

Editorial Note

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The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE), defined broadly as quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocation, higher and adult education.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

SAMANTHA COLÓN, NATHAN THOMPSON, AND DANA BURDE

Significant progress has been made in the expansion and evolution of an education in emergencies (EiE) data and evidence ecosystem since the EiE field first began to coalesce in the mid-1990s, and with the founding in 2000 of the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). Researchers have increasingly recognized the value of mixed methods and participatory research approaches in crisis and conflict contexts and have focused resources on contextualized and localized measurement tools, data-collection mechanisms, and evaluation research. These advances have helped to strengthen the visibility and rigor of EiE research while improving the field's ability to respond to rapidly evolving crises. Nevertheless, many gaps remain in the generation, uptake, and use of EiE data and evidence. Indeed, this fragile but steady progress in research and programming has been set back by newly emerging, overlapping, and protracted crises, a surge in global displacement and the number of out-of-school children, and the shuttering of USAID, which has had a profound effect on the EiE field and beyond. Despite these shocks to international aid and the research system, evidence-based decisionmaking in EiE remains as important as ever.

UNHCR (2026) estimated the number of forcibly displaced people at the end of 2025 to be approximately 117.8 million, a 4 percent decrease from the previous year. However, the number of conflict settings and conflict intensity remain high, and children are particularly vulnerable. Approximately 1.6 billion children live in a conflict-affected country (Østby and Rustad 2025); of the 258 million school-age children affected by crises, 93 million are out of school entirely (ECW 2026). Protracted crises in Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo account for nearly half of the out-of-school children. This number increases with the addition of crises in Syria, Myanmar, South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Palestine, and the Sahel region. Climate emergencies and food insecurity also disrupt education and put added pressure on humanitarian and development actors to address gaps in data and evidence on issues that intersect with schooling (UNESCO 2022). Although data and evidence are central to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners for education financing, accountability, and planning (UNESCO 2023, 18), major questions remain about the quality, equity, ethics, and usability of EiE evidence (Kim et al. 2024).

The EiE data and evidence ecosystem remains fragmented and is marked by unequal power dynamics. Questions about the contextual relevance of EiE research prevail, as Global North actors dominate research planning and fundraising, while Global South research colleagues, if they are included, often assume the role of field experts due to their familiarity with communities, languages, and in-country networks (Haelewaters,

Hofmann, and Romero-Olivares 2021). When Global North actors guide the early phases of education research and programming, those in the Global South may be sidelined. These dynamics underscore the critical ongoing debates in EiE on epistemic justice and authority. In addition, the demand for data in many crisis contexts has expanded faster than the sector's ability to ensure that evidence systems are equitable, participatory, and safe. Many actors, including the authors whose work appears in this issue, argue that the humanitarian ethos to “do no harm” must undergird the entire EiE data and evidence enterprise.

This *JEiE* Special Issue on Mobilizing an Effective, Equitable, and Just Data and Evidence Ecosystem for Education in Crisis and Conflict Contexts prompts EiE researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to consider what it may take to address the limitations of the current data and evidence systems and ensure that these systems are accountable—not only to donors and institutions but to learners, families, educators, and crisis-affected communities. The EiE field has increasingly advocated for participatory evidence, localization, codesign, and community voices, which has prompted a broad rethinking of what counts as evidence (Barnes et al. 2023; Haelewaters, Hofmann, and Romero-Olivares 2021). Ethical data stewardship principles further encourage EiE actors to center voices from the local communities affected by crisis and conflict, rather than imposing top-down structures that may lead to culturally insensitive interventions.¹ Inclusive and equitable research partnerships that go beyond tokenism may support the ethical generation of community-informed evidence, while strong research institutions can help safeguard the rights and wellbeing of research participants.

The five research articles, four field notes, one commentary, and five book reviews presented in this Special Issue contribute to capacity-sharing and strengthening EiE data and evidence systems. Collectively they emphasize the use of multiple methodologies and multilevel analysis in diverse contexts. They examine evidence that supports learner wellbeing, participation in education, and recovery in crisis contexts, while also interrogating the power structures and institutional dynamics that shape decisionmaking about education in humanitarian settings. These contributions advance collective understanding of effective social-emotional learning (SEL) programming and the benefits of EdTech for accelerated education programming. They offer models for confronting safety risks to participation in education; for school-based data collection, use, and accountability; for equity and capacity-sharing in EiE research goals and processes; and for programming EiE interventions that prioritize data security and integrity.

¹ Ethical stewardship refers to the responsible generation, interpretation, and use of evidence in ways that prioritize human-centered, equity-driven, and locally led responses while advancing localization, redressing power imbalances, and promoting antiracist practices in the EiE sector (Shreeraman 2025). Practitioner knowledge comprises the operational expertise, contextual understanding, and practice-based evidence generated through the design and implementation of education responses in crisis settings. Grounded in frameworks such as the INEE Minimum Standards, it supports coordinated, accountable, and contextually responsive decisionmaking while promoting safe, equitable, and continuous learning for crisis-affected populations (INEE 2024).

We open the issue with two research articles that foreground the learning outcomes and education participation for conflict- and crisis-affected learners. In “What Works to Improve Social-Emotional Skills in Conflict and Crisis Settings: Evidence from a Meta-Analysis of Education Interventions,” Silvia Diazgranados Ferráns, Bernard Thujo, and Ignacio López synthesize findings from 20 rigorous impact evaluations of seven types of education interventions conducted between 2000 and 2024 to identify which approaches are most effective, which domains of SEL they improve, under what conditions, and at what cost. They find that SEL interventions in EiE contexts show a pooled impact of 0.10 standard deviations (SD), which indicates a modest but statistically significant effect on improving children’s SEL outcomes. Interventions that targeted the emotional (0.13 SD), social (0.09 SD), and perspectives (0.07 SD) domains of SEL produced significant effects. In their analysis of intervention types, the authors found that studies of interventions that incorporated SEL-targeted practices into academic programming exhibited modest effects, with low heterogeneity and high statistical significance; mental health and psychosocial support interventions had a high impact (0.16 SD), but considerable variability across mental health and psychosocial support studies resulted in a pooled estimate that was not statistically significant. Diazgranados Ferráns, Thujo, and López conclude with a discussion of the cost-effectiveness of SEL interventions in conflict and crisis settings, noting the tremendous variability among these programs. Interventions that improve SEL outcomes cost US\$211 on average, and achieving a 0.20 SD improvement in SEL outcomes is estimated to cost between US\$157 and US\$636 per child. The authors note that the EiE interventions in their meta-analysis tended to produce smaller overall effect sizes than SEL interventions in high- and middle-income contexts, which they suggest may reflect implementation challenges, insufficient localization and contextual adaptation, and limitations in how SEL is measured in crisis-affected contexts. This study underscores the importance of designing interventions to support SEL outcomes in conflict and crisis settings that are developmentally appropriate, culturally grounded, codesigned with local stakeholders, and scalable from the outset.

In the next research article, “Perceptions of School and Community Safety and Links to Education Outcomes in Contexts of Forced Displacement: Evidence and Mitigation Strategies from Project 21 Countries in the Central Sahel,” Cirenía Chávez Villegas, Alanna Heyer, Seun Bunmi Adebayo, Pierre Vernier, Arsenii Slieba, and Ivan Lopes, address the perceived safety of schools and the surrounding communities among households facing forcible displacement, linking these perceptions to the households’ decisions about participating in schooling and the influence risk factors have on learning. The authors draw from Project 21, a community-based monitoring project among households in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, and Niger, where education participation among displaced families (40%) is lower than among all surveyed households (46%). The authors show that nonparticipation in education is driven by schools being perceived as unsafe, insufficient space in schools, conflict and climate shocks, as well as dropout and prolonged periods out of school. The authors’ interviews with key informants highlight the threats

students face when in transit to and from school, which, along with community- and school-based violence such as bullying, reduces participation in schooling. The authors then recommend a three-pronged approach to counteracting these barriers: (1) school preparedness and emergency planning that builds schools' capacity to respond to threats to safety; (2) the mainstreaming of child-protection principles and strategies to prevent and mitigate gender-based violence; and (3) adaptive education delivery and proximity-based school infrastructure that may, for example, reduce students' exposure to danger en route to and from school. This study strengthens EiE evidence systems by showing how community-based monitoring, such as that provided by Project 21, can address critical data gaps on safety in displacement contexts while modelling ethical, locally grounded approaches for generating actionable evidence.

Building on these discussions of learning and participation, the next research article explores how innovative technology-supported approaches may help address education disruption and exclusion for marginalized learners. In "Can EdTech Improve Accelerated Emergency Education Programs? Empirical Evidence from Pakistan after COVID-19," Thomas Brown, Allyson Krupar, and Farman Khan present results from Learning Tree, a mobile learning application piloted in Pakistan in 2021, where COVID-19 and natural disasters heightened inequities in education access for girls. Using a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design in which a Learning Tree component was introduced alongside accelerated education programming in 25 randomly assigned learning centers, Brown, Krupar, and Khan show evidence of large and statistically significant gains in literacy, numeracy, executive functioning, and SEL outcomes among the Learning Tree treatment group, as measured by the Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO). From the baseline HALDO assessment to the follow-up assessment four months later, the girls who received the additional EdTech intervention had double the learning and developmental gains of those who received only the standard accelerated learning center programming. In their discussion, Brown, Krupar, and Khan argue that EdTech interventions may help to close digital divides for girls in education settings marked by precarity, disruption, and inequality.

We continue our research article section with two pieces that pose questions about how institutional dynamics and governance shape the ways evidence is generated, interpreted, and translated into education policy and practice. In "Hypergovernance and Multilayered Data Accountability in Haiti: Implications for Leadership of NGO Schools," Marion Imboden and Cathryn Magno examine the accountability structures and mechanisms through which school directors generate, analyze, and utilize data in the provision of education. Imboden and Magno review the case of Solèy, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that operates schools across Haiti. They also provide a document review, field observations, and interviews with the NGO's school leaders and executive director, which indicate that school-based leaders are positioned as intermediaries in a kaleidoscopic system of multiple reporting lines, externally imposed compliance regulations, interrupted information flows, fractured accountability, and

high scrutiny. The authors explore how the nature and structure of NGO oversight over schools may influence gaps in school leaders' capacity, and they offer recommendations to help empower school directors to be critical actors in the EiE data ecosystem, such as receiving training on data collection and reporting systems and participating in evidence-based decisionmaking for their schools.

In our final research article, Celia Reddick considers the institutional dynamics at play in refugee education. In "How Decisions Are Made: Organizational Isomorphism and a Focus on English in Refugee Education," Reddick argues that EiE is an "institutionally defined field," one that has strong institutions that share a common enterprise, patterned mechanisms for regulating data and evidence flows, recognized structures of collaboration, and work taking place in uncertain, constrained, low-information, or shifting circumstances. All of these factors may make EiE vulnerable to isomorphism, or the tendency of institutions and organizations in a given sector to converge and become increasingly similar. Drawing from 34 interviews with individuals working in EiE, by participating in EiE convenings, and making other observations of the EiE field in Uganda, Reddick argues that, although EiE program and policy leaders often articulate a diverse set of goals and ambitions with respect to language programming for refugee learners, the reality is that their organizations often default to focusing resources on education access and English language programming, despite these leaders' awareness of the evidence supporting multilingual approaches. Reddick discusses the case of the Language Support Program in Uganda, which has worked to resist the isomorphic trend toward English language programming by "engaging refugees' other linguistic resources, ...drawing from emerging evaluation and research to help inform problem-solving, and identifying resources to fund the work of experts and stakeholders outside the field" of EiE (p. 156). Reddick's article warns of the unintended consequences of streamlining and efficiency, which may stymie innovation for refugee learners and put pressure on organizations to offer refugee education programming that does not align with evidence.

We begin our field notes section with two pieces that illustrate how tailored assessment systems and collaborative research design processes may support a more responsive provision of education, while also challenging unequal power dynamics in the production and use of evidence. In the first field note, "Exploring How EiEPC Data and Evidence Support Teaching and Learning in Practice: Implementing the Holistic Assessment for Learning in Syria," Allyson Krupar, Wafa Al-Amaireh, Bem Tivkaa, Khaled Al-Yousef, and Abeer Attari present the results of an adaptation of the Holistic Assessment for Learning (HAL) assessment for nonformal education settings in Northwest and Northeast Syria in 2023. Drawing from training reports, fieldwork data, teacher surveys, and debriefing tools, the authors argue that classroom-level, curriculum-aligned measures, like those in HAL, can generate actionable insights for teachers while remaining adaptable for aggregation into broader data systems, such as national education management information systems. Krupar and her coauthors position HAL as helping teachers use literacy, numeracy, and SEL data to identify learning gaps and

adjust lessons and remediation strategies, rather than merely as a tool for reporting data to ministry officials and donors. The field note represents a step forward in the goal of formulating data systems that are practical and meet the needs of educators and education planners alike, and offers a proof-of-concept for adapting tools to measure learning in nonformal settings.

Gray Rinehart, Myat Thandar Aung, Naw Bway Paw, May Yi Myint, and Saw Ler Moo outline their efforts to subvert predominant relational dynamics in EiE research in their field note, “Confronting Research Neocolonialism: Reflections on a Quantitative Study Codesign in Myanmar.” Rather than replicating a pattern in which Global North actors design, direct, and manage research, often from afar, while Global South partners play subordinate roles, Rinehart et al. set out to develop instruments that they tailored to the Myanmar context, with participation from the Karen community. Rinehart and his coauthors lay out three guiding principles and orientations in their field note, which they argue may transform historically unequal North-South research partnerships into complementary, nonhierarchical collaborations by “redistributing epistemic authority, practicing contextual and cultural humility, and recognizing the interdependence of different forms of expertise” (p. 176). The field note is instructive for strengthening systems and capacity-sharing in the data and evidence ecosystem, particularly for researchers and donors seeking to adopt more inclusive and ethical practices in North-South research partnerships.

The last two field notes discuss the ethics and coordination facets of the EiE data and evidence ecosystem, highlighting how practitioners navigate participant protection, trauma-informed data stewardship, accountability demands, and coordination challenges while working to sustain equitable education responses in fragile environments. In “Data Stewardship and Trauma-Informed Care in Online Professional Development for Afghan Adult Learners: Lessons from Practice,” Janice D’souza and Jeremy Bryan Coats review the implementation of safeguarding and protection practices in a program of online professional training for Afghan learners. They note that digital and remote learning modalities can expose participants to novel sources of risk, particularly in environments with heightened surveillance. These programs create a digital record of those who participate in training and education, thus making data security and data stewardship principles paramount for program planning in these contexts. D’souza and Coats discuss how the program emphasized informed consent and data minimization so that only the data most critically needed for the intervention to function effectively was collected, and how these principles influenced the recruitment, instruction, monitoring, and evaluation of the training program throughout its rollout. This field note unpacks the tension between participant protection and data collection and provides practical insights into program adaptations that reduce risk while meeting learning needs.

In our final field note, “The Multifaceted Responsibilities of Education Clusters: Successes and Struggles,” Friedrich W. Affolter and Michelle Brown document Education Clusters’ (ECs) role in the EiE data and evidence ecosystem. They particularly highlight how ECs aim to support inclusive response systems, coordinated planning and operationalization, collective and inclusive evidence generation and knowledge-sharing, and resource mobilization. Drawing from EC documents across multiple crisis contexts worldwide, along with insights from the coordination literature, Affolter and Brown discuss EC milestones in convening EiE actors, generating and using evidence, improving cost-effectiveness, and advocating with decisionmakers for the needs of education systems and learners. Affolter and Brown position ECs as powerful institutions in the EiE field that work to advance children’s right to protective, continuous, and safe education and note how ECs must be attuned to data and evidence requirements to ensure that goal is met.

We also present Francine Menashy’s commentary article, “A Framework for Ethics and Equity in Education in Emergencies Research,” which brings into dialogue many of the central themes and questions raised throughout this Special Issue. Menashy draws from the comments of her research participants and collaborators and of scholars of decolonization and education, and from key stakeholders’ observations of the EiE field to demonstrate its tendency toward “extractive research practices, Global North epistemic authority, and the marginalization of racialized and crisis-affected communities in agenda-setting and knowledge production, as well as the privileging of quantitative evidence and the ethical risks of datafication, privacy breaches, and restricted dissemination” (p. 202). Menashy then offers a four-question framework to help EiE actors center ethics and power dynamics in their conceptualization of the research enterprise. She argues that power brokers in the EiE data and evidence ecosystem must interrogate assumptions and historical legacies that have shaped who determines EiE research agendas, what and whose knowledge is valued, how evidence is collected and by whom, and who ultimately is positioned to disseminate and use research in EiE. In considering these questions, Menashy argues that a more ethical and just data and evidence ecosystem will open doors to more participation from local experts, broader conceptualizations of methodological rigor, and freer access to evidence on which to base EiE programming and policy decisions.

Finally, we close with a set of book reviews that bring together many of the crosscutting themes of this Special Issue, including justice, decolonization, peacebuilding, displacement, and the politics of humanitarianism, while also highlighting whose knowledge, experiences, and futures are centered in education in emergencies research, policy, and practice.

We begin with Abraha Asfaw’s review of *Education and Resilience in Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by Mary Mendenhall, Gauthier Marchais, Yusuf Sayed, and Neil Boothby. Drawing from research-practice partnerships across seven countries, the book’s authors examine how humanitarian crises shape education

systems. Asfaw notes the book's emphasis on resilience, teacher and learner wellbeing, and on pathways toward more just and responsive education in crisis contexts. In his analysis, Asfaw pays attention to the external factors that affect education continuity, the inclusion of a gender perspective, and a stronger focus on program objectives over cross-system comparisons. This review contributes to this Special Issue by reinforcing the importance of contextually grounded evidence and critical reflection to the advancing of EiE research, policy, and practice.

In the next book review, Elisheva Cohen reviews *Schooling for Refugee Children: A Social Justice Perspective Informed by Children from Syria* by Eleanore Hargreaves, Brian Lally, Bassel Akar, Jumana Al-Waeli, and Jasmine Costello. Presenting Syrian refugee children's words, drawings, and experiences in Lebanon and the United Kingdom, the book foregrounds the children's perspectives on belonging, participation, and justice within educational spaces. Cohen emphasizes the methodological contributions of the book's participatory research approaches, while also reflecting on the absence of stronger policy recommendations to address the structural inequities that make nonformal education programs necessary.

Gabrielle Oliveira's review of *Unsettled Families: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and the Politics of Kinship* by Sophia Balakian shifts attention to the politics of refugee classification, family recognition, and humanitarian governance. Through personal narratives and long-term ethnographic research with Somali and Congolese refugees who are navigating resettlement systems between Kenya and the United States, Oliveira discusses the way the book highlights how personal narratives can deepen understanding of the everyday realities faced by displaced families.

The last two book reviews turn toward broader questions of transformation, peacebuilding, and decolonization in education. Sofía Antonia Gómez-Doyle reviews *The Art of Global Peacebuilding and Excellence in Education: Pathways to Hopeful, Transformational Practice* by Angie Kotler and Jo Westbrook. Kotler and Westbrook reconceptualize the relationship between peacebuilding and educational excellence through case studies from diverse education contexts and argue that transformative, context-responsive practice is central to fostering more just and inclusive education systems. Gómez-Doyle details how the book's authors position language, education values, and reflective practice as catalysts for reshaping approaches to teaching and learning in conflict-affected settings. This book review enriches the Special Issue by inviting researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to reconsider how education can advance peacebuilding and transformational change in contexts affected by crisis and conflict.

We conclude this issue with Shreya Shreeraman and Luke Pye's review of Yvette Hutchinson, Artemio Arturo Cortez Ochoa, Julia Paulson, and Leon Tikly's edited volume, *Decolonizing Education for Sustainable Futures*. The volume brings together diverse voices to examine decolonization, sustainable futures, and the enduring influence

of colonial legacies on education and development. Shreeraman and Pye engage critically with the book's methodological approaches, recognizing its contribution to advancing decolonial, reparative, and planet-centered perspectives on education while also noting opportunities for broader methodological representation. Although the volume is not specific to crisis-affected contexts, Shreeraman and Pye's review demonstrates its relevance for EiE settings by illustrating how its insights can inform more equitable, context-responsive, and sustainable education practices.

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