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**A systemic and qualitative exploration of career adaptability among young people with
refugee backgrounds**

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Abstract

This article reports on a secondary analysis of qualitative research about five African young adults with refugee backgrounds who storied through semi-structured interviews their career transition in the complex, everchanging systems of their migration journeys. Qualitative descriptors of career adaptability and the systems of the Systems Theory Framework informed data analysis. Findings revealed that the recursive interaction between the five career adaptability dimensions occurred within complex personal, social, geographic and socio-political systems of the migration journey. Findings extend theoretical understandings of career adaptability as a process deeply embedded in complex contextual systems. Suggestions inform career practitioners and future career research.

Most people with refugee backgrounds who are resettled through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement program are below the age of 30 (UNHCR, 2018). This program applies only to those in urgent need of resettlement and involves a lengthy process. Prior to resettlement, most refugees have spent many years in waiting and the processing of their asylum claims can take up to 20 years before they are resettled permanently through the UNHCR resettlement program. Throughout their migration journeys and in transition, young people with refugee backgrounds imagine and plan for their future careers after resettlement (Abkhezr et al., 2018). Integration into the unfamiliar learning and work contexts of the resettlement country is critical for successful resettlement of these young people as they have experienced one of the most disrupted, transitional and complex forms of career development (Cohen et al., 2011).

Career adaptability is a competency required to make successful career transitions in the twenty first century and refers to “the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions” (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). Despite a continuing increase in the number of young people with refugee backgrounds globally, there remains a lack of research about their career development, in particular, their career adaptability. However, the complexity of constantly changing personal, social, geographic, and socio-political systems of the pre-, within- and post-migration journey suggests that career adaptability may be a dynamic process for these young people. This study therefore, investigates the career adaptability of young people with refugee backgrounds after resettlement and its role in their career development in the contexts of their systems of influence. These young people’s adaptation to different circumstances and systems of influence may offer new insights into career adaptability

and understanding its relevance to the migration journey and potentially inform career practice after resettlement. Exploring the career adaptability of young people with refugee backgrounds after resettlement in a new context where they adapt to new circumstances improves our understanding of the relevance of career adaptability in such contexts and, as a result, career practitioner might be more prepared and informed about potential ways of assisting these young people.

Refugee transitions, migration and resettlement

Despite recent record levels of global forced displacement, the UNHCR announced that in 2019, out of over 1.4 million people in need of urgent resettlement, only 63,696 (4.5 percent) were resettled (UNHCR, 2020). In 2018, this number was approximately 1.2 million people and similarly, only 55,692 (4.7 percent) were resettled (UNHCR, 2019). As a result of the gap between resettlement needs and available places, most people with asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds have to wait for years to be resettled, and therefore, spend a long time in transition and uncertainty, either in their original country of residence or in transition countries. Young people and children constitute a large proportion of those who are resettled. For instance, in Australia, between 2006 and 2017, 36% of those resettled were children and an additional 27% were between the ages of 18 to 30 years (Australia Government Department of Home Affairs, 2019) who are considered as youth in this paper. Due to long waiting periods and the unstable conditions of their countries of origin and transition, most of these young people's educational and career pathways have been disrupted as they moved across different locations.

Transitions and career adaptability

Young people with refugee backgrounds transition through a range of diverse contexts and conditions. Their often-protracted migration journey positions them in a variety of

unexpected situations, an outcome of which is the experience of many discontinuous and involuntary transitions (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Some of these young people simultaneously experience a number of transitions to the extent that they develop a “sense of self in transition” (Abkheyr et al., 2018, p. 26) even after resettlement in a final country. This relates to two parallel and simultaneous transitory experiences of “self in the maturation process” and “self in transition through contexts” (Abkheyr et al., 2018, p. 27) through which some of these young people begin to develop strong adaptive skills.

Young people with refugee backgrounds’ experience of self in transition occurs concurrently with a continual need and pressure to adapt to new circumstances in new contexts. Concepts such as a sense of “agency in waiting” or “active waiting” (Brun, 2015, p. 19) reflect the protracted experiences of these young people that are filled with hope and anticipation as they wait for final resettlement (Abkheyr et al., 2018; Conlon, 2011). During this waiting period they envision a future after resettlement which suggests that career adaptability and its five dimensions as suggested by Savickas (2008) may provide some insight into their transitions. For example, they become *concerned* and consequently *curious* about possibilities. In many instances, even in transitory contexts, they take *control*, make decisions and pursue new pathways such as learning new skills or acquiring new qualifications and finally revising future career plans as a sense of *confidence* develops. Finally, throughout their migration journeys, young people with refugee backgrounds interact *cooperatively* with other people who influence their future career stories in person or via social media (Abkheyr et al., 2018; Schultheiss et al., 2011).

Adaptability was initially conceptualised as “being able to change, without great difficulty, to fit new or changed circumstances” (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). However, as the

construct of career adaptability was further developed and operationalised, a number of dimensions were introduced for it. Career adaptability consisted of four dimensions of concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas, 2005). Subsequent refinement of the construct identified a fifth dimension of cooperation (Savickas, 2008), particularly when researching career adaptability with people from collectivist and non-western cultural backgrounds (Brown et al., 2012; McMahon et al., 2012; Nye et al., 2017; Savickas, 2008). Relational influences play an important role in the career development of people from collectivist cultural backgrounds (Watson et al., 2011) and the inclusion of cooperation as the only interpersonal dimension of career adaptability balances its individualistic focus (Nye et al., 2017).

Reflecting on the previous conceptualisations of career adaptability, a heavy emphasis on volition is evident (Wehrle et al., 2019). A high degree of career adaptability assumingly could lead to “objective markers of [career] success, such as increased employability, promotability, and [higher] wages” (Campion, 2018, p. 12). However, youth with refugee backgrounds’ challenging experiences during the migration journeys and after resettlement limit their volition and access to resources (Abkhezr et al., 2015; Beadle, 2014). Despite this, many young people with refugee backgrounds who have experienced multiple unexpected educational and career disruptions throughout their migration journeys make efforts to take advantage of transitions and develop new skills. In fact, they seem to readily activate and employ a high degree of flexibility and agency after resettlement (Obschonka, et al., 2018) and they have been considered “career adaptive” (Campion, 2018, p. 6). However, research that could explain or operationalise career adaptability among young people with refugee backgrounds is scant. Little research has empirically explored career adaptability among people with refugee backgrounds and its role in their career development remains unclear. Understanding the career adaptability of young people

with refugee backgrounds and the relevance of its five dimensions for their career development in a qualitative way could also be useful in formulating supportive strategies.

Qualitative understandings of career adaptability

Some authors have suggested advancing qualitative understanding of career adaptability (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Johnston, 2016; Savickas, 2008), and to date, a limited number of qualitative studies have done so (e.g., McMahon et al., 2012; Wehrle et al., 2019). In particular, the research of Wehrle and colleagues highlighted the role of both contextual resources and barriers on people with refugee backgrounds' ability and motivation to be more adaptive with their careers and their successful application of adaptability resources for career development after resettlement (2019). These examples illustrate how qualitative, systemic and process-oriented research of career adaptability could inform career counselling. To further expand the scope of qualitative research on career adaptability of disadvantaged populations, the current research used the qualitative descriptors of career adaptability proposed by McMahon, Watson, and Bimrose (2012) in their research on older women's career transitions.

The "Qualitative Descriptors of Career Adaptability" (QDCA; McMahon et al, 2012, p. 762) are a set of qualitative descriptors for each of the five dimensions of career adaptability listed in the *CAAS-International Forms 1.0 and 2.0* (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). QDCA enables a detailed exploration of career adaptability in people's life-career stories as they transition through various contexts and makes evident the recursive interplay between the five dimensions of career adaptability (McMahon et al., 2012). It provides an opportunity for researchers to qualitatively reflect on how the five dimensions of career adaptability are experienced by participants. Additionally, the application of QDCA for the analysis of qualitative research with disadvantaged populations aligns well with intentions of conceptualising career adaptability as a

heuristic construct (Savickas, 2011) and could be useful for informing practice that supports young people after resettlement. The diverse influences of the often-protracted migration journey results in their telling of a diverse range of life-career stories (Abkhezr & McMahon, 2017) that reflect the complexity of the systems within which their subjective understandings of careers are constructed (McMahon et al., 2019). Against this background, the current research use of the QDCA for the analysis of young people with refugee backgrounds' life-career stories happens in conjunction with a detailed consideration of various systems that influence their career adaptability through the Systems Theory Framework of career development (STF; McMahon & Patton, 2018; Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Systems Theory Framework of career development

The STF is “an integrative and coherent framework of career influences” (McMahon, 2011, p. 170). Comprising three broad systems of influence within the context of past, present and future time, the STF is a map that depicts the complex and dynamic nature of career development (McMahon & Patton, 2018; Patton & McMahon, 2014). At its centre is the individual system that comprises a range of cognitive, psychological and physical attributes. Intersecting the individual system is a range of social influences such as family, peers and the media. The individual and social systems are situated within a broad environmental-societal system that incorporates influences such as geographical location, socioeconomic status and political decisions. The influences of these three systems are regarded as the content of career development. Change over time is one of the process influences of career development along with the recursive interaction within and between influences. The influence of chance represents the third process influence of the STF. For people with refugee backgrounds, the migration journey from their country of origin to the country of resettlement is deeply embedded in

complex, challenging, and constantly changing personal, social, geographic, and socio-political systems as depicted in the STF (McMahon & Patton, 2018). For example, such systems initially provoke the need to migrate and later influence the nature of the journey including the support available for education and career opportunities throughout the diverse contexts of the pre-, within- and post-migration journey. The STF may provide a way of understanding how career adaptability manifests. The aim of the present research was to systemically explore young people with refugee backgrounds' life-career stories to better understand how career adaptability manifests in their lives and how it contributes to their career development after resettlement.

Method

This article reports on a secondary analysis of data collected in research that explored the career development of young people with refugee backgrounds and details related to its methodology have been reported elsewhere (see Abkhezr et al., 2018 & Abkhezr et al., 2020).

Recruitment and Participants

Purposive and snowball sampling were used for recruiting participants through educational institutions and community organisations that provided services for young people with refugee backgrounds around Brisbane (an Australian state capital city). Once the first two participants were recruited through purposive sampling and interviewed, they referred interested volunteers to the lead researcher (snowball sampling) and a further three participants were recruited. Ethical approval was granted by the University Ethics Committee.

Five participants (four females and one male) who were born in three different African countries were recruited. All participants had been resettled in Australia for less than a year through the UNHCR Resettlement Program and Australian Humanitarian Visa Programme for

Refugees (offshore) category (Australia Government Department of Home Affairs, 2019). Three female participants, Maysa (28), Zafeera (23) and Asima (21), moved together in various contexts including a refugee camp and spent 15 years in transition (pseudonyms were chosen with participants' approval). Kali (20), another female participant spent more than 14 years in transition and finally, Amir (21), the only male participant spent 11 years in transition before resettling in Australia. All five participants are now permanent residents of Australia.

Instruments and data collection procedures

Each participant attended two semi-structured narrative inquiry interviews as part of the larger project which also included other data collection procedures and instruments. This paper only focuses on the first interview with each participant which explored their life-career stories and future career plans (see Abkhezr et al., 2018; Abkhezr et al., 2020) and enabled an exploration of aspects of their career adaptability throughout the migration journey. An interview protocol informed the overall structure of the interviews that explored the participants' pre-, within- and post-migration life-career stories, which included their education, paid and unpaid work experiences and future career plans. The lead researcher who conducted all the interviews, occasionally asked further clarifying questions. Each interview was between 70-90 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were also given a chance to read the de-identified transcripts of the interviews after the transcription and remove or add any information. None of the participants requested any changes.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using a theory driven deductive thematic analysis based on the theoretical constructs of career adaptability and the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2014; McMahon & Patton, 2018). The analysis of each participant's transcript was completed in two distinct

stages. Stage one involved coding each participant's transcript for representations of the five dimensions of career adaptability using McMahon et al.'s (2012) qualitative descriptors of career adaptability (i.e., Concern: *planful, forward thinking, connects present and future, optimistic, hopeful, prepared, ready* – Control: *independent, autonomous, contemplative, pre-emptive, accountable, trustworthy, persistent, patient, self-principled* – Curiosity: *investigative, self-reflective, future focused, future orientated, exploratory, informed, observant* – Confidence: *efficient, productive, self-perceptive, reliable, proud, self-confident* – Cooperation: *inter-relational, collegial, friendly, interpersonally skilled, accommodating, collaborative*; p. 765).

Two of the researchers cross coded the transcripts according to the QDCA codes, compared their coding and resolved any differences. The second stage of analysis involved a deductive analysis of all the examples of career adaptability dimensions identified in stage one, using the systems and influences of STF (McMahon & Patton, 2018; i.e., individual, social, environmental-societal, change over time, recursiveness, and chance). To ensure rigour and consistency of the analytical process, the research team met regularly for development and discussion of the coding strategies and to reach an analytical consensus where needed. This enabled a depth of discussion in finalising the coded transcripts. Trustworthiness was assured by applying criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Table 1 provides sample narratives from the life-career stories of participants in which a few of the five dimensions of career adaptability were represented and coded in stage one and then through a deductive analysis procedure, a few of the relevant systems and influences of STF were identified and coded.

Table 1

Analytical coding procedures

Sample participant narratives	Stage 1 QDCA codes	Stage 2 STF codes
<p>I'm still studying English ... I look for any [link]? so that I can go to uni and study what I want, cause that's something to me, I really want to do it and it is in my blood, I have to go with it. Here, in Australia, people, they don't need me at the moment, but I think my people in my country need me when I studied that international relations. I will get that opportunity to go and have the voice and maybe support them.</p>	<p>Curiosity Concern Cooperation</p>	<p>Environmental- Societal Recursiveness</p>
<p>My school experiences, they help me a lot because, when I was in school, I interacted with other students, talking ... each of your friend's backgrounds, where they come from, their problems, what they like, what they don't like ... I learn more through the teachers, through other students ... I learn more and know more and prepare.</p>	<p>Curiosity Cooperation Control</p>	<p>Recursiveness between past, present and future</p>
<p>There are things which I passed through, because I had a lot of problems and I see some people coming to help our family, then I say: "Oh, god. I have to help people" ... because there are people who are helping us. And I have to help other people who are suffering. Because I was suffering too much and a lot of people ... help us, so I have to help other people. Because yeah ... [clap] people love us ... We had a lot of problem, but [clap] people help us. Like UNHCR, it's not easy. A country like Kenya to receive refugee through refugee camp to stay in their country. It's not easy, yeah. That's why I'm planning to help people, yeah. That's why.</p>	<p>Cooperation Control Concern Curiosity</p>	<p>Social Environmental- Societal</p>

<p>If I still have that power, I think I may not change their mind, but I will know ... the reason why ... because when I was in the camp, sometimes we interact with the UN managers. I always ask them: “why is that a few of people going and many others are not going” and they never give the right answer. They always say ... you guys don't have peace, but they are going through the same things ... I think we just have to give them support and give them an opportunity to maybe go abroad, stay and study and come back and help people.</p>	<p>Curiosity Confidence Cooperation Concern</p>	<p>Environmental- Societal Chance</p>
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Results

The analysis of participants’ interview transcripts revealed a broad range of narratives in which the five dimensions of career adaptability recursively interacted with each other within the migration journey’s systems of influence as outlined in STF. Each participant’s life-career stories will be briefly overviewed separately to provide examples of the recursive interactions between the five dimensions of career adaptability within the migration context and its systems of influence.

Asima

Forced to leave her village behind when she was only six years old, Asima who never met her father, lost her mother too. She walked for hundreds of kilometres with two of her cousins for almost two years, crossed country borders and arrived in a refugee camp where they spent their next thirteen years before they finally were resettled in Australia through the UNHCR resettlement program. While telling stories of her evolving interests, plans and work experiences, Asima explained how she was *curious* about the work of accountants and business managers.

Concern was evident as she had some ideas about studying business management since she was in primary school:

I used to tell myself “that is what I want to be”. I felt that maybe when I grow up, something will change, but it was growing more. So, I found myself just loving business. I see something and turn it into business ... My teacher asked me: “What do you want to do in future?” and I said: “I want to be a business-person” and that’s it.

While the *curiosity* dimension was reflected through her exploratory and observant attitude for becoming a businesswoman, the role of broader social influences over time were evident:

I was thirteen. I used to like how they dress and present themselves ... sit in the front rows. I saw them in movies and magazines ... somebody once said you can be an accountant and then I was like: accountant? He explained and I said: that’s what I want to be.

Asima’s reflections on the evolving plans of becoming a businesswoman in the following example exemplified both her sense of *concern* and *curiosity* for her future career but also a strong desire to help others which illustrated the interaction of the *cooperation* dimension with *concern* and *curiosity*. The camp’s environmental-societal context and observing the struggles and suffering of others were strong influences:

It touched my heart when I saw what happened to them. I said this world without money, it’s nothing. So, I decided to work hard and provide to them, so that people won’t be killed because of money ... I told myself I just have to work harder and save money to help others in future and when I go to America, I’m

going to study and start again ... I worked as a carer for a while ... I was trying to help the disabled kids. Because I was never brought up with my real mom, I felt like a mother ... I felt so happy talking to them and [seeing] they understand me.

Gradually, Asima took more *control* of her plans by finding a way of working in a nearby town's pharmacy due to policy related to being able to move outside the camp for work (environmental-societal system). Being persistent (individual system) meant that she gained the support of the owner (social system) who then opened another shop for Asima to manage (*control and cooperation*). As she succeeded in her role and developed a quality relationship with the owner (social system), she learned more about herself and some of her plans changed once she became more confident in her abilities (*curiosity and confidence*):

The small business we opened was my own small business. She liked my hard work because I was doing everything and she was just like my sister, like my mother and we shared ideas. She was older than me, but we were so close, and I really loved the business ... She gave me bonus when I passed the target and I always passed our targets.

After coming to Australia, Asima prioritised working as a businesswoman over studying. The following is an example of how the three dimensions of *concern, control* and *curiosity* are interacting within the individual and social systems as Asima reflects on her own personality and interests, following a chance event that provided her with opportunities when her local council offered business start-up grants (environmental-societal system; a chance event for Asima):

My next plan is ... I want to sell and make African ... I decided to research and see ... how much it will cost, and I start saving for it. But then I saw this [local council project] advertisement. I applied and I heard that I got the shop just

yesterday ... They liked my proposal ... Now, I work for a month or two, until I know how my business is running and then ... go to university ... I'm still working on that ... I want to continue studying.

Asima's career development that occurred in transition contained many examples of the interactions between the five dimensions of her career adaptability that resulted in new realisations of skills and interests within her changing systems of influence that recursively influenced her career adaptability.

Maysa

Maysa moved through the same migration journey with Asima and their other cousin. However, being older meant that she took more *control* as she felt responsible for her younger cousins, and therefore, was forced to disrupt her education and start working earlier (social system):

I did my high school, but not passed. Most of the times I dropped out to go and work, to bring something home for my sisters to eat ... I had to work more to bring a teacher home to teach us English until I got university scholarship. Then that was nice ... I went to university.

Considering their circumstances, Maysa's sense of *control* interacted with the *cooperation* dimension. Maysa's narratives also contained many examples of the *concern* dimension. Her sense of *concern* and planfulness for the future emerged immediately in the initial moments of the interview when she was asked about the duration of her time in Australia: "It is now six months, one week and three days". Reflecting on the environmental-societal and social systems from which she came, Maysa explained:

I'm counting for my dreams, my plans, what I want to do in six years. I want to achieve everything that I wanted to do in my life ... all my plans are to help the babies, the mothers giving birth. That's really a problem ... in Africa. We have a big issue of circumcision of ladies.

She continued outlining her education plans and her intentions to study nursing and maybe later gynaecology. However, there was always a trace of accommodating other people's needs (*cooperation*) in these future plans (*concern*):

I want to study hard and fight against it ... work here, earn money and go back to Africa ... we have a plan with some friends. We want to open our own hospital for women who are having difficulty giving birth. That's what I'm counting for.

Through becoming more familiar with the environmental-societal context of the camp in which such plans and priorities developed, Maysa explained a variety of curiosities through which she transitioned step by step closer to this current plan. From volunteer community work, to a desire for making movies and finally to the plan of education in health and building a hospital:

We started filming in the hospital ... I saw some patients, the rooms, wards ... I was not impressed with it all ... I felt like I want to help in there. I had that feeling of 'I need to do something, but I can't do anything'... we had a break and then I started talking to doctors: Can I help you? Can I do this? They said: No! ... but I just wanted to help and see what people are doing. Then there was Jane! A nurse ... She was such a nice lady. She told me: I see you really like to be a doctor ... Later, I saw an advertisement of a nursing course ... I applied.

The above excerpt is an example in which *curiosity*, *concern*, *control* and *cooperation* are all interacting recursively within Maysa's individual and social systems and the chance event of seeing an advertisement for a nursing course.

Zafeera

Zafeera wanted to be a fashion model when she was in the camp's primary school. She related this interest to seeing what some models usually did around the environmental-societal system of the camps to help orphaned children or homeless people: "They always build and visit them. So, I thought with that opportunity [of becoming a model], maybe I can also help more people ... I thought whatever I want to do, I just want to help". However, this plan gradually changed as Zafeera learned more about other ways of helping people: "Something that I really wanted to do in my life was going and working in the community ... I said that I want to study international relations and peace building". Zafeera explained how the camp context influenced this decision:

What I saw or heard in the camp from thousands of different people from different countries, I really wanted to do international relations ... they had a small college in the camp. I went and did public relations for six months ... I got the certificate. That encouraged me ... because I really admire Kofi Annan ... how he's helping people, with the war in Syria or Kenya ... He studied international relations too. He has that power and chance to help other countries ... I say to myself I just want to be like him. So that made me focus on what I want to study.

Zafeera's sense of *curiosity* that manifested through her social system by listening to different people's stories, wanting to complete a certificate in the camp college and learning more about her role model, interacted with other dimensions of *control*, *concern* and *cooperation*.

Zafeera connected her future plans with a sense of concern for others while reflecting on her own life experiences of hardship:

I have to build my future ... be someone. I don't want my kids or others to come and go through what I have gone through. So, that always gives me power ... make me achieve what I want: to be able to go back and help my people.

Again, the recursive interaction of the three dimensions of *concern*, *cooperation* and *control* in the context of development within a migration journey is apparent in Zafeera's statement. Such strong willingness for nurturing a future career plan in public and international relations and helping people, encouraged Zafeera to even reflect on the personal characteristics of her individual system of influences and with the support of others from her social system of influences, impose change where needed:

Because I was very shy, it was very hard ... I couldn't speak to someone face to face but that [motivation] made me to be strong ... Before I never had that interacting power and this made me say "I have to do that" ... first thing my manager gave me support and always sent me to places where I talk to people ... talking to people and exchanging words, that made me stronger, not the way I was before.

With a changed tendency for interacting with more people and becoming social, Zafeera was resettled in Australia through the UNHCR resettlement program (environmental-societal

system). At the time of interview, Zafeera was trying to access tertiary education. The interaction between *concern*, *curiosity* and *cooperation* is evident:

At the moment I'm still studying English and looking for any [link] so that I can go to uni and study. I want to do it and it is in my blood, I have to go with it ... I still want to study international relations. I think here in Australia, maybe people don't need me at the moment, but I think my people in my country need me ... I will get that opportunity to go and have the voice and maybe support them.

Kali

Kali was the youngest participant in this study. She completed most of her primary and secondary education when she and her family were in the refugee camp. She was the only participant who was accompanied by her family, including both parents and four siblings, when moving out of her country (social system of influences). This provided her with more opportunities to focus on her studies and interests given her parents' support. She was proud of receiving two scholarships to complete her secondary studies in boarding schools along with her twin sister (social systems of influences) as well as knowing five languages and singing Gospel music (individual system of influences). However, the journey to Australia disrupted much of this for Kali who was adapting her skills and interests to a new context (*curiosity*):

When I heard that we are coming to Australia, I was very happy, I was not even concentrating anymore on school ... I knew five languages. But I have to practice again. That's why I'm planning to go further with my studies ... I need to improve English now, I can then start French or Arabic.

I like singing Gospel songs at home sitting with my sisters and their children ... I can say because of dad. He's a good teacher. Every night before sleeping we have to sing ... that's why I can sing very nice. I can sing in public ... we have already released a CD ... we were singing back in the camp when I joined a group. Then when they said we're choosing people to go and record, I was among the people who went to record.

While being very explorative and curious about further studies, Kali talked about the migration challenge of the cultural differences between Australia, her transitory country and the refugee camp:

I was there fifteen years. The culture was different ... when I came here, I saw a lot of difference in how people communicate ... Like neighbours [in Australia] are not too friendly. At least where we are staying, because I don't know my neighbours even until today ... It was a bit difficult, but I am now used to it.

In camp when we sing at night, people can hear what you sing ... they can get a message ... us Christians, some people don't go to church and we sing at night, so they can also get that message. Then in the morning, they come to you ... because my dad is a priest. But not here ... because you can't make noise to neighbours.

We sing slowly in our house and then sleep. (social system of influences)

The above narratives reflected aspects of Kali's life in which various dimensions of career adaptability interacted with each other (language and singing activities for *curiosity* and *confidence*, challenges faced for *control*, study plans for *concern*, and family connections for *cooperation*). Like other participants, Kali's context of transition from Africa to Australia reflected the recursiveness between individual (age and/or personality), social (family and/or

school) and environmental-societal (geographic location, media, education authorities and/or UNHCR) influences that were part of the systems of the migration journey. When asked about her future career plans, Kali responded:

I'm planning to work with international community services ... to work in like UNHCR. Because I like helping people ... There are things which I passed through, faced a lot of problems and I saw some people came and help our family. Then I say: "Oh, god. I have to help people" ... because there are people who are helping us. And I have to help other people who are suffering ... I have that heart to help people now. That's why I need to study very hard ... That's why I'm planning to help people who are suffering.

The above excerpt is also an example of the recursive nature of the interaction between *concern*, *curiosity* and *cooperation* dimensions of career adaptability. A further example of *cooperation* and *curiosity* dimensions of her career adaptability is evident in Kali's explanation of how her social context has influenced her future plans of community work:

Teachers usually ask that question. Everyone wanted to be a lawyer, a doctor, but I told them "I would like to work with UNHCR" ... I felt good. But some of my friends said: "No ... you can't succeed doing that. You can't do that" ... I said: "Oh, my god. That's what they are saying" ... then I ask my dad. He said: "If it's your plan... then you must remain with it. No one can change your mind". Even my mom and my twin sister encouraged me.

Some of these plans were also reinforced by the social system influences of role models and media:

I like Nelson Mandela. I have never met him, but I like the way he was talking in television. Then I was in grade four. We are reading the social studies books and there are pictures of him and his story. I wanted to help people like he always did ... the other one for me is Angela Chibalonza. She moved from her country to where I was too, just like me. I always liked the way she sings ...

Amir

Amir was the only male participant in the study. He studied, worked and lived in a neighbouring country outside the camp for some years. The interaction between his *control* and *confidence* dimensions with *curiosity* are evident (exploratory and investigative initiatives):

I can say I was lucky to be moving to all those places ... you learn many things in different countries ... get to meet and make new friends ... learn about a lot of cultures and you get used to the world, instead of remaining in only one place ... living with many people, get used to them, to what people want, how to communicate with them.

His *confidence* in navigating his future career plans led him to aim directly for one of the best universities in Australia:

It was a bit hard and now everyone asks me how I did it. When I moved here, I knew I had every reason to continue my studies ... I had purpose, that can make me qualified for what I want to do. So, I started looking for the way out ... searching everywhere ... there was no one to help me, to tell me all that about school, university ... I started with English courses, then I changed to another course, but I changed that too. They were too small for me. I had to force myself

to look for a way to study at university. I went there and talked with someone ... I got accepted into I.T.

The above excerpts reveal the recursive interaction between four dimensions of career adaptability (*control, concern, curiosity* and *confidence*) within a post-resettlement environmental-societal system that is filled with uncertainties and explorations. In this context, various individual, social and environmental-societal levels of influence were also interacting with each other. Amir explained the history of his passion for working in the information technology industry and having a white-collar job:

I left school and joined a net-café, working full time ... then somebody helped so I go back to school. That's how I got interested in computing ... My high school friend knew a lot about computers ... they were so good in computer stuff ... that's how I started. Always asking "who made this? ... who did that?" I got involved with computers ... Mark [Zuckerberg], I consider him as a role model. I want to do similar things ... I mean to get a white-collar job in future ... to work as professional, with people, with papers.

Amir's response further reflected the dynamic nature of interactions between *curiosity, control, concern* and *cooperation* in social systems such as a new workplace, school and even media.

Overall, the findings illustrated the recursive relationship between the five dimensions of career adaptability in the stories of all participants. Studying these interactions was supported through the application of STF that offered a lens to carefully and systemically consider the systems of influence within which the dimensions of career adaptability manifested.

Discussion

The participants in this research recounted their stories of career development during their migration journeys and subsequent resettlement in Australia. The findings supported a conceptualisation of career adaptability as contextually embedded in complex systems of influence and continuously in transition. This section will first briefly discuss findings related to how young people with refugee backgrounds' five dimensions of career adaptability manifested in their stories and then how the systems and influences of the STF offered a useful vantage point for exploring the dynamic and recursive nature of the dimensions of these young people's career adaptability.

Findings revealed how young people with refugee backgrounds can transform “tensions into intentions” (Savickas, 2002, p. 162) as reflected through their stories of autonomy, independence, persistence, accountability and resilience in the face of challenges. The career adaptability dimension of *control* was evident in participants' stories about challenges that initiated their displacement, the survival stories of the migration journey, coping with the limitations and shortcomings of living in a refugee camp, adapting to difficult life circumstances of transitory countries, taking advantage of rare opportunities and finally mapping out a new life in Australia. The career adaptability dimension of *concern* was evident in participants' stories about their strong sense of planfulness, preparation and forward thinking that was evident in their stories of hopefully waiting and optimistically contemplating future education and career possibilities throughout the migration journey (e.g., while living in the refugee camps or transitory countries) as well as when they were resettled in Australia. The career adaptability dimension of *curiosity* was evident in participants' stories of becoming inquisitive, explorative and curious about the possibilities of various experiences, qualifications and courses throughout

the journey, inside and outside of the refugee camps, in transitory countries and now in Australia. The career adaptability dimension of *confidence* was evident in participants' stories as they gradually, independently (and sometimes collectively) faced complexities that emerged at different stages of their journey and were exposed to life threatening experiences (for themselves and others) and reflected, planned, and expanded on potential future career plans. Through these reflections and navigations, they became confident about themselves as they achieved some important steps towards their intended careers. The career adaptability dimension of *cooperation* was evident in participants' stories of interacting and relating with significant others which reflected their sense of "relational resourcefulness" (Abkhezr et al., 2018, p. 27), especially in times of uncertainty and transition. Importantly, this embeddedness within a diverse range of social relationships at "local, global, and metaphoric" levels (Abkhezr et al., 2018, p. 27) influenced many of their plans and decisions and at many points revealed recursive interaction between the cooperation dimension of career adaptability with other dimensions. Therefore, aligned with previous qualitative explorations of career adaptability (Brown et al., 2012; McMahan et al., 2012; Nye et al., 2017), the inclusion of the cooperation dimension of career adaptability in future research seems important, especially as these young people came from and transitioned through a variety of contexts with collectivist and non-western cultural backgrounds. As with the cooperation dimension, each of the other dimensions of career adaptability recursively interacted with and informed other dimensions throughout the pre-, within-, and post-migration stages of each participant's journey, depending on the various systems and process influences of the migration context.

The STF provided a platform for considering the wide range of influences and interrelationships at individual, social and environmental-societal systems levels in the

development, construction or inhibition of the five dimensions of career adaptability for young people who have transitioned across a range of diverse contexts. As such, the five dimensions were not reflected equally in each participant's transcripts. Thus, at the time of interview less than a year after resettlement, participants' narratives evidenced some of the career adaptability dimensions more than others. The STF process influences of change over time, recursiveness and chance evident through the individual, social and environmental-societal systems were useful in making sense of how the dimensions of career adaptability were evident in particular contexts and/or at specific stages of the migration journey. Against this background, the STF was a clarifying lens that offered a balance between the conceptualisations of career adaptability as a personality trait (e.g., CAAS) and as a process and a heuristic construct (Savickas, 2011). The STF facilitated the "macroanalysis of external influences" as well as the "microanalysis of [internal] factors" (Arthur & McMahon, 2005, p. 209) such as participants' personality traits, and as a result, provided the opportunity to explore the intersections of both internal and external systems and subsystems that influenced these young people's career adaptability.

For the young people in this research, their childhood and adolescence stages of development were filled with a "sense of self in transition" (Abkhezr et al., 2018, p. 26), that consists of both internal psycho-physiological (maturational process) as well as external transitions (socio-geographical movements across contexts). Such multilayered transitional experiences are not limited to youth with refugee backgrounds. Many young people dealing with the complexity of navigating their lives in the rapidly shifting contexts of the 21st century, in which the nature of work is changing and diversifying (Frey & Osbourne, 2013), and "jobless work" (Savickas, 2011, p. 251) is dominating their life-career stories, are simultaneously engaged in various forms

of transitions in short periods of times when they are forced to move between contexts, cultures and projects.

Overall, the manifestation of career adaptability in complex dynamic systems throughout the protracted migration journeys suggest that career adaptability could be considered as a life-long, dynamic and fluid construct as well as a point in time personality trait. These findings raise questions about considering career adaptability only as a personal trait, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalised populations who have only limited career exploration opportunities, access to resources, or volition with their education and career choices (Fouad & Kozlowski, 2019). As these young people transitioned through various environments, faced numerous barriers, challenges and opportunities at different stages of their journeys, their potential for developing different dimensions of their career adaptability was heavily dependent on systemic influences.

Implications for practice

The findings have implications for career practice and research. In practice, career counselling has been shifting its focus to qualitative, narrative and collaborative approaches to working with people. This research demonstrated how the facilitation of storytelling for young people with refugee backgrounds made the qualitative exploration of their career adaptability possible. As such, narrative career counselling could be useful in exploring their career development, career transitions, and career adaptability within the context of complex and dynamic systems of influence reflected in the STF. Therefore, the potential usefulness of the STF as a foundation to inform career counselling with culturally and contextually diverse clients (Arthur & McMahon, 2005) is highlighted. One of the practical ways that the STF of career development has successfully informed career practice include using the STF of career

development diagram as an overall map for career counsellors to facilitate contextual and transitional storytelling (McMahon, 2005). Using the map in career counselling also enhances opportunities for improved client's reflection, connectedness, meaning making, learning and agency (McMahon et al., 2015). Awareness of the systems and subsystems of the STF could be useful for both career counsellors and researchers who engage with diverse people. In this way, the STF could operate as a link that connects theory, practice and research (see Patton & McMahon, 2017).

Limitations and future research

The findings of the current study need to be considered in light of the small sample size. However, the study did not seek to generalise. The findings offered a nuanced qualitative understanding of how the five dimensions of career adaptability manifested in the migration journeys of young people with refugee backgrounds in the context of the complex and dynamic systems of influence depicted in the Systems Theory Framework of career development. We recommend that future career adaptability research with disadvantaged populations or those who might have transitioned through a variety of contexts consider including the cooperation dimension of career adaptability. As the only relational dimension of career adaptability, cooperation provides an opportunity to gain insight into the social, contextual and relational aspects of career adaptability.

Future research could examine career adaptability in larger samples with a view to better understand career adaptability as both a trait and as a systemically embedded process. Future research could consider a longitudinal exploration of career adaptability (both qualitatively and quantitatively) among recently resettled young people with refugee backgrounds. Such studies could further enhance our understandings about the dynamic nature and systemic embeddedness

of career adaptability during the lengthy migration journey and its following resettlement process.

Conclusion

Young people with refugee backgrounds who are resettled in countries such as Australia, often develop their first ideas about a future career before final resettlement while still in transition.

The current study revealed stories of career development in transition that reflected the recursive nature of the five dimensions of career adaptability in complex and dynamic systems of influence as illustrated in the Systems theory Framework of career development. The dimensions of career adaptability manifested differently in different contexts and at different times during their transition. This research suggests that career adaptability could also be considered as a process, dynamically reshaped within recursively interacting systems and subsystems of influence.

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