

# The Impact of Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Differences on Refugees Integration: A Study of Mahama Camp in Rwanda

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**Abstract:** This study investigates and provided solutions to cultural and linguistic challenges in Mahama Camp where refugees and camp staff are from various cultural backgrounds. The specific objectives that guided the study are: to discover the causes and effects of cultural and communication challenges in Mahama Refugee Camp; and to investigate potential strategies and interventions to address these challenges. The theories that underpin this study are Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Cultural Dimensions Theory (CDT) and Sociocultural Theory (SCT). To achieve above-mentioned objectives, questionnaires and interviews were dispatched to refugees residing in Mahama Camp, camp staff, non-governmental organisations and the hosting community members. The data collected were coded in SPSS software, analysed and presented them using tables and figures. The findings revealed that refugees in Mahama Refugee Camp face cultural and communication challenges including cultural diversities (82.4 %), language differences (85.3 %), overcrowding and lack of privacy (66.7 %), discrimination and racism (21.6 %), and ethnocentrism (31.4 %). The findings also showed that effects of multicultural challenges to refugees include culture shock (67.6 %), increased stress and anxiety (88.2 %), sense of isolation and depression (75.5 %), loss of identity (36.3 %), and feeling of displacement (29.4 %). The study recommends all the actors involved, including the government of Rwanda, non-government organisations, and refugees, to provide psychological preparedness training, organize regular community dialogues, provide intercultural integration trainings, cultural immersion workshops and festivals, and organize mass sports activities in order to overcome multicultural challenges in the camp.

**Keywords:** Refugee, Culture, Cultural Diversity, Cultural Integration, Intercultural Communication

## INTRODUCTION

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention declares that a refugee is someone who has fled their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution on one of five grounds: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (UN Refugee Convention, 1951). The Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda, situated on 160 hectares of land in Kirehe District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda, provides refuge for 54,846 refugees, 5,517 asylum seekers and 3,044 others of concern from the Republic of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, who have escaped conflict and persecution in their homeland (UNHCR, 2023). Among the myriad challenges they face, multicultural issues are often prevalent and can pose significant barriers to their integration and well-being. The camp hosts refugees from diverse cultural backgrounds, each with their own customs, beliefs, and practices. This diversity can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and difficulties in communication and cooperation among the refugee population. By identifying and exploring the specific challenges faced by refugees in this context, this study aims to shed light on the unique experiences and needs of this population and provide recommendations for policies and interventions to support their well-being and successful integration into the host community.

### 1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mahama Camp hosts refugees from diverse cultural backgrounds, each with their own customs, beliefs, practices, traditions, norms and values. This diversity leads to misunderstandings, conflicts, culture shock, and difficulties in communication and cooperation among the refugee population. Therefore, exploring, understanding and addressing these multicultural challenges is crucial for the successful integration and comfort for refugees as well as effective management of the camp. Thus, this study investigates the multicultural challenges faced by refugees, their causes and effects, then proposes potential strategies to address them.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the causes and effects of these cultural and communication challenges?
- 2) What strategies and interventions could be put in place to address these challenges?

## STUDY OBJECTIVES

- 1) To identify the causes and effects of these cultural and communication challenges in Mahama Refugee Camp;
- 2) To investigate potential strategies and interventions to address these challenges.

## The importance of the study

This research seeks to generate evidence-based findings that can foster better understanding and decision-making addressing multicultural challenges in refugee camps, with specific relevance to Mahama Camp in Rwanda. The study's recommendations aim to inform policy-makers, camp administrators, and humanitarian organisations, enabling them to adopt targeted strategies for addressing multicultural challenges, improving social cohesion, and enhancing the overall living conditions for refugees.

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The aim of conceptual review is bringing out the key terms of the study and defining them.

### Refugee

According to the UNCHR (2005), based on Article I of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is anyone who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution, is outside their country of nationality and is either unable or unwilling to seek protection from that country. This fear of persecution can be based on factors such as race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, 2005, p. 5). The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol classify refugees into several categories based on their circumstances and specific needs including *Convention Refugee*, *Asylum Seeker*, *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)*, *Stateless Persons*, *Religious or Political Affiliation*, and *War Refugees*.

### Culture

Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language (Raymond, 1989:89). Culture refers to the symbols, language, norms, beliefs, values, and artefacts that characterise any society and that shape the thoughts, behaviours, and attitudes of the members of the society.

Culture is the way of life of people, their customs, their traditions, their value systems, their belief systems, their festivals, their dressing code, what they eat, the way they socially interact among themselves, and how they express themselves in language (Allwood, 1985).

### Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity generally refers to a reality of coexistence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, and sexual orientations of human beings. It could extend to the way people react to this reality and the way people choose to live together with this reality (Lin, 2019:1). Cultural diversity means the sum of various kinds of differences (ethnic, "racial", or cultural) including their intersections or co-articulations with gender and also the debates, controversies, and conflicts, as well as warmth and solidarity. By interacting with cultural diversity, our cultural identities can be constructed (Lott, 2010:5-7).

### Cultural Integration

In multicultural societies, understanding the dynamics of distinct majority and minority identities is crucial. Cultural integration is the process of blending together different cultures into a unified whole, where people from diverse backgrounds come together and share their beliefs, values, customs, and traditions. There are two main strategies of acculturation that individuals may use to integrate into a new culture, which are assimilation and integration. Assimilation is the process in which individuals adopt the culture of the dominant group and forsake their own cultural identity. This can involve learning the language, customs, and traditions of the dominant culture and fully immersing oneself in that culture. Assimilation can lead to a loss of one's original cultural identity and a complete adoption of the new culture. Integration, on the other hand, involves maintaining aspects of one's original cultural identity while also adopting elements of the new culture. This approach allows individuals to preserve their cultural heritage while also participating in and contributing to the new culture. Integration requires individuals to navigate between the two cultures and find a balance between their original identity and the new culture they are integrating into. Berry (1997), connected culture and integration and focuses on the ability of individuals to adapt to new cultural contexts. Berry proposed a well-known framework that categorises acculturation strategies based on two dimensions: cultural maintenance and cultural adoption. Cultural maintenance is the extent to which individuals maintain their original culture, while Cultural Adoption is the extent to which individuals adopt the culture of the host society.

### Intercultural Communication

Intercultural Communication can be defined as "the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, including both national and cultural differences as well as differences which are

connected to participation in different activities that exist within a national unit" (Allwood, 1985:2). Authors like Gudykunst (2003:163-166) limit the term intercultural communication to refer only to "communication among individuals from different nationalities". Other authors, such as Judith & Thomas (2007:51-83) in contrast, expand the notion of intercultural communication to encompass interethnic, inter-religious, and even inter-regional communication, as well as communication among individuals of different sexual orientations. Therefore, intercultural communication refers to the exchange of information and ideas between people from different cultural backgrounds. This type of communication requires an understanding and awareness of the differences in cultural norms, values, beliefs, and communication styles in order to effectively communicate and interact with others from different cultural backgrounds. It also involves being able to navigate and adapt to cultural differences in order to avoid misunderstandings and promote mutual respect and understanding.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and Cultural Dimensions Theory (CDT) to explore communication behaviours. CAT, developed by Howard Giles in 1987, examines how people adjust their communication styles to align with their conversation partners, focusing on behavioural adaptations and perceived attunement, which is particularly useful in cross-cultural contexts. Additionally, CDT, developed by Geert Hofstede in 1965, provides a framework for understanding cultural differences through six dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. These theories together help to understand and predict communication outcomes, attitudes, and behaviours in diverse cultural settings.

### METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative method to collect and analyse data.

#### a. Targeted population

This study targeted refugees, camp officials (staff members), development partners, and the hosting community in Mahama Refugee Camp were selected as the population sample for this study.

#### b. Research instruments

This study used questionnaires as data collection instrument. In this investigation, quantitative data was collected using questionnaires that contained multiple-choice, open and close-ended questions. The questionnaires were sent to the respondents via Google forms, and they were administered electronically. The questionnaires were pertinent for answering the two research questions to find the causes and effects of linguistic and cultural problems, and possible solutions to address them.

#### c. Sample size

A size of one hundred and two (102) participants were selected including ninety (90) refugees, seven (7) humanitarian aid workers and representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs)/Development Partners, two (2) camp staff, and three (3) participants from hosting community.

#### d. Sampling techniques

This study uses purposive and random sampling to select research participants. 102 respondents were purposely selected to provide information about linguistic, cultural and communication challenges that they experience in the camp. These include managers, NGO Representatives, executive committee members, quarter leaders, village leaders who provide a voice for refugee community, and other refugees.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Demographic information of the respondents

This section presents the demographic information of the sample population to describe the research questions in this study. Demographic questions were asked to the refugees about their gender, age, marital status, place of birth, level of education, spoken languages, and profession.

**Table 1: Demographic data frequency**

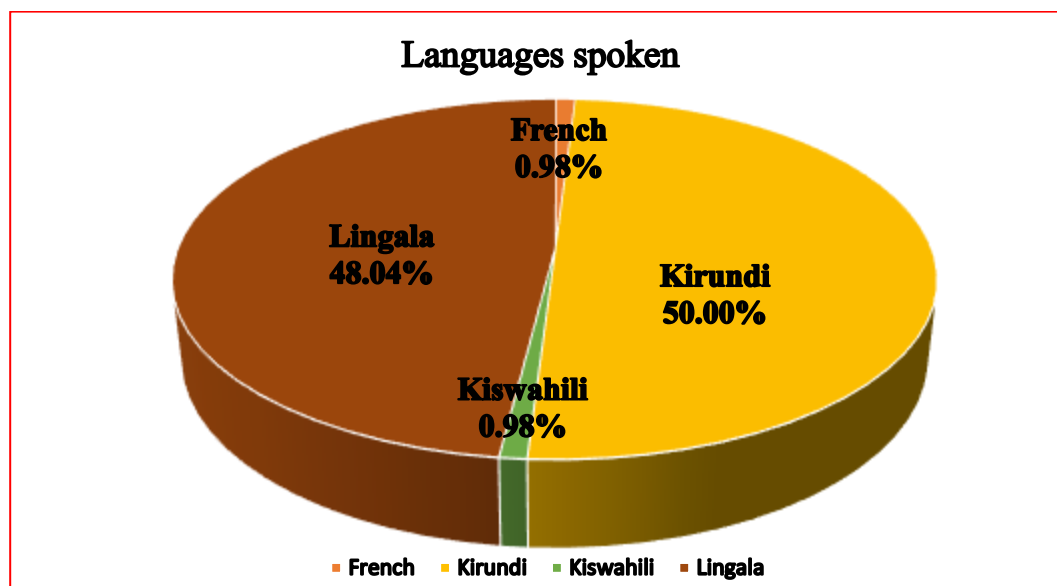
	Gender		Age			Marital status			Place of birth	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>15–20</i>	<i>21–25</i>	<i>26 +</i>	<i>Divorced</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Burundi</i>	<i>DRC</i>
<b>Count</b>	53	49	12	27	63	21	35	46	52	50
<b>%</b>	52.0%	48.0%	11.8%	26.5%	61.8%	20.6%	34.3%	45.1%	51.0%	49.0%

*Source: Fieldwork, 2024*

Out of the 102 respondents, the gender distribution of participants shows that 53 (51.96 %) were female and 49 (48.04 %) were males. The age group of respondents shows that 11.76 % of respondents are in the 15–20 age range, another 26.47 (falls into the 21–25 age range, while 61.76 (are in the 26-age range and above. Marital Status of respondents shows that 21 (20.59 %) respondents are divorced, 35 (34.31 %) are married, while 46 (45.10 %) are single. 52 (50.98 %) respondents were born in Burundi, while 50 (49.02 %) respondents were born in DR Congo. This near-equal distribution suggests that the sample provides a balanced representation of individuals from both countries. This balance is beneficial for comparative analyses that aim to understand language and cultural diversities across these two groups.

### Spoken Languages

**Figure 1: Languages spoken**



*Source: Fieldwork, 2024*

According to the figure above, the language distribution shows that the majority of respondents speaks Kirundi (50 %), followed by Lingala (48.04 %). French and Kiswahili are spoken by a very small fraction of the respondents, each at 0.98 %. Kirundi and Lingala are the dominant languages in the camp, together accounting for 98.04 (of the total). This indicates a strong linguistic presence of these two languages within Mahama Camp. The dominance of Kirundi and Lingala suggests that these languages play a significant role in the cultural and social interactions within the community. Programs and services should consider using these languages to effectively reach and engage the refugees. The dominance of Kirundi and Lingala implies that these languages play a significant role in the cultural and social interactions within the community. Programs and services should consider using these languages to effectively reach and engage the refugees.

### Cultural and communication challenges faced by refugees in the camp

**Table 2: Cultural and communication challenges faced by refugees**

Cultural and Communication Barriers Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Language differences	87	29.4%
Ethnocentrism	21	7.1%
Overcrowding and lack of privacy	84	28.4%
Discrimination and racism	16	5.4%
Cultural diversities	88	29.7%

*Source: Fieldwork, 2024*

The above table highlighted the primary causes of cultural and communication challenges in Mahama refugee Camp. Language differences are a prevalent challenge ranked with 29.4 (of responses and 85.3 (of cases. Similarly, cultural diversities are highlighted

as a significant challenge, with 29.7 (of responses and 86.3 (of cases, indicating that the diversity of cultural background can lead to misunderstandings or communication difficulties. Overcrowding and lack of privacy is also a prominent barrier, with 28.4 (of responses and 82.4 (of cases, suggesting that overcrowding can impede effective communication by reducing privacy and increasing stress. Ethnocentrism, with 7.1 (of responses and 20.6 (of cases, is a notable barrier which can hinder open and respectful communication. Although less frequent, discrimination and racism are significant with 5.4 (of responses and 15.7 (of cases, highlighting the impact of prejudices and discriminatory behaviours on communication. The findings suggested that policies and initiatives aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting inclusivity can help create a more respectful and open communication in camp environment.

#### Aspects of camp life found most different

**Table 3: Aspects of camp life found most different**

Camp life Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Social norms and customs	58	26.9%
Language and communication	43	19.9%
Daily routines	55	25.5%
Food and cuisine	60	27.8%

**Source : Fieldwork, 2024**

The above table shows some aspects of camp life different from those of refugees in their respective homes. Food and cuisine are the most frequently mentioned aspect, with 27.8 (of responses and 58 (of cases, possibly due to the importance of dietary preferences and cultural food practises. Social norms and customs are also a major aspect of camp life with 26.9 (of responses and 56.9 (of cases. Daily routines are another important aspect with 25.5 (of responses and 53.9 (of cases, indicating the role of structured activities and routines in the daily lives of refugees. Language and communication, although the least frequently mentioned, account for 19.9 (of responses and 42.2 (of cases.

#### Causes of multicultural challenges

**Table 4: Causes of multicultural challenges**

Causes of cultural challenges Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Language barriers	79	38.7%
Cultural differences	61	29.9%
Limited access to technology	43	21.1%
Lack of interpreters	21	10.3%

**Source: Fieldwork, 2024**

The above table highlighted the primary causes of cultural and communication challenges in Mahama refugee Camp. Language barriers are the most frequently cited cause, with 38.7 (of responses and 77.5 (of cases, which makes it a major obstacle in effective communication and cultural integration. Cultural differences are the second cause with 29.9 (of responses and 59.8 (of cases, indicating that varying cultural norms and practices significantly impact communication in the camp. Limited access to technology, representing with 21.1 (of responses and 42.2 (of cases, highlights the role of technological access in facilitating or hindering communication. Although the least cited cause, lack of interpreters accounts for 10.3 (of responses and 20.6 (of cases, underscoring the importance of having interpreters to bridge language gaps.

Therefore, the high percentage of language barriers indicates a need for robust language support services, such as language classes, translation and interpretation services. Addressing cultural differences through training programs that promote cultural awareness and sensitivity can help mitigate misunderstandings and improve communication. Enhancing access to technology could facilitate better communication within the camp. Availability of interpreters could significantly reduce communication challenges faced by refugees in Mahama Camp.

#### Impact of multicultural challenges on daily interactions, decision-making, and community cohesion

**Table 5: Emotional and psychological effects**

Emotional and psychological effects Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Increased stress and anxiety	90	29.7%
Sense of isolation and depression	77	25.4%
Culture shock	69	22.8%
Loss of identity	37	12.2%
Feeling of displacement	30	9.9%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As mentioned in the above table, multicultural challenges pose several emotional and psychological effects on refugees in Mahama Refugee Camp. The findings ranked increased stress and anxiety as the most frequently reported effect, with 29.7 (of responses and 88.2 (of cases, which shows that stress and anxiety are prevalent emotional effects among refugees in the camp. The second most common effect is sense of isolation and depression, with 25.4 (of responses and 75.5 (of cases, indicating that isolation and depression are significant issues in the camp. Culture shock, is also a notable psychological effect, with 22.8 (of responses and 67.6 (of cases, reflecting the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment. Representing 12.2 (of responses and 36.3 (loss of identity highlights the impact of cultural transition on personal identity. Although the least frequently mentioned, feeling of displacement accounts for 9.9 (of responses and 29.4 (of cases, indicating the relevance of displacement within the camp.

#### Overcoming language barriers to enhance communication

**Table 6: Existing programs and initiatives**

Overcoming language barriers Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Promoting language learning	101	81.5%
Using visual aids and pictograms	12	9.7%
Providing multilingual interpreters	11	8.9%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

As the findings show, in order to enhance communication in the camp, interviewed camp staff, development partners and members of the host community proposed the following: 81.5 (of them proposed promoting multilingual learning, 9.7 (proposed using visual aids and pictograms, and 8.9 (of them proposed the provision of interpreters.

#### Strategies and interventions could be put in place to address these challenges

This section presents the strategies, interventions, suggestions and recommendations to address those multicultural challenges. It compiles data of respondents from both refugees and camp staff as well as non-governmental organisations operating in the Mahama Camp. It equally presents qualitative data from interviewees.

#### Strategies to promote cultural understanding and harmony among refugees in Mahama Camp

**Table 7: Strategies to promote cultural understanding in the camp**

Strategies to promote cultural understanding Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Regular community dialogues	12	21.8%
Celebrating cultural festivals together	10	18.2%
Providing intercultural communication training	12	21.8%
Multilingual education	8	14.5%
Psychological preparedness	13	23.6%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024



The findings show that in order to promote cultural understanding and harmony in the camp, as requested camp staff and DPs personnel, the following strategies need to be implemented: psychological preparedness is the most frequently cited strategy, with 23.6 (of responses and 92.9 (of cases, which suggests that preparing individuals psychologically for cultural differences is seen as highly effective. Regular community dialogues and providing intercultural communication training are equally important, each with 21.8 (of responses and 85.7 (of cases, indicates that ongoing conversations and formal training are crucial for promoting cultural understanding. Celebrating cultural festivals, with 18.2 (of responses and 71.4 (of cases, highlights the importance of shared cultural experiences in fostering mutual respect and understanding. Although less frequently mentioned, multilingual education still counts for 14.5 (of responses and 57.1 (emphasising the role of language education in bridging cultural gaps.

Therefore, the findings suggested that a combination of psychological preparedness, regular dialogues, intercultural training, and cultural celebrations can effectively promote cultural understanding. The high percentage of mental preparedness indicates that mental readiness to face cultural differences is crucial. Programs should include components that address emotional and psychological aspects of cultural adaptation. Community dialogues and cultural festivals are essential for building a sense of community and shared identity.

### Government and Development Partners' policies regarding refugee integration in Mahama Refugee Camp

**Table 8: Government and DPs Partners' policies**

Government Frequencies		
	Responses	
	N	Percent
Comprehensive language training	11	32.4%
Vocational skills development	13	38.2%
Mass sports activities	9	26.5%
Cultural exchange programs	1	2.9%

*Source: Fieldwork, 2024*

The findings show that in order to integrate refugees in the camp, camp staff and development partners (NGOs) need to implement the following policies: vocational skills development is the first-ranked program, with 38.2 %of responses and 92.9 (of cases, comprehensive language training is ranked the second with 32.4 (of responses and 78.6 (of cases, indicating the importance of language skills for integration and communication. Mass sports activities, representing 26.5 (of responses and 64.31 (of cases, highlights the role of sports in promoting social cohesion and physical well-being. Cultural exchange programs, though the least ranked with 2.9 (of responses and 7.1 (of cases, suggests a need for more emphasis on cultural exchange initiatives.

Therefore, the high percentage of vocational skills development indicates a strong need for programs that enhance employability and economic self-sufficiency to further support community integration. The significant role of comprehensive language training underscores the necessity of language proficiency for effective communication and integration. In addition, encouraging participation in mass sports would enhance social bonds. Developing more cultural exchange initiatives could promote mutual understanding and respect among refugees.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### Cultural and communication challenges faced by refugees in the Mahama Refugee Camp

Descriptively, findings show that the majority of respondents, agreed that the refugees in Mahama Refugee Camp face cultural and communication challenges because of language differences, cultural diversities, overcrowding and lack of privacy, discrimination and racism, and ethnocentrism. The following are the details:

#### a. Language differences

The findings showed that the camp uses different languages including Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, Lingala, French, Arabic, and mother tongues. 85.3% of respondents identified language differences as a significant challenge. This high percentage underscores the importance of addressing language barriers to improve communication in the camp.

#### b. Cultural Diversities

The findings show that 86.3% of respondents pointed to cultural diversities as a challenge. This indicates that the diversity of cultural backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings or communication challenges. Diversity enriches the camp experience but it also requires effective management to prevent misunderstandings.

#### **c. Overcrowding and Lack of Privacy**

Among the asked respondents, 82.4% of them reported overcrowding and lack of privacy as a challenge. Overcrowding can exacerbate stress and discomfort, leading to communication breakdowns. It also suggests that physical conditions could impede effective communication by reducing privacy and increasing stress.

#### **d. Discrimination and Racism**

The findings show that 15.7 % of the respondents reported discrimination and racism as an issue. Although a lower percentage compared to other factors, it remains a critical area that needs attention to ensure a safe and inclusive camp environment.

#### **e. Ethnocentrism**

Ethnocentrism was identified by 20.6.4% of respondents as a cause of cultural challenges. This tendency to view one's own culture as superior can hinder open, respectful, and effective intercultural communication in the camp.

In conclusion, language differences and cultural diversities are the most pressing issues, followed by overcrowding and lack of privacy. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies can significantly enhance communication and cultural coexistence in the camp.

#### **The Causes and Effects of Cultural and Communication Challenges**

The findings showed that the majority of respondents agreed that the causes include language and communication barriers, cultural differences, lack of interpreters, limited access to technology. On the other hand, effects include culture shock, increased stress and anxiety, sense of isolation, conflicts and miscommunication. This is in agreement with Thomas (1985) who stated that symptoms of culture shock include depression, helplessness, hostility to the host country, feelings of anxiety, overidentification with home country, feelings of withdrawal, homesickness, loneliness, paranoid feelings, preoccupation with cleanliness, irritability, confusion, disorientation, isolation, tension, defensiveness, intolerance of ambiguity, and impatience.

#### **a. Language Barriers and Communication Difficulties**

The findings showed that 77.5 % of respondents identified language barriers as a big challenge, with a numerical value of 79. This high percentage underscores the importance of addressing language barriers to improve communication and cultural integration in the camp.

#### **b. Lack of Interpreters**

A lack of interpreters was highlighted by 59.8% of the respondents as a hindrance to successful communication. Increasing the availability of interpreters can significantly reduce communication challenges within the camp.

#### **c. Cultural Norms**

Specific cultural norms and practices cause misunderstandings among refugees, as highlighted by 47.1% of respondents. These norms include food and cuisine (58.8%), social norms and customs (56.9%), language and communication (58.8%), and daily routines (53.9%).

#### **d. Limited Access to Technology**

The findings show that 42.2 % of the respondents have limited access to technology. This affects their harmonious stay within the camp as they have limited access to information. This view is in line with Quintanilla (2013:1) contends that, refugees are living in an information void and communication gap environment. They are left in the dark about what is happening around them.

#### **e. Not Having Access to Different Services**



The findings show that 24.5 % of the respondents face barriers in accessing services such as education and health care services. Among the reasons provided include language barriers and communication issues, expensive medications, lack of school materials and equipment.

#### **f. Increased Stress and Anxiety**

A high percentage of respondents, 88.2%, reported experiencing increased stress and anxiety. This indicates that cultural and communication barriers significantly contribute to mental and health issues.

#### **g. Sense of Isolation and Depression**

Feelings of isolation and depression were indicated by 75.5% of respondents. This shows that some refugees face severe emotional distress.

#### **h. Culture Shock**

The findings show that the cultural differences are at 86.3 %. Thus, 67.6 (of respondents faced culture shock. The latter has affected their emotional well-being by feeling isolated at 75.5( and increasing stress and anxiety at 88.2 %. 23.5( of the respondents supported the idea of integrating other cultures into their own, while 76.5 % did not support the idea of integration.

This highlights the challenges individuals face when adapting to a new cultural environment. This in concord with Furnham and Bochner (1982) who asserted that culture shock occurs in the social encounters, social situations, social episodes, or social transactions between sojourners and host nationals. In other words, we experience culture shock when many familiar cultural cues and patterns are severed, when our values and beliefs are questioned in a new environment (Kohls, 1984).

#### **i. Loss of Identity**

A loss of identity was reported by 36.3% of respondents. This occurred when they felt disconnected from their cultural roots and struggled to find their place in the new setting of the camp.

#### **j. Feeling of Displacement**

Feelings of displacement were reported by 29.4% of respondents. This reflects the emotional turmoil of being uprooted from familiar surroundings and the difficulty of establishing a sense of belonging in the new environment.

### **Strategies and Interventions to Address Above Challenges**

In order to address the multicultural challenges in the camp, the majority of respondents agreed that strategies and interventions to be put in place include comprehensive multilingual education and training, vocational skills development, cultural exchange workshops, regular community dialogues, advocating for inclusivity, providing psychosocial support, mass sports activities, providing intercultural communication training, and celebrating cultural festivals together. The following is a detailed summary:

#### **a. Comprehensive multilingual education and training**

Comprehensive language training was supported by 78.6% of respondents. Among camp staff, 57.1% supported multilingual education. This strategy would help bridge language barriers, making communication more inclusive and effective within the camp. It would also facilitate integration, helping refugees navigate daily life and access services.

#### **b. Psychological Preparedness**

A significant 92.9% of camp staff respondents highlighted psychological preparedness as a crucial strategy to ease integration. This high percentage emphasises preparing refugees psychologically for cultural differences to enhance harmony and understanding. Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978) also noted that to deal with culture shock or psychological stress in a host culture, we must effectively deal with eight potential problems we may encounter therein: (1) frustration, (2) stress, (3) anxiety, (4) different political systems, (5) pressure to conform, (6) social alienation, (7) financial difficulties, and (8) interpersonal conflict.

#### **c. Vocational Skills Development**

Vocational skills development for job creation was chosen by 92.9% of respondents. This high percentage underscores the importance of equipping refugees with vocational skills as a key strategy for integration. This approach enables refugees to become self-reliant, support their financial stability, and contribute to the local economy.

#### **d. Cultural Exchange Workshops**

Identified by 7.1% of the respondents, this policy involves organizing cultural exchange workshops and celebrating cultural festivals together. 71.4% believed in the power of celebrating cultural festivals together, to foster mutual understanding, a sense of community and appreciation for diverse cultures.

#### **e. Organizing Regular Community Dialogues**

The strategy is supported by 85.7% of camp staff respondents, while 12.7% of refugee respondents agreed on organizing regular community dialogues. These dialogues provide a platform for open communication, helping to address misunderstandings and build trust among camp residents.

#### **f. Providing Intercultural Integration Trainings**

The importance of intercultural communication trainings was highlighted by 85.7% of the camp staff respondents. Additionally, 14.6% of refugee respondents showed interest in intercultural integration trainings. Such trainings would equip refugees with the skills needed to navigate cultural differences effectively. Intercultural training begins with the understanding of cultural differences and teaches to recognize that people are a complex product of gender, ethnicity, and individuality (Gairnor & Forrest, 1991). Through effective intercultural training, people acquire a wider repertoire of knowledge and skills to interpret the worldviews and communication patterns of people of different cultures.

Good intercultural training affects our cognition, and behaviour beneficially in a variety of ways (Brislin, Landis & Brandt, 1983). Cognitively, trainees come to (1) understand more about each other's points of view; (2) use fewer negative stereotypes in thinking about people of different cultures; (3) recognize greater complexity in their own and others' cultures; and (4) develop a "world-minded" attitude just as they gain a greater knowledge of their own culture. Affectively, effective intercultural training enhances (1) enjoyment in interacting with people of different cultures; (2) expectations that we can establish good relationships with people of different cultures; and (3) the pleasure of living in an unfamiliar cultural environment. Behaviourally, effective intercultural training helps us (1) develop better interpersonal relationships in a work group whose members represent different cultural backgrounds; (2) better adjust to the different kinds of stress caused by cultural differences; (3) achieve better job performance; (4) feel more at ease while interacting with people of different cultures; and (5) achieve the goals we set for ourselves in intercultural communication.

Kohls (1984) narrowed the proposed impact of intercultural training on participants to the following elements: preparation for participants' physical move to a new culture; comprehension of survival and logistical skills in a new culture; the ability to verbally and nonverbally communicate with the host nationals; the reduction of social blunders in the new culture; enhanced sense-making in the face of cultural variability; the application of the worldviews of the host nationals; the ability to cope with culture shock; facilitation of positive feelings in the process of intercultural adjustment; transformation of the trainee into a bicultural person; and the expansion of the self and of cultural understanding.

#### **g. Organizing Mass Sports Activities**

The last but not least is organizing mass sports activities. This strategy was opted for by 64.3% of refugees' respondents. These activities promote physical health, social interaction, and a sense of community among refugees. Encouraging participation in sports enhances social bonds.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made for resolving cultural and communication challenges in Mahama Refugee Camp, in Rwanda:

#### **1. Recommendations to Refugees of Mahama Camp**

All refugees are recommended to play their part in making the camp a harmonious and comfortable place for them by sharing personal stories and experiences, participating in community leadership and cultural awareness events. Refugees should be of best behaviour in order not to violate camp rules, regulations, and norms of both the host community and their mates.

## 2. Recommendations to the Government of Rwanda

It is recommended that they implement various interventions and strategies proposed by this study. The government should provide comprehensive multilingual training; psychological preparedness; vocational skills development; cultural exchange programs; organize regular community dialogues; provide intercultural integration training; and organize mass sports activities to address multicultural challenges encountered by refugees in Mahama Refugee Camp.

## 3. Recommendations to NGOs

NGOs play a pivotal role in ensuring the safe stay of refugees in camps. The non-governmental organisations operating in Mahama Refugee Camp are recommended to invest in capacity building programs that bring harmony and comfort in the camp. They should advocate for refugees whose living conditions are at stake, promote conflict resolution, provide humanitarian assistance, and ensure the smooth compliance with refugees rights through close collaboration with the government and the host community.

## 4. Recommendations to the East African Community

The East African Community is recommended to:

- a. Promote peace and security by accelerating and ensuring implementation of regional peace mechanisms and agreements to address state fragility and promote stability; and implementing regional and bilateral mediation and reconciliation processes to resolve conflicts;
- b. Protect vulnerable populations by developing joint guidelines for the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless populations, particularly children, women and youth, in humanitarian, peace, and development process.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings of the study, the research concludes that the linguistic and cultural communication challenges faced by refugees in Mahama Refugee Camp are detrimental to building good relationships and effective communication among refugees, camp staff and hosting community. In addition, due to the existence of diverse social groups and ethnicity, discrimination, hatred and lack of trust between refugees and host impede the interaction and acculturation. Thus, increased stress and anxiety, sense of isolation, conflicts and miscommunication are considered to be the main effects of culture shock which is prevalent in the camp. The researcher opines that there is a strong need of strategies and initiatives that address these multicultural challenges among refugees in the camp. Those strategies and initiatives include, provision of interpreters to ease communication, comprehensive language training, vocational skills development, cultural exchange workshops, community dialogues, advocating for inclusivity, providing psychosocial support, and mass sports activities. The study has achieved its objectives by investigating the challenges that refugees face, examining their causes and effects, and proposing strategies and interventions to manage those multicultural challenges.

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