 2020). Although remote-learning and technology-assisted teaching would have been highly useful in the camps prior to the pandemic, the lack of resources available to facilitate that access before the pandemic struck highlighted how fundamentally impossible introducing any technology-based solutions would have been because teachers did not have the necessary training or familiarity with digital resources to use those solutions (Pillai & Zireva, 2020). The root of this problem is the restrictions the GoB put on access to the internet and phone SIM-cards in Cox's Bazar in 2019, with authorities alleging that these technologies were a security threat in the camps, when in reality there was no substantive evidence of these threats (Floven, 2022). This foundation of non-access to the digital world extinguished any potential options of using technology-based solutions for Rohingya children to access education during the pandemic.

The route the Education Sector chose for providing interim education through the school closures was supporting caregiver-led, home-based education (UNICEF, 2021b; Floven, 2022). Monthly and quarterly update reports from UNICEF through 2020 and

2021 touted the caregiver-led program as a success, stating that as of August 2020, 86% of students previously enrolled in NGO-led education programs were reported to be participating in home-based learning (UNICEF, 2020b). The reports are absent of the education level possessed by caregivers in this program, but since some adult Rohingya refugees were able to access elementary education growing up in Myanmar, we can postulate that most were likely literate and educated to a degree. In their mid-year, January to June 2021 Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation report, UNICEF declared that booklets handed out in support of the caregiver-led education program “enabl[ed] 190,663 Rohingya children to engage in learning activities at home” (p. 4). The age group these booklets were aimed at was never clearly stated, but given the general aim of content from the Education Sector at ages 8 to 14, we can assume it was on par with LCFA levels one and two content. As of September 2021, TLCs were allowed to start opening, and support for caregiver-led education diminished with focus returning to the GIEP and transition to the MCP rollout.

However, in contrast to the description of events provided by UNICEF about the success of the caregiver-led program, based on responses from a participant working in the education sector in an interview with Ingrid Floven (2022) for their master’s thesis, we can see that the number of children reached with materials does not correlate to successful learning. The interview participant explained that “not all learners had been able to pursue caregiver-led education, due to different variables such as the children engaging in household work, taking care of their younger siblings, engaging in monetary activities... so there was a gap between different households” (Floven, 2022, p. 96). Though at the time of writing there has still been little research on the true effectiveness of the caregiver-led programs, with the given information there are a few conclusions to draw about the success of this program. For instance, the learning that did occur was likely better received by the Rohingya community because in this circumstance it was community members teaching their own children or youth in their care. This would have inevitably led to a culturally relevant and locally grounded lens being taken on all material because the background knowledge of the caregivers would influence the way they taught others. Rather than having outsiders teach Rohingya children, this was to a degree, community-led education which was more aligned with what this community sought for itself.

Reports from UNICEF used the phrase 'enabled to engage' in many reports, indicating that the focus of this program was to provide materials and that success was measured by the number of households reached, as opposed to making any indication of how many learning booklets were completed by students and collected again, or any other indicator of actual engagement with learning. This narrative of progress was likely aimed at placating stakeholders and donors, and to present the most desirable image of success. Moreover, as with all home-based learning that took place globally during the pandemic, we know it was a strain on households to have adults educate the children while attempting to concurrently engage in their own work and income-generating activities. The need for income-generating activities to persist through the pandemic was no less urgent for Rohingya households, and in fact beyond many caregivers not having the skills or the time to provide home-based learning, the need for focusing on maintaining income rose to new levels and pulled students farther away from learning.

Despite the staged re-opening of schools starting in September 2021, there have been lower rates of returning students to TLCs and community-led network education programs. Reasons have varied for why students are not returning, with humanitarian worker teachers interviewed by Human Rights Watch stating that they knew some of their female students had been married off during the school closures, and some older students had been working in manual labour jobs with no plans to return to school (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The high drop-out rate and increases in both child marriages and child labour were also highlighted by respondents in Floven's interviews, who stressed that keeping students in school was a challenge before the pandemic and that the challenge has increased manifold now (Floven, 2022). Another re-occurring theme in Floven's interviews were concerns from respondents over the gender inequality issues in education for Rohingya that they expect will become exacerbated as early re-enrolment has shown a stark drop in female attendance since the re-opening of schools (Floven, 2022). The unequal responsibility of household labour put on girls rather than boys, compounded with cultural ideas around early marriage and education not being a necessity for girls continues to cause female refugees to be excluded from education in Cox's Bazar, like many other places around the world.

Seeing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the dynamics between NGOs and community-led operations, the 2021 Joint-Sector Response Plan states that the Education Sector "will also work to strengthen the engagement of Rohingya refugees

through community-based learning facilities to facilitate access for populations who cannot enroll in the traditional learning centres” which shows that despite community-led network members being untrusting of NGOs and having little engagement with them in the camps, the Education Sector put the onus of responsibility strongly on the community-networks, relying on them to continue providing education when their programs could not (Joint Response Plan, 2021, p. 33). By not engaging with the community-led networks in non-emergent times and not hearing their requests for different curricula, then turning around and emphasizing their role in supporting continuing education through the pandemic, the Education Sector fueled tensions and frustrations of the Rohingya community.

Finding #4: The MCP

Though not without critiques and concerns, the MCP presents an opportunity for Rohingya to be taught culturally relevant material and receive quality, advancing educations.

The MCP is a long overdue opportunity for Rohingya to be taught culturally relevant content and to receive a satisfying education, and although the program is in its early stages, because there were agreements reached between Rohingya community education networks and the Education Sector during the development stages, there is reason to be optimistic about this initiative’s success (UNICEF, 2020b). The MCP represents an acknowledgement of NGOs hearing Rohingya desires for Myanmar-based curriculum and an attempt at imposing less of a top-down system of education provision for Rohingya refugees. Moreover, the reported element of consultation that occurred between the Education Sector, stakeholders, and Rohingya community education networks is encouraging in terms of the potential success this program could have in the eyes of Rohingya – not simply donors and the international community – yet evidence of this consultation is very weak. In the 2020 Multi-Year Strategy publication from the Education Sector, they unveiled the details of the MCP and included information about the rollout of the program. Critically, in explaining the need for this new curriculum, the report specifically states that:

educating Rohingya children using the Myanmar curriculum is a wish of the Rohingya people themselves: parents and students in camps have long been expressing a strong and consistent desire for access to education in

Myanmar curriculum as they see repatriation as the solution to their current plight and they too, want to be prepared to go home when the conditions are right (Vincent, 2020, p. 27).

Acknowledging the path Rohingya had been advocating so long for, this justification for the MCP is an important moment of progress for culturally relevant education provision for Rohingya in Cox's Bazar. The MCP rollout also highlights the need for Rohingya children to have opportunities beyond what the LCFA/GIEP provided so its initial implementation would be aimed at middle school children (ages 11 to 14 with the educational content of grade 6 to 9) (Vincent, 2020).

Regarding the specifics of the curriculum itself, the basic areas covered are listed as: "language of instruction, teaching and learning materials, teacher recruitment and training, remedial/accelerated education programmes, assessment and accreditation/certification of learning, cost of introduction of Myanmar curriculum, and help to cope with the trauma and displacement and mitigate associated risks," and the elaborations on each of these areas includes vital details that align with what Rohingya have been requesting (Vincent, 2020, p. 27-28). For example, there are plans to coordinate opportunities for students to sit for Myanmar's matriculation exams (abroad or potentially in-country) to allow formal certification to be achieved, and there are plans to allow multiple languages of instruction to exist covering Rohingya desires to learn Burmese and English (Vincent, 2020). Moreover, in response to each basic area listed above, there are references to the way Rohingya will be consulted on each. These references imply substantive input is sought from the community networks and the Rohingya population at large, but secondary evidence - direct quotation, references to projects that involved interviews in the fields, reports illustrating the details of these conversations – of this consultation occurring is strikingly difficult to find. The substance of the MCP appears to be positive and aligned with what Rohingya have been seeking, but I believe there is still reason to be wary of the thoroughness of the consultations due to the lack of clear evidence they occurred or how they occurred.

An additional element for concern is that the success of the MCP is contingent in large part on continued buy-in from the GoB, support from the government of Myanmar due to the use of Myanmar's national curriculum, and ongoing financial support from donors. The GoB has proven itself to be fickle in the ways it approaches education for Rohingya refugees and if it withdraws its support of the MCP, the program will likely

come to an end. The use of Myanmar's curriculum and need to participate in national exams means the Education Sector, as the body piloting this program, requires technical and material support from the Government of Myanmar (Vincent, 2020). This support could be highly difficult to secure because the Government of Myanmar has shown no interest in supporting the Rohingya population. Finally, the estimated cost to roll out the first stage of the MCP, which is enrolling only 10,000 students in grades 6 to 9, is US \$8.5 million for the first year and although the yearly costs will reduce drastically after the initial start-up costs for construction and stocking of classrooms are past, the costs will still be extremely high for donors and the international community (Vincent, 2020). Funding requirements for the Rohingya refugee crisis has been increasingly difficult to meet as in 2019 there was a 60 percent deficit in the projected funding needs for the Rohingya crisis, and as of December 2021 UNHCR reported only having met 48% of its US \$294.5 million funding requirements for that year (Human Rights Watch, 2019; UNHCR, 2021c). There is valid concern over whether sufficient funding will be garnered to support the MCP.

After operating for six months, in May 2022, the MCP met its initial goal of enrolling 10,000 students under the new curriculum in TLCs (UNICEF, 2022b). This was a milestone in the journey of securing access to quality, formalized, culturally relevant education for Rohingya refugees. As of December 31, 2022 the Education Sector's main reporting page showed 253,000 learners enrolled in the MCP between the equivalents of grades 1 to 9 (Humanitarian Response, 2022). After the target 10,000 was hit in May 2022, very little data has been published about the MCP, and since the program has only been running for approximately a year, there is little data currently available to analyze in regards to progression rates, attendance, enrolment, and overall sentiments of success with the MCP. That being said, the baseline statistics of enrolment provided by the Education Sector are encouraging and show high engagement in these early stages.

Chapter 6.

Recommendations and Take Aways

Although this study has focused narrowly on the case study of Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar District, the critical situational insights that have been brought to light here are aimed at providing a broader understanding of how access to culturally relevant education must not be deprioritized in times of conflict and that refugees must have autonomy in deciding what kind of education they will receive in order to determine their own future. My hope is that the details of the Rohingya education situation can serve as an example for policy makers and the international sphere of how refugee education should be approached and how refugee voices must be heard in the process of creating educational opportunities for their populations.

Although there are certain methods and practices that have often been used by NGOs and the international community in approaching situations of EiE and providing education to refugees, I believe each instance of refugee education must be treated as a unique situation. A one-size-fits-all approach to creating education options for refugees does not work in this field where each refugee crisis has a different cause, history, political dimensions, and social complexities, and the populations themselves have different aims for the future. While certain scholars and experts in the field of EiE have cautioned against the use of education for the purpose of repatriation, I think there is more nuance to that discussion than is often focused on and what is key to include in the narrative is that education for forced repatriation is not acceptable. However, culturally relevant education that refugees desire because they see repatriation as their sought after future – this should not be disallowed or deprioritized by education providers. It shouldn't be the only opportunity presented, but it shouldn't be revoked as an option either because refugees should have access to as many options for education as possible to ensure they are privy to the same educational opportunities as everyone else. In times of conflict, forced migration, and vulnerability, people need a connection to their homes and their culture. This can come in the form of education and if that is what the population desires, whatever is possible to do to facilitate that should be done by international community and relief providers.

Refugees should also be given more autonomy and a greater voice in matters of education for their communities. Rather than the international community and NGOs imposing top-down approaches to education systems, plans should be made with consultation occurring between the leading NGO bodies, stakeholders, and the refugee community. In the situation of the Rohingya, the community has successfully been the driver for change and led advocacy efforts for access to education and opportunities for themselves. Despite all the barriers to accessing resources and support they faced, since the community was unhappy with the educational options available for their children, they ran community-led networks to give their next generation the education they saw fit. These networks persisted after being shut down by the GoB and refused to stop filling the need they saw for their community.

Moreover, the timeline and expediency of action on the part of the international community and NGOs must be improved to secure proper education for refugees. While the LCFA may have sufficed in newly established or short-term refugee situations, from the very start Rohingya refugees were not supportive of this program because they knew it would be insufficient for their needs. Their displacement crisis has been ongoing for decades, and the narrative of the potential for a 'lost generation' of uneducated youth was voiced as of 2017 (Olney, et al., 2019). For a population who had been battling a crisis of statelessness and refugee life for many years, even taking the five years it did to implement the MCP is too long and risks an entire generation of children missing out on the chance to become educated and live a full life.

Another area that needs work to achieve progress in protections is the international legal frameworks and agreements around refugees and stateless persons. A fundamental cause of the barriers of achieving education for the Rohingya was their lack of citizenship status in Myanmar, relegating them to stateless persons both inside Myanmar and Bangladesh. Compounding a lack of citizenship rights with the fact that Bangladesh continues to withhold from signing the 1951 UN Refugee Convention forced the Rohingya into a place of flux, vulnerability, and instability. Neither Myanmar nor Bangladesh are signatories to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, so there is yet another example of an international agreement that is not applicable for enforcement in this circumstance and thus provides no protections or supports to Rohingya refugees (UNHCR, 1961). In 2014 the UNHCR presented a 10-year plan to eradicate statelessness, which appears primed to fall woefully short of its goal, and

despite efforts by the European Union to entice Bangladesh to adhere to the CRC by offering free trade benefits, no current efforts by the international community seem to be making progress in gaining more legal supports for the Rohingya.

While I still believe the international community should not stop supporting the Rohingya refugee crisis and battle to secure education for this population, potentially this is where the private sector could step in and without the red tape imposed on NGOs and INGOs by their donors, private actors could provide more direct financial and physical support to Rohingya schooling. We can use the Syrian refugee crisis to show evidence of initial successes with private actor involvement. Education Cannot Wait, arguably the most influential NGO working to provide education to refugees and one largely funded by private actors, has conducted studies showing that private actors have been instrumental in creating technological solutions that have facilitated accessing education for Syrian refugee children (Beaujouan & Rasheed, 2020). In a similar manner for the Rohingya crisis, funding and innovation then are two areas where private actors could feasibly step in to relieve pressure from INGOs and allow the international community to take on other roles such as seeking to broker arrangements with the GoB and exercise other forms of soft power to secure supports for Rohingya.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

Throughout this study I have argued that culturally relevant, refugee-driven education must be seen as more than a means of forcing repatriation as the sole option for refugees, but rather as a supported option if that is what they desire because it represents a linkage to their roots, and an opportunity for refugees to have a modicum of autonomy in a situation where they are otherwise essentially powerless. In the Rohingya situation, we have seen the effects of too slow movement from INGOs and NGOs providing subpar educational support, of misaligned policies that did not adequately serve the Rohingya population and shifting curriculums that finally resulted in one with a degree of optimism for success. Although rooted in good intentions, the result of these actions has been overall lower enrolment and attendance statistics than there should have been given that this refugee population has been displaced and in crisis for decades. As a protracted refugee crisis it requires well-planned, long-term solutions. Eventually the Education Sector was able to create a long-term plan with a solid structure for advancement and educational growth for students, but with the number of lost years of schooling due to COVID-19 and previous subpar educational opportunities, we will be left wondering if the Rohingya children have become a 'lost generation.'

Barriers to accessing education for Rohingya refugees predated the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic played a detrimental role in exacerbating existing barriers and stalling any progress that had been made or could have been made in the past few years. However, I think if we search for a sliver of optimism here, one result of the pandemic has been that globally, the idea of access issues around education has been brought to the forefront of discussions everywhere. People around the world who have never faced precarious access to education now understand what it means for children and youth to be unable to access schooling, and the consequences of interruptions to education are known globally now after every country's population has experienced some level of school closure between 2020 and 2022. My hope is that existing education issues now have increased visibility in the international sphere and that more people seek to help in these situations where children are still unable to secure educations. In 2021(a), UNICEF's yearly report stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst

crisis to affect children since the organization was created in 1946. What UNICEF also highlighted was the unequal impact of the pandemic and underscored the importance of not letting marginalized populations fall through the cracks in the process of rebuilding post-COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2021a). Being forgotten, deprioritized, and unsupported by the international community in their recovery is the risk facing Rohingya refugees and all other refugee populations who face precarious or inadequate access to education. This is where the international community and people everywhere with the agency to make a change need to step in and support refugee crises to save a generation of children from losing out on the opportunity to receive an education.

While the recommendations presented above are not exhaustive, they do aim to provide suggestions of key areas where those who have the agency and power to enact change in the sphere of refugee education for the Rohingya should do so. There are countless other areas where support is needed that have not been touched upon here, such as a deeper examination of how to ensure equal access for female and male students, and students with disabilities; how to advocate for orphans and secure their access; teacher training and ensuring educator roles are not a weak link in the system; and more. However, I believe the issues presented in this study and recommendations for change address the most fundamental barriers to achieving access to culturally relevant, refugee-driven, advancement-oriented education for Rohingya refugees and that in order to provide as many children as possible with the opportunity to secure a fruitful future, we must start here. Critical to success is acknowledging the desire of Rohingya refugees to determine their own future and play an active role in providing their next generation with the education they see as necessary. Refugees deserve a seat at the table when it comes to determining their own futures and as those with the power to provide this seat, we must advocate for their voices to be heard.

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Appendix.

Survey Questions

Please answer these questions based on an understanding that for the purposes of this study we will be using April 2020 as the marker for the start of the pandemic and December 2021 as the end point of period under question.

- 1.) Describe in 1-2 sentences the type of work you do in relation to refugees and education.
- 2.) What are the biggest changes in accessing education you have noticed since the start of the pandemic?
- 3.) What changes have you seen in school attendance since the start of the pandemic?
- 4.) What changes have you experienced in access to resources/delivery of resources since the start of the pandemic?
- 5.) What changes have you seen in enrolment numbers of students since the start of the pandemic?
- 6.) Have you noticed a difference in the gender-dynamic of school attendance? For example, have you noticed more or fewer boys/girls attending school since the start of the pandemic? If yes, please elaborate.
- 7.) What changed for you in your work when education was deemed a non-essential activity in March 2020 by the UN Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner in Cox's Bazar?
- 8.) If you were ever forced to suspend in-person teaching/education programs, what was the reason and how long did that persist for?
- 9.) Was there any option for you to pursue online teaching/education programs

10.) If there are any other experiences you would like to elaborate on, or any additional comments you would like to make, please use this space to do so freely.

11.) If you would be open to being contacted by the study team for a follow up discussion about this study (via either phone, Zoom, or email), please indicate your interest here and list your preferred contact information.