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“It Would Help If We Actually Knew about the Initiative”: The Barriers Female Refugees Face in Accessing Incentive Teacher Training in Ethiopia

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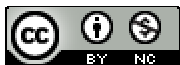

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“IT WOULD HELP IF WE ACTUALLY KNEW ABOUT THE INITIATIVE”: THE BARRIERS FEMALE REFUGEES FACE IN ACCESSING INCENTIVE TEACHER TRAINING IN ETHIOPIA

Andie Reynolds

ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, the Ethiopian government and global actors in education in emergencies have made significant investments in training refugees to become primary school teachers who deliver education to refugees in Ethiopia. These investments include an incentive teacher training initiative in the country’s refugee-hosting regions. This initiative was enhanced in 2018, when the Ethiopian government, supported by global education funding, began offering scholarships to refugees so they could study at teacher training colleges to become qualified primary school teachers. The initiative has faced major challenges in recruiting participants, particularly female refugees. In February and March 2020, a team of 22 researchers conducted a situational needs assessment at 14 refugee camps in Ethiopia. The assessment included focus groups, surveys, and semistructured interviews that were used to collect data from 685 participants. We identified three initiative-specific barriers and four associated structural barriers that were hindering the participation of female refugees. Initiative-specific issues included poor recruitment, a lack of awareness of the initiative among female refugees, and delays in training and scholarships due to funding shortfalls. Structural barriers included the low incentive payment, a shortage of national teachers, limited opportunities for career progression, and a scarcity of eligible refugee girls. My aim in this article is to increase female refugees’ participation in the initiative and improve retention rates for both trainees and teachers by providing evidence-based and participant-driven recommendations to address these barriers.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a key component of humanitarian support for refugees. It aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, which addresses the delivery of inclusive and quality education for all. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2020a) estimates that fewer than half of the eligible refugee children in Ethiopia are attending primary school. Refugee girls are more likely than refugee boys to drop out of primary (Lashford and Malik 2019; Nigusie and Carver 2019) and secondary school (Carvalho 2022). To address supply-side issues stemming in part from low enrollment and high dropout rates among refugees in primary education, several global funders and bilateral and multilateral agencies have worked increasingly over the last two decades, in partnership with the Ethiopian government, to develop and invest financially in a teacher training initiative for refugees. The aim of the initiative was to train refugees in all of Ethiopia's refugee-hosting regions to become primary school teachers (World Bank 2021), with those teaching in refugee primary schools to receive a monthly "incentive" payment from the UNHCR (Carver 2020). To date, little has been documented about the scale and scope of this initiative, or about its recruitment and communication strategies for targeting potential refugee participants.

In this article, I explore the development of this incentive teacher training initiative in Ethiopia, including a 2018 upgrade, when the Ethiopian government, supported by global education funding, began to award scholarships to eligible refugees to study at teacher training colleges (TTCs) and prepare to become accredited primary teachers. I also critically examine the administration and implementation of the initiative to determine why it experienced a major challenge in recruiting female refugees and consider whether lowering the minimum entrance criteria would result in greater female participation. Utilizing a situational needs analysis that collected data from 685 participants in 14 refugee camps in Ethiopia in 2020, this research exposed both initiative-specific and other associated structural barriers that impeded the participation of female refugees. Finally, I offer evidence-based and participant-driven recommendations to overcome these barriers.

REFUGEE EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

Refugee Populations

Ethiopia is the second largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. It maintains an open-door policy toward refugees seeking to enter the country and allows access to humanitarian aid and protection for those seeking asylum (UNHCR 2020b). The number of refugees in Ethiopia has risen sharply in recent years. In 2023, the UNHCR (2023) reported that Ethiopia hosts 926,471 people, of whom 922,428 are refugees and 4,043 are asylum-seekers. This is an increase of 54,561 refugees and asylum-seekers over the 2022 figures (UNHCR 2022a).

Most refugees in Ethiopia are currently located in four regions of Ethiopia: Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali. Until 2020, the Tigray region had hosted the largest number of refugees in Ethiopia (UNHCR 2020b), but due to the 2020-2022 civil war between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, most refugees in Tigray were relocated to the Afar region (UNHCR 2022b). Vemuru et al. (2020, 2) claim that these refugee-hosting regions "are the least developed regions in Ethiopia, characterized by harsh weather conditions, poor infrastructure, low administrative capacity, a high level of poverty and poor development indicators."

Just under half of all refugees in Ethiopia are South Sudanese; the remaining refugee population comes predominantly from Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan (UNHCR 2020b). The factors driving these populations to seek refuge in Ethiopia include the conflicts in South Sudan and Sudan, the prevailing political environment in Eritrea, and conflict and drought in Somalia (UNHCR 2022a). Evaluations of education access and quality in these countries consistently find both to be compromised and/or inconsistent; this is particularly true in Somalia, where the education system completely collapsed decades ago (Wolhouter 2014).

Policy, Administration, and Delivery

Ethiopia's adoption of the UNHCR's Global Education Strategy 2012-2016 has resulted in some key changes in refugee education programming. This includes increased staffing for refugee education planning and programming at key bodies and organizations in Ethiopia, including UNHCR and the Refugee and Returnees Service (RRS). It also led to the development of the Ethiopia 2015-2018 Refugee Education Strategy, with the aim of adapting and contextualizing the Global Education Strategy to the Ethiopian context and to improve refugee access to high-quality education (UNHCR 2015).

Ethiopia has also adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and its annex, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, and signed the Djibouti Declaration and the Global Compact for Refugees in 2017-2018. To comply with these agreements, the Ethiopian government pledged to achieve full enrollment of refugees in primary school, and greater access to and integration of refugees into secondary and postsecondary education (Austin 2024). Due to the Ethiopian government's move from a humanitarian to a responsibility-sharing approach to refugee education (Carvalho and Dryden-Peterson 2024), refugee education in Ethiopia is now funded by multiple sources. The UNHCR still funds most of the day-to-day refugee education system, including the RRS and other partners. The World Bank has become more involved in refugee education policies and practices in Ethiopia and recently funded several programs operating there (Carvalho and Dryden-Peterson 2024), including additional financing for the General Educational Quality Improvement Program for Equity for Refugee Integration (World Bank 2021). Other donors that fund refugee education programs in Ethiopia include Education Cannot Wait (ECW 2020), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF Ethiopia 2018),

and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (World Bank 2021). There are approximately 13 international and local nongovernmental organizations (I/NGOs) actively involved in implementing early childhood care and education, as well as primary and secondary education in refugee camps and host communities. Additional organizations, such as Plan International, provide support through accelerated learning, as well as technical and vocational education and training (Lashford and Malik 2019).

The administration and management of education in Ethiopia is decentralized. Ethiopia has nine national regional states and two city administrations. Each has its own bureau of education that has primary responsibility for administering and managing education systems. These bureaus are administratively and financially responsible for delivering education, but they receive some additional financial support from the federal government "in support of general education, technical vocational training and teacher training colleges that operate in their respective States" (UNHCR 2015, 8). To help implement national education, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ethiopia focuses on policies and guidelines that are based on research and policy analysis. The regional education bureaus tend to be left to their own devices to devise and implement education policy in accordance with their regional needs and realities (Lashford and Malik 2019). They largely leave the policy development and delivery of refugee education to the RRS (Nigusie and Carver 2019). Of the 61 refugee primary schools in Ethiopia, 56 are operated by the RRS; the remainder are expected to transfer to the RRS by 2025 (World Bank 2021).

Since 2015, the curriculum for refugee education has predominantly followed the national curriculum (Nigusie and Carver 2019; UNHCR 2015). Primary education is divided into lower primary, grades 1-4, for children 7-10 years old, and upper primary, grades 5-8, for adolescents 11-14 years old (UNHCR 2015). Completion of primary school is followed by two years of general secondary education in grades 9-10, for young people age 15-16, then by preparatory secondary education in grades 11-12, for young people age 17-18. Regional examinations are administered at the end of grade 8, national examinations at the end of grades 10 and 12 (UNHCR 2015). The curriculum for refugee education is typically delivered in the lower primary grades in the refugee students' mother tongue, and then it changes to Amharic or English for upper primary and secondary school (Nigusie and Carter 2019; Demissie and Boru 2023). There has been a tendency to use the curriculum from students' countries of origin in the lower primary grades, "despite the difficulties of acquiring materials, assuring teacher training or monitoring quality" (UNHCR 2015, 12). For refugee students who begin with the home-country curriculum, the shift in language and to the host-country curriculum in grade 5 can be problematic, and it is cited as a factor contributing to school dropout (UNHCR 2015; Demissie and Boru 2023).

Two types of teachers deliver primary school education to refugees: qualified or eligible "incentive" teachers who are refugees, and Ethiopian national teachers. National teachers who deliver refugee education receive a salary of approximately 6,275 Birr (US$89) per month (Bengtsson et al. 2020), while incentive teachers receive a monthly payment—

an incentive—estimated to be between 700 and 800 Birr (US$12-US$14) (Carver 2020). Refugee schools are typically staffed by the incentive teachers in the lower primary grades, and by the national teachers from upper primary onward (Lashford and Malik 2019).

Studies show that teachers in Ethiopia are often regarded as low-status professionals (Abebe and Woldehanna 2013), and the entry requirements for teacher training programs are among the lowest for all professions in Ethiopia (UNESCO 2019). Teacher training in Ethiopia is delivered through technical and vocational education and training (Austin 2024). The Education Sector Development Programme framework stipulates that primary teacher trainees must have obtained "a minimum of Grade 10 general education" plus a TTC certificate to teach in lower primary, and a TTC diploma for upper primary, which takes 3-4 years to complete (Abebe and Woldehanna 2013, 6). A survey of 305 student teachers in Ethiopia found that many had "joined the teaching profession because of lack of other options," which included entry-level qualifications to access higher education or other professional training (Kasa 2014, 53). A key recommendation from the study was that the MoE, the regional education bureaus, and the TTCs "should promote…the relevance of the profession and being a teacher…to improve attitude towards teaching professionals" (Kasa 2014, 44). These factors have contributed to a shortage of qualified teachers for refugee operations (Abebe and Woldehanna 2013; Bengtsson et al. 2020; Kasa 2014) and an increase in the number of incentive teachers (ECW 2020; Austin 2024) across refugee-hosting regions in Ethiopia.

Female Students and Teachers

The Ethiopian MoE seeks to increase the enrollment of refugee students at all education levels, which is in keeping with the pledges made in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, Djibouti Declaration, and Global Compact for Refugees to deliver quality education and provide equal access to education for refugees. Nevertheless, the gross enrollment rate for primary education is 47 percent for refugees, which compares to the national average of 95 percent; secondary education enrollment for refugees is 13 percent, which compares to 42 percent for nationals (UNHCR 2022a). These numbers for refugees are low, and the challenges behind the low numbers persist. Refugee girls, for example, are less likely than refugee boys to enroll in primary and secondary school (Carvalho 2022; Lashford and Malik 2019) and are more likely to drop out (Carvalho 2022; Lashford and Malik 2019; Nigusie and Carver 2019). Available statistics indicate that only 12 percent of refugee girls and 38 percent of refugee boys in Ethiopia complete primary school, and that the gross enrollment rate in secondary school is 6.9 percent for refugee girls, 19.2 percent for refugee boys (Ethiopian MoE 2020). This suggests that completing primary school and making the transition from primary to secondary school is a challenge for refugees, especially for refugee girls (cf. Carvalho 2022).

Like many African countries, the teaching profession in Ethiopia is largely dominated by males, and male teachers outnumber female teachers. In the national primary schools, an estimated 39 percent of teachers are female (UNICEF Ethiopia 2018); in refugee primary schools, the male-to-female teacher ratio is approximately 10:1 (Nigusie and Carver 2019). Academics, practitioners, and policymakers recommend recruiting more female teachers to serve as role models for female students, in the hope of improving the recruitment, retention, and academic performance of young girls in both primary and secondary school (Kane 2005; Stromquist 2017; Winthrop and Kirk 2005). Existing studies confirm that female teachers improve female students' outcomes across four domains: access, support, learning, and protection. Female teachers are perceived to attract girls to attend school (Kane 2005), to support girls in class, which increases retention (Winthrop and Kirk 2005), and to promote increased knowledge gains for female students (Morley 2019). Having female teachers also helps create a safer learning environment for young girls by reducing sexual harassment and violence in the classroom (Stromquist 2017). While refugee education policy and strategy in Ethiopia stipulate that "extra efforts will be made to ensure a gender responsive education system" (UNHCR 2015, 22), gender parity among teachers remains low, as do female enrollment and school completion.

INCENTIVE TEACHER TRAINING INITIATIVE

The qualifications incentive teachers currently require to teach lower primary education align with the national Education Sector Development Programme framework (Abebe and Woldehanna 2013). However, these teachers often do not have qualifications equivalent to those of the countries they have fled, which often have suffered years of conflict and instability that interfered with the education system (UNHCR 2015). Female refugees also tend to have fewer qualifications than their male counterparts (Liebig and Tronstad 2018). Due to these factors and the shortage of qualified teachers in refugee operations (Abebe and Woldehanna 2013; Kasa 2014), refugees who are not qualified teachers often deliver primary education in refugee schools (UNHCR 2015). In addition to working as teachers, they often also are upper primary students or first-cycle secondary students. At RRS primary schools that have two daily shifts, it is possible to see unqualified refugees teaching lower primary classes in the morning and attending upper primary classes as students in the afternoon (UNESCO 2019). In 2020, Education Cannot Wait (2020) estimated that only 245,959—approximately 47 percent—out of all grade 1-8 teachers in Ethiopia are adequately qualified. This percentage is estimated to be significantly lower for incentive teachers (Bengtsson et al. 2020).

Due to these unsatisfactory numbers, the Ethiopian government, supported by global education funding, has made significant investments in training and qualifying incentive teachers so they can effectively teach the children in the refugee camps (World Bank 2021). However, there is a paucity of research that has examined the development and implementation of this incentive teacher training initiative beyond the anecdotal (Nicolai

et al. 2020). The foundations of the initiative can be traced to the early 2000s, when the International Rescue Committee introduced regular in-service teacher training for RRS primary teachers in the Tigray region. Most of these teachers were (1) male, (2) nominated by their community, (3) the most educated of the refugee community, although not necessarily secondary education graduates, and (4) receiving a UNHCR-funded incentive payment of approximately US$30 per month (Kirk 2010). To facilitate the recruitment of female teachers into their primary schools, the RRS lowered the minimum requirement for incentive teachers to having completed primary school (grade 8) (Kirk and Winthrop 2013). In 2009, this requirement was increased to grade 10, in keeping with the Education Sector Development Programme national framework (Assefa et al. 2021).

This initiative has since expanded to all refugee-hosting regions in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, this has occurred unevenly, due to disparities in funding streams across the regions and to training being delivered by different, and in some regions multiple, providers (Eschete 2022; Tsegaye 2023). For example, training providers in the Gambella region have included the International Rescue Committee, British Council, Plan International, and Save the Children (Refugee Education Working Group 2018, cited in Austin 2024). Beyond the funds primarily provided by UNICEF, UNHCR, and the Ethiopian MoE, these organizations have struggled to source sustainable funding to provide multiyear training for incentive teachers so they can gain skills that mirror the TTC certificate training for national teachers (Refugee Education Working Group 2018, cited in Austin 2024). To ameliorate this, TTCs in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali expanded their summer training courses for national teachers to make space for a limited number of incentive teachers (UNHCR 2017; West and Ring 2015). However, it has proven difficult to standardize all available training to meet a set curriculum (Refugee Education Working Group 2018, cited in Austin 2024; Tsegaye 2023), and the incentive teachers have reported duplication in their training programs (Nicolai et al. 2020).

Since 2016, the Ethiopian government has secured financing from additional funders—including Education Cannot Wait, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the World Bank—to develop and implement a more comprehensive and standardized approach to refugee education management and delivery (World Bank 2021). This has included financing for TTCs and scholarships for refugees, which will enable refugees to study alongside national teacher trainees and to earn a TTC certificate (ECW 2020; UNHCR 2017; World Bank 2021).[1] The TTCs are located in the capital cities of all regions that host refugees and they deliver the certificate training in English (Assefa et al. 2021). It costs approximately US$1,500 to train and provide a scholarship for each incentive teacher (ECW 2020). In 2018, this upgraded initiative was piloted with 343 incentive teachers in the Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regions (Westfall 2018), the plan being to expand it across all refugee-hosting regions (Ethiopian MoE 2020).

1 This includes funding streams of US$15 million from Education Cannot Wait for 2017-2020 (ECW 2020) and US$10 million from the Building Self-Reliance Project, which is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UNHCR 2017).

However, for reasons already identified, refugees rarely complete grade 10, so the number of refugees recruited to train at the TTCs has not matched the numbers needed. Female participation has been particularly low (Bengtsson et al. 2020; Nicolai et al. 2020).

UNICEF shared these concerns about the female refugees' limited participation in the initiative and directly funded this research project to (1) examine what prevents female refugees from taking part in the initiative, and (2) contemplate whether lowering the entrance criteria to grade 8 for females—as the RRS did in the Tigray region two decades ago—would increase the participation of female refugees.

METHODOLOGY

UNICEF commissioned this research to conduct a situational needs assessment across all 26 refugee camps that were operational in Ethiopia in early 2020. All 26 camps were included to ensure that we captured the uniqueness of each refugee camp and the factors that were influencing the female refugees' participation, or lack thereof. However, our initial discussions with RRS officials revealed that 12 of the camps were inaccessible on security grounds. We therefore conducted research at the 14 accessible camps, which were in five regions: Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Somali, and Tigray. We accessed and collected data at all 14 camps between February and March 2020.

To incorporate the views of all stakeholders, a team of 22 researchers undertook the data collection with nine groups of participants in refugee camps across all five regions. These groups included

- adolescent girls age 12-16 who were eligible, or soon to be eligible, to become incentive teachers;[2]
- former incentive teachers who had left the primary teaching profession;
- incentive and national teachers in refugee primary schools;
- parents;
- religious leaders;
- camp leaders, including Refugee Central Committee leaders;
- TTC educators;
- refugee education specialists from I/NGOs; and
- government specialists, including RRS officials.

2 The lower end of this age range (12-14) was to assist our investigation in determining the factors that can affect the female refugee dropout rate for primary school.

The research team was composed of 11 women and 11 men; 20 were Ethiopian nationals, and the remaining two were from the UK and Ireland. More than half the research team members had previous experience working in Ethiopian refugee camps as researchers, teachers, or INGO workers. Our situational needs assessment applied a mixed methods approach, which used multiple data-collection tools to make the needs assessment as accessible as possible for participant groups that were difficult to reach (Robson and McCartan 2016). The semistructured interviews were selected as data-collection methods for all the participant groups, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with three of the participant groups, and survey questionnaires (SQs) were offered as an alternative for some participant groups. The SQs and the key informant interviews (KIIs) for each research participant group were purposely designed to extract the same qualitative and quantitative data.[3] Where possible, the participant groups were given a choice as to how the data was to be collected—that is, which data-collection tool the researchers would use. For example, filling out a survey may have seemed less intrusive for some than participating in a face-to-face interview or FGD (Emden and Smith 2004). Table 1 illustrates the primary data-collection methods available to each participant group.

Table 1: Data-Collection Methods Available to Each Participant Group

Participant Group	KII	FGD	SQ
Adolescent girls	X	√	X
Former incentive teachers	√	X	√
Incentive and national teachers	√	√	√
Parents	√	√	X
Religious leaders	√	X	X
Camp leaders	√	X	X
TTC educators	√	X	√
I/NGOs	√	X	√
Refugee and Return Service officials	√	X	√

Key: √=used; X=not used

FGDs were specifically chosen for their ability to generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and values; they also are effective in reflecting majority views (Prior et al. 2020). We designed the FGD schedules for three participant groups (adolescent girls, incentive and national teachers in refugee primary schools, and parents),

3 The quantitative data we collected included sociodemographic data on the participants, languages spoken, number of students in primary school classrooms, male-to-female student and teacher ratios in primary schools, and the student dropout rate (male and female) in primary schools.

with the aim of uncovering the barriers that were affecting female refugees' access to teacher training. We integrated four participatory tools to enrich these discussions: body mapping, the problem tree, the bridge tool, and fishbone analysis. These tools empowered participants to collaboratively explore complex context-specific issues, to identify the root causes of low female refugee participation in teacher training, and to generate effective solutions (Henderson et al. 2023; Snowdon et al. 2008; VSO 2012). This approach ensured that participant-driven solutions were captured accurately in the findings and recommendations, which sets this study apart from previous research (cf. Nigusie and Carver 2019; Lashford and Malik 2019). Table 2 summarizes the number of KIIs, FGDs, and SQs undertaken at the 14 sampled refugee camps.

Table 2: Data Collection Undertaken in 14 Refugee Camps

Region	Camp	Total FGDs	Participants (FGDs)	Total KIIs/SQs	Participants (KIIs/SQs)	Total
Tigray	Adi-Harush	4	Adolescent girls Parents	11	Former teachers Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	57
	Mai-Ani	4	Adolescent girls Incentive and national teachers Parents	7	Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	47
	Hitsats	4	Adolescent girls Parents	10	Incentive and national teachers Religious leaders Camp leaders TTC educators I/NGOs RRS	56

Region	Camp	Total FGDs	Participants (FGDs)	Total KIIs/SQs	Participants (KIIs/SQs)	Total
Gambella	Kule	3	Adolescent girls Incentive and national teachers Parents	5	Religious leaders Camp leaders RRS	29
	Jewi	5	Adolescent girls Parents	5	Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	57
	Nygenyiel	4	Adolescent girls Parents	5	Religious leaders Camp leaders TTC educators I/NGOs RRS	51
	Tierkidi	2	Adolescent girls Parents	8	Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	28
Somali	Awbarre	4	Adolescent girls Parents	7	Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	53
	Sheder	3	Adolescent girls Parents	8	Former teachers Incentive and national teachers Religious leaders Camp leaders TTC educators I/NGOs RRS	42
	Kebribeyah	4	Adolescent girls Parents	10	Former teachers Incentive and national teachers Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs	56

Region	Camp	Total FGDs	Participants (FGDs)	Total KIIs/SQs	Participants (KIIs/SQs)	Total
Afar	Barahle	5	Adolescent girls Incentive and national teachers Parents	5	Religious leaders Camp leaders TTC educators I/NGOs RRS	57
	Aysaita	4	Adolescent girls Parents	5	Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	52
Benishangul-Gumuz	Tsore	3	Adolescent girls Parents	6	Incentive and national teachers Religious leaders Camp leaders RRS	55
	Sherkole	4	Adolescent girls Incentive and national teachers Parents	5	Religious leaders Camp leaders I/NGOs RRS	45
					TOTAL	**685**

Consent was requested from all the participants to use the data they provided. Consent forms and information sheets outlining the study's aims and objectives were provided in multiple languages, including English, French, Arabic, and Amharic, to match the languages of curriculum delivery in the camps. When in the camps, we hired people to translate these documents into the local languages where needed. Parents were asked to provide consent for us to interview children under age 18. All participants were given the option of ending their participation at any time. None of the participants chose to withdraw during the data-collection process.

Three research team members then analyzed the data using inductive thematic analysis. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis but, due to the large amount of data collected, we added a pilot stage to test our generation of initial codes and emerging themes.[4] This pilot stage involved all three analysts individually undertaking the first three phases of thematic analysis on the data collected from one refugee camp (Adi-Harush). We met to share our initial codes and the emerging core themes and subthemes, reviewed and deliberated on them, and then collectively generated an emerging thematic map (Braun and Clarke 2006). We used this map to

4 These phases are (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

inform, but not lead, the remaining data analysis. Once the pilot was completed, we compared and refined our emerging themes, and then generated and mapped the final core themes and subthemes. We selected quotes that summarized the data relevant to each theme and included them so that an analytical "story" emerged (Robson and McCartan 2016). This informed the structure of our findings and the subsequent recommendations of this study.

We collected most of the data in English, some in Amharic and Arabic. A limitation of this study is that we had planned for most of the data to be collected in Amharic and, accordingly, all but two of the researchers were native Amharic speakers. Six members of the research team did not have B2 level competency in English, and they acknowledged that they collected much less data in English than in in Amharic. Some of the participants spoke local languages, particularly the adolescent girls, parents, and religious leaders, and we used translators to help us with the data collection in these cases; we recognize that some meaning and nuance may have been lost in translation.

FINDINGS

Our situational needs assessment found that the incentive teacher training initiative contributes to positive outcomes in refugee primary education, including higher enrollment of female students in primary schools, more female teachers who are qualified and confident to teach, and more inclusive education for female students. Nevertheless, our findings uncovered three initiative-specific barriers and four associated structural barriers in refugee education that impeded the female refugees' participation in the initiative. This section outlines and critically discusses all seven barriers.

Initiative-Specific Barriers

While the level of awareness about the initiative varied across camps, there was a pattern in terms of who was aware of it. RRS officials, camp leaders, and incentive teachers were those most aware, whereas the adolescent refugee girls were frequently least aware: "There is a lack of awareness among the adolescent girls themselves and in the community, more generally. Most adolescent girls and the community are not aware of the incentive teaching initiative" (religious leader, KII, Gambella).

Even when adolescent girls had heard of the initiative, they could only describe it sketchily: "We heard rumors, but we don't know much about incentive teaching" (adolescent girl, FGD, Gambella). Some parents also seemed unaware of the initiative. This was problematic, as parents are influential in shaping their children's aspirations (incentive teacher, KII, Benishangul-Gumuz; Soong et al. 2022). One parent commented that "female incentive teachers are not in this camp because adolescent girls are not

aware of teaching jobs" (parent, FGD, Afar). This suggests that parents and female incentive teachers are critical in making adolescent girls aware of the initiative.

Some female incentive teachers we interviewed remarked that they had not heard of this initiative before getting involved. Three of the female incentive teachers had visited the TTC in Asosa, Benishangul-Gumuz, to enquire how they could train to become teachers. No one had informed them that there was an incentive teacher training initiative available to them in the camps, which these teachers called "a significant barrier faced by women in the camp." A former male incentive teacher in Somali told a similar story in an interview. He had enquired at the primary schools in his camp about how to become a teacher and was sent to the TTC in Jijiga, but there was no mention at the schools of incentive teaching or of an initiative already in place.

Recruitment

The initiative recruitment strategy was also vague and it differed across regions. In Gambella, RRS officials posted about vacancies for primary school teachers in the primary schools and RRS offices, but some adolescent refugee girls said they had never seen these postings. One RRS official in Somali stated that, "when vacancies are posted there is no criteria to include more adolescent girls." In Tigray, an RRS official directly approached certain refugees based on their profiles:

> We have data of the refugee teachers here. How many of them have graduated from universities in Ethiopia. How many of them were teachers or other professionals in their homeland. Based on their data, we try to identify these refugees. And they apply, based on their skills… So, we use their data to recruit them. (KII)

The RRS officials involved in our study have access to the education data on the refugees in each camp. They reported that refugee men were more likely to arrive in refugee camps with "certificates on teaching training" (RRS official, KII, Gambella); that female refugees typically have "not undertaken teaching training in their country of origin" (RRS official, KII, Gambella); and that female refugees were more likely than males to drop out of school (RRS officials, KIIs, Tigray and Somali). This is consistent with the existing literature, which states that female refugees have fewer qualifications than male refugees (Liebig and Tronstad 2018) and that female refugees in Ethiopia have higher rates of school dropout than males (Nigusie and Carver 2019; Lashford and Malik 2019). The literature also offers a rationale as to why UNICEF was interested in further lowering the entrance requirement for girls to grade 8—that is, to "catch" adolescent refugee girls before they drop out of school.

Our study found few female incentive teachers working in the RRS primary schools. At least one camp in every region studied had no female incentive teachers. Where female incentive teachers were employed, they were considerably fewer in number than their male counterparts. Our data indicates that the male-to-female teacher ratio was more than 10:1.[5] Providing and facilitating training opportunities specifically for females in the camps was frequently cited as a way to attract female refugees to the initiative (adolescent girls, FGDs, Gambella and Somali). Our research identified female-only spaces created by INGOs and NGOs in most of the camps that the initiative could use for such training.

Despite the lack of female incentive teachers, some adolescent girls were interested in becoming teachers, saying "I want to support students," "I want to get money," and "I want to support my family" (adolescent girls, FGDs, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz). But most of the refugee girls didn't know about the initiative or whether they were eligible: "We are interested to become incentive teachers even though we don't know if we are qualified for it" (adolescent girl, FGD, Gambella).

Again, awareness of the initiative and the current recruitment strategy need to be reviewed in each camp, especially as relates to adolescent girls. Years have passed since the aspiring incentive teachers from Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali inquired at the TTCs how they could become teachers. There is little evidence that the outcome of their situation would not be the same for adolescent girls in the refugee camps today—that is, they would likely first have to inquire directly at the TTCs to find out about the initiative and then be recruited.

Training and Scholarships

There was concern in all the camps that adolescent girls did not have the level of English language skill required to become incentive teacher candidates, as the language of instruction in the TTCs is English (Assefa et al. 2021). Existing research confirms that refugees in postsecondary education often struggle with English, which is the language of instruction in Ethiopia at that level (Austin 2024; Tamrat 2022). Although INGOs were adding English courses in most of the camps to help the trainee and incentive teachers improve their language skills, there apparently was no additional English language support for adolescent girls or aspiring female incentive teachers to help them prepare for the language of instruction in the TTCs. The RRS in one camp had set up volunteer-run English schools for students "that have not passed their examinations… to learn communicative skills, writing skills, the basic skills in English. So they will be able to get jobs" (camp leader, KII, Benishangul-Gumuz). However, the research is inconclusive as to whether these schools had a positive impact on the number of female refugees enrolling in the initiative.

5 The 10:1 male-female ratio was considered the average in similar and recent studies in Ethiopian refugee camps (cf. Nigusie and Carver 2019).

A related criticism concerned gaps in the initiative's adaptation to refugee education: "The courses prepared for the incentive teachers [are] not demand-driven and not specific for the refugee community" (NGO worker, KII, Afar). Our research concurs with this criticism. As previously discussed, the training was specifically designed for Ethiopian national teachers to teach primarily in nonrefugee schools. Incentive teachers were only invited to attend classes with the national teacher trainees at the TTCs, and the training they received there was largely perceived as not having been adapted or modified to meet the initiative teachers' needs.

The TTC educators we interviewed in four regions reported that, at the time of our research, they had delivered the teacher training component of the initiative to refugees. However, one of our key findings was that the TTC educators were still relying on I/NGOs to provide some of the training in the camps. This reportedly was due to unforeseen delays and/or shortfalls in funding the TTCs and scholarships for refugees, findings that were also identified in related research (cf. Austin 2024; Bengtsson et al. 2020; World Bank 2021). Moreover, when we visited the TTCs, we asked to see all official documentation concerning the initiative, including the training manuals the incentive teachers had received, but they were not available. This echoed claims the incentive teachers had made during our discussions—that is, that they never received these materials during their training. When we asked the TTC educators for the name of someone from whom we could obtain these training materials, a common response was that "there is no such focal person [in charge of the initiative]" (TTC educator, KII, Afar). These factors suggest that the initiative had not yet been fully implemented at the time we conducted our research.

Some incentive teachers told us that they had not received any training. One disclosed that she hadn't received any training despite having worked at the RRS school for more than six months and having been told she would receive some training "in the first month" (incentive teacher, KII, Somali). Two female incentive teachers in Gambella told us in an FGD that they had also started teaching without any training, due to a lack of scholarships available for them to attend the training.

Associated Structural Barriers

National Teacher Supply

Official policy limits the incentive teachers to providing instruction in the lower primary classes, while the national teachers with diplomas teach the upper primary classes (Lashford and Malik 2019). However, due to a national teacher shortage, incentive teachers in all five regions often teach at both levels. They reported covering upper primary classes for months or being officially assigned to these classes (incentive teachers, KIIs, Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz). At the upper level, instruction is in either English or Amharic, and our research found that several incentive teachers lacked

proficiency in these languages. On three occasions—twice in Benishangul-Gumuz—translators proficient in the local languages were needed so we could collect meaningful data from the KIIs and FGDs conducted with incentive teachers in English or Amharic. Adolescent girls in Benishangul-Gumuz described some incentive teachers as difficult to understand (adolescent girls, FGD, Benishangul-Gumuz), and their parents echoed this concern: "The quality of education is poor because the teachers don't understand Amharic or English" (parent, FGD, Benishangul-Gumuz).

When incentive teachers were teaching upper primary classes, the lower primary classes were often merged. This created larger classes and, therefore, additional stress and a greater workload for the incentive teachers who taught the lower primary students. Most of the incentive and national teachers we interviewed indicated that lower and upper primary classes were overcrowded (incentive teacher, KII, Benishangul-Gumuz; national teacher, KII, Somali) and that, as a result, "it is difficult for teachers to manage students" (camp leader, KII, Gambella). Our teachers reported that most classrooms were only built for 30-40 students, yet they typically taught between 70 and 120 students; one incentive teacher in Gambella (SQ) reported having 148 students (84 boys and 64 girls) in their class.

Incentive teachers having an excessive number of students and heavy workloads corroborates existing findings (Bengtsson et al. 2020; UNHCR 2015). In light of these circumstances, the women who were eligible for the initiative but were married and/or had domestic/familial responsibilities were cited as "preferring other duties than incentive teaching as they don't want to be stressed by their work" (incentive teacher, KII, Somali). Former incentive teachers we interviewed also cited this as a factor in their leaving the profession: "There are just too many students and not enough teachers" (former teacher, KII, Somali).

Incentive Payment

In this study, the most pressing structural barrier affecting the recruitment and retention of incentive teachers was the low incentive payment. The existing literature states that incentive workers are paid a maximum of 800 Birr (US$14), which is "legally acceptable under refugee law" (Carver 2020, 17), whereas our research revealed that incentive teachers are paid 720-920 Birr per month, depending on the region. However, even this pay range was widely perceived to be insufficient to support even the most basic standard of living. RRS officials acknowledged that the current level of remuneration was insufficient for incentive teachers: "They are economically poor and the salary is not enough" (RRS official, KII, Gambella). Other participant groups expressed similar views: "They hardly survive due to the low salary rate" (religious leader, KII, Afar); "The salary rate is insufficient" (camp leader, KII, Gambella); "The incentives to teach in the schools are not enough" (NGO worker, SQ, Gambella).

Some incentive teachers we interviewed could not afford to eat breakfast and were going to school hungry: "The main problem is my salary. I cannot cover my basic needs…To teach grade 1-6, you need energy, [but] we come here sometimes without breakfast" (incentive teacher, FGD, Afar). This was verified by other participant groups: "The salary is not enough for incentive teachers…it does not meet the teachers' basic needs and they are not eating breakfast" (camp leader, KII, Gambella).

Incentive teachers also remarked that the "financial incentive [805 Birr] is not sufficient for [the] size of the workload" (incentive teacher, FGD, Gambella). Considering the low pay incentive teachers received, many adolescent girls with an already high domestic workload considered the profession unattractive: "The salaries of incentive teachers are small…To spend time as an incentive teacher is losing time because she has responsibility for home chores" (adolescent girl, FGD, Gambella).

It was speculated that, with such a meagre salary, adolescent girls with qualifications would look for more lucrative work: "If they are qualified…they often go to other NGOs or they search for a position in the host community…They are not interested in working for 800 Birr" (RRS official, KII, Gambella). The adolescent girls themselves asserted that only rich women can afford to be incentive teachers: "If she is rich she may want to [be an] incentive teacher because the salary of incentive teacher is [only] 805 Birr per month" (adolescent girls, FGD, Gambella).

According to the parents, who are key in terms of encouraging their adolescent daughters to become teachers (Soong et al. 2022), poor remuneration was a disincentive: "Teachers have families, and the salary is not enough to feed the family. So they drop the teaching jobs and engage in other jobs" (parent, FGD, Gambella). Poor pay is also an impediment to families giving girls permission to become incentive teachers: "If the salary [were] much higher, her husband or her family [would] allow her to engage in incentive teaching" (adolescent girls, FGD, Gambella). Male partners—who usually are the principal decisionmakers in the family (Geleta et al. 2015)—may only give permission to teach if it is financially viable: "Her husband will be happy if she is able to bring more money"; "The payment the incentive teachers are getting is really poor so it's better to stay at home and take care of the house. Her husband also believes it's better to take care of the house instead of the incentive money" (adolescent girls, FGDs, Gambella).

The four former incentive teachers we interviewed all cited low pay as the key factor in their decision to leave the profession, especially when the incentive payment was compared to Ethiopian national teachers' salary:

> National teachers take high salaries, incentive teachers don't. Even if the incentive teachers had a diploma, their payment didn't change. There was no justice. We were doing the same thing, doing the same job. The national teachers have a diploma and they get more money. But I am an incentive teacher and I have a diploma, but I don't get the same payment. (former teacher, KII, Somali)

The existing literature confirms that national teachers working in refugee and host-country primary schools often earn "figures seven times higher than refugee teachers" (Bengtsson et al. 2020, 77). The assumption behind this discrepancy in payment is that "refugees receive benefits including shelter, access to health services, food, education and other services from UNHCR and its partners" (Bengtsson et al. 2020, 77). The incentive payment is therefore deemed sufficient. However, participants in our study claimed that national teachers also receive a benefits package (camp leader, KII, Somali), including free accommodation in the nearby host community, to attract them to teach refugees. In our review of the literature, we could not find data to support the existence of a benefits package for national teachers, but the rumors on top of the discrepant pay were clearly creating barriers to the recruitment and retention of incentive teachers.

Career Progression

The certificate refugees are awarded when they complete their teacher training has little value outside the refugee camp, as the incentive teachers who earn these certificates are only allowed to work in the camps—that is, not in the Ethiopian communities (Bengtsson et al. 2020; Nigusie and Carver 2019). This qualification is also not internationally accredited. Therefore, there is no guarantee that an Ethiopian teaching qualification would be recognized when an incentive teacher returns home or migrates to a third country. In our interviews and FGDs, refugees often perceived their stay in Ethiopia as being "for now" (parent, FGD, Gambella), not for the long term. The poor incentive pay was also static, so the incentive teachers could not earn more in the camps even if they earned a certificate or diploma. Our study found that, with no career progression in sight, former incentive teachers were approaching private schools and/or I/NGOs operating in the camps to earn more money: "I work at another school. It's a local language school. [The salary] is better than the RRS salary…The salary is a problem. The incentive teachers need to have the same salary as the national teachers. Especially if they have a diploma" (former teacher, KII, Somali).

Another former teacher related that she went to a local NGO to ask for teacher training and ended up working for that NGO because it offered a better salary and less stress (former teacher, KII, Somali). It was reported across the camps that I/NGOs and private schools in the camps offered a better salary (former teacher, KII, Tigray): "[The salary] is better than the RRS salary" (former teacher, KII, Somali). This was attractive to the adolescent girls: "Some of the girls who completed primary and/or secondary are recruited into other implementing partner organizations" (camp leader, KII, Gambella). This payment discrepancy was also cited as a barrier in attracting adolescent female refugees to the initiative: "Adolescent girls aspire to join NGOs as social workers rather than take part in the incentive teaching initiative" (camp leader, KII, Tigray).

Pool of Eligible Girls

Since 2009, all female candidates for the incentive teacher training must have completed at least grade 10 to qualify for entrance to the initiative. The literature is clear that refugee girls are more likely than boys to drop out of refugee primary schools (Lashford and Malik 2019), which our findings support. A consensus across the camps and participant groups was that the pool of suitably qualified refugee girls was small and that this was an associated structural barrier affecting their participation in and the success of the initiative: "[There is a] limited number of adolescent girls who completed primary and/or secondary school" (camp leader, KII, Gambella); "The eligibility problem…means [adolescent girls] don't fulfill the educational criteria to be a teacher" (parent, FGD, Gambella).

But not all adolescent refugee girls in Ethiopia drop out of primary school (Carver 2022; Lashford and Malik 2019). We interviewed parents who encourage their daughters to go to school and finish their education. However, several eligible adolescent girls and other participant groups pointed out that enrolling in the initiative in grade 10 or even in grade 8 could mean that they do not progress to or participate in postprimary education: "[The adolescent girls] said that when they become an incentive teacher, they may have to drop out of their school. So, they were not interested in becoming an incentive teacher. They want to complete school" (interview notes, adolescent girls, FGD, Gambella); "There is not anything that motivates adolescent girls to take advantage of this incentive initiative; there is not additional training [or] higher education opportunities" (camp leader, KII, Somali).

For girls who are invested in their education, leaving secondary education to enroll in the initiative appeared counterintuitive, especially as they had gotten quite far despite the many odds against them. Several adolescent girls we interviewed had future aspirations, including undertaking a postsecondary education in order to enter more prestigious professions: "A girl wants to be a doctor not a teacher"; "She doesn't want to be a teacher, she wants to be a midwife" (adolescent girls, FGDs, Gambella). While refugee girls with

high educational aspirations were likely not the intended beneficiaries of the initiative, the program does compete with other available education pathways.

Research indicates that the school dropout rate for refugee girls increases with age. Specifically, refugee girls are less likely than both refugee boys and host community girls to enroll in and complete secondary school (Carvalho 2022; Zubairi and Rose 2016). For refugee girls who have educational aspirations but had to drop out of secondary school, the incentive teacher training initiative offers a pathway back into education and training. Lowering the entrance criteria for girls to having completed grade 8 could help adolescent refugee girls who finished primary education but did not transition to secondary school.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To meet the pledges made by signing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, Djibouti Declaration, and Global Compact for Refugees, the Ethiopian government has increased its partnerships with global funders and organizations to develop an incentive teacher training initiative to train refugees to become primary school teachers. The aim of the initiative is to increase the enrollment and retention of refugees in primary schools and address the shortage of qualified teachers in refugee operations. The initiative's roots can be traced back to the early 2000s, when the International Rescue Committee introduced regular in-service training for RRS primary teachers in the Tigray region. These teachers were mostly male, nominated by their community, and unqualified. The initiative has expanded unevenly across Ethiopia's refugee-hosting regions over the last two decades, mainly due to disparities in the funding streams and to training being delivered by multiple providers. An enhanced initiative was launched in 2018 to ameliorate these issues by providing financial support for refugees who wanted to study alongside the national teacher trainees at TTCs and earn an accredited TTC certificate. Despite this support, only a limited number of female refugees enrolled in the initiative, a situation that persists. The research team operationalized a situational needs assessment to examine what prevents female refugees from taking part in the initiative and contemplated whether further lowering the entrance criteria to grade 8 for girls, as the RRS did in the Tigray region two decades ago, could increase the participation of female refugees.

While the TTCs across all refugee-hosting regions were delivering the incentive teacher training for refugees, the findings indicate that the initiative had not been fully implemented at the time this research was conducted. However, the findings suggest that the elements of the initiative that were implemented had the potential to produce positive outcomes for refugee primary education in Ethiopia.

The research identified three initiative-specific and four associated structural barriers in refugee education that impede the participation of eligible adolescent girls. Recruitment into and awareness of the initiative were poor, and the adolescent refugee girls we interviewed were the least likely of all the participant groups to know about the initiative. I recommend that the initiative be upgraded to provide a more cohesive and sustainably funded program that is clearly embedded in the refugee education policy frameworks and strategies in Ethiopia. The design of this program should include the voices of female refugees to ensure that it meets their needs. This program could be launched in conjunction with a dedicated awareness-raising campaign across all refugee-hosting regions. This study found that parents and existing female incentive teachers were the key influencers of adolescent girls, and that increasing these groups' awareness of the initiative could help them direct more adolescent refugee girls to the initiative.

Not all the incentive teacher trainees who participated in our study had access to the training and scholarships offered by the initiative. Moreover, none of the trained and former incentive teachers we interviewed had received official teacher training manuals, which left them without essential pedagogical resources when they began to teach. These issues warrant further research, which should focus on differences in how the training and scholarships are administered in each refugee-hosting region.

Recruiting national teachers to teach in refugee schools urgently needs to be reassessed, as the low number of national teachers affects the recruitment and retention of incentive teachers. The incentive teachers in our study frequently covered upper primary classes, due to the shortage of national teachers, but they often were not proficient in English or Amharic, which made it difficult for them to teach the upper-level classes, especially in one region. With incentive teachers now covering upper primary classes, the lower primary classes were merged, and the resulting larger classes were increasing the stress, workload, and attrition of incentive teachers across all regions. I found that this was a disincentive for eligible, or soon-to-be eligible, adolescent girls.

Following Kasa's (2014) recommendation, I strongly urge the Ethiopian MoE, regional education bureaus, and the TTCs to work together to enhance the status of the teaching profession in Ethiopia, and to attract more national teachers to refugee education. Incentive teachers also need pathways for career development. In keeping with the UNHCR (2015) strategy for refugee education in Ethiopia, I recommend upscaling the initiative by providing an incentive payment that "takes into account education qualification, years of experience, and performance of teachers" (UNHCR 2015, 15). Like Bengtsson et al. (2020), I advocate for a standardized incentive scale based on merit, which would eliminate the current blanket scale for incentive payments. Incentive and former teachers who participated in this study reflected that this could provide enough of an incentive to increase the recruitment and retention of eligible adolescent girls in the initiative. A related recommendation is to award an international teaching

certificate through the initiative for refugees. This could be achieved by consulting with the Ethiopian MoE and its counterparts in neighboring countries (Keevy et al. 2014).

I also recommend providing separate training for female incentive trainees in the refugee camps. The research identified female-only spaces created by I/NGOs in most camps that could be used for training. Moreover, if the entrance criteria were lowered to grade 8, the initiative could recruit adolescent females who had dropped out of primary school. This would enable them to complete their primary school education in these female-only spaces, and then to enroll in the initiative. These efforts could begin to address female refugees' high primary school dropout rate and be used as a pilot for ways to re-engage female refugees in education.

I highlight the crucial need for free English language classes in all the refugee camps in Ethiopia. Eligible adolescent girls and female incentive teachers need additional English support so they can transition to English as the language of instruction in the TTCs, and so they can benefit fully from the training available. The RRS should collaborate with their affiliated I/NGOs in each camp to provide English courses for these groups and should fund them as part of the initiative.

Finally, I recommend lowering the eligibility criteria for female refugees to grade 8. This study shows that the number of refugee girls who are qualified at grade 10 is small, which affects female participation in the initiative. To address concerns that grade 8 students would lack the English proficiency needed for the teacher training, I urge that free English courses be part of the initiative. Moreover, because few female refugees who complete primary school enroll in secondary education (Ethiopian MoE 2020; Carvalho 2022), lowering the initiative's entrance criteria and providing free English classes could provide adolescent refugee girls, who don't pursue secondary education, with a much-needed pathway to continue their education and gain professional training.

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