

DISSERTATION

Online Education: Benefits and Challenges for Refugee Students

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## ABSTRACT

Currently, only 3% of refugees are pursuing higher education opportunities compared to the 37% higher education participation rate globally. There is an urgent need for quality academic work to leave behind the endless descriptive accounts of refugee life and move toward identifying effective strategies and successful solutions that could facilitate the integration of refugees into higher education. Technology has proffered some hope in providing access to public education for marginalized populations. This study looked specifically at how one online education organization attempts to address refugee education and multiple barriers that prevent the majority of the world's university-age refugee youth from accessing tertiary education. This research is a single case study of Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL), an NGO that has been using digital innovation to provide higher education opportunities to refugees and underserved communities around the globe. This study focuses on JWL's operations in the Middle East and Africa regions, specifically Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, and Malawi. Interviews with JWL's administrators and staff as well as an analysis of the organization's documents were conducted to gain a more thorough understanding of the organization and its leadership. In addition, the online learning platform of JWL was analyzed and observations of its several online courses were completed to better understand their learning processes, specifically, the organization's innovative educational model. JWL's case study reveals that online higher education represents a significant benefit for the refugee youth that have no access to tertiary education. Despite some of its challenges, this online educational model supports refugees' academic progress by constantly adapting its pedagogical approach, curricula, technology, and general support system to

respond to their needs. Considering the very limited academic research on initiatives that support refugee education, this close look at one distance educational model for refugee students can serve as a valuable resource for those who are attempting to help a greater number of refugee students: educators, policy makers of countries hosting large refugee populations, local and international NGOs, and the international educational community more generally.

*Keywords: refugee education, online education, human development*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### **Online Education: Benefits and Challenges for Refugee Students**

Refugee education, the topic of this research, falls under the larger area of development studies and is a theme that has been intertwined into my life in one way or another since I left my parent's home in Northern Kazakhstan for college. That time coincided with the collapse of Soviet Union (which my current motherland, Kazakhstan, had been a part of) and where I experienced close to "refugee" conditions while the country was trying to rise from the ashes of an economic collapse and chaos. This background, coupled with founding and running a small business, has given me insight into the joys and pain of economic development from a micro-level perspective. Also, working for a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project aimed at bringing professional expertise to companies operating in a developing country has helped me to see how developmental aid provided at the right moment and in the right way can lay groundwork for long-term growth. My current work for a university that provides Master's degrees and PhDs in the field of Development Studies also serves as another factor motivating my interest in this research project. This study shows how multiple areas, including my education, life and professional experience, interests, values, passions, aspirations, cultural heritage, and spiritual development have come together and organically connected to my research interest in the education of refugees.

#### **Background of the Study**

Less than 1% of refugees applying through official governmental channels and the United Nations (UN) are resettled in the high-income countries of North America and

Europe (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Shapiro 2018). 86%<sup>1</sup> of the world's refugees reside in middle- and low-income countries and lack an opportunity to become citizens of their host countries or access public education (UNHCR, 2020). As a result, school enrollment rates for refugee children and youth around the globe are very low, representing a startling contrast to the enrollment rates for the children and youth of citizens getting an education within their home countries' education systems.

According to the United Nations refugee agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 63% of refugee children participate in primary education in comparison to an average of 91% for non-refugee children globally, and only 24% of secondary-aged refugees are fortunate enough to get into secondary schools in comparison to the 84% of children who are citizens or their country and of an age group to receive a secondary education (UNHCR, 2019a). The situation with participation of refugees in higher education is even more dire. Currently only 3% of refugees are pursuing higher education opportunities compared to the 37% overall global higher education participation rate (UNHCR, 2019a).

The world's forcibly displaced population has almost doubled since 2010 (UNHCR, 2020) and, currently, displaced children and youth represent more than a half of the total global population of refugees (Arar et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2020). Challenges for school-aged and university-aged refugees are often exacerbated by local legal frameworks of countries hosting refugees, including legislation surrounding refugee status; pathways (or lack of pathways) to citizenship (Baban et al., 2017; Dryden-

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<sup>1</sup> Supposedly, the remaining 13% of refugees migrate to the rest of developed countries (South Korea, Japan, some Golf countries, countries like Singapore, Taiwan and several others are all considered developed countries).



Peterson, 2016a; Dryden-Peterson, 2016b; Dryden-Peterson, 2017); dynamics between a host population and newcomers (Kaysili et al., 2019; Taskin & Erdemli 2018); trauma that refugees carry with them (Ozer et al., 2016); and questions of recognition and accreditation of their previous educational experiences (Bengtsson & Naylor, 2016).

“Trajectories” of refugees’ educational journeys are highly unpredictable (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017), characterized by the time required to find a place for a long-term resettlement, the length of time individuals hold refugee status, conditions surrounding return or non-return to a home country, and some refugee’ aspirations for a better future in North America or Europe (which, unfortunately, as data suggests, will never be realized for most refugees) (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017). These complex challenges surrounding the field of refugee education help explain the relatively small number of comprehensive studies in the field.

Crul et. al. (2019) describe the state of the existing and emerging research on refugee education in the following way: “Even when the field is rapidly expanding, compared to the huge number of studies on the education of the children of immigrants, attention to refugee children in education is still limited and often refugee children are not distinguished separately” (pp. 1-2). They argue that this line of inquiry should be distinct even though it draws from multiple fields of study including migration, economy, politics, sociology, education and many more.

The UNHCR in its 2021 report lists the Middle East and Eastern Africa among global regions with the highest concentrations of refugees (p. 17). The educational systems of countries hosting refugees in these regions are significantly challenged by the influx of large number of refugees (Ayik, 2019; Bellino & Hure, 2018; Christophersen,

2015; Fincham, 2020; Rasheed & Munoz, 2016). Considering the fact that these are either developing or middle-income countries with already strained educational systems and limited resources, there is a need for innovative educational solutions that can open access to education for school-aged and university-aged refugees in these contexts (Crea & McFarland, 2015; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010).

According to Fincham (2020), only 8% of refugees residing in Jordan enrolled in higher education programs. In comparison, the rate of Syrian youth (18–24 years old) enrollment in tertiary education before the war was 20% (Fincham, 2020). It shows that the rate of Syrian youth enrolled in higher education at their home country (before fleeing the war) was significantly higher than now. The statistics on the number of refugees enrolled in higher education in Iraq, Kenya and Malawi is very limited. El-Ghali et al. (2017) mention only three Syrian refugees enrolled at the American University of Iraq, seven Syrian refugees studying at the University of Duhok, and 250 refugee students enrolled in the public universities of Kurdistan Region of Iraq. UNHCR (2020) reports 567 refugee students enrolled in higher education programs in Kenya and 53 refugee students in Malawi.

The discussion of innovative refugee educational solutions has been initiated and driven mostly by international organizations and by governments (Hatayama, 2018). These organizations are increasingly interested in evaluating the potential of innovative, technology-related solutions that can address the problems of refugees' access to education and how best to accommodate the many special characteristics of refugees' lives that prohibit their participation. Lewis and Thacker (2016) suggest two possible solutions to facilitate refugee education: provide access to technology and enable

refugees to access small private schooling. Their optimistic projections are grounded in an incredible amount of experience gained from their on-the-ground research during the recent years of the refugee crisis. To date, however, most recommendations stem from the opinions of practitioners operating in the field and are not supported by systematically gathered empirical evidence. Academic work that points to best practices and promising solutions specifically for refugees who cannot access education remains at a very minimal level for school-aged and university-aged refugees.

### **Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study**

As previously noted, less than 1% of refugees who officially apply for resettlement via United Nations' channels (a process that can last for decades for some) end up in the so-called Global North (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Shapiro 2018) areas that could potentially increase educational opportunities for refugees. Instead, 86% of the world refugees live in developing countries (UNHCR, 2020) whose education systems are already "over-stretched" (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). The challenges faced by the majority of global university-aged refugees require the immediate attention by the global academic community. Specifically, there is a need for studies focused on refugees residing in the regions with the highest concentrations of refugees whose access to tertiary education has not been given the attention it deserves from either the local or worldwide research community. Refugees who are not pursuing higher education opportunities in developing countries, literally, remain outside of the sight lines of the academic community. There is an urgent need for quality academic work that leaves behind the endless descriptive accounts of refugee life and moves toward identifying effective strategies and successful solutions that could potentially facilitate the integration

of refugees into higher education. In this study I examined the implementation of one online tertiary educational program for refugee students. I focused on refugees residing in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya and Malawi, the countries of the Middle East and Eastern Africa regions that have one of the highest concentration of refugees around the globe.

Informed by previous research on online learning, we learn that in many cases it can provide much needed educational access opportunities (Dahya, 2016; Zawacki-Richter & Qayyum, 2019). Technology and distance learning has proven successful for connecting some groups of students with educational opportunities- students who suffer from being previously unable to access schooling. These students typically live in remote and rural areas, have disabilities, belong to nomadic communities or are part of other marginalized populations (Dyer, 2016; Massengale & Vasquez, 2016; Mulcahy et al. 2016; Simon et al., 2014). Technology has also offered some hope for providing access to public education for marginalized populations in developing countries like India, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, Tanzania and some other countries through initiatives and programs developed and offered by their governments (Liyanagunawardena et al., 2014; Mtebe, 2017; Din & Jabeen, 2014). To date, however, none of these studies have focused specifically on the needs of refugee students. Some limited exceptions, as mentioned previously, are the research studies on NGOs that have often taken up the work of addressing the educational needs of refugees (Hatayama, 2018). The extent, to which online learning has benefited the educational experiences of refugee students is still unknown, however.

The theoretical framework of this study stems from the area of development studies. The notion that human development depends on increasing the number of

opportunities or choices available for individuals in order to grow academically and professionally was first articulated by Amartya Sen, a winner of the 1998 Nobel prize in Economics. His ideas greatly influenced the appearance of the Human Development Index (HDI) that the United Nations introduced to measure its development efforts (Sairo, 2003). According to Sen, “education is an important factor in broadening human capabilities, which include human capacities” (Sairo, 2003). Therefore, resolving the problem of inaccessibility of higher education for refugees globally is viewed as directly linked to the development of them as individuals, development of refugee communities, and, consequently, development of host countries where they reside. Theoretically, online education potentially responds to the need for refugees to gain access to learning and therefore, to their development. Questions remain, however, on whether online education is an effective practice since there are very few existing online initiatives that deliver higher education to refugee students.

This study addresses the current gap in the research on refugee education and offers a deeper analysis of a working educational model that will allow an assessment of the potential of distance education in addressing refugees’ lack of access to education, and, as a result, their low participation in higher education. This research may benefit educators, policy makers of countries hosting large refugee populations, and international and local NGOs attempting to help a greater number of refugee students with insights that may further their work in this area.

The pioneering work of JWL is one of the very few initiatives of this type and scale that currently exists for delivering online education to refugee students. It is well-situated to provide these students with tremendous academic opportunity but, to date,

there is no empirical evidence to support that assumption. On the surface, JWL's work appears as one of the most successful recent initiatives specializing in delivering online education to refugees, considering the twelve years of existence, scale of operations, its innovative technological approach, and the multiple stakeholders (universities, NGOs, donors) involved in their initiative. The findings of the organization's own internal research also support this assumption: "the findings of this research are surprisingly positive and confirm the early assumptions, with set outcomes met more than one had dared to expect at the beginning: 88% of graduates found employment; 65% of graduates pursuing further studies" and "ultimately, the students who believed in the programme against all odds surpassed expectations, achieving the astoundingly positive outcomes with great impact in their communities" (Rega and Tshilombo, 2021, p. 23).

The purpose of this study is to examine the work (and the impact of the work) of JWL, one international NGO that has twelve years of experience using technology to successfully provide higher online education to refugees and underserved communities in the Middle East, Africa, and a few other regions of the world. Given the relative success of technology in helping other marginalized groups gain access to education elsewhere, this qualitative research study will focus on the benefits of the technology model offered by JWL, as well as the barriers or challenges of using technology-based distance education to support educational integration of refugee students. Results from this study will have implications for educators and policy makers who want to create effective distance education solutions to engage a greater number of refugee children and youth, and, potentially, for other marginalized groups currently lacking access to education.

The relative success of JWL makes it an ideal candidate for investigation that promises insights into the developed existing working online educational model for refugee students.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the study, at least initially:

1. In what ways, if any, does JWL's technological distance educational model support refugee populations and facilitate their access to education?
2. What factors support or challenge JWL's distance learning model in providing higher education opportunities to refugee students specifically, in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya and Malawi?
3. What are the implications of this study for educators, policy makers of countries hosting large refugee populations, and international and local NGOs operating in the region that are attempting to help a greater number of refugee students?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Literature Review Overview**

The majority of the world's refugees reside in middle- and low-income countries and lack an opportunity to become citizens of their host countries or access public education. Less than 1% of refugees applying through official governmental channels and the United Nations (UN) are resettled in the high-income countries of North America and Europe (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Shapiro 2018). As a result, school enrollment rates for refugees around the globe are very low, representing a startling contrast to the enrollment rates for the children and youth of citizens getting an education within their countries' education systems.

According to the United Nations refugee agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 63% of refugee children participate in primary education in comparison to an average of 91% for non-refugee children globally, and only 24% of secondary-aged refugees are fortunate enough to get into secondary schools in comparison to the 84% citizens' children of their age group receiving a secondary education within their countries' education systems (UNHCR, 2019a). Only in the last few years has the number of refugee youth enrolled in higher education increased from 1% to 3% globally, compared to the 37% overall global higher education participation rate (UNHCR, 2019a). But as the numbers suggest, the level of refugee participation in higher education remains unacceptably low.

Understanding how to address the phenomenon of refugees' lack of access to the education systems around the globe requires an overall familiarity with the field of



Refugee Education (RE). This literature review is an attempt to glean insights from the RE field that can serve as foundational knowledge for a dissertation study that will attempt to make sense of the reasons for refugees' non-enrollment in educational systems of host countries and articulate policy and practice options that conceivably could provide innovative and promising educational solutions to support the education for refugees.

The two visions of what literature reviews should look like as expressed by Boote and Beile (2005), on the one hand, and Maxwell (2006), on the other, were taken into consideration while working on this literature review. Boote and Beile argue that literature reviews should provide a comprehensive and relatively complete overview of literature within a field of study. Maxwell argues for literature reviews that do not map a field but rather make the case and set the stage for the study that a researcher will do. This literature review has attempted to adopt both approaches. Boote and Beile's position that literature review's comprehensiveness is central to the quality of a dissertation was considered during the first phase of the review process that involved generating relevant literature to review. Maxwell's position that emphasizes a literature review's relevance for the study that is to be or has been done characterized the second phase of the review process, which was the phase that involved drafting this document.

The first phase was oriented to getting an overall feel of what has been accomplished so far in the fairly new field of RE. In this phase, a thorough search of databases was undertaken. The databases of two universities were used during the first phase of research: University of San Diego and William Carey International University. The following databases were included in the search: 1<sup>st</sup> Academic Search Premier database (Education and Sociology sections), Business and Economics database,

Business Source Premier, Catalog Plus, EBSCO, ProQuest, ERIC, JSTOR, Sage Premier Journals, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Wiley. The search produced 395 documents covering refugee related themes.

An initial review of titles and abstracts on refugee education resulted in the list of topics summarized in Table 1. Table 1 also indicates the number of documents found on each topic.

**Table 1**

*List of Relevant Bodies of Literature That Emerged During the Database Research*

Body of literature associated with the field of refugee education	Number of documents
Integration of refugees into educational system and society	132
Innovation, technology, and learning	38
Mental health of refugees	36
Turkish refugee policies	29
Host population and refugees	28
International community and refugees	28
International - EU - Turkey law	27
Refugee education field overview	17
Syrian refugee crisis	17
Refugee higher education	26
Refugee experience	16
Total	395

In this literature review I provided a deeper look at Refugee Education bodies of literature that appeared to be most relevant to the dissertation. I looked at reasons causing very low refugee participation rates in education. The goal of the review was to begin to

envision innovative solutions that could connect refugee students in countries currently hosting the largest populations of refugees with educational opportunities that if made available, could provide opportunity for them. This goal is directly addressed in the dissertation's final discussion chapter.

Reviewing the RE literature produced very little information on virtual learning models applied among refugee students (only a several studies out of 395 reviewed). The lack of this kind of information triggered additional research of known practices of distance education (DE) used among populations whose access to education is also limited: women in some developing countries, students with disabilities, nomadic people groups, rural communities, and some other disadvantaged groups. The research revealed a number of studies covering multiple aspects of distance education and the role it can play in the lives of people whose access to traditional education models is limited. While each group may have their own particular challenges in gaining access to education, the barriers these groups face are arguably similar to those of refugees thus making their experiences with distance education helpful when attempting to understand the experiences of refugees. This stage of research produced the list of literature covered in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*List of Relevant Bodies of Literature Emerged During the Databases' Research*

Body of literature associated with the field of distance education	Number of documents
Distance Education and Disadvantaged Populations	44
Total	44

The “Distance Education and Disadvantaged Populations” body of literature will be reviewed in this chapter in addition to the four bodies of literature chosen for detailed review from Table 1 as they appear most relevant to the goals of this research study.

### **Refugee Education Overview**

“Exile is fundamentally an unsettling experience, an almost paranoid life of looking forward while watching your back,” concludes Leonardo (2020, p. 106). The key challenges of academic research in the area of RE are associated with the transient nature of the refugee experience that is, consequently, hard to access and capture. This RE literature overview will discuss the following aspects of the refugee literature: literature that is focused on generating a general theory of RE; literature providing a brief history of RE; and the literature that documents the existence of two quite different contexts in which RE and research on RE occur.

#### ***In Search of a General Theory of Refugee Education***

There is a small amount of literature (only 17 documents out of 395; see Table 1) that is concerned with generating what might be characterized as a general theory of the RE field. These documents provide key definitions, concepts, and frameworks that would help to form a basis for a systematic approach to RE.

Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) are among the few scholars who have made an attempt to provide a framework to approach research in the refugee education field. They have written:

Refugee families, along with policymakers and practitioners, struggle daily with uncertainty of unknowable futures as they make decisions about what curriculum

refugees will follow, the languages in which they will learn, the certification they will receive, and the types of schools that might best prepare them for work and life, both in the present and the future. Their decision-making processes are a productive lens to understand the purposes of refugee education. (p.2)

Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019), along with a few other scholars, recommend looking at RE in multiple global contexts through the lenses of four possible futures for refugees: future of resettlement, future of integration, future of return and transnational future for refugees that want to keep their options open and prepare for a future not bound by one country (Akcapar & Simsek, 2018; Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019). Although systematic research is not normally cited to support claims about the existence of these four anticipated futures, the claims have a fair amount of face validity associated with them. As a result, these lenses (or perspectives) can help governments, the international community, and other key stakeholders operating in the field of RE to see clearly how educational needs of refugees need to be addressed in every particular context in the light of the different futures that refugees are aspiring to pursue.

### ***The Three Eras in the History of Refugee Education***

The notion of refugee education is not a very old one. Born out of the World War II refugee crisis, this field is a “child” of the United Nations that appeared for the whole world to take notice of at its 1951 Convention and, since then, has always been a part of its wider commitment to support refugees around the globe (Dryden-Peterson, 2011a; Dryden-Peterson, 2011b). The Convention provided definitions, international norms, and guidelines for states and international institutions. To date, 144 countries have joined the

Convention's declaration that, among other rights, refugees have a right to education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a).

The literature reviewed points to three different eras in the history of Refugee Education. The first era falls between 1945 and 1985 and was shaped by the European refugee crisis in the aftermath of World War II and the long years of the Cold War that brought its own international and local conflicts (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a). The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 had signaled a new era characterized by the appearance of a new type of global institution that took responsibility for addressing the refugee crises around the world.

The second era lasted from 1985 until 2011 and reflects a growing involvement of the UN and other global institutions in the field of RE. During this period, all responsibility for educating refugees was almost solely shouldered by international organizations. At the time most refugees had resided in designated camps, and humanitarian responses were considered to have a temporary nature. The second era in the history of RE ended in 2012 with the UN announcement of a new global refugee strategy that shifted the direct support for refugees to governments of countries with large refugee populations (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a; Dryden-Peterson, 2011b).

This new strategy reflected the realization that modern refugee crises will likely be more protracted than was previously assumed (Bengtsson & Naylor, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2016a; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019) and will be characterized by a growing level of urbanization of refugee populations. For example, currently, 98% of refugees in Turkey live in urban areas (UNHCR, 2020). The new realities of the field of RE required

a new approach to the problems of RE (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; Dryden-Peterson, 2011a; Dryden-Peterson, 2011b).

The current strategy is also guided by the idea that the host countries' education systems are better resourced than short-term humanitarian relief efforts and can provide more stable environments for refugee children and youth who are seeking education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a). The latest shift in the field has triggered the emergence of refugee studies by local scholars, especially from the countries with significant refugee populations (Arar et al., 2020; Kale & Erdogan, 2019; Unutulmaz, 2019).

### *Two Different Research Contexts*

Scholars of RE can be divided into two categories with the majority of them falling into the first category. The first group of scholars concentrate their efforts around research on refugees residing in the high-income countries located in the North America, Europe, or Australia. These countries' education systems operate within stable, structured environments (Alalami, 2019).

The second group of scholars devote their efforts to researching RE in the middle- and low-income countries whose education systems almost certainly would be placed in crises with each large influx of refugees. These contexts usually require an urgent response by a local government or the international community. Considering that less than 1% of refugees who officially apply for resettlement via UN channels (a process that can last decades for some) end up in the so called Global North (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; Shapiro 2018), combined with the fact that 85% of the world refugees live in developing countries (UNHCR, 2020) whose education systems are already "over-stretched" (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019), the challenges the majority of global refugee

children and youth confront receive a relatively limited amount of attention from the global academic community.

Refugees in the high-income countries of resettlement with a guaranteed permanency of refugee status, a pathway to a citizenship, and a non-emergency context (due to the low number of refugees accepted by those countries) enjoy the level of certainty that refugees in the middle and low-income countries normally do not experience (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017). Refugees in the second group face several possible futures but cannot be sure when and how those futures will be realized, since the refugees have little influence on circumstances shaping those futures. Will there be an end of a war that will allow them to return home? Will they settle in the host country over time, assuming legislation will allow them to integrate? Or will they hope that one day their application for asylum will be accepted and they will resettle in a distant country? These questions point to factors that are shaping the educational opportunities and experiences of the refugee children and youth in this second group of countries. To date, however, the literature I reviewed—or to be more precise, the absence of literature available to review—suggests these factors have not been studied.

### ***A Few Closing Remarks for this Section***

The world's forcibly displaced population has almost doubled since 2010 (UNHCR, 2020) and, currently, children and youth represent more than a half of the total global population of refugees (Arar et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2020). Challenges for school-aged and university-aged refugees are often exacerbated by local legal frameworks of countries hosting refugees, including legislation surrounding refugee status, pathways (or lack of) to citizenship (Baban et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Dryden-Peterson,



2017), dynamics between a host population and newcomers (Kaysili et al., 2019; Taskin & Erdemli 2018), trauma that refugees carry with them (Ozer et al., 2016), and questions of recognition and accreditation of their previous educational experiences (Bengtsson & Naylor, 2016). “Trajectories” of refugees’ educational journeys are highly unpredictable (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017), characterized by the time required to find a place for a long-term resettlement, the length of time individuals hold refugee status, conditions surrounding return or non-return to a home country, and some refugee’ aspirations for a better future in North America or Europe (which, unfortunately, as data suggests, will never be realized for most refugees) (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017). These complex challenges surrounding the field of RE help explain the relatively small number of comprehensive studies of the field. Crul et al. (2019) describe the state of the existing and emerging research on RE in the following way: “Even when the field is rapidly expanding, compared to the huge number of studies on the education of the children of immigrants, attention to refugee children in education is still limited and often refugee children are not distinguished separately” (p. 1-2).

### **Integration of Refugees into the Education System and Society**

Dryden-Peterson (2019) notes that refugees tend to seek and achieve integration via “access to quality education, social belonging, and economic opportunities” (p. 6). This literature review reveals that questions of integration have attracted the attention of many scholars with almost every third reviewed study devoted to the multiple aspects of integration (see Table 1). Initial database research produced 132 documents related to the integration theme (Table 1). What is interesting is that the majority of these studies were produced during the last several years. In this section I will be covering the literature

devoted to refugees' integration processes in the geographic regions and countries that this study is focusing on, specifically, the Middle East (Jordan, Iraq) and Eastern Africa (Kenya, Malawi), all regions known for hosting large refugee populations within the last several decades. I begin by taking a closer look at the integration challenges that directly affect refugees' educational opportunities in these regions.

### *Middle East*

The recent Syrian refugee crisis caused the population of Jordan to grow by 10% within just several years. This small country continues showing an incredible level of hospitality to about a million of refugees it allowed within its borders (Culbertson et al., 2016; Fincham, 2020). Only four academic studies focusing specifically on Jordan (out of 132, see Table 1) were found in the researched literature. They all were directly devoted to the process and challenges of refugee integration into Jordan's education system. It is clear that there is a lack of research on refugees' experiences trying to assimilate in this country and trying to enter its formal education system. Given the emergency of the matter, it is important to understand the integration challenges that the refugees are facing within Jordan. The several research works found on this topic were all completed by western scholars. These studies found that the integration of refugees into the Jordanian educational system is complicated by the capacity challenges, language barrier, refugee children choosing work over studies, difference in curriculum, prejudice against the newcomers, and discrimination in school settings (Christensen, 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2016b; Kubow, 2020). There is an apparent lack of insight on questions of integration coming from the local or regional academic community. The research search returned no results devoted to the integration issues of refugees in Iraq.

### ***Eastern Africa Region***

Although this research search identified 132 articles devoted to the integration topics of refugees around the globe, only one article discussed integration challenges of refugees in one of the largest refugee camps in Kenya (Duale et al., 2019). The search returned no results devoted to the integration topics of refugees in Malawi. The results of this literature review confirm the lack of academic research devoted to refugee higher education in developing countries in general, and the countries of Eastern Africa region specifically.

### **Refugees in Higher Education**

This search produced only 26 studies devoted to the issues of refugees in higher education (out of 395). Several of these articles cover the geographic regions and countries focused on in this study. As research suggests, higher education related challenges that refugees are facing in the Middle East and Eastern Africa are numerous. Most of the empirical research completed on this field so far was triggered by the growing recognition of the fact that refugees are largely absent in tertiary education. Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) explain this phenomenon by pointing out the “broken pipeline” of the educational systems of host countries. As research suggests, the low number of refugee students in tertiary education is a consequence of high non-enrollment numbers of refugees at primary and secondary levels. Studies reveal that about 40% of school-aged refugees in Jordan (Christophersen, 2015), 46% of school-aged refugees in Iraq (El-Ghali et al., 2017), 51% of primary and 90% of secondary school-aged refugee children in Kenya (Rose & Zubairi, 2016), and 63% of school-aged refugee children in Malawi (UNHCR, 2019b) are not enrolled in schools. As a result, only 8% of refugees

are currently enrolled in tertiary education in Jordan (Fincham, 2020). El-Ghali et al. (2017) point to the very limited data on higher education statistics in Iraq and mention only 3 Syrian refugees enrolled at the American University of Iraq, 7 Syrian refugees studying at the University of Duhok, and 250 refugee students enrolled in the public universities of Kurdistan Region of Iraq. UNHCR (2020) reports 567 refugee students enrolled in higher education programs in Kenya and 53 refugee students in Malawi. Lack of access to tertiary education, in turn, may further encourage decline of primary and secondary enrollment rates among refugee students (Fincham 2020).

### ***Refugees Barriers to Higher Education***

Moved by the fact that there is a very low refugee participation rate in higher education, an academic community is trying to understand the reasons that prevent refugees' access to tertiary education. The barriers refugees are facing are complex and many and largely driven by the significant pressures imposed by the economic, political, and educational systems of countries within these regions due to the large numbers of refugees and non-stable economies of these countries (Atesok et al., 2019; Fincham, 2020; Komsuoglu & Ozera 2019; Rasheed & Munoz, 2016). When it comes to funding, more immediate needs of refugees like food, shelter, and medical assistance, often come first in humanitarian emergencies. Also, primary and secondary-age refugee children are given higher priorities when it comes to access to education due to the prevalent perception that younger children experience a higher level of vulnerability under uncertain conditions (Fincham, 2020; UNESCO, 2018a; UNESCO, 2018b).

Reviewed research studies agree that availability of scholarships serves as “the main conversion factor” (Fincham, 2020, p. 17) that affects refugees access to tertiary

education. Among the barriers that also come up often are institutional policies and practices, language of study related challenges, interrupted education, lack of evidence or non-recognition of previous education, lack of various support services, political considerations, indirect educational costs, lack of evidence of residency, and a limited range of subject areas and programs available for refugees (Atesok et al., 2019; Avery & Said 2017; Cin & Dogan, 2021; Crea & McFarland, 2015; Dryden-Peterson & Giles 2010; Fincham, 2020; Kamyab, 2017; Rasheed & Munoz, 2016; Streitwieser et al., 2018).

However, scholars disagree about an availability of tertiary education opportunities offered in the region with some noting its lack and others saying that there are many existing universities that are ready to provide quotas for refugee students (Atesok et al., 2019; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; Fincham, 2020; Kamyab, 2017). Future research work in this area would bring more clarity into this important aspect of the problem.

### ***Significance of Refugee Participation in Higher Education***

Review of the literature in the area of refugee higher education provides multiple reasons for increasing refugee youth participation in higher education. Kamyaba (2017) notes that there is a need to “provide the student -age refugees with high quality and accredited higher education to enable them successfully integrate into their new homelands” and that “investing in higher education is imperative to transform post-conflict societies” (p. 12). It is hard to underestimate the importance of peacebuilding skills for refugees whether it comes to being able to live in peace within the host societies or participate in peacebuilding efforts after returning home. Coffie (2014) points to

another important role of the higher education stating that “investment in higher education for refugees not only meets their individual needs, but also contributes to the development of the human capital necessary for peacebuilding” (p. 138).

### ***Lack of Research on Refugee Higher Education***

Almost every article reviewed on this topic emphasized the lack of research on various aspects of the field of refugee higher education. Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) put it this way: “the issue of higher education for refugees is virtually unexplored in both scholarship and policy” (p. 3). Among some of the areas recommended for future research are “the availability of higher education for refugees, refugees’ access to these opportunities, refugees’ expectations from higher education and their experiences within it” (Fincham, 2020, p. 2), “the experiences, aspirations and expectations of refugee youth during access and participation to higher education” (Atesok et al., 2019, p. 122), “research focused on refugee education from a long-term view” (Rasheed & Munoz, 2016, p. 173), “the impact beyond the classroom of access to higher education” (Crea & McFarland, 2015, p. 241), “appropriate pedagogy; accreditation and recognition of earned credentials” (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010, p. 7), and “whether participating in higher education improves refugees’ educational and work outcomes, and their overall quality of life” (Crea & McFarland, 2015, p. 241).

In my opinion, the existing literature on this geographic region also lacks insights on some important themes like a refugee agency and resilience, best existing practices, and benefits and challenges of innovative forms of refugee higher education. Shapiro (2018) observed a positive influence of an immediate and extended family on student’s agency and resilience, but at the same time she notes that “the scope of this project is

limited, with a small number of participants from one community, interviewed at one point in time” (p. 342). Cin and Dogun (2020) state that many refugees they interviewed had a strong desire to contribute to their communities after graduation by applying the knowledge and skills they gained at the university, but it is hard to generalize these findings since they interviewed only 15 refugee students all from the same city. Unungst and Grea (2020) observed a lack of research on the region and” call not only for additional research in this area but for increased sharing of best practices among HEIs” (p. 241). Commenting on the existing innovation initiatives taking place in the refugee higher education, Dryden-Peterson (2010) notes that “these programs are mostly ad hoc, with no global coordination and, as they are also new, little has been documented about their processes and outcomes” (p. 13).

When it comes to research design and methodology, focus groups and semi structured interviews are very prevalent among research approaches noted in the existing literature. Most of the reviewed studies prefer a qualitative research design over a quantitative approach. The results of existing research may not fully reflect the realities of the field due to a widespread tendency to choose convenient samples (Crea & McFarland, 2015; Rasheed & Munoz, 2016), lack of large-scale data used for studies (Cin & Dogun, 2020), and a lack of ethnographic observations. And finally, as Fincham (2020) notes, “where research has been conducted in this area, many studies have not met the standards of academic rigor” (p. 2). Most of the studies in the area of RE are limited in their scale, use few methods and simplistic in their approach to the research design.

## **Innovation, Technology, and Distance Education in Refugee Education**

Driven by a desire to explore the potential of innovative education options available for refugees, I was looking for academic research describing how technology disrupts traditional educational processes and can address multiple barriers preventing refugees from enrollment and integration in education systems of host countries. The innovation literature reviewed, along with the very limited research devoted to the experiences of refugees in higher education, will form the heart of the literature foundation for my dissertation study. I was encouraged by the fact that there is still so much work that can be done in the area, but, at the same time, discouraged due to the lack of academic work that could inspire, direct and enrich my potential research work.

Arguably, the most promising area of innovation-oriented research that has been conducted thus far focuses on the areas of technology and distance education. To be sure, this body of literature is quite small: out of about 395 texts initially reviewed, the literature mentioning how technology affects the lives of refugees was reflected only in 38 research pieces (See Figure 1). It did not make sense to divide only 38 documents into several bodies of literature, so I have collected them into one single body, since they all had something to do with technology.

It was surprising to realize that the discussion on innovative refugee education is initiated and driven mostly by international organizations and, at times, by governments (Hatayama, 2018). These organizations, in fact, produced most of the studies referenced in reports initiated and conducted by the UN, UNHCR, UNESCO, World Bank and other key international organizations during the last several years (Anderson 2013; Colucci et al., 2017; Culbertson et al., 2019; Lewis & Thacker, 2016; UNESCO 2018a; UNESCO,



2018b). These organizations are increasingly interested in evaluating the potential of innovative, technology-related solutions that can address the problems of education accessibility and accommodate many special characteristics of refugees' lives.

Lewis and Thacker (2016), for example, note that “while UN agencies strive to integrate refugees into local school systems, the potential of small-scale private schooling, assisted by technology, should be explored” (p. 7). Moreover, their optimistic projections are grounded in the incredible amount of fieldwork and experience gained by their work on the ground during the recent years of the refugee crisis. However, most of the literature on technological solutions and on innovative practices, generally, is dominated by the opinions of practitioners operating in the field but not supported by systematically gathered empirical evidence. Most works, almost invariably, lack academic insight and approaches.

While searching for literature on innovative solutions, I hoped to find examples of distance education used for connecting the university-aged refugees with educational opportunities, thinking it would provide me with initial ideas about how to build my dissertation work. I discovered, however, only a few studies within a body of literature covering the topics of innovation and technology that were focused exclusively on online higher education (Colucci et al., 2017; Halkic & Arnold 2019; Zawacki-Richter & Qayyum, 2019), with the rest devoted to non-relevant topics covering the different roles technology plays in refugee lives.

I found only one large scale empirically grounded study that partially examined the potential of online education to connect university-aged refugees with educational opportunities or, even, to suggest it as a non-formal way to support the formal education

process in helping refugees close the gaps in education caused by migration (Fincham, 2020). Unlike most research on distance education, this study raises concern with a desirability of online forms of education for the university-aged refugees since many refugees noted that they would prefer face-to-face learning opportunities to online education.

The overall status of the research in this area is portrayed quite well by Lewis and Thacker (2016): “Many seek evidence that technology-assisted approaches are effective, but little has been gathered with respect to ICT [Information and Communication Technology] in education generally, let alone [its role] in emergency situations” (p. 7). It seems that there is a high interest in finding evidence supporting the effectiveness of online forms of education, not only when it applies to the refugee students, but in supporting regular students as well.

Colucci et al. (2017) provide a detailed account of recommendations for future research in the area of technological innovation, including arguments that research efforts need to (a) provide deeper insights into how non-formal online education can help refugees to fill the gaps created by lost years of schooling, (b) focus on online education impact assessments on refugees from different age groups, (c) evaluate already existing instances of refugee online education taken place (both, formal and non-formal), and (d) conduct efficiency studies exploring cost/benefit models of online education.

### **Distance Education and Disadvantaged Populations**

Faced by the apparent lack of research on the refugees participating in the distance education, I turned my sights to the role the distance education has been playing in the lives of other marginalized populations. These insights could help generate ideas

and shape the following research work on refugee education. Although the phenomenon of distance education is relatively recent, it has already been considered by a number of state and private educators from around the globe as a solution to the educational access challenges of specific populations including but not limited to nomadic communities (Dyer, 2016); professional athletes (Bates & LaBrecque, 2017); rural communities in Canada (Mulcahy et al., 2016) and Pakistan (Din & Jabeen, 2020); marginalized due to the caste, gender, location, minority and disability communities in India (Chaudhury, 2016); development workers (Beckmann, 2010); marginalized university age youth in Tanzania (Mtebe & Raphael, 2017), Sri Lanka (Liyanagunawardena, 2014), and Western Africa (Amini & Oluyide, 2016). A number of these studies provide evidence of the effectiveness of online education to overcome the issues of access to education for these disadvantaged populations. There is a need for a similar type of research performed in relation to the refugee populations that could continue building the evidence deepening our understanding of potential of the distance education in the lives of the disadvantaged populations.

## **Conclusion**

Gutiérrez and Penuel (2014) state that “relevance to practice must be an explicit criterion for judging the quality of research proposals” (p. 20) and also that “the problems that researchers initially think important to address are not likely to be the same ones that diverse education stakeholders perceive as important” (p. 20). Clearly, RE is a complex field with a diverse array of interested stakeholders, including, but not limited to, international NGOs and local governments. Many of these stakeholders appear to exhibit

a sense of urgency around the research that has—and has not—been done in the area of refugee education to date.

Although this study is focused on one educational model and is limited to certain geographic areas, it provides insights and possibilities that have wider implications for understanding how best to support and integrate populations of students who are being marginalized due to their condition and, as a result, not able to access education. This study also responds to the lack of empirical research undertaken on the innovative refugee higher education in the developing contexts and examines how a certain educational approach may address a significant challenge of the unacceptable low enrollment rates of refugees in higher education, especially in the geographic areas with a high concentration of refugee populations. And, finally, this work is an opportunity to look closely at the potential disadvantages of a specific distance educational model along with its benefits.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Design Overview**

The notion that human development depends on increasing the number of opportunities or choices available for individuals in order to grow was first articulated by Amartya Sen, a winner of the 1998 Nobel prize in Economics. His ideas greatly influenced the appearance of the Human Development Index (HDI) that the United Nations introduced to measure its development efforts (Sairo, 2003). According to Sen, “Education is an important factor in broadening human capabilities, which include human capacities” (Sairo, 2003). Therefore, resolving the problem of inaccessibility of higher education for refugees globally is directly linked to the development of them as individuals, development of refugee communities, and, also, the development of host countries where they reside. So, theoretically, online education perfectly fits the assumption that providing the refugees with an option to study will trigger their development, but questions remain about whether online education is effective in practice. This study is seeking empirical evidence to support (or, possibly, refute) the validity of the claim that merely providing access to higher education is sufficient for creating conditions for refugees to realize their potential for a better future. The online educational model developed by JWL is one of the very few current initiatives for connecting the refugee students residing in contexts with high concentration of refugee population with higher education. JWL’s work appears as a successful initiative, considering the twelve years of existence, scale of operations, its innovative technological approach, and multiple stakeholders (universities, NGOs, donors) involved

in the initiative, but a closer look at JWL's working educational model can reveal if it is really supporting refugees and facilitating their access to higher education and in what ways the model benefits and challenges refugee students.

This is primarily a qualitative study that uses a case study design and case-study methods. However, quantitative evidence, specifically descriptive statistics, were also obtained in order to understand the student achievement outcomes of the program. This study is approached with a pragmatic/utilization research paradigm (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yazan, 2015). Saunders et al. (2009) wrote, "For a pragmatist, research starts with a problem, and aims to contribute practical solutions that inform future practice" p. 143). This philosophical concept originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was further developed by John Dewey along with several other scholars (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

Pragmatism is rooted in the belief that transformation is intrinsically connected to well informed action. Since pragmatists are mostly driven by trying to find solutions to their research problem, they are ready to look at reality from multiple perspectives, as long as a perspective promises to provide insights that can lead to addressing that problem. Kaushik & Walsh (2019) suggest that pragmatism is situated somewhere in the center of the paradigm continuum in terms of modes of inquiry. That continuum puts post-positivism at one end and constructivism at the other end. Post-positivism typically supports quantitative methods and deductive reasoning, whereas constructivism emphasizes qualitative approaches and inductive reasoning; however, pragmatism embraces the two extremes and offers a flexible and more reflexive approach to research design (p. 255). This creates more freedom with the choice of research design and

methodology. The case study research method seems to fit well with a pragmatist's tendency to consider different approaches, methods and tools for gathering information in order to find solutions that can contribute to addressing a problem and, consequently, inform future practice (Saunders, 2009).

The purpose of this research study is to address the problem of refugees' lack of access to educational opportunities. A single explanatory case study is an ideal method to explore this topic as it provides the "ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and direct observations, as well as participant-observation" (Yin, 2018, p. 43). The pragmatic approach to the significant problem of lack of refugees' access to education may also help to leave behind the endless descriptive accounts of refugee life that are prevalent in the current literature and move toward identifying most effective strategies and successful solutions that could facilitate the integration of refugees into higher education.

### **Site and Participant Selection Procedures**

#### **Site**

This is a case study of the JWL organization. JWL was established in 2010 and represents a longitudinal operation which has been providing refugees and other marginalized communities with access to higher education opportunities via employing the distance technological educational model. As Yin (2018) points out, "Single case studies can be invaluable when the single case has any of five characteristics – being a critical, extreme or unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal case" (p. 24). Given the project's twelve years of experience, it is in an ideal position to help a researcher understand in what specific ways this particular model has been facilitating access to

education for refugees. Also, the data that JWL has generated over the long period of time can shed light into the challenges and advantages distance education can provide for the particular group of refugees this organization is serving.

Considering that distance education is still perceived as a relatively new approach in the field of education, generally, and, to an even greater degree, in the area of public education, there are very few organizations that have had an opportunity to be involved in contributing to the process of educating refugee youth via distance education over a long period of time. Consequently, there are very few existing organizations specializing on delivering distance higher education to the refugee students in the developing countries (where the majority of refugee population reside) and can be a source of information on how certain conditions and processes facilitate learning of students who are refugees.

The completed literature review points to the increasing attention shown by governments and NGOs to this topic. It seems that any empirical evidence in this regard may represent a value for future strategic planning and policy formation. Doing a case study of JWL has provided me with an opportunity to gather empirical evidence and learn from one of the very few initiatives of this type and scale that currently exist. It appears as one of the successful recent initiatives, considering the 12 years of existence, scale of operations, the amount of support and attention it generated, and multiple stakeholders (universities, NGOs, donors) involved in the initiative.

JWL is an organization committed to increasing the access to quality higher education for refugees and marginalized communities via digital innovation. Currently JWL serves about 5.5 thousand students in the Middle East, Africa, South-East Asia and South America. These students are enrolled in about 11.5 thousand courses. After taking



advantage of free accredited online courses offered via the HeLP (online learning platform developed by JWL), they can earn a certificate or a bachelor's degree. JWL's credits are transferrable and can be used to continue education in the countries of their current residence or abroad. Students who do not want to pursue JWL's academic programs may choose one of their several vocational programs. The organization also provides all levels of English courses to help refugees learn or improve their language proficiency, since all JWL's programs are offered in English.

JWL's goal is to help refugees and other marginalized communities take advantage of the virtual technological distance education by providing access to higher education. The intent of JWL is to work with the refugee students in their attempt to succeed in the places of their location.

JWL collaborates with multiple stakeholders including students, faculty, supporters, local and international NGOs, foundations, local and international universities. JWL's online global community consisting of administration, faculty, online facilitators, and supporting staff provides education in 18 countries via 55 Community Learning Centers (CLCs) [local learning centers opened to support students in place of their residence; their detailed description and role they play in the educational process will be covered later in this chapter] by offering English language courses, professional programs, and academic programs (certificates and bachelor's degrees). Education delivered via the JWL's blended online learning model called HeLP (Higher Education Learning Platform) which was developed by JWL. It is created by considering the special needs of refugee students who face multiple unique barriers to access education such as not having stable internet connection, experiencing power outages, having to travel long

distance to the learning spaces, and lacking learning resources. Refugee students can access education materials on the platform that allows them to study anytime from any place.

The HeLP is an ecosystem that unites the Learning Management System (LMS), Student Management System (SMS), and JWL's onsite learning centers that have laptops and tablets, including standalone access points for infrastructure, networking and transmission (SMARTs) that have independent Wi-Fi hotspots, individual power sources, educational courses and library. JWL's typical class size is about 20-25 students. The term lasts for about 8-10 weeks. Typically, students work individually on the online material and meet weekly or bi-weekly to discuss with peers and with a learning facilitator in a local community learning center (CLC). Students interact asynchronously with global faculty, online facilitators and peers in a global classroom. Occasionally, faculty can hold Zoom sessions. Faculty dedicate about 7-10 hours a week for one course. JWL requires its faculty to have a master's degree from an accredited university (a minimum requirement).

This study was limited to researching the JWL's operations in its Middle Eastern and African sites located in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, and Malawi. These countries in the Middle East and Eastern African regions are known for hosting large refugee populations which are a focus of this study. I provide a brief description of operations in each country and reasons for choosing these sites for this study.

### ***Jordan***

It is one of the oldest JWL's operating centers (third JWL's operating center opened in 2012 in Amman). The ethnic composition of its urban refugee student body is

very diverse: refugees from Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. Jordan hosts one of the largest population of refugees, and, specifically, Syrian refugees, who represent the largest refugee community living outside of Syria.

### ***Iraq***

JWL has one of its fastest growing sites in Erbil, Iraq. It was opened in 2016 but it already serves one of the largest JWL's student body (more than a thousand students) represented mainly by Syrians, Yezidis, and Iraqi Christians. A thriving educational project in the geographic region characterized by the widespread violence and hosting diverse urban refugee community.

### ***Kenya***

The very first JWL's learning center was opened in Kukuma refugee camp, Kenya in 2010. It is one of the largest and oldest refugee camps in the country (has 150,000 residents and operating since 1992) hosting refugees from Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan. It is located in the Northern part of Kenya, near the South Sudanese and Ugandan border. This JWL's site has one of the largest student bodies (about 800 students) and lots of graduates (195 students graduated by 2020).

### ***Malawi***

One of the oldest JWL's projects (its second center) was opened in 2010 at Dzaleka refugee camp located in Malawi. Dzaleka refugee camp is operating since 1995 and hosting about 30,000 residents mainly from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is located 40 kilometers outside the Malawian capital city Lilongwe. About 500 refugee students are currently enrolled in JWL's education

programs at the camp. There is a large number of refugee students who completed their studies at this site.

### **Participants**

Interviews were conducted with JWL's administration and staff, including key senior administration, online faculty, onsite facilitators, online and local support staff members. Access to education is a complex phenomenon and several different departments of this education provider organization contribute to understanding the different aspects of the process that refugee youth go through to access education. The senior administration and local support staff members, for example, helped to provide important information on the details of the organization's operations on the ground, the specifics of the JWL's online educational model, and their challenges on operating in certain contexts. Online faculty were able to provide insights into the learning process and curricula. They also offered their firsthand observations of benefits and challenges this distance education model represents for educators as well as for the refugee youth. IT staff representative helped to explain the nuances of how technology has been developing over time to better address the challenges specific for the refugee student condition and achieving the intended goals of the organization in supporting the learning process of refugee students.

Considering the vulnerable status of refugees residing in the contexts of this research study I have chosen not to interview refugee students and their family members. For example, one of the locations this study is focusing on is Iraq. US government's current advise for US citizens is not to travel to Iraq due to the risks of violence, terrorism, kidnapping, and civil unrest. From one of my conversations with JWL's online

facilitator (Interview #7) I learned that JWL tries to safeguard disclosing personal information of its refugee students by limiting their communication with the international faculty and staff to its LMS platform and discouraging sharing personal contact information. For the same security reasons, I had a limited temporary access only to 3 online courses integrated in to the organization's LMS. What I have also noticed while observing these courses is that most of the students and onsite facilitators avoided uploading their profile pictures to the platform. I am also not sure if they used their real names there.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Collecting Qualitative Data**

Field, qualitative, and ethnographic researchers normally gather data via interviewing, the collection of relevant documents, and/or observation. All three of these data sources were used in this study.

### ***Interviews***

Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews, each lasting about an hour, were conducted online with the participants described above. Fourteen online synchronous interviews, each lasting for about an hour, were conducted using Zoom, a software preferred by each interviewee. Appendix A provides the interview questionnaires for each group of participants described in the previous section. The interviews were performed with representatives of JWL's administration and staff, including senior administration, online faculty, online and onsite facilitators, and country coordinators.

I aspired to perform interviews that are “deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful for the individual or community being researched” (Tuck & Yang 2014, p. 223). I did not interview refugee youth and their parents due to their vulnerable status and security issues that had potential to arise in the process. All data collected was coded with a number or pseudonym. Interviewees’ real names were not used. Any information provided and/or identifying records remained confidential.

### *Document Analysis*

The organization’s website was researched in order to find information related to questions of access, details of its distance educational model, information about the organization’s operations and academic programs.

The resources database of JWL was researched to collect documentation about such factors as achievement of academic outcomes (e.g., students’ grades; enrollment numbers, graduation rates, retention data, withdrawal rates stratified by demographic data and other relevant categories). Learning process administration documents in the form of reports, assessments, surveys, and other internal records were reviewed. Archival records of JWL generated over twelve years provided insights into the effectiveness (or any limitations) in using a distance educational model for educating the refugee youth.

JWL’s internal research documents reviewed during this study were developed by organization’s research team headed by its global research director who holds Ph.D. in Communication Sciences from the Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI). She also currently serves as an associate professor at Bournemouth University. Her experience includes working in various international organizations and contexts, including research projects in Kenya, South Africa, Brazil and Mozambique. The organization’s internal

research documents are developed with participation of its current students and graduates that serve in the role of research assistants to perform interviews and participate in research design activities. A several documents used in this study were developed by the Jigsaw Consult firm, an external reviewer. The rest of the documentation is represented by financial reports, annual reports, documents describing organizational processes and polices, and program descriptions. All documents referenced in this study are listed in Appendix E.

### ***Observations***

After obtaining permission to access courses on JWL's online learning management platform, an observation of chosen online asynchronous educational courses that refugee students attend was conducted. I was able to observe the Learning Management System (LMS) developed by JWL called Humanitarian eLearning Platform (HeLP) that provides online learning to the refugee students. Also, I was able to observe 3 online courses that were conducted by JWL at that time where refugee students participated. I have been granted access to HeLP as a faculty and was able to login to the LMS using the username and password provided by the organization.

JWL has provided me with a temporary access to its 3 online courses that refugee students attend. The organization does not encourage sharing personal information and contacts of refugee students due to their vulnerable status. The communication between international faculty and staff is limited to its LMS platform which has built in discussion space and messaging system. The observation of JWL's LMS and online courses represent about 0.03% of the collected field data. They did not provide substantial insights but served a triangulation purpose validating the data obtained during interviews

and document analysis. The guidelines used for observation are provided in the Appendix B.

### **Collecting Quantitative Data**

Although much of the data gathered during the study was qualitative data, I was able to access some quantitative data collected by JWL. This data included JWL's learning process assessment documentation such as, students' grades; enrollment, graduation, retention and withdrawal rate reports; certain demographic data; financial indicators, including cost of education, scholarship opportunities, and operations expenditures. Descriptive quantitative data analysis was performed to enrich the qualitative findings by providing different, but especially relevant information to contribute to interpreting research findings.

### **Data Coding and Analysis Process**

Coding was the method used to analyze the qualitative data gathered during field interviews, observations, and document analysis (Neuman, 2011; Saldana, 2016). A significant amount of the field data consisting of about 1200 pages of subscribed texts of interviews with administration and staff, observations of the learning management system, and organizational documents were reviewed and coded. For the coding and analysis process I adapted the coding approach described by Saldana (2021) who cites Creswell and Poth (2018) to "begin with a shorter list of five or six that begins the process of 'lean coding.' This expands to no more than 25–30 categories that then combined into five or six major themes" (p. 216). Merriam & Tisdell (2016) also refer to this approach in their book on qualitative research by citing Creswell (2013) who notes that "in his research he prefers to work with 25 to 30 categories early in data analysis,



then strives ‘to reduce and combine them into the five or six themes that I will use in the end to write my narrative.’” (p. 214).

During the first coding cycle the main concepts identified in the research questions were used to create six provisional codes: 1) JWL’s online educational model; 2) the challenges JWL faces in delivering online education to refugee students residing in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi; 3) the barriers or challenges to higher education that JWL’s distance educational model was able to eliminate for the refugee population; 4) how, in general, JWL supports refugees and their access to higher education; 5) the advantages and implications of JWL’s distance educational model in affecting access to higher education for refugees; and 6) the disadvantages or limitations of JWL’s educational model. The data collected under each provisional code went through the second cycle of coding during which the categories emerged inductively. After grouping the relevant emerged categories, the four major themes emerged. Appendix C provides the details of the data coding and analysis process that produced the four major findings of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA FINDINGS

As described in Chapter 1, refugee enrollment in higher education is almost non-existent. There are many reasons for low enrollment. In interviews with JWL country coordinators and local learning center facilitators, they told stories of the challenging living conditions of its refugee students. One country academic coordinator noted that “almost no one of our students can afford to not work. It's just like luxury to not work, so many of them work” (Country Coordinator #14). Another country’s academic manager characterized the life of their refugee students in the following terms: “Life in the camp can be, let's say unpredictable...Food and shelter are things that you worry about; they face so many day-to-day challenges” (Academic Manager #4). There are instances when a refugee student “becomes the main provider for their household” (Academic Manager #4) which, of course, affects their ability to contribute to the learning process.

“You need to first have some safety, you know, so personally I think that is the biggest challenge,” shared one of the onsite academic managers during our conversation. She noted that managing stress arising from the hardships of the refugee life often prevents refugee students from engaging in the learning process productively: “To be able to do your schoolwork, you need to have some level of peace” (Academic Manager #4).

Interviews with JWL administration, faculty, country managers, and on-site facilitators generated many comments on the absence or very limited number of opportunities refugees have to access higher education in locations covered in this study (Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi). One of JWL’s administrators noted that “they have no

status, which would allow them to go to the public school, for example, in Kenya or Malawi or Iraq or Jordan. It means there is no other opportunity [for access]” (Administrator #5). The organization’s faculty member also believes that refugee students do not have many alternatives for higher education in general: “I don’t think that they would have access to education outside of JWL” (Faculty #9). In spite of efforts of local and international NGOs to increase the number of higher education opportunities for refugees, the demand for the existing options is much higher than supply. During a conversation with one of JWL’s country academic coordinators she shared: “Just today I had a conversation with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), they, I think, they had over 900 applications for their DAFI [Deutsche Akademische Fluchtlinginitiative Albert Einstein] scholarship, and I think they could accept a hundred. So, there are other opportunities, but they are even more limited” (Director #14).

Sometimes local public universities offer scholarships for refugees; but the majority of them are left behind:

I was once in, in Ethiopia and there were students who actually made it because the state had a program of sponsorships, 100% sponsorships, including everything, from accommodation to tuition, but there were a few numbers only... So, there, there are, for some who are lucky, and there are sometimes scholarship programs in the camps too, but it's not the big numbers. Administrator #5)

In this chapter, I describe how JWL provides access to higher education for refugee students. This chapter consists of an analysis of about 1200 pages of texts of interviews, observations of the learning management system and their three online

courses, and organizational documents. Six provisional codes were created to review the field data during the first cycle of coding and 47 categories emerged during the second cycle of coding that later were combined into the following four themes: the overall philosophy of JWL and its focus on where and why JWL places its programming, the structural supports it offers, the culture of support it provides, and the disadvantages and advantages of JWL educational model.

I begin with a discussion of the organization's philosophy and founding principles that are at the heart of JWL's educational programs. Then the focus shifts to a description of the various structures the organization has put in place to support refugees' access to higher education. I will also share an explanation of the culture and the level of support offered within the organization's community that shapes relationships between JWL's staff and students. Finally, I conclude by sharing my findings on JWL's online educational model's disadvantages and advantages.

### **The JWL Philosophy: Mission and Vision**

Only 63% out of all available primary school age refugee children are enrolled in primary school. When it comes to secondary school statistics the number of refugees participating in education falls to 24%. Only 3% of refugees are enrolled in higher education (UNHCR, 2019a). JWL facilitates access of refugees to higher education by operating in contexts where higher education is limited or not accessible for refugees. The facilitation of refugees' access to higher education has been built into JWL's online educational model. Their philosophy and theory of action is stated in their mission and vision statement.

From the very beginning, JWL’s education model was designed with a goal of providing refugees and other marginalized communities with access to higher education. There are a number of aspects of the online educational model that support JWL’s mission that supports access to higher education. For example, JWL states it will:

Provide equitable high-quality tertiary learning to people and communities at the margins of society – be it through poverty, location, lack of opportunity, conflict or forced displacement – so all can contribute their knowledge and voices to the global community of learners and together, foster hope to create a more peaceful and humane world (Document #29).

JWL’s vision statement also indicates the focus of their work. JWL envisions “learning together to transform the world.” (Document #29). The philosophy behind JWL’s inception and its approach to higher education was well expressed during an interview with one of their administrators who said, “the future for people who are excluded from tertiary education might not be in buildings, but in online offers and in online studies...that is a little bit where we are... It’s much easier to bring the university to the people where they live... even if it is a refugee camp” (Administrator #5).

Where JWL places its programming is a philosophically driven set of decisions. JWL chooses to serve in the least developed regions of the world. This is explained in their 2018 Annual Report:

The magis<sup>2</sup> incorporated in our identity inspires us to contribute to doing more... we have been sent to those places that are not easy to reach, and which others

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<sup>2</sup> Magis (pronounced “màh-gis”) is a Latin word that means “more” or “greater.” It is related to ad majorem Dei gloriam, a Latin phrase meaning “for the greater glory of God,” the motto of the Society of Jesus. Magis refers to the philosophy of doing more for Christ, and therefore doing more for others.

have avoided. The university education provided by the Society of Jesus seeks to be open to all and has been particularly called upon to reach out to the marginalised or impoverished, to refugees and to those who have been displaced due to the unfair social relations that prevail in today's world. The new historical era of knowledge has given us the educational means to reach remote or socially marginalised locations.” (Document #4)

JWL establishes its learning centers “in less developed regions throughout the world” where “foreign operations are subject to risks inherent in operating under different legal systems and various political and economic environments.” According to the JWL's 2019 Financial Report (Document #8), operations in those contexts can be affected by “changes in existing tax laws, possible limitations on foreign investment and income repatriation, government price or foreign exchange controls, and restrictions on currency exchange” which makes those environments a challenging place to run an institution (Document #8).

One of JWL's first programs was opened in Aleppo, Syria. When they had to close their programming in Spring of 2012 as the war reached Aleppo, they moved the center to Amman, Jordan. This country had not been marked by conflict or violence at that point. However, they found that Amman was home to one of the largest refugee communities in the world and, it simply did not have enough resources to accommodate all the refugee youth in its educational system (Document #1). And thus, although it was not a war-torn country, they felt JWL programming was needed.

“We have been sent to those places, which others have avoided” is a quote from the organization's 2018 Annual Report that captures the essence of the organization's

philosophy—go where they are needed the most to the places with a little or no higher education presence to provide individuals with an opportunity to advance their education. This non-profit organization aims to bring higher education to the members of the most vulnerable sections of society, in particular refugees. It is represented by three non-profit organizations registered in the USA, Germany and Switzerland. JWL focuses on the geographic areas and countries with a low-level Human Development Index (HDI), and it is committed to advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many JWL centers are located in countries with large refugee populations, including Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi. Although JWL is open to all people who belong to the least served communities, whether they are refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), or local citizens, most of JWL's students from Jordan, Iraq, Kenya and Malawi, the contexts that are covered in this study, are refugees. JWL brings online blended academic, professional, and language programs to the areas with large refugee populations through its partnerships with Jesuit Universities and other like-minded institutions of higher education, Jesuit Provinces, international and local NGOs, technological organizations, and other partners from around the globe.

When individuals do not have access to higher education, JWL goes in.

According to the words of one of JWL's administrator:

There's no way for, for them to, to go to the university in Iraq [for example]. It's special. If they know Arabic and they're living in Kurdistan, the, the university is in Kurdish, not in Arabic. Ah, so there's already a language problem. And then, it's always a question. Can they access the university? Is a school degree from their home country recognized; that is another problem. Then some of the

universities have quota for how many, non-nationals they accept and then comes the whole profession of school fees... so there are certain limits and thresholds they cannot make” (Administrator #5).

These conditions and set of circumstances prompted JWL to go to the “places, which others have avoided” in order to address the overwhelming low rates of postsecondary school completion (Document #4).

JWL has been operating in multiple contexts worldwide and, although its student body is not limited to refugees only, refugees represent the largest number of its students. From the very beginning JWL’s strategic choice was to target the communities that represent the most vulnerable sections of society. In its 2019 Annual Report JWL emphasized that:

JWL walks with socially and geographically marginalized communities across the globe, including conflict-affected communities and forcibly displaced persons; people deprived of their freedom and dignity; and women, with a focus on regions/countries with low levels of human development (according to the Human Development Index). (Document #3)

This is especially true when it comes to JWL’s targeted outreach to countries like Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, and Malawi, countries that host a significant number of refugees. The majority of JWL students in those locations have a refugee background. Many Community Learning Centers (CLCs) [local learning centers opened to support students in place of their residence; their detailed description and role they play in the educational process will be covered later in this chapter] in those locations are operating within the refugee camps (Iraq, Kenya, Malawi). Whether it is a refugee camp or an urban setting



where refugees reside, higher education remains out of reach for most of them due to multiple factors, including a country's legal frameworks, local universities' location and requirements, cost of the local higher education, and many other reasons.

In 2010 when JWL opened its first three piloted learning centers in Kenya, Malawi, and Syria, the organization was able to enroll only a few students and offer only the Diploma in Liberal Studies as its highest-level educational offering. Over time, the number of students in JWL's academic programs rose from 350 in 2017 to 484 in 2018 (Document #4). There was also a great demand for JWL's Global English Language program, as indicated in the program's growth from 1500 to 2500 students and the addition of 22 new CLCs in 2018, according to JWL's 2018 Annual Report (Document #4). Table 3 shows how JWL has increased the number of courses offered to its students between 2017 and 2019.

**Table 3**

*Number of Courses Delivered by JWL Globally*

Year	Number of courses delivered
2017	5403
2018	10286
2019	10777

*Note.* JWL, 2020, Annual Report 2019

According to the organization's 2020 Annual Report, by 2020 JWL's reach had extended to 19 countries and 45 locations globally (Document #2). That same year, 4143 students were enrolled in JWL's programs (Document #2).

In the next section, I will describe in detail the structural aspects of JWL's online educational model that support refugees in their pursuit of higher education.

### **The Structure of JWL's Online Educational Model**

#### **Curricular Decisions**

JWL's curricular decisions are, in part, philosophically driven. JWL pedagogical approach draws on the almost 500-years-old principles of Jesuit education. JWL's online blended educational model uses the Ignatian pedagogical approach that puts emphasis on caring for the whole person by providing direction and walking alongside the student during the whole educational process (and even beyond!). This caring approach has been achieved through so called online "global classrooms" where students interact with the international faculty and fellow students from other countries and at the Community Learning Centers (CLCs) where onsite facilitators and local group of students form a learning community within the context of students' country of residence. Supported by both, global and local networks, the students are busy not only with acquiring intellectual knowledge and skills individually but also are placed in an environment intended to trigger the lasting transformation within their lives and the lives of their communities.

JWL believes that Ignatian pedagogy-based action-oriented learning "promotes critical thinking, social awareness and a positive view of self and others" (Document #13) that results in a holistic approach to the learning process. The way the Ignatian approach engages students increases their chances to sustain the learning process and achieve desired outcomes. One of JWL's administrators noted that:

We really try to bind it back to the Jesuit spirituality so that we are driven from a certain view of the human person on the way of how we should educate human

persons and that all these feeds into a pedagogical model, which then builds up in an online model... blended online learning, and then, and that produces, actually impacts an outcome we are looking for. (Administrator #5)

JWL's online courses are structured around five components—context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation—that promote action-oriented learning. The organization also provides a unique online learning path to help refugees continue to access more and more knowledge. Early on, JWL realized that the refugee student's journey toward higher education will not be the same as it is for average non-refugee youth of university age, since the refugee condition is complicated by many factors, including the lack of language utilized for instruction, lost years of schooling, less-than-ideal living circumstances, and many other factors, as well. To make sure that refugees and other marginalized students are capable of, at first, starting and then completing their challenging journey to higher education, JWL has developed a comprehensive learning plan called a “stackable learning path.”

An example of the stackable learning path strategy involves offering English classes at the start of programs. A number of academic studies indicate language as a major barrier for refugees to enter the higher education (Unutalmaz, 2018; Ayik, 2019; Gürsoy & Ertaşoğlu, 2019). Since all JWL programs are offered in English (except for one program recently offered in Arabic), the stackable learning path begins by offering the Global English Learning (GEL) program that uses the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) approach to offer quality English language courses at six levels beginning from A1 (Starter) to C1 (Advanced). The Cambridge English Placement test is provided at the beginning of the program and the Cambridge

Linguaskill test at the end. After completing the course, students receive Cambridge Linguaskill and JWL certificates. This test is free, as well as are all educational programs offered by JWL to refugees.

The “stackable” arrangement of classes allows students to progress through the system with some flexibility. Upon achieving the B1 level of English, the refugee is eligible to enter JWL’s professional certificate program and at the same time continue working on improving her/his language skills. Once the B2 level of English is achieved, considering that a refugee has a proof of high school completion, she/he can pursue first, the yearlong Certificate in Liberal Studies, and, if desired, continue with the Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development degree for an additional 3 years. The refugee students can control their workload all throughout the learning path and can either enter or exit the learning path at a number of points in their journey to higher education depending on life circumstances. Because this stackable path allows learners to leave and re-enter at any point of their learning journey, the refugee students can accumulate skills gradually by building capacity to continue their academic journey wherever their circumstances allow them. For example, after completing GEL courses the refugee can take the GEL Teacher Certificate (that JWL provides along with access to the Digital English Unlimited resources) and depending on circumstances has an option to exit the learning path. With the recently gained qualifications, the refugee can find a work of an English teacher in the refugee camp or a translator at an NGO.

In case a refugee student decides to continue studying with the recently achieved B1 level of English, she/he has a choice of several professional certificate programs that are usually six months long and provide specializations relevant to the refugee students’

contexts that often serve as professional development opportunities and their first experience in the world of tertiary education. For those who want to continue their academic pursuits after meeting the entrance requirement of English for the Certificate in Liberal Studies program, the road is open to JWL’s flagship degree program, the Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development, and number of other opportunities, including pursuing degrees at a number of other universities JWL has partnerships with. As a result, “Through a learning pathway that includes quality language, professional and academic courses with transferable credits and degrees, youths are empowered to put what they have learned into action to serve their communities – even open their own learning centres – creating a more hope-filled future for themselves and others” (Document #3).

Table 4 provides the list of different JWL’s (Annual Report, 2020) programs that represent different stages of the “stackable path.”

**Table 4**

*JWL’s Programs in 2020*

Program	Number of students
Global English Language	2051
eEducation Certificate	665
Learning Facilitator Certificate	211
Peace Leader Certificate	180
Sustainable Environment Certificate	52
Youth Sports Facilitator Certificate	279
English Teacher Training Certificate	50
Teaching English Online Certificate	20
Diploma in Liberal Studies	402
Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development	70
Bachelor of Arts in Management	152

Bachelor of Science in Leadership	11
Total	4143

*Note.* JWL, 2020, Annual Report 2020

For students who have successfully completed the first stage of their stackable path by achieving the B2 level of English language, the door is open to enroll in the yearlong Certificate in Liberal Studies that serves as another significant step in their learning journey toward acquiring the highest degree offered by JWL – the Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development.

Improving curriculum to respond to the needs of refugee students has also always been a constant priority for JWL. The organization has been consistently updating its Learning Management System/Student Information System (LMS/SIS) called HeLP to better fit the situation on the ground. The feedback they have received from its students, online and onsite facilitators, and faculty is a source of innovation of its online educational model. Over time, the model has been adjusted to operate offline as well as online at the CLCs to address unstable internet connection and electricity shortages at some of its locations. The online learning space has been moving toward ease of use and increase in interaction. Also, the uploading speed of assignments has been improved.

The organization also continues to seek opportunities to offer advanced academic degrees to the refugees and its graduates by establishing new partnerships with universities around the globe. Initially, the highest degree level that JWL was able to offer was the Diploma in Liberal Studies that did not lead to a degree but in 2020 the organization was able to replace the 3-year Diploma with the yearlong Certificate in

Liberal Studies. After an additional 3 years of studies, students can receive a Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development degree.

### **JWL's Flagship Academic Program**

The Diploma in Liberal Studies, JWL's first academic program, was offered between 2010 and 2021 mainly to refugees. With the help of JWL's field partner, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the three first sites that were chosen to pilot the program were refugee camps Kukuma in Kenya and Dzaleka in Malawi, along with the urban site in Aleppo, Syria, which hosted refugees from Iraq. Initially the program was offered to a small number of refugee students but, over time, admission expanded to hundreds of students residing in eight countries and thirteen locations. The refugee students enrolled in JWL's Diploma in Liberal Studies program do not have other viable options to receive higher education in their contexts of residence. Table 5 provides the number of students enrolled in the Diploma in Liberal Studies program in 2011–2019 years. This information is taken from the JWL's Report on 10 years of the Online Diploma in Liberal Studies for Refugees and Marginalized communities (2020).

**Table 5**

*Number of Students by Country Enrolled in the Diploma in Liberal Studies, 2011–2019*

Year	Jordan	Iraq	Kenya	Malawi
2011			50	41
2012	11		22	24
2014	24		31	37
2015	32		32	34
2016	24		34	31
2017	2	33	32	33
2018	19	29	56	59
2019	37	29	11	

*Note.* JWL, 2020, Report on 10 years of the Online Diploma in Liberal Studies for Refugees and Marginalized communities

The Diploma in Liberal Studies, as JWL's flagship program, consisted of 15 accredited transferable courses equivalent to 3 US credits each. During the 8 weeks of each course, students worked individually online but once a week had meetings with other local students at the Community Learning Centers (CLCs) guided by an onsite facilitator. At CLCs, students discuss the learning material, ask questions, receive guidance, work on projects together, and are provided with access to technology and the internet. The program's average graduation rate from this program was about 60%.

It seemed that the demand for Diploma in Liberal Studies was less of an interest in the areas that had alternative higher education opportunities but for students coming from the Kukuma, Kenya and Dzaleka, Malawi refugee camps, enrolling in the Diploma in Liberal Studies was an important step in advancing to higher education. JWL's partner organization, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), has been offering the primary and secondary education in those locations for about two decades, so the Diploma in Liberal Studies served as natural extension of their education. A number of graduates of the Diploma in Liberal Studies program were able to receive scholarships from JWL's partner institutions to continue working toward their bachelor's degrees. Table 6 provides data on the length of time required for students in different locations to complete the Diploma in Liberal Studies and taken from the JWL Report on 10 years of the Online Diploma in Liberal Studies for Refugees and Marginalized communities (2020).



**Table 6**

*Time Required for Students by Country to Complete the Diploma in Liberal Studies, 2011–2019*

Range	Iraq	Jordan	Kenya	Malawi
Min	1.5 years	2.7 years	1.3 years	1.3 years
Max	3 years	5 years	7.6 years	5 years
Average	2.2 years	2.2 years	2.7 years	2.7 years

*Note.* JWL, 2020, Report on 10 years of the Online Diploma in Liberal Studies for Refugees and Marginalized communities

Spending three years working on the Diploma in Liberal Studies without achieving a degree presented a challenge, particularly for refugee students, so JWL replaced the program in 2021 with the Certificate in Liberal Studies program. This certificate serves as a foundation for acquiring a Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development. It is provided by JWL in partnership with Xavier University Bhubaneswar (XUB, India). The Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development begins with a foundational Certificate in Liberal Studies consisting of 10 courses (30 credits) that is expected to take about one year to complete. Upon meeting the condition of completion of the Certificate within one year and with a GPA of 7 out of 10, the graduates are automatically admitted to the Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development program, which consists of another 30 courses, two internships and one final project. So, the total number of the program's courses is 40 (129.75 credits).

Students are admitted to the program twice a year, in March and September. The anticipated length of the program is four years, including one year devoted to completion of the Certificate in Liberal Studies. Most of the courses are delivered by Xavier

University (Bhubaneswar, India), with 5 courses provided by the Newman Institute (Sweden), and 3 courses by Hekima College (Kenya). The learning process consists of studying the relevant literature, watching videos, quizzes, case-studies, discussions, fieldwork. The details of the Certificate in Liberal Studies program are provided in Appendix D.

During an interview, one of the administrators of JWL commented on the Bachelor's in Sustainable Development program:

The bachelors in sustainable development... it's pretty new... the first cohort is halfway through it... very exciting courses, sustainable development goals... you will never find it in, in that grouping together, really that focus... education, emergencies, sustainability, cooking, tailor technologies, water and waste management, sustainable agriculture. So, you know, so much about so many fields, [they gain] social analysis skills. I like that a lot. (Administrator #5)

### **Partnerships**

The Sustainable Development program, as well as other JWL programs, are offered through partnerships with other universities, international and local NGOs, technological organizations, and others. This is another way in which JWL's structures provided support for refugee access. Each partnership brings unique experience, skills, strengths, and resources to address the challenging task of delivering higher education to the places where it is limited or not existing. JWL's 2019 Annual Report communicates the words of Dr. Christian Rutishauser, the President of JWL, who is extremely grateful to JWL partner organizations. He expresses his appreciation to "all universities, partner organisations, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Jesuit Provinces and foundations who

provide JWL with knowledge, teaching, financial and operational support” (Document #3). JWL has “a lot of different partners for different things” and they contribute to JWL’s ability to serve refugees (Administrator #2).

JWL’s global network of partnerships is able to achieve its mission of delivering higher education to those who have no opportunity to access it. In 2020 the organization has been facilitating access to accredited transferrable courses with the help of about 20 universities that were running professional and academic courses on JWL’s online learning platform. The refugee students, upon completion of the courses or programs, were able to receive their certificates with accredited transferable credits. In one of its latest developments, “Xavier University in Bhubaneswar, India signed the agreement on the development and delivery of a Bachelor program in Sustainable Development which is starting in January 2020” (Onsite Facilitator #6). Also, there are other universities that simply outsource their faculty to teach JWL courses, support its admission process, and perform research work in the field. Table 7 provides the list of JWL’s university partners that deliver professional and academic programs.

**Table 7**

*JWL’s Partnerships in 2020*

Organization	Area of partnership with JWL
Regis University (Denver, USA)	Diploma Liberal Studies
Creighton University (Omaha, USA)	Bachelor of Science Leadership & Global English Language Teacher Certificate
Hekima University College (Nairobi, Kenya)	for Peace Leader Certificate
Loyola University (Kinshasa, DRC)	Global English Language program,
St. Joseph University (Bangalore, India)	Creative Writing and Design Certificate & eCommerce Certificate

Loyola University (Andalusia, Spain)	Training for Linguaskill Online Tests
Newman Institute (Uppsala, Sweden)	Sustainable Environment Certificate
Xavier University (Bhubaneswar, India)	Certificate in Liberal Studies & Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development
Metropolitan State University (Denver, USA)	Youth Sports Facilitator Certificate in English
Yarmouk University (Irbid, Jordan)	Global English Language Program
Southern New Hampshire University (Manchester, USA)	Associate of Arts Management & Bachelor of Arts Management
Catholic University Eichstaett-Ingolstadt (Eichstaett and Ingolstadt, Germany)	Learning Facilitator Certificate & Youth Sports Facilitator in Arabic
School of Tourism and Hospitality Management Sant Ignasi (Barcelona, Spain)	Ecotourism Certificate
Munich School of Philosophy (Munich, Germany)	Research Peace Leader
Georgetown University (Washington D.C., USA)	JWL USA office space, IT services, LMS, SIS, library
Loyola College (Chennai, India)	IT & Registrar office space

*Note.* JWL, 2020, Annual Report 2020

JWL also has operational partners in the field, including the United Nations Higher Commission Refugee (UNHCR), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), New Horizon - Human Welfare and Development Organization, ZAIDI, Students of Loyola, Middle East Jesuit Province, Jesuits Eastern Africa, Jesuits West Africa, and others. JWL shares its operational costs with these partners. A number of JWL's partner organizations on the ground are already connected to and have experience serving the refugee populations. They support JWL's operations in different countries by coordinating the onsite portion of the learning process. They help with recruitment, admissions, operating CLCs, and supporting students.

JWL's 2021 annual report notes that in 2020 their personnel consisted of 417 people, including 23 core staff, 48 local partner field staff, 67 field staff, 49 local English teachers, and 130 online professors (Document #2). JWL's core staff is located in US, Europe and India and responsible for providing administration, academic management,

human resources, operational, IT and communication support. Most of JWL's faculty are located in US and Europe but there are those who live in other parts of the world. JWL's work at a number of CLCs is currently supported by its alumni serving in roles of onsite facilitators for professional and academic programs. They take care of and support its local offices and technology, organize networks for communication and support of students, and seek for engaging with other stakeholder organizations.

JWL is achieving its mission of delivering higher education to the most vulnerable sections of society, not alone, but with the help of a large network of partners. In its Annual Report 2019, the organization emphasized the importance of continuing development of strategic collaborations with other organizations. They stated:

We also need to collaborate with like-minded people and organizations. Specifically, in Geneva, collaboration with the UN and other partners of the international community and networking are key for our mission. To learn together and find new solutions and models to the challenges of humanity and the environment, the conversion of minds, hearts and the will are needed. (Document #3).

### **Online Learning Management System (LMS)**

JWL realizes that effective technology is another key structure that helps them successfully connect refugee students with learning opportunities. The organization continues to improve its Learning Management System (LMS) platform in response to previous challenges experienced by its students. Before developing its own LMS called HeLP (Humanitarian eLearning Platform), JWL used Blackboard and later Canvas donated by Georgetown University. But over time it became evident that the standard

LMS used in Western universities did not fully respond to the needs of its students. With the help of technological experts and organizations, JWL's LMS was developed to take into account the specific contextual conditions in which the majority of its students reside. Currently it partners with Fujitsu Ltd., Seitwerk GmbH, and AfB Social and Green IT organizations to help to continue to develop curricula and improve its LMS platform.

JWL's LMS is innovative, able to bring higher education to low resource contexts where the majority of the world refugees reside. JWL has created an educational technological structure ranging from its LMS/Student Information System (SIS) called Humanitarian eLearning Platform (HeLP) to the IT equipment and devices provided to the refugee students in its CLCs. JWL's creative technological approach to learning addresses the educational barriers specific to the refugee condition, that is, their lack of higher education opportunities and lack of learning and economic resources.

Initially, JWL simply used the online educational platforms offered by its partner universities, Blackboard and later Canvas, to deliver online courses but over time JWL has developed its own learning platform. The challenge with using the learning platforms provided by other universities was that they didn't work in the offline mode and that the staff working at CLCs were not able to enter the specific information pertaining to each location to the standard Learning Management Systems (LMSs) provided by the partner universities. JWL began looking for a way to provide students with access to the LMS platform when the internet connection was not stable or available.

One of JWL's staff members coordinating the work of JWL in the areas with large refugee populations shared their insights on the organization's educational leaning model and the development of their own LMS:

We developed our own learning platform or learning management system with a partner company in Germany . . . because we realized . . . in the last years that most of the learning management systems that are available are not really made for crisis environments, like basically, because you need constant internet connection, which is unrealistic for many of the places we work in. So, we have our own learning platform where the courses are made available to the students. And students can also download the study material for, for the whole course, but like, even just like week by week if they want... and then, also study it when they're offline, which I think is like the biggest advantage of our learning platform. (Director #14)

The latest revision of HeLP included changing grading function and the way the information is organized. JWL is continually observing and redesigning its LMS to operate in different contexts and is working on upgrading the platform and curricula to better accommodate to the needs and conditions of its students. JWL has also been in collaboration with three technology organizations, Fujitsu Ltd., Seitwerk GmbH, and AfB Social and Green IT. In 2020 JWL designed 17 new online courses and revised five current online courses that are offered through its LMS.

Interviews with JWL staff reveal that in spite of the harsh living conditions of refugee communities, most refugees nowadays own a smartphone or, at least, can have temporary access to a mobile device. Considering the wide accessibility of mobile

devices for refugee students, JWL is adjusting its online educational model to better facilitate the learning process that can be used on a smartphone. As one JWL's administrator explains: "the big majority has access to a phone, or they have a phone in the family, or they can borrow from a friend. So, most of them have access" (Administrator #5). Mobile phones and the internet are opening the opportunity to learn to millions of people that otherwise would not have access to information and knowledge.

In its 2018 Annual Report JWL notes that "mobile learning is enhancing e-learning, independent from permanent online connection. Mobile learning functions on- and offline allowing the students to learn anytime/anywhere on a smartphone, tablet or notebook . . . what online learning could not achieve in every context, mobile learning can and reaches the most marginalised communities" (Document #4). JWL developed an app that allows the learning resources to be uploaded from the learning platform to the student's smartphone:

Through our app... mobile app, our own, you know, we call it as a computer in the corner that is standalone, independent, server. So, one computer that will work as a local server... it is enough to connect to that computer that is laptop with ethernet... and that will work as a, that computer will work as a Wi-Fi to the other gadgets and that computer has only our mobile app and the contents. So, students can connect to that computer that is Wi-Fi... then once they get connected, they can download the material in their own gadgets, and they can study the material. They don't need any internet. (Academic Manager #3.)

The mobile data bundles were also introduced in some of JWL's CLCs who were experiencing internet connection problems. Some students are now able to connect to the



internet via the USB type of device (called USB stick) and some CLCs buy data bundles and distribute them among students.

JWL's online blended educational model consists of global and local components of the learning process. JWL's 2018 Annual Report notes that "through this online/offline learning platform, students are enabled to interact with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, bridging the geographical divide to achieve worldwide learning" (Document #4). Students are able to access online courses using computers, laptops, smartphones and other similar devices and get connected to learning resources, international faculty, online tutors, other students, discussion space and form a global community of learners. These "global classrooms" usually consist of about 20-25 students representing different countries and facilitate an exchange of ideas by bringing together people from different parts of the world and different cultures. One of the country coordinators of JWL provided the following description of a JWL global classroom. He said there are: "I think, around 25 students, in one global classroom and they are also mixed from all around the world. I don't know, it can be that we have, like, I don't know, five students from Kenya, three from Iraq, four from Afghanistan, few from Sri Lanka, Myanmar" (Director #14).

All learning resources are provided to JWL students via its LMS platform. They don't need to purchase any resources on their own. A team of three specialists help faculty, CLCs' staff, and students with technical support related to the LMS. The refugee students attend within a group of local students and receive guidance from an onsite facilitator.

Before each course begins, JWL educators prepare and upload the readings, study materials, and assignments for all eight weeks of studies to the LMS. Students work by themselves on each week's materials and once or twice a week go to their local CLC and engage with onsite facilitators and local students. Faculty also prepare and upload videos to the LMS platform to explain complex concepts. For some programs, videos are uploaded weekly. Students have an opportunity to interact with international faculty by reaching out to them via the LMS platform as well. Some faculty organize Zoom meetings with students weekly to study, discuss challenges, receive guidance, perform exercises. JWL also offers online tutoring as an extracurricular activity with the help of online facilitators/tutors.

Another advantage of the LMS is that the refugee students also don't have to disclose their true identities while interacting with faculty and their peers across the globe. JWL ensures that the learning process protects their identities, due to the refugee students' vulnerable status. JWL does not encourage connecting outside of its LMS or disclosing and using personal phone numbers and emails.

Students usually take one or two courses per term. The main way for refugee students to connect with the international faculty and peers is via JWL's LMS that has a built-in messaging system and online discussion space. JWL's students mostly work in an asynchronous format but, depending on location and circumstances, other tools like WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, email, phone are sometimes used as well. The challenge with using the video-conferencing applications is the need for high-speed internet which can be a challenge in some locations. However, in some cases, if JWL's students have a computer and internet they do not need to come to the local CLC since they are allowed

to connect with an onsite facilitator at the center via a video-conference call. However, in most cases students are encouraged to meet in person at the CLCs once or twice a week, depending on the type of program they are enrolled in.

### **Community Learning Centers Facilitate Access**

In addition to their innovative technology structure, JWL provides an onsite teaching and learning arrangement, the Community Learning Center. Community Learning Centers (CLCs) provide the opportunity for refugee students to visit a local facility once or twice a week to discuss assignments, reflect on the learning process, ask questions and get encouragement. This structure plays an important role in maintaining a community of support and accountability and provides a place where refugee students can socialize and form friendships. During an interview with one of the country's JWL coordinators explained the benefits of having a local community center: "We want them to engage in a local community of learners... for many reasons... first of all, it's important to, to reflect and exchange maybe on this, international, global learning [process]." (Director #14). They provide students with technology, space for studies, learning resources, technical assistance, and other help. Although, several participants in my study noted that nowadays a good amount of people in the camp have a smartphone and use a prepaid card, those who do not own a smartphone, a tablet, or a laptop, need to come more to the Center to take advantage of the CLC's equipment and internet and participate in the learning process.

In the Dzaleka refugee camp (Malawi), JWL students are required to participate in onsite discussions once a week for the degree programs and twice a week for professional certificate programs. The CLC in the Dzaleka refugee camp is open from

7:30 am till 6 pm, seven days a week. The local staff from Iraq noted that they try to make community learning centers (CLCs) accessible: “They can study at 2:00 AM if they prefer” (Director #14). The CLCs keep the computer labs open in some places even on Sundays “so, they have access to come in whenever they have the time” (Academic Manager #4). JWL expects full-time participation from students of degree programs. Students from professional certificate courses, especially residing in the refugee camps, have more flexibility and often times take only one course in a semester to be able to accommodate studies into their work and family life. Although JWL encourages students in the academic degree programs to come to the CLCs, the organization still provides lots of flexibility for some students who have challenges with getting to the CLCs. Students may connect with the group meeting at the CLC via Zoom or other similar software from home.

During their face-to-face meetings of local groups of students, they share their progress in the program, have discussions guided by on-site facilitators, ask questions, and work on assignments. If no one can come to the center, they can do it fully online (this arrangement was used during the Covid-19 pandemic). The Zoom application needs a high-speed internet which can be a problematic in some locations, so, instead, classes can form a WhatsApp group that works with weaker internet. Sometimes faculty connects via Zoom and WhatsApp with a group of students in the CLC, although due to internet connectivity problems, videos sometimes need to be turned off.

JWL understands that learning cannot take place in isolation. During an interview with one of JWL’s country coordinators, she mentioned that:

Generally, learning is not just individual studying. I think learning is also, or like a very important part of learning is community. Like if, I think back to my... university studies, the most important part was always like standing together with your classmates after the lecture and just discussing what you just learned, you know? So that's the, that's the part where you ask yourself questions and, where you, yeah, I don't know, actually learn something." (Director #14)

### **Tuition Structures Support Access**

Another strategy employed by JWL to improve refugee access to higher education is to offer free tuition, JWL found that the most effective way of providing access has been to remove tuition. JWL offers higher education opportunities for refugee students for free. The organization is able to achieve this through sharing its operational costs with multiple partnerships. As one of JWL's staff confirmed: "So it's free, totally free" (Academic Manager #1).

Even if refugee students manage to access the higher education system of the host country, in most of the cases they will simply not be able to afford it. Oftentimes refugee students fall into the international student category and, traditionally, the tuition is higher for non-residents. "Why you don't join in the local universities? Yeah. So, then I heard 99% of the answer is the same... they need to pay heavy money. The fee is huge" (Academic Manager #3)," shared on of the international staff member during the interview. Many other staff members commented on unaffordability of higher education in locations where JWL is present: "they could probably get into private universities but they can't afford it... I don't even think they can afford the state universities" (Administrator #2); "but in many of these places where these students are, I, I don't think

that there's like the money for a school" (Online Facilitator #7). There are cases when other international NGOs provide scholarships for refugee students to join local universities, but these opportunities are a drop in the ocean.

The organization's 2019 Annual Report (Document #3) provides some insights into JWL's ability to remove tuition costs for its students. It became possible due to an extensive partnership network JWL has developed over time that includes various foundations, universities, UNCHR, other international and local organizations. Number of JWL staff noted that JWL shares operational costs with other partner universities. Many JWL faculty and staff volunteer for organization, according to JWL's 2020 Annual Report (Document #2).

JWL's online educational model facilitates access to education by keeping costs low and affordable. According to the 2019 Annual Report, in 2019 JWL was able to decrease the course cost production 11% from previous year (Document #3). JWL also states that between 2017 and 2019 the organization has doubled the number of courses offered (from 5,403 to 10,777) with only 37% increase in production costs (from \$1,217,93 to \$1,950,84) (Document #3).

### **Admission Process: Mitigating Challenges**

JWL equips refugee students to increase their chances to be admitted to its programs. Their overall approach toward its admission process is summarized well in the words of JWL's staff:

We are also, trying very hard not to eliminate or exclude anyone in the admission process. So, it depends on the, the requirements of each university partner, and

it's actually there's room for, for, you know, flexibility, it's depending on the program (Academic Manager #1).

It appears that JWL has designed the comprehensive pre-admission process with a purpose of getting every JWL's applicant to grow into the full capacity of a successful applicant that can be accepted to the Certificate in Liberal Studies program which, in turn, is a first step toward its Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development program. The applicant who comes with the lack or low level of English language, not sufficient digital skills, missing the high school document or years of schooling, can find encouragement and solutions to their challenges prohibiting them from the entrance to one of JWL's programs.

Another way JWL stands out when it comes to supporting the admission of refugees into its programs is that they require only the reading and listening sections of the Cambridge Linguaskill test (no writing and speaking). JWL realizes that common tests like TOEFL, IELTS that are often required by the universities worldwide are too Westernized and they tend to measure concepts that refugees may not be aware about. One of JWL's staff shared that "this is something students who went through their local high school system just don't know" (Director #14).

Another indication of the organization's flexibility with their admission process is its decision to approach each case individually: "English language requirements, you know, sometimes we do accept students who are a bit lower than the requirement, but actually the university sometimes agrees and they are, as long as they are able to complete the course" (Academic Manager #1).

It is interesting that even the person without a high school document (that is the second of the two key requirements for admission to JWL's academic programs) can start taking JWL's English courses. By the time the refugee student reaches the necessary English language level, she/he can find an opportunity to address the missing years of schooling and receive the high school document. One of JWL's administrators shared that refugees have practically no barriers for taking English courses: "They can enroll, even without having high school diploma or so, that doesn't matter. And then they can climb up the ladder slowly, slowly... grade by grade... in that way they can learn the English with us. It's free... every level they'll take between three and four months. So, we, we can offer that in every center where we offer the university courses" (Administrator #5). JWL's Global English Language (GEL) courses are "offered for free" as the rest of its courses (Academic Manager #1).

Similar to the English language requirement, JWL expects its applicants to satisfy the high school completion admission requirement. And, similarly, the organization shows the same gracious attitude toward applicants when it comes to the English language challenge by leaving no obstacles between refugees and higher education.

There are many reasons for refugee youth not meeting the high school requirement: leaving their high school diploma in the homeland, destruction of documentation during the relocation or due to living conditions, or loss of years of schooling during transition. They may find it difficult to obtain an affidavit from the government of their country to show some kind of affirmation of their education. Depending on each individual situation, JWL has a number of ways to deal with cases when refugees do not meet the high school requirement, such as, having a partner



organization help refugees to complete high school. A number of JWL staff members provided their comments on how JWL addresses the absence of high school diploma during the admission process. One of the onsite academic coordinators shared that: “But if you really do not have the transcripts and you want to do the onboarding, we also refer you to, to organizations who are giving the high school diplomas so that you can go fulfill that” (Onsite Facilitator #8).

One of JWL’s staff explained that JWL is willing to work together with other organizations on assuring that every barrier preventing the refugees from taking their programs is removed. He stated: “we also have a few JRS [Jesuit Refugee Service] programs that are there that allow students to be able to apply to boarding schools within the country where they can be sponsored by JRS on a scholarship so that they can be able to attend school at one of the boarding schools around the country” (Interview 4). In case of Malawi, for example, JWL connects its prospective refugee students with public high school opportunities. Using the words of one of JWL’s local academic managers: “So, it really helps if a student, if someone, has come in, it would be really good for them to actually go through the secondary school so that they can be able to get a Malawian certificate and write the Malawian exams.” (Academic Manager #4).

JWL’s application process in itself becomes a learning exercise for those who are open to participate in it. In conversation with JWL’s onsite facilitator, it was interesting to realize that “a number of students have never used a computer before. Ah, so it takes them a while to get used to using a computer and learning a program. They struggle with that at first, but we have a lot of assistance on site for them” (Administrator #2). JWL

helps students overcome the Digital Literacy Challenge. From the words of one of JWL's local academic manager:

We have others who have some computer experience and then others who have absolutely none and then we have some, somewhere in the middle. So, what we try to do is to be able to, identify those who are in need of extra support when it comes to computer literacy at the very beginning and then we make sure that during orientation, they get a little bit more assistance. (Academic Manager #4).

It is quite remarkable that JWL staff is ready to assist refugees in acquiring the different skills all throughout their academic journey:

The application process requires you to have an email address. Yes. So, there are other applicants as they come in, we're actually helping them set up a Gmail account so that, that they can be able to use so that they can be able to apply. And as they're going through the Bridge to Learning [non-credit introduction course], we're able to also go through email etiquette if, how to send an email, how they can be able to access their email, how to improve their typing speed, et cetera. So, as they're going through the program, they are also learning more of the computer literacy. (Academic Manager #4)

Even though the situation may vary from country to country and from one CLC to the other CLC, it is easy to observe that JWL is doing everything they can for each applicant to succeed.

## **Culture of Support Shapes the Educational Process of JWL**

JWL guides each refugee prospective student by walking alongside them during the pre-admission and admission process and equips them with what they need to meet each requirement. There is a culture of support that guides their work.

### **Individualized Support**

It is important to note that JWL's admission process is competitive as there is a high demand for its programs. What differs JWL's admission process compared to those in other higher education institutions, however, is that applicants receive individual support from JWL through the entire application process, including help with submitting an online application, accessing technology, and being able to receive a short training for taking an English the Linguaskill test.

One of the organization's country coordinators shared: "We received around 950 applicants, but we won't take, admit all. Maybe we admit only 400" (Academic Manager #3). That said, JWL does what it can to support each students' admission. Although it has quite rigorous academic requirements for refugees to be admitted to its programs, including several important criteria that applicants should meet (high school diploma evidence, B2 level of English, digital skills and others), JWL has developed processes to address each of these requirements. It equips refugees with the necessary tools and resources to successfully meet each criterion. The refugee student that desires to pursue one of JWL's programs has a greater chance of being admitted due to a thoughtful, flexible, and highly personalized pre-admission and admission process developed by the organization.

Upon acceptance, students enrolled in the academic degree programs at the beginning of their studies are provided an in-depth orientation called the Bridge to Learning Course. In this course “we have some, some computer related, like games and other material to support them... So, you can’t be left out because of computer literacy” (Onsite Facilitator #8).

### **JWL Supports Refugee Students All Throughout Their Learning Journey**

JWL continues to support refugee students after admission and even after graduation. Data revealed many ways in which the refugee students continue to receive support after being admitted to JWL’s professional and academic programs.

The onsite facilitators are even aware of what type of gadget(s) the student needs for the specific type of the course they are taking. For example, a graphic design course would require a laptop, not a tablet. This JWL’s country coordinator described how the refugee students are supported locally:

We try to enable students to have this experience by having those local learning communities in our learning centers and also providing them with like all the other support. That’s usually connected to a university, but not like studying itself. So, I don’t know, like following up, like giving, like helping them to get together their academic plan. So, they finish like maybe helping them, like with some CVs, like if they want to apply or with the internships, stuff like this, you know, so that’s all happening in the, in the learning center. (Director #14)

It is not easy for a refugee student to get into JWL’s program but, probably, an even greater challenge is to remain in it. Again, JWL is eager to support its students

throughout the whole learning process. According to the words of JWL's country coordinator:

This local support really helps to decrease the dropout rate because you have this support from a learning facilitator onsite, but also even more important from your fellow, the fellow students, you know, in like, if you have like a week, week time, like, you know, like together, they will drag you through and then the next course will be better again. So, I think that's really something very important." (Director #14)

Apart from the local support, JWL supports refugee students online. JWL's refugee students have an opportunity to receive help from the international online facilitators. Here is how one of the online facilitators is describing her experience working with the refugee students:

We're just like, we're always encouraging, you know, hey, take advantage of it. And we've really tried all different, unique ways to spell that. Like say, hey, we're not grading you this isn't extra work because maybe a lot of these students haven't been in a position where they've had a tutor so that they don't even know the value it can provide. And that's why we just explained step by step. Hey, this is what happens. It's not extra work really for you. This is opportunity to sharpen your skills. And or if you don't even know where to get started, you know, it's nice to have another pair of eyes, read the instructions and say, hey, you're on the right track. This is... here's your game plan, da da da" (Online Facilitator #7).

JWL now has alumni. After more than 10 years of operating, JWL has graduated many refugee students in various locations. JWL's alumni are starting to play a visible

role in supporting its activities on the ground. The support of the graduates who have been refugees themselves is especially meaningful since they know best what it is like to be a refugee student and they serve as great role models for those who are yet to climb this mountain. Some graduates have assumed roles of onsite facilitators and support the refugee students academically, but others form the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) trying to get involved in establishing assistance to the refugee students in the form of a “day-care, IT assistance, and a platform for exchange of information about employment/professional experience opportunities” (Document #4).

A JWL student’s role does not end after the refugee student graduates from one of its programs. I found multiple pieces of evidence of JWL continuing to support and encourage its graduates to continue their higher education. For example, one of JWL’s senior administrators noted: “I’m also looking for opportunities for our students once they finish their certificate to go on, to get a bachelor's degree . . . I’m talking to a few universities about being the awarding university after they get a certificate” (Interview #2).

Moreover, JWL’s educators and administrators have been actively working on connecting graduates with scholarship opportunities at other universities. According to JWL’s 2020 Annual Report, “in collaboration with Southern New Hampshire University, JWL enabled 150 graduates of the Diploma in Kakuma and Dzaleka camps to continue studies towards a Bachelor” (Document #2). This JWL’s effort to ensure its students continue pursuing higher education was also discussed during the interview with one of JWL’s administrators who shared that:

I'm also looking for opportunities for our students once they finish their certificate to go on, to get a bachelor's degree. So, I have, I'm talking to a few universities about being the awarding university after they get a certificate, and they may contribute 30 credits. They may contribute 60 credits. So that's, that's a real passion of mine to get these students all the way to a bachelor's degree."

(Administrator #2)

Another way that JWL shows their culture of support is by reducing course load. Refugee students have many other responsibilities in addition to their studies since most of them cannot afford not to work. Many of them also have families, so this adds to their daily workload and often times becomes a reason for leaving studies. JWL tries to regulate the student's study load through academic advisors or onsite facilitators available to refugee students at the CLCs: "we came in with some academic advisors... where you were able to kind of on weekly, just check in with them... then revise a little bit your personal learning plan" (Onsite Facilitator #8).

One major caveat here is important to note. Despite all these efforts to improve access and opportunity for refugees, the unfortunate reality is that JWL does not have the capacity to satisfy the needs of all refugees. Here is how one of JWL's staff describes the situation:

The number of slots is determined of course, by funding... it, it varies... like last year we had an intake of 104 for the bachelors... and before we just need to take 35 to 40 for the diploma... so it just depends on the number of slots available... last year we had around close to 300, 400 applicants for the Bachelor in SD.

(Onsite Facilitator #6)

### **Disadvantages and Advantages of JWL**

JWL's case study revealed that the JWL program and, by implication, online higher education, generally, despite some significant shortcomings, can provide significant benefits to refugee youth that have no access to tertiary education in their new home country. This research, in fact, generated several times more codes under the provisional code "Advantages of JWL's educational model" (512 codes) than the provisional code "Disadvantages of JWL's educational model" (152 codes). In the particular case that was studied, in fact, the educational model's disadvantages often were mitigated by the actions of an organization that was constantly evolving its pedagogical approach, curricula, and learning technology. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss in detail the shortcomings of JWL's online educational model that affected the process of delivery in refugee contexts.

#### **Disadvantages of JWL's Educational Model**

In JWL's 2018 annual report, the authors state that "the lack of English language skills is the biggest barrier to accessing tertiary education" (Document #4). In JWL's case this challenge has been dealt with by offering a menu of introductory programs Global English Language (GEL) programs, however, learning English takes time, and for this reason JWL continues to "exclude people from this opportunity because [students] need to have [achieved] B2 in English" (Director #14). One of the country academic coordinators shared this comment during interview:

I don't know, like, how to solve this. It's just something I wish we could just, like, offer, you know, in other languages, in Arabic, but then, you know, it loses all this



global component and studying with people from around the world and learning from each other. (Director #14)

There are dropout challenges as well. An external review conducted by the Jigsaw Consult firm included an excerpt from an interview with a JWL's student: "For me, it is that the time for each course is too short. I struggle to do everything in the time that is allocated" (Document #12). Regardless of the fact that the overall graduation rate at JWL is higher than the average graduation rate in online education globally, the organization faces a significant student dropout challenge. JWL's Report on 10 years of the Online Diploma in Liberal Studies (2020) notes that "over the past 10 years out of 1,073 students who enrolled, 433 have already graduated and a majority of the presently 305 active students are expected to graduate before end of 2021. The expected completion rate will be around 60%" (Document #23). The interviews with JWL staff reveal that the organization has been analyzing the reason behind this challenge and trying to bring the changes to the academic process that potentially will allow to decrease the dropout rates even further.

Many refugees cannot afford to not work full-time, so it was surprising to discover the following statement on JWL application form: "Students of the BA-SD programme must study full-time and therefore cannot hold full-time jobs. Are you willing to reduce your current work hours or forgo full-time work until after you graduate from this programme?" (Document #27). The statement provides a glimpse into the work-study balance challenges the refugee students have to deal with during the learning process. Interviews with JWL's faculty and staff along with several organizational documents support the fact that JWL's students have challenges with maintaining a

healthy balance between work and studies. During my conversation with an organization's administrator, I asked him to describe student's challenges with the program by putting himself to students place and speak if he would be a JWL student. He shared the following: "It [the program] is time demanding. I have to submit every week. If I fall behind, it becomes very way tricky. Depending on the program, I have very little breaks in the year" (Administrator #5).

In addition, in spite of its high quality and the accreditation of JWL's education, the programming is perceived by some countries as inferior to the local on-campus university education, in part due to its online nature. One of JWL's administrators shared that "many of these countries...have been pretty slow to recognize online education" (Administrator #2). JWL's country academic coordinator also shared the same opinion on the status of online education in her context:

You look at how society in general perceives online education. And this is something which is not just in Malawi, but I think it's a worldwide thing where if someone has graduated from a, got their degree online, they tend to be less respected because there's usually a question mark as to whether or not they're truly competent in whatever that they learned... So, I think if it was a choice between going to a university that you're meeting your lecturer face to face, you have classes every day that you need to attend the way any other university runs. There would be a lot of people who would run for that because there is still that perception that it is more recognized as... proper education" (Academic Manager #4).

Moreover, the organization's documents revealed that frequently there is a large power gap that exists between faculty and refugee students that contributes to the lack of ability to deeply relate to the reality the refugee students are facing:

The instructors have never been in a refugee camp and don't know what our life here is like. So, they can treat us like any other student who is not in our situation ... some instructors are not understanding about the conditions we are living in and the problems we face, and say that we need to just concentrate on our studies” (Document #12).

According to an external review conducted by the Jigsaw Consult firm, students encourage JWL's online global faculty and staff to visit countries of students' residence, provide more personal time between faculty and students before each course, and introducing professional development activities that provide a thorough information on the cultural and political contexts of JWL's refugee students (Document #12). But of course, this does not always happen, and online distance instructors contribute to a lack of understanding of student needs.

Another major challenge, already mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter, is that the demand for JWL's programs exceeds the supply. The local higher education opportunities for the refugees are so few or, at times, non-existent, so it leaves the organization with a constant challenge to scale-up its operations in the various locations. As one interview said, “It's actually a lot of work, but also, we kind of feel bad when we can't accommodate most of them because they're interested, and the opportunities are just limited” (Onsite Facilitator #6).

Although JWL designs its programs and courses so that knowledge earned during studies is relevant to the contexts where its students reside, the organization's program and course developers are challenged by curriculum decisions. The content of the JWL's curricula consists of not only progressive knowledge originating from the Western countries, but also integrates the knowledge and experience of the local communities and cultures. There is an ongoing conversation within the JWL community, however, on what curricula best fits the needs of its students. The external review conducted by the Jigsaw Consult firm found among JWL's documents indicated that:

The debate is focused on a divide between those who advocate for the opportunity for refugee students to study curricula originally from US or European universities, and those who advocate for curricula designed in and more relevant to specific displacement or country of origin locations (Document #12).

Some refugee students prefer to have the curricula designed in the West (US, European, Australian universities), noting that its recognition around the globe can increase their chances to get advanced degrees from the Western universities in the future and, potentially, enable students to enter the international job market, according to an external review conducted by the Jigsaw Consult firm (Document #12). However, considering that the majority of refugee students will eventually integrate into their host countries or return to their homelands, it is important to provide them with an education that is relevant to their contexts as well and increase their chances for entering their local job market or continue education available in their countries. This contextualized knowledge would find more application locally and would help refugee students to better integrate into their new homelands. The curricula originating from the West is also

partially responsible for JWL's credentials sometimes not being recognized locally, which also puts pressure on JWL's curricula designers to come up with the content that may benefit its students, even if their credentials at the end will be not recognized by the local governments.

Although JWL is known for its continuous efforts to receive feedback from their own staff and students, more work is needed on capturing the gaps in the instructional design of its courses. One of the faculty members of the organization shared an important insight during the interview:

I think they struggle when the assignment is not well written... A couple of the assignments I thought were very poorly written. And if they asked the student to do too many things in one assignment so they struggled with understanding what the assignment is. But the truth of the matter is I had struggled with understanding what the assignment was... I hope to talk to some of the designers or who make up the courses... I thought the students would be as confused as I was because they were asked to do too many things... I think designing the course in a way that students find it easy to understand assignments it's really, really important" (Faculty #13).

Moreover, although it appears that the majority of JWL's courses offered to its students are accredited and transferable, as indicated by one administrator during an interview, there are instances when JWL's courses do not come with credits: "we have, for example, one course, it's a youth sport facilitator that is with... Metro Denver city college. And there we give a certificate, but not credits, which are transferable" (Administrator #5).

Refugees are at risk. They represent one of the most vulnerable parts of society and in many ways even just getting in contact with them creates multiple risks for them. Lots of details specific to the learning process need to be considered to make sure these risks are eliminated or, at least, mitigated for the refugee students. This, of course, complicates how best to educate them, keep them safe and provide greater opportunity providing additional challenges for the education providers in these environments.

### **Evidence of Student Success**

JWL's educational process equips refugee students with various academic and practical skills along the way helping them to advance academically and professionally. A significant number of codes generated during data analysis indicate that those interviewed believe that JWL's learning process is rich with opportunities for refugee youth to acquire different skills that increase their chances to advance academically and professionally. JWL's internal research study that was designed with participation of refugee students, graduates, onsite and online facilitators, and country coordinators revealed that "graduates acknowledge the skills they developed during the Diploma programme can open the doors to new opportunities. Whether academic, networking, or professional opportunities, graduates identify the role of the Diploma in shaping new experiences" (Document #1). The organization's 2021 Report described the impact of its JWL's Diploma in Liberal Studies program: "The findings of this research are surprisingly positive and confirm the early assumptions, with set outcomes met more than one had dared to expect at the beginning: 88% of graduates found employment; 65% of graduates pursuing further studies" (Document #13).

JWL's graduates can be found contributing into multiple fields. According to JWL's 2021 Report, JWL's 21% of the male and 47% of the female graduates are involved in local NGOs, 36% of the male and 35% of the female graduates are active in community-based organizations, 13% of the male and 7% of the female graduates work for large international NGOs, 9% of the male and 7% of the female graduates joined educational institutions, and 2% of the male and 4% of the female graduates are participating in government services (Document #13).

Academic success is evident from the May and September 2021 JWL's Reports that revealed "65% of Diploma graduates continued their higher education after graduation" (Document #13) and also indicated that "many alumni highlight the impact of the Diploma as contributing to their academic growth. It was reported that 65% of graduates pursued further studies" (Document #1).

The interviews with JWL's staff also pointed to the fact that oftentimes JWL programs serve for its students as a "gate" to other higher education institutions and programs. As one interviewed administrator said, "So, yeah, a number of our students go on and get bachelor's degrees elsewhere" (Administrator #2); another told me, "Over 150 of the diploma graduates have enrolled in bachelor's degrees" (Administrator #2); and a faculty member said, "I have even gotten emails from former students of the human rights and women's rights course asking me... for recommendation letters because they are applying to universities in the US" (Faculty #11). In addition, JWL's 2021 Report revealed that "diploma graduates have joined 26 different education institutions around the world, proving that the Diploma in Liberal Studies was a real catalyst in opening doors to pursue global Higher Education opportunities" (Faculty #13). And a faculty

member in the program told me that “98% of respondents who pursue further studies believes that the Diploma Program was extremely/very important for their education path” (Faculty #13).

The evidence I reviewed also indicated that professional advancement was enhanced, as well. Considering that until 2021 JWL was not able to offer to its refugee students a full degree program (the Diploma in Liberal Studies), it is appropriate to question the value of the short-term language, professional, or academic programs offered by JWL in the eyes of a potential employer. A conversation with JWL’s senior administrator pointed to the fact that:

The missing recognition in some other countries [where the Diploma in Liberal Studies is offered] doesn't stop us from offering it because ---we are not deceiving the students, they know what...they get. We see that there is a lot of personal development in the student, so there is a lot of benefit in these studies and it's, it's a way into the job market, which we have seen” (Administrator #5).

A number of conversations with JWL’s administration, staff and faculty emphasize the intrinsic value that comes with the organization’s learning process – the skills and qualities acquired during studies tend to contribute to the personal development of their refugee students and, as a result, are reflected in their professional achievements. Here is one of the examples shared during an interview with JWL’s onsite academic manager on how the development of digital skills and access to resources led to greater professional opportunity:

Because they have access to the Center in terms of the unlimited internet, more time on the computer, you actually have some students finding work online and



they're able to continue doing that work online... by, you know, coming to the Center... they work on this on the weekends or something like that. So, I think the digital aspect and opening up the world to the students is really important. [It is important] for them to recognize that the world is not just the camp. (Academic Manager #4)

Getting internships that can turn into jobs have been actually integrated into the studying process itself. Academic Manager # 3, for example, stated, "The university helps us to connect them [the students] through the companies to do online internships." Furthermore, according to JWL's onsite facilitator, even for those students that have limited work opportunities due to their refugee status, some possibilities tend to open up:

You can use it to get a job in the camp, because most of our students, like almost all of them are working within the camp, also with the organizations that are there. Um, others work in Nairobi, others work back in their home countries. So, the opportunities are limitless. Others have joined even the UN and so on and so forth" (Onsite Facilitator #6).

Completion of JWL's programs is seen as form of a professional development by some employers, according to this JWL's country coordinator:

It really helps them like internally in their work or like with the kind of work they do... for example... she was working as a cleaning lady at an NGO here, in the beginning and then later she was promoted to be the receptionist. And later she was like a program coordinator for, I think, a small program. So, like, you know, even like within her job, like it helped her to, to get a better position. (Country Director #14)

A number of JWL's staff pointed to the positive effect of JWL's education not only on students' professional lives but also by restoring their sense of worth and purpose in life, which oftentimes is lost during the abrupt change of circumstances refugees are often faced with. Faculty # 10, for instance said:

It's, it's something that now is, it, they say it's almost like their life is back on track there's goals now, there's, it's more than just survival... which for a lot of years, for many of them, that's all it was about.

To summarize, regardless of what the future holds for refugees, it seems that the skills earned during studies find multiple application. According to one of the academic managers who commented on the benefits of having JWL's certificate,

For those that end up getting resettled, it's been very, very helpful. And for some that are still in the camp, they were able to take the knowledge and add it on to whatever they were doing. So, there are a few students that ended up creating some CBOs [Community Based Organizations] and growing whatever business that they were doing, et cetera, and also being a part of the community in helping more of the youth to get into education" (Academic Manager #4).

JWL's May 2021 Report provides positive statistics on the effect of JWL education on the professional development of its refugee graduates: "85% of the respondents who reported at least 1 job experience stated the Diploma was extremely/very important for their career path" (Document #13).

Students gained language skills as well. According to JWL's 2018 Annual Report, the Global English Program (GEL) developed and provided by JWL is in high demand in many countries where JWL is operating:

The GEL programme was in great demand in 2018 as news of this highly sought-after course spread. Student numbers grew from just under 1500 students in January 2018 to over 2500 at the end of the year and 22 new community learning centres (CLCs) opened across the world (Document #4).

In the contexts where the majority of refugees are residing, knowledge of the English language, if refugees are able to acquire it, becomes an asset in itself that can significantly improve their condition. For others, a lack of English skills is the barrier that prevents them from accessing higher education. In addition, according to JWL's 2018-2019 Financial Report, JWL's students benefit from taking the GEL courses because "students receive a Cambridge University Press accredited certificate at the end of the course, proof of having completed a high-quality English course and providing the opportunity to subsequently access tertiary education and enhance employment opportunities" (Document #8).

Finally, technology literacy is just one of the so called "twenty first century skills" that students are able to pick up during the online learning process. Some of JWL's students never used a computer or other technology before studying at JWL, "therefore, the contribution of the Diploma was pivotal in developing graduates' digital skills, which are identified as being crucial to engage in professional and educational opportunities" (Document #1). In addition, JWL's personalized Ignatian pedagogical approach to the learning process stimulates acquiring the skills that prepare the refugee students to face

the globalized future: critical thinking, communication, media literacy, leadership, and social skills.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered four themes that emerged during the analysis of the field data:

1. The JWL Philosophy: Mission and Vision
2. The Structure of JWL's Online Educational Model
3. Culture of Support Shapes the Educational Process of JWL
4. JWL's Disadvantages and Advantages

The final chapter of this research study summarizes the previous analysis, compares the findings of this study to the existing literature on online education, discusses its significance and limitations, and provides ideas for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The number of refugees around the globe including refugee children and youth has been increasing exponentially during the last several decades (UNHCR, 2020, Arar, Öricü & Waite, 2020; UNHCR, 2020). This phenomenon is not showing signs of slowing, fueled by new refugee crises that are taking place largely in developing and middle-income countries. The local educational systems of countries hosting large refugee populations often times lack capacity to integrate school-aged refugees into their public educational systems. In addition to the structural challenges on the governmental level, refugees are facing other barriers including lack of the language of the host country, limited economic resources, legal issues surrounding refugee status, and other context-related challenges. As a result, a significant number of refugee children and youth are missing out on education at all levels beginning from the primary to tertiary education. When it comes to higher education, the situation with refugee participation in education can be described as critical, considering that only 3% of refugees around the globe are currently able to gain access to post-secondary education.

There is evidence of a growing interest in innovative educational technological solutions to higher-education access problems around the globe. However, the literature reviewed for this study revealed there is a lack of empirically grounded research that examines the potential of online education to connect university-aged refugees with educational opportunities. There are, however, some examples of organizations using online education to support other sorts of disadvantaged and marginalized populations and give them greater access to education. The governments of some developing

countries, for instance, have been investing in online education to make it available for their underserved communities. A number of studies of this phenomena provide some evidence of the effectiveness of online education to overcome the issues of access to education for populations that have special characteristics preventing them from participating in traditional education. There has been a clear need for a similar type of research that could extend our understanding of how online education could address the needs of refugee populations. This study addresses this current gap in the research by offering a deeper analysis of how one international NGO has used technology to successfully provide higher online education to refugees and underserved communities in the Middle East, Africa, and a few other regions of the world, a population whose tertiary education has been seriously neglected.

Data were collected throughout this study through interviews, observations, and document analysis. This research design created opportunities for triangulation. The concepts and approaches learned during interviews were also reflected in the documents of the organization and in my observations of the organization's learning management platform. All data was coded and I summarize an analysis of these and the other findings next.

### **Summary of Findings**

According to many of the documents I reviewed and the interview data I collected, JWL has been successful in facilitating refugees with access to higher education and supporting them throughout their learning. Their success can be attributed to a few key factors that lay in the heart of the organization's online educational model. First of all, this NGO came into being as a response to the recognition of the fact that

refugees are neglected and lack an opportunity to receive a post-secondary education. JWL's mission has been grounded in the organization's philosophy to serve those that are most in need; this mission has guided the organization's educational efforts from the inception of their organizational structures. Second, JWL has continued to build programming that has considered its students' special characteristics and the conditions and contexts of their residence. Also, over the years, its structures of the organization's educational initiatives have been continuously adjusted as JWL gained knowledge of the additional challenges refugee student populations face. Third, JWL has purposefully integrated a culture of support throughout its programming that assists refugee students during admission and the entire learning process. Their culture of support is reflected at all levels of communication. Each of these factors is discussed in more depth next.

### **Philosophy**

The philosophy of the JWL has been a driving force defining what the organization does and how it does it. JWL chooses to establish its operations in the developing regions of the world to bring quality higher education to communities who have previously excluded refugees from tertiary education opportunities. JWL establishes its learning centers in locations that are characterized by a lack of higher education opportunities and where refugee education has usually been affected by conflict or forced displacement. Although the JWL's is open for all marginalized sections of society, refugees represent the majority of its students in the locations that were the focus of this study: Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, and Malawi.

The holistic Ignatian educational philosophy and pedagogical approach has guided JWL in its policies and practices. It emphasizes critical thinking, social awareness

and a positive view of self and others. This philosophy has a positive effect on refugee students who tend to enter higher education less prepared academically and emotionally compared to the average youth of university age who are citizens of the countries in which they are now living.

### **Structure**

Over the years JWL has made several important structural changes to help build a sense of community among refugee students and support their resilience and retention. In 2021, JWL introduced a yearlong Certificate in Liberal Studies that serves as a foundation for acquiring a Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development. It replaced a program that required three years of study but did not award a degree. JWL educators realized the former program was not ideal given the need for refugee students to get a degree quickly.

JWL also arranged to deliver their higher education programming through partnerships with multiple likeminded universities, local and international NGOs, foundations, and technological organizations. Its innovative online educational model also has also gone through some structural changes to consider the challenges the refugee students face in various geographical contexts. JWL has made every attempt to mitigate or overcome many of the barriers preventing refugees from pursuing higher education.

JWL has also continuously adjusted its technology to better meet the needs of refugee students. JWL developed its own Learning Management System (LMS)/ Student Information System (SIS) that responds to the conditions students in certain geographic locations face such as a lack of internet connection, electricity outages, and various equipment and learning resource challenges. JWL's innovative educational technological



structure comprises a range of elements beginning from its LMS/SMS to the IT equipment and devices. These are provided to refugee students in their local Community Learning Centers (CLCs). The LMS supports the global and local exchanges between JWL's faculty and staff, hosts curricula and learning resources, and serves as a communication platform. JWL continues to improve its LMS platform with the help of technological experts and organizations like Fujitsu Ltd., Seitwerk GmbH, AfB Social, and Green IT.

In addition to its online programming, JWL organized strong local support for the refugees in the form of Community Learning Centers (CLCs). These centers provide a peer support group and onsite facilitators. The organization also resources the centers with necessary technology and access to various networks, and the organization closely monitors refugee students' performance by helping them to regulate their workload, equip them with skills to advance academically and professionally, provide a positive culture of support and have an influence on their interaction with students from the local communities.

A major reason many refugee students have not accessed education is that they were not able to afford it. JWL has responded by eliminating tuition costs. This action provides refugee students with a high-quality accredited education and credits transferable to other universities. Moreover, since gaining admission status has plagued refugees, JWL has adjusted their admission process to assure that every refugee student that shows up at their door could have an opportunity to access their programs. It is built to mitigate the barriers refugees face and to increase their chances to be admitted to its programs. Every refugee applicant who comes with a lack of or low-level English ability,

without sufficient digital skills, missing a high school document or record of years of schooling, lacking financing, or experiencing any other problems, JWL can find encouragement and solutions to their challenges due to their thoughtful and flexible admission structure.

### **Culture of Support**

JWL's approach to refugee education includes providing an overall culture of support. Applicants receive highly individualized attention from the organization's staff throughout the entire application process, including help in submitting an online application, access to technology, and providing a short training in preparation for taking an English Linguaskill test<sup>3</sup>. Upon acceptance, students are provided an in-depth orientation course created to equip the admitted students with skills they need to be successful in the learning process. JWL continues to support refugee students after admission and even after graduation.

### **Advantages and Remaining Challenges**

During my analysis of interviews with JWL administrators and review of the organization's documents, I found evidence that suggested that JWL was able to support refugee students' tertiary education in many positive ways. There were three times more codes that indicated positivity versus the codes that suggested challenges or disadvantages with their online educational model, though some of this disparity might be attributable to the fact that I was interviewing insiders and reviewing reports that were, in many cases, prepared by insiders. In total, however, JWL's case study suggests that

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<sup>3</sup> Linguaskill is an online, multilevel test provided by [Cambridge Assessment English](#)

online higher education represents a significant benefit for the majority of world refugee youth that have no access to tertiary education. It is evident that JWL has at least attempted to support the development of refugee students in various spheres of their lives, including personal, academic, and professional. It is important to note that the refugee students in the contexts covered in this study did not, in most cases, have an alternative opportunity to access higher education. JWL is able to serve as an entrance point to higher education.

JWL's educational model is scalable, transferable, sustainable, and resilient, which is reflected in the growing number of locations, learning centers, courses offered and, consequently, in the increasing number of students admitted to its programs. The healthy average 60% completion rate of JWL's online educational programs places the program among the leaders in the industry. According to JWL's internal research study that was designed with participation of refugee students, graduates, onsite and online facilitators, and country coordinators, the global component enriches the learning process by allowing the refugee students to interact with faculty and classmates from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds which adds to their skillset a competence that "can play at a global level in contributing to peace" (Document #1). According to JWL's 2021 Research Report, "the students who believed in the programme against all odds surpassed expectations, achieving the astoundingly positive outcomes with great impact in their communities...88% of graduates found employment; 65% of graduates pursuing further studies (Document #13).

There is no doubt that the educational model continues to face challenges in supporting the access and learning of refugee students. These challenges are primarily

related to students' language ability, economic barriers, and JWL's inability to mitigate the many reasons behind their ability to stay in the program. Moreover, there are larger societal challenges. JWL also faces negative perceptions from others regarding the quality of online education and the persistent power gap that remains between the international faculty and refugee students which causes some dissonance. JWL continuously modifies their pedagogical approach, curricula, and technology to address curricula and instructional design shortcomings but they remain challenged by their own lack of capacity to meet the needs of all students.

### **Contributions to Refugee Tertiary Education and Online Learning**

#### **A Human Imperative**

JWL appears to have taken a major step in addressing the educational needs of refugee students and as a result has contributed to their academic and emotional well-being. The notion that human development depends on increasing the number of opportunities or choices available for individuals to grow professionally and academically was first articulated by Sen (Sairo, 2003) and was used as a conceptual framework for this study. Sen noted that education plays an important role in expanding individual capacities that lead to the development of individuals and communities. Therefore, resolving the problem of inaccessibility of higher education for refugees globally is directly linked to the development of them as individuals, as well as the development of refugee communities, and, consequently, the development of host countries and the individuals who live and are schooled with refugees.

## **Online Education and Refugee Education**

This academic research also supports the voices of international NGO practitioners who are driving the conversation on innovative technological educational solutions and their potential in addressing the issues of inaccessibility of education for certain populations (Anderson 2013; Colucci et al., 2017; Culbertson et al., 2019; Lewis & Thacker, 2016; UNESCO 2018a; UNESCO, 2018b). This research suggests that with online education that is carefully crafted and responsive to the needs of students, populations that are disenfranchised can be given greater opportunity to do well. It affirms the importance of providing structures and a culture of support to help refugees realize their potential and prepare for a better future.

This study of JWL has shown specifically how this organization contributes to the education of refugees by creating structures and a culture of support to mitigate some of the issues refugees face when attempting to gain access to tertiary education. This study also provides important information on the many ways in which online education can help other populations of who have been disenfranchised and unable to access higher education, such as nomadic communities, professional athletes, rural communities, communities marginalized due to the caste, gender, location, minority and disability (Dyer, 2016; Bates & LaBrecque, 2017; Mulcahy et al., 2016; Din & Jabeen, 2020; Chaudhury, 2016); Beckmann, 2010; Mtebe & Raphael, 2017; Liyanagunawardena, 2014; Amini & Oluyide, 2016).

Dryden-Peterson & Giles (2010) explain that the phenomenon of low enrollment rates of refugees in higher education has been called the “broken pipeline.” This concept alludes to the fact that the low rates of refugee enrollment in primary education fall

significantly in the secondary level and to almost no high school graduates available to access universities. In addition, educational systems in countries hosting large populations of refugees have not provided tertiary educational opportunities for refugees. There has been a very low participation of refugees in higher education in the Middle East and Eastern Africa regions (Christophersen, 2015; El-Ghali et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2019; Fincham, 2020; UNHCR, 2020). In attempting to explain this “broken pipeline,” previous research has noted the many barriers preventing refugees’ enrollment in higher education, reasons such as, institutional policies and practices, lack of the language of instruction, interrupted education, lack of evidence or non-recognition of previous education, political considerations, indirect educational costs, and a limited range of subject areas and programs available for refugees (Fincham, 2020; Cin & Dogan, 2020; Atesok et al., 2019; Streitwieser et al., 2018; Kamyab, 2017; Avery & Said 2017; Rasheed & Munoz, 2016; Crea & McFarland, 2015; Dryden-Peterson & Giles 2010).

Protopsaltis & Baumi’s (2019) study, “Does Online Education Live Up to its Promise? A Look at the Evidence and Implications for Federal Policy,” summarizes the arguments of critics of online education. They emphasize the need for “frequent and meaningful interaction” with students to increase the quality and outcomes. They warn of the consequences if federal requirements are weakened in regards to the amount of interaction required between instructors and students and how it would “erode employer confidence in the value of online credentials” – an area that is already presenting challenges to JWU. Studies conducted by Palvia et al. (2018) that compare online education to traditional education, Blahusiakova et al’s (2021) study of university students in Slovakia, Horvath et al.’s (2022) study of university students in Hungary, and

Frolova and Rogach's (2021) study of Russian university students all question the quality of online education in comparison with traditional education.

Despite the challenges with online education and the debate about the quality of online education, it appears however from this study that online education should be looked to as an appropriate way to support refugee education for refugees and other marginalized groups. In Zawacki-Richter & Qayyum's (2019) book, "Open and Distance Education in Asia, Africa and the Middle East: National Perspectives in a Digital Age" the authors describe the status of online education around the globe. They note the significant growing demand for higher education and how this growth is already accelerating the adoption of online education, especially, within the developing regions of the world and countries with large populations. They state: "globally, enrollments in higher education have been growing faster than any other level of education. From 1995 to 2014, enrollments [grew] in primary education by 9.5%, in secondary education by 34.3% and in higher education by 60.9%" (p.129). Online education is seen as a way to meet this demand without investing in massive infrastructure and high costs (Zawacki-Richter & Qayyum, 2019). Palvia et al. (2018) also predicts the continues growth of online education adoption in response to accelerating demand for higher education in developing countries.

JWL's online educational model confirms the opportunities for successfully supporting refugee students in gaining access to tertiary education when online learning is provided. Moreover, online education appears to be the only solution for this population, given the challenges they face in either obtaining a higher education degree or not having it at all. This study has revealed that with the appropriate structural

arrangements and a culture of support that addresses the needs of students throughout the process of access, admission, retention, and graduation, an online program of study is a viable option in certain contexts and situations.

Considering that online education is still perceived as a relatively new approach in the field of education, generally, and to an even greater degree in the area of public education, there are very few organizations that have had an opportunity to be involved in contributing to the process of educating refugee youth via online education over a long period of time. Consequently, there are very few existing organizations specializing in delivering distance higher education to the refugee students in the developing countries (where the majority of refugee population reside).

The data gathered by JWL over the past twelve years and data from this case study reveal a meaningful pedagogical and technological approach to the education of refugee students. It shows the advantages of offering an educational model that changes and progresses over a significant period of time, one that adopts a reflective process and continually responds to the needs of refugees. It shows how the development of effective technology strategies facilitate the learning process. This case study represents a significant value to policymakers, governments and NGO organizations who are attempting to help a greater number of refugee children and youth, many of whom do not have access to education.

### **Limitations**

This case study is of course an examination of only one organization and therefore it provides a limited understanding of how organizations can support tertiary education for refugees or if the use of technology is the best strategy. We do however



gain a better understanding of the potential benefits and disadvantages of a distance educational model for refugee students. This study shows how one organization increases refugee access to education and adds new knowledge to the field of refugee education in general by pointing out the various strategies and problems refugees face.

Although not generalizable to all organizations that provide educational support for refugee students, the findings can be used to apply important conceptual knowledge for further investigation into other organizations focused on supporting higher education for refugee students. This study is valuable in terms of connecting a real life setting with real players in the field of Refugee Education.

I understand that my cultural biases and preferences may have affected the way I have approached and interpreted certain areas and topics within the areas of this research work. My less-than-complete knowledge in the area I am researching, along with my subjective lenses as an administrator who has spent the last 15 years working and studying at Western institutions of higher education as well as my lack of field research experience undoubtedly has affected the entire research process. However, having gone through a significant development process in my own life helps me better understand the needs, conditions, and aspirations of the very people [refugees] this research is aimed to serve. Also being equally exposed to the Eastern and Western worldviews makes me (hopefully!) a better communicator in some conversations that are taking place in the international development community.

Due to the vulnerable status of refugees residing in the contexts of this research study I have chosen not to interview refugee students and their family members. I realize that this represents a significant limitation since I had to relay mostly on the interviews

with JWL's staff and its internal documents. JWL tries to safeguard disclosing personal information of its refugee students by limiting their communication with its international faculty and staff to its LMS platform.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Research on the emergent field of refugee education in general, and innovations in refugee education specifically, is an uncharted territory. The situation worsens when it comes to understanding how the developing world regions are serving large refugee populations. Most of the existing research covers refugee educational experiences in the Global North countries that host only a small fraction of the global refugee population. Future research is needed to analyze government policies toward refugee students, to better understand the role of local educational systems in refugee education, and to provide an overall evaluation of the status of refugee online education around the world. Additional studies that unpack the reasons for refugee students' attrition as well as when refugees persist is called for.

As we learn more about what works and what does not work in supporting the education of refugee students, the new educational models that are better adapted to the contexts and conditions of refugees can be envisioned. These new educational approaches can shape the work of the multiple stakeholders working on the enormous challenge of bringing refugee youth to the world of higher education.

This closer look at one distance educational model for refugee students has provided important insight into how online education can serve as a valuable resource not only for those who are attempting to help a greater number of refugee students

(educators, policymakers, NGOs) but all institutions interested in adopting and developing online education in their contexts

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide

#### Interview Questions List is guided by the Research Questions:

- In what ways, if any, does JWL's technological distance educational model support refugee populations and facilitate their access to education?
- What factors support or challenge JWL's distance learning model in providing higher education opportunities to refugee students specifically, in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya and Malawi?
- What are the implications of this study for educators, policy makers of countries hosting large refugee populations, and international and local NGOs operating in the region that are attempting to help a greater number of refugee students?

#### Introduction:

- Thank you for meeting me. I am so grateful to you for taking the time to do this interview.

- I am excited to have this opportunity to learn from you.

- As I mentioned in the email, I am conducting interviews for my dissertation study on the topic of refugee education. The interview will be used only for the purposes of the dissertation study and will be shared with the staff of JWL, the members of the dissertation committee and several students. I will make sure this research study respects the boundaries identified by your organization and every individual involved. Also, I will not interview refugee students and their parents due to their vulnerable status and security issues that may arise in the process. No identifiers, including students', teachers' and staff names, students' ID numbers, contact information, and other identifiers will be collected.



Instead, I will code the information using the generic tags like student #1, staff member #1, etc.

- You are not required to answer every question and you can stop the interview at any time or ask to skip a question. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview so I can recall exactly what you said. You can ask me to turn off the recorder at any time.

- Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Interview Participants' Groups:**

- 1) Instructors of JWL
- 2) JWL's administration members
- 3) JWL's supporting staff members
- 4) JWL's IT specialist(s)

### **Interview Questions:**

#### Instructors

- 1) Please can you share a little bit about yourself? What has motivated you to join this organization?
- 2) Please can you describe your average student? What is the age range of students of the JWL? Ethnic backgrounds? What language(s) do they speak?
- 3) Do your students have alternative opportunities to access education?
- 4) What educational goals have you set for your students?
- 5) What is the language of instruction?
- 6) What are your students' biggest challenges?

- 7) Please can you describe your distance education technological model and the learning process?
- 8) What education access barriers, in your opinion, JWL's educational distance model was able to eliminate for its refugee students? What kind of educational access challenges still exist?
- 9) Please can you give me an example of how the current educational model benefits refugee students? What are some of the challenges with distance learning?
- 10) How does the current educational model consider the needs of refugee students?  
Does not consider the needs of refugee students?
- 11) Can you list the disadvantages of your distance educational model?
- 12) In your opinion, does this distance education model represent a better alternative to a traditional school setting, if you think it does, when it comes to educating the refugee students?
- 13) Tell me about a time when you have seen refugee students succeed. What were the factors influencing it? When have you seen them fail? What were the factors influencing it?
- 14) If you would have a chance to influence the educational legislation process in the country, what educational policies and practices you would introduce that would respond better to the needs of refugee students?
- 15) What educational journeys will your students pursue after leaving this setting?

#### Organization's administration

- 1) What is/are the purpose(s) of JWL's educational project?

- 2) What education access barriers, in your opinion, JWL's educational distance model was able to eliminate for the refugee students? What kind of educational access challenges still exist?
- 3) Do your students have alternative opportunities to access education?
- 4) Please can you give me an example of how the current educational model benefits refugee students? Does not benefit refugee students?
- 5) How the current educational model considers the needs of refugee students? Does not consider the needs of refugee students?
- 6) In your opinion, does this distance education model represent a better alternative to a traditional school setting when it comes to educating the refugee students?
- 7) Can you list the disadvantages of your distance educational model?
- 8) If you would have a chance to influence the educational legislation process in the country, what educational policies and practices you would introduce that would respond better to the needs of refugee students?
- 9) Does JWL provide a free education for refugees? If not, how much does it cost (including any additional costs)?
- 10) How do you find/recruit your students?
- 11) Does JWL provide extracurricular activities? Please can you list them?
- 12) Are credentials provided by JWL recognized in the country? Are they transferrable?
- 13) What educational journeys your students pursue after leaving this setting?

Supporting staff members

- 1) What education access barriers, in your opinion, JWL's educational distance model was able to eliminate for the refugee school-aged students? What kind of educational access challenges still exist?
- 2) Do your students have alternative opportunities to access education?
- 3) Please can you give me an example of how the current educational model benefits refugee students? Does not benefit refugee students?
- 4) How the current educational model considers the needs of refugee students? Does not consider the needs of refugee students?
- 5) In your opinion, does this distance education model represent a better alternative to a traditional school setting when it comes to educating the refugee students?
- 6) Can you list the disadvantages of your distance educational model?
- 7) If you would have a chance to influence the educational legislation process in the country, what educational policies and practices you would introduce that would respond better to the needs of refugee students?
- 8) What educational journeys your students pursue after leaving this setting?

IT specialist(s)

- 1) Please can you describe your distance education technological model?
- 2) Please can you give me an example of how the current educational model benefits refugee students? Does not benefit refugee students?
- 3) How the current educational model considers the needs of refugee students? Does not consider the needs of refugee students?
- 4) In your opinion, does this distance education model represent a better alternative to a traditional school setting when it comes to educating refugee students?

- 5) What education access barriers, in your opinion, JWL's educational distance model was able to eliminate for the refugee students? What kind of educational access challenges still exist?
- 6) Can you list the disadvantages of your distance educational model?
- 7) If you would have a chance to influence the educational legislation process in the country, what educational policies and practices you would introduce that would respond better to the needs of refugee students?

## APPENDIX B

### Observation Guide

#### **Observation Protocol is guided by the Study Research Questions<sup>4</sup>:**

- In what ways, if any, does JWL's technological distance educational model support refugee populations and facilitate their access to education?
- What factors support or challenge JWL's distance learning model in providing higher education opportunities to refugee students specifically, in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya and Malawi?
- What are the implications of this study for educators, policy makers of countries hosting large refugee populations, and international and local NGOs operating in the region that are attempting to help a greater number of refugee students?

#### **Setting(s):**

JWL's online courses which refugee students participate in asynchronously.

#### **Observing Setting Guidelines:**

**I will take an ethnographic approach and document the entire session paying particular attention to the following:**

#### The Setting

- What technology(s) are used for this online course?
- What Learning Management System (LMS) is used for this online course?
- What software/program(s) is used in this online course?

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<sup>4</sup> Observation Guides are prepared based on recommendations stated in the Merriam & Tisdell (2016)

- Is internet connection stable for every participant? Can everyone connect to the online course?
- What tools/applications/objects/resources are used throughout the online course?
- What device(s) are required to be able to participate in this online course?
- Who administers the setting?
- Do students experience problems with connecting to the online course? What kind of problems?
- What stands out?

#### Participants

- Who is participating in the online course? (list all participants)
- Describe participants
- Who is participating in discussions? Who is not?
- Does everyone participate in the online course? If not, who does not participate?  
How many participate regularly in the online course? How many do not?
- How many students do not submit weekly assignments?
- Do you observe anything unusual in participants and their behavior?

#### Activities and Interactions

- What is the language of instruction?
- Does anyone struggle with the language of instruction? If yes, who are they?
- Who speaks to whom in the discussion space?
- Do you observe any norms or rules that structure the activities and interactions?
- Describe the instructor's pedagogical approach/method(s)/style.
- Observe/summarize conversations in the discussion board.

- Do you observe anything unusual?

Subtle factors:

Less obvious but perhaps as important to the observation are

- Informal and unplanned activities
- Symbolic and connotative meanings of words
- “What does not happen” . . . especially if “certain things ought to happen or are expected to happen” (Patton, 2015, p. 379, emphasis in original)
- Artifacts

My own behavior:

- How is my role, whether as an observer or a participant, affecting the interface I am observing?
- What thoughts I am having about what is going on?
- What thought I am having about the participants?

**Fill out during observation:**

Place:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Observation:

Participants (how many, their ages and roles, ethnicity, course grade level):

Documents/Artifacts:



Running Notes or Field Notes (filled out during observation):

Follow the guidelines listed above to document the observation session.

## APPENDIX C

### Coding Process

#### Research Questions

- 1) In what ways, if any, does JWL's technological distance educational model support refugee populations and facilitate their access to education?
- 2) What factors support or challenge JWL's distance learning model in providing higher education opportunities to refugee students specifically, in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya and Malawi?
- 3) What are the implications of this study for educators, policy makers of countries hosting large refugee populations, and international and local NGOs operating in the region that are attempting to help a greater number of refugee students?

#### First Cycle of Coding

##### Provisional Code 1

JWL's online educational model (358 codes)

##### Provisional Code 2

Challenges JWL faces in delivering online education to refugee students residing in Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi (242 codes)

##### Provisional Code 3

Barriers or challenges to Higher Education that JWL's online educational model was able to eliminate (159 codes)

##### Provisional Code 4

How JWL supports refugees and their access to education (241 codes)

##### Provisional Code 5

Advantages and implications of JWL's online educational model in affecting access to Higher Education for refugees (442 codes)

Provisional Code 6

Disadvantages or limitations of the JWL's educational model (152 codes)

**Second Cycle of Coding**

Categories Emerged from the Provisional Code 1

The data generated under the Provisional Code 1 was reviewed against the provisional subcode "facilitating access of refugees to higher education" (218)

Categories Emerged from the Provisional Code 2

Challenges with internet/electricity (31)

War, conflict, political instability, unemployment, operating under the different legal systems related challenges (46)

Transportation related challenges (15)

Cultural prejudice against education/education for girls (24)

Local culture challenges (alcoholism, narcotics, theft, crime, violence, etc.) (8)

Local environmental challenges (flooding, epidemics, pollution, etc.) (15)

Learning process is challenged by harsh living conditions of refugees (lack of shelter, food, sickness, loss of family members, anxiety, etc.) & lack of realizing it by the distance-based staff (41)

Capacity challenges (high demand for HE but JWL can accept only a few students) (13)

Challenges related to the vulnerable status of refugee students (2)

Challenges with LMS (8)

Challenge with the choice of curriculum (Western or Local?) (3)

Mobility of refugees interrupt learning process (19)

### Categories Emerged from the Provisional Code 3

JWL removed the geographical/cultural barrier by bringing HE to the places where it does not exist, or existing opportunities are not accessible for refugees (67)

JWL removed the financial barrier by providing refugees with access to HE for free (13)

JWL removed the language barrier by (15)

JWL removed the digital skills barrier to HE by providing refugee students with training (4)

JWL opened the door for refugees to pursue advanced degrees locally and globally by providing certificate & bachelor programs that serve as a first step in their academic careers (23)

JWL removed some documentation requirements necessary for enrollment to its programs (for refugee students) (7)

JWL removed the technology barrier by providing IT equipment to refugee students for free (16)

JWL removed an age barrier for refugee students (4)

### Categories Emerged from the Provisional Code 4

JWL supports refugee students locally through community learning centers (CLC) (58)

JWL supports refugee students through its Ignatian pedagogy approach that promotes critical thinking, social awareness and a positive view of self and others (29)

JWL supports refugee students online (online tutors, resources, applications) (33)

JWL supports refugees economically (free education, increased employability, professional development) (26)

JWL supports refugees by providing them with different practical skills: English language skill, digital skills, research skills, etc. (23)

JWL supports refugees with access to academic opportunities (JWL's free accredited higher education, refugees earn transferable credits or degrees, JWL's programs serve as an academic foundation for refugees' further academic studies, flexibility of the JWL's educational model and its policies and processes) (86)

JWL supports refugees by providing various networking opportunities (8)

#### Categories Emerged from the Provisional Code 5

High graduation/completion rate of JWL online educational programs; growing number of courses offered and growing number of students (34)

Holistic Ignatian educational philosophy approach used at JWL that emphasizes critical thinking, social awareness and a positive view of self and others has a positive effect on refugee students (63)

Community Learning Centers (CLCs) provide local guidance and support for refugee students by allowing them to have a peer support group and onsite facilitators' guidance (42)

JWL brings HE to the places where it does not exist, or existing opportunities are not accessible for refugees (53)

JWL programs equip refugee students with skills helping them to advance academically and professionally (114)

Credits of courses taken at JWL can be transferred to other universities (19)

JWL's free education provide refugees with access to HE (8)

JWL online programs provide refugee students with access to various networks (22)

JWL's education is inclusive (16)

JWL refugee students have a positive influence on their communities (31)

JWL provides education in partnerships with others (44)

JWL online model is scalable, transferable, sustainable, resilient (22)

Advantages/innovativeness of the JWL's technology (29)

Flexibilities of the JWL policies called to remove refugees barriers to accessing education (15)

#### Categories Emerged from the Provisional Code 6

Students' academic challenges with the JWL model (60)

JWL credentials are not recognized locally; refugee students consider distance education not as valuable as on-campus education; governments do not allow refugees to work in some countries (27)

Sacrifices students make and challenges they face in order to pursue JWL education (36)

Local community prejudice against foreign influence/cultural challenges (2)

Lack of placement/limited capacity of the JWL's programs (8)

Refugee youth is at risk group/vulnerability of refugees (4)

Power gap between faculty/staff of JWL and refugee students/lack of connection (15)

## APPENDIX D

**Certificate of Liberal studies and Bachelor's Degree in Sustainable Development  
program of JWL**

The program has three concentrations:

- Sustainability, Leadership for Peace Building
- Business Enterprise
- Management.

Program's learning objectives are:

- Develop a deeper understanding of the development landscape at local, regional & global levels.
- Acquire analytical and managerial skills to plan, implement, monitor & evaluate sustainable development programs.
- Set up business and social enterprises leading to sustainable development.
- Act as stewards for protecting our common home; become leaders of peace and voices to foster hope for creating a more just and humane world.
- Help communities to develop in a way that is sustainable and highlights the importance of the relationship between the economic, social, political and environmental spheres.

Programs' courses:

Academic Program	# Courses	Credits	List of Courses
<b>Certificate in Liberal Studies – Foundation Program – One Year</b>	11 courses (1 non-credit + 10)	3	Academic Writing
		3	Interpersonal Communication
		3	Dynamic Algebra
		3	Introduction to Physical Science
		3	Ethics and Human Person
		3	Religions of the World

	credit courses)	3	Introduction to Political Thought
	= 30 credits	3	Introduction to Sociology
		3	Human rights and women rights
		3	Introduction to Business
<b>Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development Three Years</b>	30 courses	5	The Journey of Sustainable Development
	+	5	Fundamentals of Environmental Science
		3.75	Humans and Environment (NI)
	Internships	3.75	Responding to Environmental Challenges (NI)
		3.75	Sustainable Water Management (NI)
	(2)- 4 credits	3.75	Sustainable Agriculture (NI)
		3.75	Agroforestry (NI)
	+	5	Climate Change
		5	Development and Global Poverty
	Final Project	5	Social Research Methods
		3	Food Security and Mitigation of Hunger
	6 credits =	3	Community Organization and Social Action for Development
		3	Education for the Margins: Challenges and Choices
	129.75	5	Sustainable Energy Systems
		5	Sustainable Consumption and Production
	Credits	3	Institutions and Agencies for Sustainable Development
		5	Waste Management for Sustainable Livelihood
		3	Public Health Systems and Services
		5	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)
		3	Access to Clean and Affordable Cooking Technologies
		5	Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Response
		5	Sustainable Development Programs: Monitoring, and Reporting
		3	Circular Economy
		5	Environment and Social Impact Assessment
		5	Natural Resource Economics
		3	Organizational Behavior and Management
		3	International Marketing
		3	Self-Care and Conflict Coaching as Peace Leader
		3	Theory of Conflict (Hekima)
		3	Forming an integrative Peace Leader Disposition
	4	Two 2-Week duration Internship at the end of year 1 year 2	
	6	Final Year Project of 8 weeks duration.	



## APPENDIX E

**List of Referenced JWL's Documents**

- Document 1. jwl-diploma-impact-report-04-complete2
- Document 2. 20210326-jwl-annual-report-web-final
- Document 3. jwl-annual-report-2019-website-final
- Document 4. jwl-annual-report-online-2018
- Document 5. 2018-consolidated-financial-report-3-19-2020
- Document 6. 20200731-covid-and-jwl-report-july-2020-2
- Document 7. collective-journey-of-the-globe-aug2018
- Document 8. consolidated-financial-report-for-website-26112020
- Document 9. engg-response-to-climate-change-jan2016
- Document 10. giz2017-0691en-refugee-higher-education-employability
- Document 11. Jigsaw\_landscape\_review
- Document 12. Jigsaw\_research\_study
- Document 13. jwl-diploma-impact-01-report
- Document 14. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-0-finalfinal
- Document 15. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-1-finalfinal
- Document 16. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-2-final
- Document 17. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-3-final
- Document 18. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-4-final
- Document 19. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-5-final
- Document 20. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-6-ir-mhd-final
- Document 21. jwl-diploma-impact-report-02-7-ir-mhd-final

- Document 22. jwl-diploma-impact-report-04-complete2
- Document 23. jwl-report-on-10-years-online-diploma-opt-final
- Document 24. Learning with Students at the Margins\_ Creighton University\_s Pi
- Document 25. meducation-washington-06oct2017
- Document 26. Translating Ignatian Principles into Artful Pedagogies of Hope
- Document 27. JWL Application Form
- Document 28. Academic Policies JWL-XUB 2020 (002)
- Document 29. Brochure- One year Certificate programme in Liberal studies and 3 year Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development, May 2020\_1
- Document 30. Interpersonal\_Communication\_Syllabus
- Document 31. PCC-Plagiarism\_Policy\_Oct2020
- Document 32. Paper\_Template\_JWL
- Document 33. Covenant JWL-XUB-BA-SD-ACT

