



VOLUME 9

NUMBER 1

DECEMBER 2023

JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

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and Dana Burde*

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Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa
edited by Ibrahim Bangura
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ISSN 2518-6833

Open-source publication; distribution free of
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Education in Emergencies (INEE)

Inter-agency Network for Education in
Emergencies

c/o International Rescue Committee

122 East 42nd Street, 14th floor

New York, NY 10168

<https://inee.org/journal>

journal@inee.org

New York University

International Education Program

246 Greene Street, Suite 300

New York, NY 10003

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EDITORIAL NOTE

NATHAN THOMPSON, SAMANTHA COLÓN, AND DANA BURDE

We are pleased to present Volume 9, Number 1, of the *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)*. The main themes among the five research articles, five field notes, and four book reviews in this issue coalesce around the education in emergencies (EiE) field's joint capacity to attend to and respond to context as we conduct research, implement programs, make policy, and create the frameworks, guidance notes, and other documentation that make up the collective voice of the EiE field. This issue also consolidates our attention toward understudied questions and underrepresented voices in EiE scholarship. The contributing authors in this issue focus on factors that influence whether students resume their education or drop out permanently when shocks disrupt their schooling; on the ways remedial education can help out-of-school students resume their education; on how locally relevant framings of hope, self-concept, resilience, and vulnerability influence students' aspirations and elevate teachers' agency within the global EiE discourse; and on the efficacy of social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions that respond to students' age- and gender-related realities.

These questions have assumed new urgency as this issue goes to press. Conflicts have proliferated and become more numerous in the past two years than at any time since World War II (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2023). Previously frozen conflicts have again erupted, such as that between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. The devastating war in Sudan has killed approximately 9,000 people and displaced close to 6 million since April 2023. Conflicts in Syria and Yemen remain unresolved, and the war between Russia and Ukraine shows no signs of waning (Poast 2023). However, perhaps no other conflict has captured more of the world's attention in recent months than the dramatic escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Israel's response to the October 7 attack by Hamas, "the rate of death...has few precedents in this century" (Leatherby 2023). Indeed, ten thousand women and children, conservatively, were killed in Gaza after five weeks of fighting—more children "than in the world's major conflict zones combined...during all of last year," including the war in Ukraine (Leatherby 2023). International laws of war were developed largely in response to the massive civilian death tolls of World War I and World War II, and the 1949 Geneva Convention codifies the protection of civilians during wartime. And yet, international norms—always unevenly applied and frequently under threat—appear to be softening ever further.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW 2023) reports that 224 million school-age children worldwide are currently affected by conflict or crisis. Among these, 72 million are out of school, and 127 million are in school but are not meeting minimum learning benchmarks. Half of the world's out-of-school children live in eight countries: Ethiopia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Mali, and Nigeria. In Eastern Africa, significant drought and ongoing conflict are driving low school enrollment (ECW 2023). Against the backdrop of these recent escalations of violence and their devastating effects on children and families, the articles we present below assess the overwhelming challenges to education and learning in conflict and crisis contexts, but they also offer a few bright spots of hope.

The first two research articles in this issue employ rigorous quantitative methods to lay out the factors children are facing in terms of catching up, or being left further behind, as their schools reopen after the pandemic in two often-overlapping contexts: Myanmar and Bangladesh. In "Impact of Catch-up Clubs in Conflict-Affected Myanmar: A Community-Led Remedial Learning Model," Silvia Mila Arlini, Nora Charif Chefchaoui, Jessica Chia, Mya Gordon, and Nishtha Shrestha evaluate the pilot of Save the Children's Catch-up Clubs, a remedial education program that was implemented among 3,000 upper primary and lower secondary students in Myanmar's Rakhine and Kayin states. The Catch-up Clubs' community-led, play-based model groups students according to their ability rather than their age, and promotes children's development of foundational literacy skills and SEL skills. In their evaluation of the pilot, the authors employ difference-in-difference multivariate regression modeling and draw from panel survey data collected at baseline and endline to demonstrate the literacy and SEL gains among students who participated in Catch-up Clubs. Students in the intervention group were eight times more likely than their peers in the control group to advance by one literacy level and twice as likely to be able to read and understand a short story (the highest literacy level tested) at the end of the program. Moreover, while boys' literacy levels tended to outpace those of girls in the control group, boys and girls who participated in the Catch-up Clubs were at similar literacy levels after the intervention. Finally, intervention students were twice as likely as control group students to attain high-level SEL skills. The authors suggest that the Catch-up Club model may be adopted in other contexts where disrupted education and chronic stress may jeopardize students' ability to resume their education and fulfill their education aspirations.

The next research article offers an examination of the barriers to resuming education in Bangladesh after the pandemic. In “Left Further Behind after the COVID-19 School Closures: Survey Evidence on Rohingya Refugees and Host Communities in Bangladesh,” Gudrun Østby, Haakon Gjerløw, Sabrina Karim, and Emily Dunlop explore the differential effects of the pandemic-related school closures among refugee and host community boys and girls. The closing of learning centers run by the UN Children’s Fund and international nongovernmental organizations during the pandemic exacerbated the existing education crisis facing Rohingya refugees, but returning to school after the learning centers reopened appears to have been the most challenging for teenage Rohingya girls. In order to understand why caregivers chose to re-enroll their students, or did not, Østby and her coauthors conducted phone interviews with Rohingya and Bangladeshi parents and caregivers in 802 households at three points during the pandemic, as well as in-person surveys with 1,226 household members after the schools reopened. The authors’ panel ordinary least squares regression model indicates that the probability that Rohingya households with girls older than age 11 accessed at least one education service declined from 55 percent in March 2020 to 34 percent in November 2021. Caregivers listed security concerns, family obligations, and marriage as the leading reasons why their teenage girls stayed out of school after the learning centers reopened. This research contributes evidence on the benefits of providing cash incentives, safe spaces, and strong security practices as part of initiatives to prevent dropout among secondary school-age girls, particularly refugee girls.

The next research article also adds to the evidence on the benefits of age- and gender-responsive EiE interventions. In “Addressing Adolescence: Advocating for Age- and Gender-Responsive Social and Emotional Learning during Emergencies,” Rena Deitz and Heddy Lahmann systematically review the key literature on SEL interventions in emergency settings to unpack “what works for whom” (111). Taking as a point of departure the unique gendered effects of conflict, along with the brain development milestones and gendered socialization that occur during adolescence, Deitz and Lahmann argue that there is a critical need for studies that disaggregate SEL outcomes by age and gender. Of the 48 articles they review, which describe 41 unique SEL interventions for refugees, internally displaced persons, or youths in crisis or conflict settings, only 33 disaggregate outcomes by gender and only five by age. Their review of gender-responsive SEL interventions gives Deitz and Lahmann insights into the program elements that best suit boys’ and girls’ needs and lived realities. For example, they find that girls tend to benefit more from interventions that focus on social outcomes and strategies for reframing stressors, while boys respond more positively to behavioral and emotional skill-building approaches. As

boys and girls encounter more complex gender norms and consolidate a gender identity throughout adolescence, SEL interventions must pay special attention to the structural issues facing older children's social, emotional, and behavioral development. Deitz and Lahmann recommend that SEL initiatives in EiE settings intentionally target narrower age groups.

The final two research articles in this issue use innovative qualitative methodologies to shed light on how communities affected by displacement and environmental disasters frame their aspirations, self-concept, hope, vulnerability, and resilience. Hassan Aden's research article, "Hoping against the Odds: Understanding Refugee Youths' Aspirations for Gaining Overseas Scholarships," is an examination of the cultural logic of hope, hard work, and success among students in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp that sustains their motivation to seek higher education abroad. Aden lays out the puzzle of young refugees' strong commitment and aspiration to secure scholarships to facilitate their resettlement and higher education outside the Dadaab camps, regardless of the scarcity of these scholarships and the steep barriers to obtaining them. Aden conducted in-depth semistructured interviews and a future aspirations mapping exercise with ethnic Somali Form One students (ages 18-25), and semistructured interviews with teachers in the Dadaab camps. He finds that these students' aspirations are "shaped and in some ways sustained by the refugee experience of precarity, unfreedom, and humiliation, and by the cultural logic that education is a pathway to prosperity" (149). They see getting a scholarship as their ticket out of the camps, and as a way to achieve upward economic and social mobility and more personal freedoms. They believe in the power of their work ethic and focus, and that, in the process of working toward the goal of getting a scholarship, they increase their odds of accessing other higher education opportunities. Aden's findings contribute to the notion that having aspirations and working toward a goal is beneficial for students' wellbeing. However, he also observes that refugee youths are not uniformly equipped to confront the psychological strain caused by failure and disappointment, and that mentorship could help refugees adjust their goals and provide psychosocial resources.

Continuing the thread of local framings of key EiE concepts that positively influence emergency education response, we present "*Bangkit Semangat—Raise the Spirits: Teachers' Vulnerability, Resilience, and Voice in Postdisaster Indonesia*" by Christopher Henderson. In this research article, Henderson highlights the slim acknowledgment of teachers' agency and the lack of representation of their voices and experiences in global policy and technical guidance for EiE. Drawing from individual semistructured life-story interviews with five in-service teachers with firsthand experience of the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake near Bantul, Indonesia,

he explores how these teachers demonstrated resilience and offered invaluable, locally relevant perspectives on education in postdisaster contexts. Henderson and his research participants' *ngobrol-ngobrol*—a type of conversation that is at once familiar and comfortable, purposeful and driven—reveal the teachers' beliefs, personal narratives, and resilience that helped them meet their teaching responsibilities and support their students amid the destruction. Henderson argues that these “culturally located framings of vulnerability and resilience can effectively guide the disaster preparedness, response, and recovery processes of humanitarian actors” (175), but key texts in the EiE sector often present teachers within a deficit paradigm. Henderson suggests, therefore, that there is a need to realign how EiE discourse is structured in order to include teachers meaningfully in policymaking and agenda-setting. Teachers' capacity to bring nuance and relevance to humanitarian response guidance and planning may help global-level humanitarian actors avoid EiE programming and interventions that promote dependencies and break out of uninterrogated frames of reference.

We open our field notes section with “Voices of Refugee Youth: Reflections on a Participatory, Youth-Centered Study” by Katrina Barnes, Rebecca Daltry, Amy Ashlee, Aime Parfait Emerusenge, Khalid Khan, Asma Rabi, Aimée Mukankusi, Julia Pacitto, David Hollow, and Bethany Sikes. This article is also concerned with broadening representation and participation in the creation of EiE knowledge and discourse. Barnes and her coauthors deliver a critical reflection on Voices of Refugee Youth, a participatory research initiative to cocreate and execute an investigation of postprimary education with young refugees in Pakistan and Rwanda. The authors apply Hart's (1992) “ladder of participation” as a framework for operationalizing the non-tokenistic involvement of young refugees, who bring varying levels of research knowledge and skills, as collaborators in designing research, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting and disseminating the findings. The field note, which was coauthored by four of the refugee youth researchers, offers insights for navigating the bias that may arise from participants' researcher-community member positionality and provides practical lessons for supporting refugees' participation in research, especially adequate remuneration and rigorous training. The young researchers involved in Voices of Refugee Youth were enrolled in an accredited training program and received a credential that they hope will lead to future employment and education opportunities and empower them to guide evidence-based education advocacy in their communities throughout their lives.

In this issue, we offer a Special Subsection on Education in Pandemics, which includes four field notes curated under the direction of our special issue lead editors from *JEiE* Volume 8, Number 3, Mark Ginsburg, Emily Dunlop, and Randa Grob-Zakhary. The articles in this subsection offer lessons for the design and delivery of community-based and distance education, such as the need for culturally responsive curricula and for offline and paper-based modalities in settings where internet- and radio-based solutions are infeasible; the benefits of teachers and other education program facilitators visiting students to provide in-person support; and the need for greater investment in teacher training and flexibility in higher education. They also describe the factors that boost the resilience of education systems as COVID-19 transitions from an acute shock to a system stressor.

In “Education Systems Response to COVID-19: Reflections on the Contributions of Research to USAID’s Education and Resilience Agenda,” Jennifer Flemming, Ritesh Shah, Nina Weisenhorn, Julie Chinnery, and Gwendolyn Heaner trace the development of the US Agency for International Development’s Education and Resilience Framework. Developed in response to case study research on the COVID-19 response in five contexts—Colombia, Georgia, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Zambia—the framework describes school- and community-based actors’ and country-level institutions’ responses to shocks and stressors that may either promote education system resilience or result in continued vulnerability. Flemming and her coauthors identify practices, resource flows, and structures from the five case-study countries that these education systems leveraged to absorb, adapt, and/or transform the effects of COVID-19 on learning as the pandemic moved from being an initial system shock to become an enduring system stressor. The authors offer key recommendations based on their assessment of education systems’ resilience dynamics: (1) the critical need to develop medium- and long-term recovery and preparedness actions; (2) the importance of acknowledging differential risk exposure and risk sensitivity to ensure equitable and inclusive education system planning; (3) making space for local strategies, networks, and resources to build locally driven resilience capacity; and (4) the need to see resilience as a process rather than an outcome.

The next three articles discuss examples of planning and delivering distance education that is attentive to the strengths, resources, and needs of the communities they are meant to serve. First, in their field note, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Connected Learning: Unveiling the Potential and the Limits of Distance Education in Dadaab Refugee Camp,” HaEun Kim, Mirco Stella, and Kassahun Hiticha contribute their reflections on the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees

(BHER) program's response to COVID-19. The BHER program is a partnership among Canadian and Kenyan universities and international nongovernmental organizations that delivers tuition-free certificates, diplomas, and degrees to refugee and host community students living in and near the Dadaab refugee camps. During the pandemic, BHER drew from more than a decade of experience delivering its innovative blended learning model, in which it sustains a sense of connectedness through relationship-building, community, and in-person encounters. Kim and her coauthors describe the complex logistical challenges posed by the closing of BHER partners' education spaces in Kenya and Canada and the need to transition to online learning. For example, BHER delivered laptops and network-connected data service to learners in Dadaab, but found that, due to the unreliable electricity and internet connectivity infrastructure in the camps, the instructors still needed to adapt their coursework and exam content, delivery, and pacing. Like many higher education institutions, BHER participants moved to Zoom and WhatsApp during the pandemic to create a synchronous learning environment; however, the authors found that it was vital to expand BHER students' capacity to serve as peer mentors and to empower program facilitators, instructors, and students to pose their own creative solutions to ensure their ability to stay in the program and continue their coursework throughout the shutdowns.

In her field note, "A Capabilities Response to the Design and Delivery of Distance Learning for the Most Educationally Marginalized Children during COVID-19," Kate Sykes shares lessons learned from the response to COVID-19 by the Transformational Empowerment for Adolescent Marginalised (TEAM) Girl Malawi Project. The TEAM Girl Malawi model delivers basic education and holistic support to adolescents facing intersecting barriers to learning, such as extreme poverty, disability, and early marriage and/or early motherhood. Sykes highlights the mechanisms that ensured that TEAM Girl Malawi could effectively reach and respond to the education needs of marginalized girls: (1) delivery of paper-based learning materials; (2) curricula that integrate resilience and SEL skills, and which teachers can adapt to students' needs; and (3) capacity-building and training for teachers to be key partners in promoting child-protection outcomes and community engagement. For marginalized learners, education access is not merely about appropriate delivery modes; it is also about preventing dropout and reducing the occurrence of early pregnancy, child marriage, and child labor. These efforts benefit from the presence of a supportive, trusted adult. Therefore, for some children living in remote or underresourced communities, face-to-face teaching with mitigations against the spread of illness is the method most likely to ensure continued learning during a pandemic. Sykes contrasts the TEAM Girl

Malawi model with radio- and internet-based distance education programming, which was prevalent during the height of COVID-19, to highlight the investment needed to make distance education more inclusive in EiE settings.

Next, in “Preparing Children for an Unpredictable World in the Middle of a Crisis: La Aldea’s Approach,” Ana María Restrepo-Sáenz and Emmanuel Neisa Chateauneuf discuss La Aldea, a flexible, learner-centered distance education initiative created by the Colombian nongovernmental organization ClickArte. La Aldea is a media program in Colombia that was designed to reach children, parents, and teachers amid the country’s intersecting refugee and internal displacement crises and the COVID-19 pandemic. The program’s books, radio shows, digital content, songs, and games use familiar local imagery and sounds to bring real-world themes to life for students. The authors describe the scale-up of La Aldea. Under ClickArte’s coordination, more than 87,000 children ages 6 to 14 have been introduced to La Aldea’s interactive multimedia content, and 4,500 teachers and 130 tutors have received training on its use. Restrepo-Sáenz and Chateauneuf attribute La Aldea’s success to its ability to engage parents in learning activities and conversations with their children through culturally relevant content and SEL skills, which also promoted continuity of learning during the school closures.

Finally, the four book reviews offered in this issue discuss peacebuilding from a variety of perspectives, including citizenship, belonging, participation in social movements, and representation in educational materials, especially textbooks. In her review of *Meaningless Citizenship: Iraqi Refugees and the Welfare State* by Sally Wesley Bonet, Samaya Mansour conveys the grim picture that Bonet paints of the lives of four Iraqi refugee families as they attempt to resettle in the United States. Based on a four-year ethnographic study, Bonet finds that, in their encounters with state-run assistance programs and other public services, including public schools, these families were met with hostility, scrutiny, and restrictions. Bonet explains how, in limiting refugees’ possibilities for educational attainment and funneling them into low-wage work, the refugee resettlement system in the United States failed the families she profiles in the book. Mansour underscores Bonet’s claim that the US resettlement program’s failure to live up to its liberal ideals of acceptance and multiculturalism stems in part from the xenophobic deficit narratives, structural inequalities, and neoliberal policies that have hollowed out the state’s capacity (and will) to help refugees settle in the United States. Mansour suggests that EiE scholars and practitioners will appreciate the book’s insights into the intersection of refugee education, citizenship and belonging, and national resettlement policies.

Also in conversation with the themes of belonging, identity, and social cohesion, Orelia Jonathan offers a review of S. Garnett Russell's book, *Becoming Rwandan: Education, Reconciliation, and the Making of a Post-Genocide Citizen*. Jonathan highlights Russell's extensive investigation of the Rwandan government's attempt to consolidate a unified national identity after the 1994 genocide, in part through education. Russell parses national education policies and discourses and draws from survey data, interviews, and ethnographic observations across diverse settings in Rwanda to examine the role of curricula, textbooks, and language of instruction in the state's attempt to build peace through education. Russell notes, however, that the government's goals sometimes had unintended consequences. For example, unified historical narratives reinforced the divisions between Rwanda's ethnic communities and made it difficult for teachers to facilitate the kind of open discussion and critical thinking about the country's history that could promote reconciliation. Jonathan leaves readers with the reminder that the complex relationship between education and peacebuilding requires EiE scholars and practitioners to consider a multifaceted approach to negotiating policy priorities.

This complexity is also articulated in Myuri Komaragiri's review of *Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding*, edited by Catherine Vanner, Spogmai Akseer, and Thursica Kovinthan Levi. The volume presents the Intersecting Roles of Education in Conflict (IREC) framework as a tool for understanding education as a victim, accomplice, or transformer of conflict. The chapter authors provide observations of the IREC roles in the discourse on textbooks and curricula in cases as diverse as Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In her review, Komaragiri invokes Bush and Saltarelli's (2000) two faces of education thesis and Pherali's (2016) framing of education as victim or perpetrator to underscore the analytical power of the IREC framework. She asserts that the IREC framework suggests that education, as illustrated in textbooks, can occupy multiple roles simultaneously, can oscillate between those roles, and that the various roles are not always mutually exclusive or at odds with one another. Komaragiri points out that, although the transformer role is often identified as an intention, it has not always been actualized. She argues that prioritizing and enabling this transformational role is crucial if education is to play a role in peacebuilding.

Finally, Deanna Pittman reviews *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*, edited by Ibrahim Bangura. The authors who contributed to Bangura's edited volume highlight young people's struggles to enact social, economic, and political change across the continent and the tendency of state authorities

to suppress youth movements, often violently. In her review, Pittman extends Bangura's analysis of African states' "gerontocracy" to observe that feminist scholars have long noted the linkages among age- and gender-based exclusion in political processes and the patriarchy. EiE scholars and practitioners will appreciate Pittman's support of Bangura's claim that consciousness-raising and learning happen in and through social movements. Pittman reissues Bangura's call to action for the EiE field: that is, to give young activists a platform and include them as essential stakeholders and participants in EiE decisionmaking—a directive that likely resonates with several of the authors whose work appears in *JEiE* Volume 9, Number 1.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express deep gratitude to all who made this publication possible. We are grateful for the time and talents our Technical Reviewers, João Souto Maior and Kelly Gillespie, and Editorial Assistants, Junna Chang and Amina Rotari, gave to the development and production of this issue. Many thanks to *JEiE* Editorial Board members Carine Allaf, Mark Ginsburg, Heddy Lahmann, Augustino Ting Mayai, Ruth Naylor, Diana Rodríguez-Gómez, and James Williams for their perennial dedication and leadership in building evidence and scholarship in the EiE field.

JEiE is hosted by New York University's International Education Program in the Department of Applied Statistics, Social Science, and Humanities, and by the Center for Practice and Research at the Intersection of Information, Society, and Methodology (PRIISM). Without their critical administrative services, meeting space, web services, library services, and more, producing and publishing *JEiE* would not be possible. Much gratitude is owed to Dean Brooks, Sonja Anderson, Peter Transburg, Sarah Montgomery, Lindsey Fraser, and others at INEE who play essential roles in supporting *JEiE*'s work. Thank you to Dody Riggs, our copy editor, and Patrick McCarthy, our designer, for their diligent work on this issue. Of course, without the researchers and practitioners who carried out the important work featured here and the research participants, survey enumerators, students, caregivers, teachers, and community members whose experiences are conveyed herein, this issue would not exist.

Finally, enormous appreciation to our many anonymous volunteer peer reviewers for *JEiE* Volume 8 and Volume 9, which were published in 2022 and 2023: Sonja Anderson, Lucy Bassett, Yasime Bekkouche, Maria Jose Bermeo, Kathy Bickmore, Amanda Blewitt, Cyril Brandt, Michela Carlana, Jihae Cha, Mary Ann Chacko, Magali Chelpe-den Hamer, Sebastian Cherng, Bruce Collet, Daniel Couch, Arja Dayal, Andrea Diaz Varela, Nicole Dulieu, Alex Eble, Izat Elamoor, Rachael Fitzpatrick, Kim Foulds, Harriet Fox, Iskiaka Gbenga Ajayi, Mark Ginsburg, Meredith Gould, Jennifer Hazen, Gillian Huebner, Abdullahi Hussein Al Sheikh, Amy Kapit, Ha Yeon Kim, Sharon Kim, Myuri Komaragiri, Allyson Krupar, Line Kuppens, Erum Mariam, Ana H. Marty, Augustino Ting Mayai, Molly McLay, Naomi Moland, Jacqueline Mosselson, Erin Murphy Graham, Muhammad Naeem, Bassem Nasir, Diego Nieto, Jessica Oddy, Ono Yumiko, Yecid Ortega, Christina Parker, Julia Paulson, Jan Plass, Lucia Quintero Tamez, Joyce Rafla, Elizabeth Randolph, Ceclia Reddrick, Diana Rodríguez-Gómez, Sigrid Roman, S. Garnett Russell, Ricardo Sabates, Rachel Silver, João Souto Maior, Carol Anne Spreen, Tanya Spronk, Molly Sundberg, Andrew Swindell, Pina Tarricone, Dan Wagner, Emmanuel Wanjala, Bill Yule, Leena Zahir, and Zeena Zakharia.

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IMPACT OF CATCH-UP CLUBS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED MYANMAR: A COMMUNITY-LED REMEDIAL LEARNING MODEL

SILVIA MILA ARLINI, NORA CHARIF CHEFCHAOUNI, JESSICA CHIA,
MYA GORDON, AND NISHTHA SHRESTHA

ABSTRACT

Myanmar is dealing with a protracted learning crisis in areas of the country where the COVID-19 pandemic was compounded by a coup in February 2021, which extended school closings. Save the Children created the Catch-up Clubs (CuCs), an intervention that supports children's remedial learning and addresses barriers to their successful return to school in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CuCs are an innovative model that offers community-led, play-based literacy instruction to children who are grouped by ability rather than age. The CuCs assess children's foundational literacy and social and emotional learning (SEL), while also addressing issues of child-protection and economic barriers to education. The model was piloted with more than 3,000 children in the upper primary to lower secondary grades who are living in 36 communities in the conflict-affected states of Rakhine and Kayin. We conducted a quasi-natural experimental impact evaluation to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between the CuCs and children's literacy outcomes and SEL competencies. The study was contextually adapted to consider children affected by conflict, and by issues related to gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. The results show that children who participated in the CuCs had significantly higher levels of literacy and SEL competency than children who did not participate. The participating children also demonstrated greater self-confidence, and they aspired to remain in school or to continue their schooling at a higher level.

Received February 7, 2023; revised October 13, 2023; accepted November 8, 2023; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic led to the forced closure of schools, which negatively affected children's education around the world. In Myanmar, the learning crisis was further compounded by a coup in February 2021. The lack of adequate support for many children who were forced to stay at home due to the pandemic and the coup prevented them from accessing the available alternative learning opportunities during the two years when nearly all schools were closed. The psychosocial state of Myanmar's children, especially those living in conflict areas, was worsened by the combined effects of COVID-19, increased exposure to violence, displacement, and disruption of their education. A growing body of literature has discussed the specific psychosocial concerns in Myanmar, particularly among the displaced Rohingya children, such as stress, nervousness, grief, and uncertainty, which have been caused by the limited access to food and loss of learning opportunities during the ongoing crisis (Tay et al. 2019).

In response to this compounded crisis, Save the Children developed and piloted what they called Catch-up Clubs (CuCs) to support children in the challenging Myanmar context. The CuCs are a remedial learning model that uses a play-based approach to enable children ages 8 to 13 to gain the foundational reading skills and social and emotional learning (SEL) skills they need to return to and remain in school. The CuCs are based on a conceptual framework of remedial learning designed to tackle learning loss (Bauman and Tuzhilin 2018; Wanzek et al. 2017; Westrope and Mahmud 2018), and on the benefits of play-based remedial approaches that enable primary school children to improve their language skills (Wadley and Stagnitti 2023; Benton et al. 2021; Nolan and Paatsch 2018). SEL activities are conducted at the start of each CuC session to create a positive learning atmosphere. Extensive studies have discussed the benefits of SEL activities, which help children living in challenging settings to develop emotional regulation, confidence, problem-solving skills, self-awareness, and empathy (Calhoun et al. 2020; Jukes et al. 2021; Malhotra et al. 2021).

The CuC model is designed to reach children, those in school and out of school, who are behind in their foundational literacy skills. The selection of Rakhine and Kayin states was based on a situational assessment, which found a high proportion of ethnic minority children in these areas who needed targeted learning support. CuCs were piloted in 36 communities, 18 each in Rakhine (including Rohingya children living in five refugee camps) and Kayin.

In this article, we address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are the CuCs effective in enabling boys and girls in grades 3-7 (below grade 2 literacy level) to gain foundational literacy?
2. To what extent are the CuCs effective in enabling boys and girls in grades 3-7 (below grade 2 literacy level) to improve their SEL competencies?
3. To what extent have the CuCs provided children with a positive learning experience and helped them develop sufficient self-confidence to resume their education and engage in grade-level curricula in order to achieve their educational aspirations?

The CuC model combines Save the Children's years of learning on effective child-friendly approaches and remedial learning into a single program. The educational component is based on two evidence-based approaches. One is Save the Children's flagship Literacy Boost program, which focuses on developing children's core skills through play-based remedial learning (Save the Children 2018). Literacy Boost has been rigorously tested and implemented in 36 countries since 2009. The other is Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), which uses a simple learning assessment to organize children into groups based on their literacy level, rather than their age or grade, and provides targeted and inclusive learning activities. TaRL is an effective, low-cost approach to helping children catch up on their learning in a short period. Studies have proven that TaRL is an effective method for improving learning outcomes in a variety of settings (Banerjee et al. 2017), including during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kaffenberger 2021).

Our study addressed this evidence on the impact of remedial learning models, like the fun-based CuCs and TaRL, on the education of children living in displacement and in conflict-affected areas. In this article, we present the results of our research on the CuCs and assess the model as an innovative approach designed to enable children living in a conflict context to make gains in literacy and SEL within just a few months.

We begin the article with a literature review that presents the context and framework of the CuC remedial learning model. Following our discussion of the CuC methodology and nuanced exposition of the program, we draw from the key findings to provide deeper insights into the impact the CuCs have on children's learning outcomes, specifically their literacy and SEL competency.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AMONG DISPLACED POPULATIONS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED MYANMAR

To date, only a limited academic literature has discussed the current state of education in Myanmar, particularly among ethnic minority children and those living in conflict-affected areas, such as Rakhine and Kayin states. Before the February 2021 coup, the international nongovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and donors involved in the humanitarian response had significant access. Despite restrictions and tight governmental control, these humanitarian actors and the cluster coordination system were able to gather situational information on the ground. However, the conflict that broke out in 2021 reduced humanitarian access and widened the information gap on the state of education in Myanmar. In this study, we aim to address these gaps in the literature and provide a contextualized understanding of the recent status of education in these regions.

RAKHINE STATE

Rakhine state is located on the western coast of Myanmar, bordering Bangladesh. It is populated primarily by the Rakhine ethnic group, who are mostly Buddhist, and the Rohingya people, who are Muslim. While the Rakhine are among the 135 official ethnic groups of Myanmar and were granted citizenship with the 1982 Citizenship Act, the Rohingya people are not recognized as Myanmar citizens. Their stateless status increases discrimination against the Rohingya as well as their vulnerability, and denies them their basic human rights, including the right to education (Lui 2007). The humanitarian actors who are the primary education service providers in the camps recognize the Rohingya children first and foremost as children; the issue of their legal identity and citizenship is a separate issue that requires a political solution.

In 2012, a series of riots and violent clashes between the Rakhine and Rohingya ethnic groups displaced tens of thousands of people in Myanmar. At the end of 2017, as many as 128,000 people remained in internal displacement camps in central Rakhine, the majority from Rohingya communities. Rakhine has the country's lowest rates of primary and secondary school enrollment and education outcomes, largely due to a shortage of teachers and teaching materials, low-quality teaching, poor infrastructure, and poverty (INGO Rakhine Initiative 2018). Government provision of primary education services is extremely limited in internal displacement (IDP) communities, which leaves the Rohingya children heavily reliant for education services on UN actors and international

nongovernmental organizations. Consequently, the provision of education services varies considerably in quality and availability.

Rohingya cultural and social norms limit women's access to public spaces, and few of their women are literate. Moreover, a lack of female educators at all levels limits the educational opportunities of Rohingya girls, which creates a cycle of gender disparity. The language of instruction is also a major barrier to the refugees' education; while the official Myanmar curriculum is in Burmese, these children's native languages are Rohingya and Rakhine. Without proper transition support to learn Burmese, the Rohingya children fail to master the literacy skills needed to continue in upper primary school. Hence, although the CuC learning materials were in Burmese, in keeping with the national curriculum, the CuC facilitators were encouraged to use the Rohingya or Rakhine language as a medium of instruction so they could communicate efficiently with the children and keep them engaged in the CuCs.

KAYIN STATE

Kayin state is in southeastern Myanmar, bordering Thailand. The Karen people represent the majority population in Kayin state and are the third largest ethnic group in Myanmar. The Karen have fought for sovereignty since Myanmar won independence in 1948. After the military coup in February 2021, the Karen National Union (KNU), along with other armed groups across the country, joined the Myanmar Spring Revolution against the de facto government.

More than 60 years of armed conflict and displacement in Kayin state led to a fragmentation of education services (Shiohata 2018). To fight the domination of the ethnic majority Burmese culture and preserve their own identity and languages, the KNU developed a separate ethnic-nationalist education system. Known as the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), this school system functions parallel to the central state education system. There also are several "mixed" schools, which are supported partly by the KECD and partly by the government. The type of school a child attends is determined by the availability, affordability, perceived quality, and language of instruction. Before the 2021 coup, several Karen communities opted for the government-led system, as it offered free public education and better prospects for higher education and employment opportunities in Myanmar.

In response to the military regime’s “burmanization” of the national culture, the KECD uses the Karen language—which differs slightly from Burmese—as the main language of instruction (Shiohata 2018). A substantial number of children in Kayin are taught the Karen curriculum, primarily in areas controlled by the KNU. Most graduates of this education system are unable to speak Burmese fluently. Of the 26 schools selected to pilot a CuC in Kayin state, 19 are mixed schools that use both languages. Most children enrolled in the CuCs in Kayin are of Karen ethnic and language background.

Kayin state is currently a hot zone of Myanmar’s civil conflict. CuCs were planned in hard-to-reach areas where tensions were great and there were frequent clashes in every township. This conflict, along with the mountainous terrain, rains, and unreliable telecommunications, added to the challenges of implementation in this area.

REDEFINING REMEDIAL EDUCATION OR LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Save the Children’s concern about the inequality of children’s access to education in Kayin and Rakhine states led them to initiate a remedial learning intervention that promoted inclusive education, which is a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and by reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO 2005). Studies have shown that inclusive education leads to children having better learning outcomes, more positive attitudes toward learning, and improved resilience, which enables them to achieve their full potential as adults (Mouchritsa et al. 2022; Ainscow 2016). Moreover, reorienting the curriculum to match the pace of students’ learning results in positive learning outcomes and makes it easier for them to achieve more than a year’s worth of learning than if they continued studying under the same learning system (Pershad, Comba, and Bergmann 2020).

REMEDIAL EDUCATION AND SEL

The remedial learning method has proven successful in bridging education gaps in various contexts. Evidence shows that children enrolled in remedial learning programs show greater improvement in their foundational literacy and numeracy skills than those in the matched group (Wanzek et al. 2017; Diazgranados Ferrás et al. 2022; Kinay and Hamidi 2022). A study in Turkey conducted with children ages 10 to 14 found a positive change in their attitudes toward education after

participating in a remedial program. These children, who were either lagging behind in their studies or had dropped out of school, found peer interaction and individualized attention from teachers to be a source of motivation (Börkan et al. 2015). Similar results were found in Syria and Jordan among children ages 7 to 13 who had low academic performance in Arabic, English, and math. The remediation program improved students' academic skills and helped them develop positive attitudes toward learning (World Vision 2020).

The global education landscape has changed in recent years. Teachers and researchers are giving greater attention to improving children's SEL skills, which include empathy and social awareness, problem-solving, responsible decisionmaking, stress management, and social engagement. Provided the appropriate environment exists in the schools, children can acquire these skills through their interactions with peers and teachers (Berg et al. 2021; D'Sa and Krupar 2021). A meta-analysis of school-based SEL programs found them to be effective at all education levels in improving children's academic performance and reducing behavioral problems. These effects were found to be present even six months after the program ended (Durlak et al. 2011). Other studies assessing the impact SEL interventions have on students found a reduction in school dropout rates (Wang et al. 2016), improved self-awareness in children and adolescents (Berg et al. 2021), and a reduction in their emotional distress (Chen and Yu 2022). Including an SEL component in remedial programs could help children learn to regulate their emotions (Kim et al. 2023). Despite the range of benefits remedial programs and SEL have for children's learning, evidence of these benefits in developing countries is limited, particularly among conflict-affected and displaced populations, whose need for these programs is tremendous (Creed and Morpeth 2014; Newaz 2023).

Promoting children's SEL and other types of learning through schooling can be especially challenging in humanitarian settings that are characterized by a fragile education system in an active conflict context (Winthrop and Kirk 2008). There also is limited evidence on how SEL programs can support children in humanitarian settings, as most evidence on these programs is from a Western context that includes a comprehensive, lesson-based curriculum implemented in formal school settings (Durlak et al. 2011; Jones et al. 2021). It could be challenging for children in humanitarian settings to attend such programs regularly, due to the expectation that they will engage in (un)paid work to contribute to the family income; issues of safety and security when attending the program; and acceptance of the program by parents and community leaders (Kearney et al. 2019; Wu et al. 2023).

CONTEXTUAL BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Environmental disruptions create an imbalance in the learning opportunities available for children, specifically those considered vulnerable due to gender, socioeconomic status, disability status, place of residence, and displacement status (Tarricone, Mestan, and Teo 2021). The COVID-19-related school closures disrupted the education of more than 1.6 billion learners globally, hitting the most disadvantaged children the hardest (UNESCO 2022). This compounded the challenges faced by more than half (53%) of all ten-year-old children in developing countries, who before the pandemic were already experiencing learning poverty—that is, they were unable to read and understand a simple text at a level appropriate to their age (UNICEF 2021b). The impact of the COVID-19-related school closures was even higher for populations living in conflict-affected areas characterized by widespread violence and human rights abuses, and for those belonging to ethnic minorities and low-income groups. Even before COVID-19, children in conflict-affected areas faced severe barriers that limited their access to education. Most fragile, conflict-affected states have strong budgetary commitments to improve access to education, yet many of their children remain out of school (Dryden-Peterson 2009). Unless it results in sustained enrollment, regular attendance, and learning progress at the appropriate ages, merely increasing physical access to primary school may not be meaningful. However, structured, meaningful, creative activities conducted in informal learning spaces in a fragile context could improve children’s social, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing, and also increase school enrollment and retention (Lewin 2007).

NEW PATHWAYS IN EDUCATION: PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Creating an effective remedial program involves finding a balance between introducing new innovations and overcoming obstacles. Moreover, additional resources are needed to plan the programs, train teachers, and create relevant learning materials (Ajaero 2015). These challenges are exacerbated in areas affected by conflict, disaster, epidemic, or economic crisis (Dulieu et al. 2022). Researchers in such environments struggle to monitor the quality of the intervention and maintain the positive impact. The difficulties they face include identifying students for the programs and a lack of local education systems that can sustain the positive effects over the long term (Börkan et al. 2015; Corcoran et al. 2018). Research conducted among refugee children in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan found that the barriers to education included exploitation and violence occurring in the schools, which the researchers needed to consider when designing remedial programs (Winthrop and Kirk 2008). Along with such systemic barriers, the

participants' complete acceptance of and engagement with the intervention was not always guaranteed, which raises concerns about the cost-effectiveness of implementing such remedial programs (Medin and Jutengren 2020). However, educators have implemented innovative approaches designed to mitigate the effects of disrupted education, even under such difficult circumstances.

One effective tool that can help to improve children's social and emotional wellbeing after a crisis is play-based learning (O'Keeffe and McNally 2021; Casey and McKendrick 2023). Including play in the learning process promotes children's greater enjoyment, deeper engagement, academic success, critical thinking, and self-reflection (Anderson and Thomas 2021; Khalil et al. 2022; Murtagh, Sawalma, and Martin 2022). Evidence from systematic reviews of education research that explores the best practices of creative experiential learning, including play-based activities, shows that the creative approach to learning has a positive impact on children's learning attainment, self-awareness, confidence, resilience, motivation, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills (Jindal-Snape et al. 2013; Bell et al. 2014). The creative approaches in question worked well with children in conflict-affected settings in Sri Lanka and Palestine (Schwartz 2022; Creed and Morpeth 2014; UNICEF 2021a). The approaches also yielded positive social-emotional and character development among children from low-income families, reduced their absenteeism, and improved their literacy and numeracy skills, as well as their academic motivation (Bavarian et al. 2013).

The literature cited above provides a starting point and framework for our investigation of the impact of the CuC intervention on children's literacy outcomes and SEL competencies. There is little systematic empirical research to date that evaluates how remedial interventions work to transform children's learning experiences and to promote equality in learning opportunities for displaced populations in conflict-affected countries, such as Myanmar. Our study hypotheses are formulated around the conceptual framework in the existing literature on remedial learning and SEL development. They reflect our thinking on the positive impact of remedial learning interventions and on the challenges of implementing interventions for people in conflict-affected areas. We hypothesize that the innovative CuC intervention—which integrates remedial literacy learning activities that use a play-based approach with SEL support, child-protection services, and cash voucher assistance (CVA)—will result in positive literacy outcomes and SEL competencies, boost children's confidence in learning, cultivate positive learning attitudes, and motivate them to learn, even in challenging contexts.

CATCH-UP CLUBS: A COMMUNITY-LED EDUCATION MODEL

Save the Children developed a targeted, data-driven, cost-effective intervention that can be implemented quickly and scaled-up rapidly to support children who need to catch up on their education. This intervention was intended to reduce the likelihood that children would drop out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, in Myanmar, to the ongoing crisis. The approach integrates elements of the Learning Boost and TaRL programs, which have demonstrated successful rapid learning gains, and builds on Save the Children's expertise in community-based learning, child-protection, and child poverty programming through cash assistance (Save the Children 2018).

Remedial education programs are commonly designed to be delivered by schoolteachers during or after regular school hours. After COVID-19, teachers were put under significant pressure to deliver the curriculum and to help their students catch up. Save the Children's global education team intended to harness the community's capabilities and use them to develop a CuC initiative to complement the efforts education systems around the world were making to address learning loss. The CuCs were developed to be play based, to be supportive of children's wellbeing, and to carve out a time and space in which children could enjoy learning without any academic pressure to perform.

The CuCs were conceived in early 2021 to address the anticipated learning loss created by the prolonged school closures stemming from the global COVID-19 pandemic (Save the Children 2021). They were designed to support vulnerable children's efforts to catch up on foundational literacy and SEL, and to help them regain the confidence and motivation they would need to go back to their schools when they reopened.

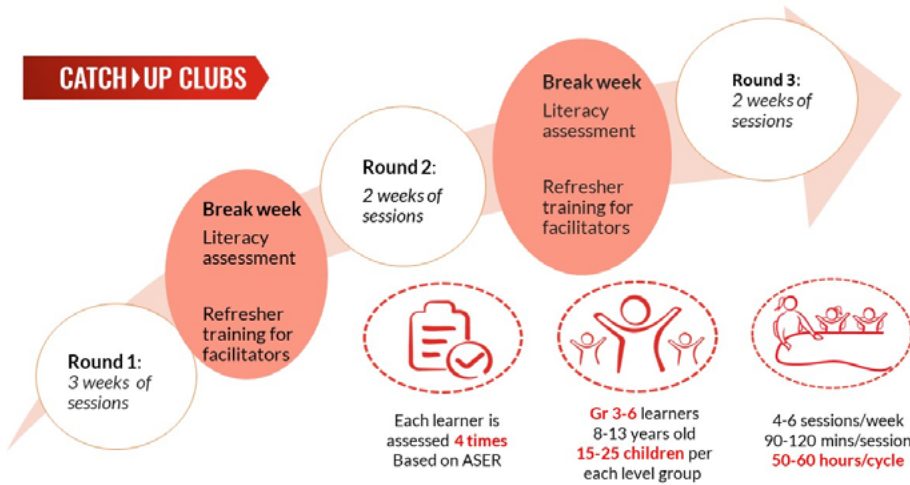
During Save the Children's internal innovation incubator challenge, the CuCs were selected as an innovative concept to support children's wellbeing and learning during the pandemic. Funding was then allocated to support CuC pilots in several countries and contexts, including Myanmar, Bangladesh, Columbia, Uganda, Malawi, Egypt, and Afghanistan (Abdalla 2023; Cortes and Pava 2023; Save the Children 2021).

The global team developed technical guidance on the CuCs implementation. This included the curriculum, learning activities, reading materials, and training manuals for the facilitators and coaches. In Myanmar, all the materials were specifically contextualized for children in Rakhine and Kayin states and translated into Burmese. The learning activities were adapted to meet the needs and contexts of the local communities and children, and they were facilitated by community volunteers in the children's native languages. Save the Children's education team in Myanmar translated the activity guide and made appropriate modifications to the activities to ensure that they were aligned with local norms and with what the local children were accustomed to. The school community, which included village authorities and leaders, school heads and teachers, and parents/caregivers who were engaged in the parent-teacher association, selected the volunteers who would run the program. Before the CuCs were implemented, Save the Children mobilized members of the parent-teacher association, school personnel, and community leaders to determine the locations and the afterschool hours in which the clubs would operate and to support the selection of volunteers. This local mobilization was maintained throughout the CuC cycle to support the children's attendance and their retention in the club. The project team shared CuC students' literacy results with community members, whose support increased as they witnessed the children's rapid progress from one CuC round to the other.

The CuCs targeted students ages 8 to 13 who were in grades 3 to 6 and had not developed foundational reading skills.¹ However, it was piloted with children up to grade 7 and to 15 years old. Using a simple learning assessment to determine the children's foundational literacy skills, the volunteer facilitators organized them into learning groups based on their literacy levels, not on their age or current grade. Each child's reading ability was assessed at the start of the CuC cycle. They were reassessed at intervals of two to three weeks and reassigned to a higher-level reading group, as was appropriate.

1 Foundational reading skills are broadly defined as being able to read and understand a short paragraph, generally around the grade 2 level, or equivalent to the highest level of the CuCs' Annual Status of Education Report assessment. See assessment section for more details.

Figure 1: The CuC Cycle



While attending the CuCs, children do not sit quietly at their desks as they do in a classroom setting. They instead have the opportunity to learn through structured play. The children are grouped and regrouped into subgroups or pairs, and they are given time to read with their buddies. Some activities allow the children to be physically active, such as jumping on paper cards that have words written on them, which the volunteers have laid out on the floor.

During a CuC cycle, children participate in sessions for at least 7 weeks and have 50 to 60 hours of instruction time. The CuCs were designed during the worldwide COVID-19-related school closures and then piloted in Myanmar and other countries as the schools reopened. A CuC cycle is meant to be an intensive intervention of short duration that boosts children's foundational skills. A CuC cycle can take place during an academic term in afterschool hours, or over school holidays.

The children who struggle academically are often facing a range of barriers and challenges to their active participation in school, including household poverty, health problems, logistical barriers, and child-protection issues, such as violence in the home. The CuCs use a supportive process to address these barriers, in partnership with the children and their families. The CuCs also address barriers to education access by providing support to overcome child poverty and child-protection issues, and they offer a supportive space in which children can learn at their own level through play-based activities. Community social workers collaborated with the CuC facilitators to identify the children who needed additional support and provided them and their families with the appropriate psychosocial support by connecting them to the relevant services.

CVA was provided to facilitate children’s access to and engagement in education by addressing families’ economic vulnerability and ensuring that caregivers could afford the direct and indirect costs associated with schooling. These provisions aimed to ensure that children would receive the holistic support they needed to engage confidently with their learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study applied a quasi-natural experimental design to understand the cause and effect of the CuC intervention on children’s literacy outcomes and SEL competencies. The study targeted conflict-affected children and ensured inclusivity in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, displacement status, and access to education or schooling. Rakhine and Kayin states were noted as areas in Myanmar that had a large proportion of displaced populations, due to the recent political conflict.² We conducted a situational analysis to identify the children most affected by inequality—specifically, those facing challenges in accessing quality, safe, and equitable education. With nearly all the schools in these two states closed, many children above age eight were struggling to read at the grade-two level.

The project team selected 3,056 eligible children in grades 3 to 7 to enroll in the CuCs. They were from (1) conflict-affected villages in Kayin; (2) conflict-affected villages and internally displaced communities in central Rakhine; and (3) host communities near conflict-affected communities in Kayin and Rakhine states.

A subset of children enrolled in the CuCs were invited to take part in the evaluation as the intervention group. Children living in the same townships who were not enrolled or exposed to CuC activities were engaged as the control group. The control group children were also targeted as potential participants for the expansion and scale-up of the CuCs.

RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION, AND SAMPLE

We employed a cluster random sampling method to establish an appropriate sample size for our analysis.³ As the subject participants were spread out across villages, we used cluster sampling to improve the sampling feasibility and to possibly increase external validity by reaching children with characteristics similar

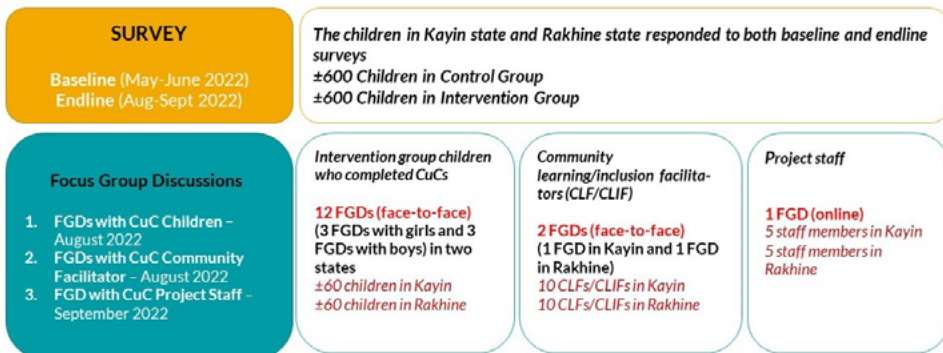
² Findings from the Save the Children Education in Emergencies project, part of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid project.

³ The sample calculation can be seen in Appendix 1.

to those of the target population. We selected children from a predetermined list of clusters of villages instead of schools, as not all children had returned to school. We randomly assigned each child to a cluster, then reached out to around 600 control group children across 34 clusters, and 600 intervention group children across 33 clusters.⁴ Before the CuCs were implemented, we invited children and their parents or caregivers to complete a baseline survey. To gain more nuanced insights after the CuC activities were completed, we conducted a follow-up survey with the same children and focus group discussions (FGD) with selected children, the CuC facilitators, and the CuC project team, the results of which complemented our quantitative results.

We conducted a baseline survey to establish benchmarks for the project outcome indicators and to understand the obstacles children faced in achieving foundational literacy, in particular education equity and inclusion. The intervention group children completed a CuC literacy assessment after each round; this occurred four times during the CuC cycle.⁵ The control group children were assessed twice, once at baseline and once at endline. Nearly all the children surveyed at baseline took part in the endline survey; the attrition rate was a mere 1.9 percent. This was a significant achievement, considering the challenges of collecting data in an active conflict setting.

Table 1: Sample and Timeline of Data Collection



4 It was not possible to conduct school clustering, due to the lack of data from schools, many of which were closed during our situational analysis.

5 Adapted from the Annual Status of Education Report literacy assessment.

The surveys were developed in English, translated into the Burmese language, and then administered by enumerators who were fluent in the local languages spoken by the children: Karen-Poe, Karen-Sgaw, Rakhine, and Rohingya. FGDs with the children and CuC facilitators were conducted face to face, while the FGD with the project team was conducted online in the local languages. The FGDs were recorded and transcribed, and a consultant who was a local native speaker of the Burmese language was engaged to translate them into English. The monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning team then double-checked the translations for quality assurance.

ANALYTIC APPROACH

The samples were comprised of children between ages 8 and 15 who were in grades 3 to 7 from the baseline ($p=0$) to the endline ($p=1$) periods. Using quantitative surveys, we collected information for context, including indicators of the children's demographic characteristics and those of their households, socioeconomic conditions, schooling, wellbeing (including their SEL competency), perceived barriers to learning and attending school, and their educational aspirations. We were able to collect a panel dataset in two time periods. By matching children's unique IDs, we were also able to triangulate the survey data with other information collected from our monitoring activities, such as the children's literacy assessment results and attendance.

We employed descriptive statistical analysis and multivariate regression analysis using difference-in-difference methods, which estimated the average treatment effect of the CuC intervention at the end of the implementation. In order to conduct a more robust examination, we combined insights from our comparisons of the intervention group and the control group before and after the intervention.

Qualitative data from the survey and the FGDs were coded for common themes and triangulated with the quantitative survey data, along with the project monitoring data. We used a conceptual content analysis approach in our qualitative analysis of the FGD participant responses, and then coded them according to the presence of certain words or themes. We used the qualitative findings to answer the study

questions on acceptability, appropriateness, and satisfaction, which complemented the quantitative results from the evaluation of the CuCs' effectiveness in helping children improve their literacy and SEL competencies.

VARIABLES

Our main outcome variables are (1) children's literacy, as scored by level: Level 1-Letter, Level 2-Word, Level 3-Sentence, Level 4-Story, Level 5-Comprehension; and (2) children's SEL competency, which is a binary variable, where 1 indicates high SEL competency and 0 indicates otherwise.⁶

We measured children's vulnerability status using several variables, including (1) member of an ethnic minority, (2) disability status, (3) family displacement status since the pandemic or military coup, (4) socioeconomic status, and (5) head of household's literacy status. These variables were used as proxy indicators for the groups most affected by inequality and discrimination in education access. Detailed information on how all the variables were defined can be seen in Appendix 2.

FINDINGS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

At baseline, a control group of 683 non-CuC children and an intervention group of 655 CuC children were surveyed. Four CuC children and 22 non-CuC children were unable to take part in the endline survey, mainly because their families had migrated away from their villages as the conflict escalated.

As seen in Table 2, we had a relatively balanced proportion of children between the control and intervention groups in terms of gender, disability status, displacement status, and age, with a median age of 11-12 years old, which made it comparable for our evaluation analysis.

⁶ This was measured by seven questions posed to the children, which had simple answers of yes (scored as 1) and no (scored as 0) and don't know (scored as a missing value). The questions were mapped onto four SEL competencies: (1) relationship management, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, and (4) responsible decisionmaking. An SEL index score was calculated from the average score on the four SEL competencies. Using principal factor component analysis, we identified and computed composite scores for the factors underlying the SEL index measure. The SEL index score was used to create a binary construct (variable); children having an SEL index score above the median SEL index were classified as having high SEL, and children having an SEL index score at the median value or below the median SEL index were classified as having low SEL.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

	Baseline		Endline	
	Control Group n=683	Intervention Group n=655	Control Group n=661	Intervention Group n=651
Foundational Literacy (average mean score)	2.5 (1.12)	2.3 (1.09)	3.1 (1.13)	3.8 (1.00)
Level 1: Letter	24.1	30.3	10.0	3.9
Level 2: Word	26.4	23.1	19.7	9.6
Level 3: Sentence	23.1	29.1	31.8	31.8
Level 4: Story	26.4	17.6	28.4	57.7
Level 5: Comprehension	0.0	0.0	10.1	21.4
SEL Competency				
Relatively high	56.2	41.2	39.4	49.7
Relatively low	43.8	58.8	60.7	50.3
State				
Kayin	60.7	44.7	40.5	55.6
Rakhine	39.4	55.3	59.5	44.4
Children's Gender				
Boys	44.9	46.4	45.2	46.5
Girls	55.1	53.6	54.8	53.5
Children's Disability Status				
With disability	1.6	2.1	1.7	2.2
Without disability	98.4	97.9	98.3	97.8
Family Displaced				
No	79.6	82.3	79.6	82.2
Yes	20.4	17.7	20.4	17.8
Children's Median Age	11 years	12 years	11 years	12 years
Primary Language				
Burmese	7.0	2.3	6.8	2.3
Non-Burmese	93.0	97.7	93.2	97.7
Ethnicity				
Burmese	4.0	0.9	3.5	0.9
Mon	7.3	0.5	7.0	0.5
Poah	6.1	0.0	5.7	0.0
Rakhine (Rohingya)	22.4	16.8	22.2	16.7
Rakhine	11.3	37.1	11.2	37.0
Karen (Poe)	38.5	9.4	36.0	8.9
Karen (Sgaw)	6.8	33.6	6.8	33.3
Other	7.6	2.6	7.6	2.6

	Baseline		Endline	
	Control Group n=683	Intervention Group n=655	Control Group n=661	Intervention Group n=651
Household Ability to Meet Basic Needs (food, clothes, water, and shelter)				
Meet all basic needs	74.5	25.5	73.5	26.5
Most of basic needs	45.1	54.9	44.6	55.4
Some of basic needs	41.0	59.0	40.8	59.2
None or hardly meet basic needs	32.2	67.8	32.2	67.8
Household Head Literacy	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Illiterate	35.4	40.5	35.6	40.2
Literate	64.6	59.5	64.4	59.8
Current School Grade				
Grade 3	60.6	39.4	64.5	35.5
Grade 4	58.2	41.8	56.1	43.9
Grade 5	54.5	45.5	49.5	50.5
Grade 6 or 7	9.5	90.5	8.7	91.3
Not in school	7.1	92.9	0.0	100.0
Attending Community-Based or Ethnicity-Based School	23.4	40.8	22.5	26.3
Seeing/Reading with Family Members	71.1	54.8	68.5	86.2
Aspiration: Remain or progress in school	19.8	13.4	12.3	41.6
Aspiration: Study at a higher level/fulfill the dream	52.6	44.0	54.6	59.1

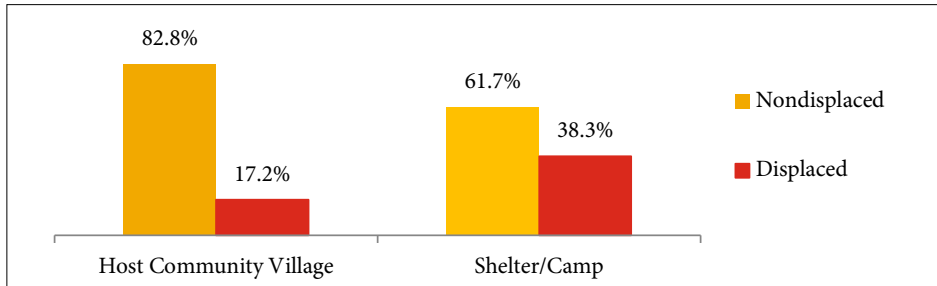
Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations of mean values; percentages shown for categorical variables.

Our sample of children with a disability was very low, just 1.9 percent. In terms of economic conditions, nearly one in four (24.0%) children's parents or caregivers reported that they were only able to meet some or none of their basic needs (i.e., food, nonfood items, shelter, education, water, and family health care) or were from relatively poor households. A higher proportion of children from the intervention group than from the control group were identified as being relatively poor.

DISPLACEMENT AND BELONGING TO AN ETHNIC MINORITY

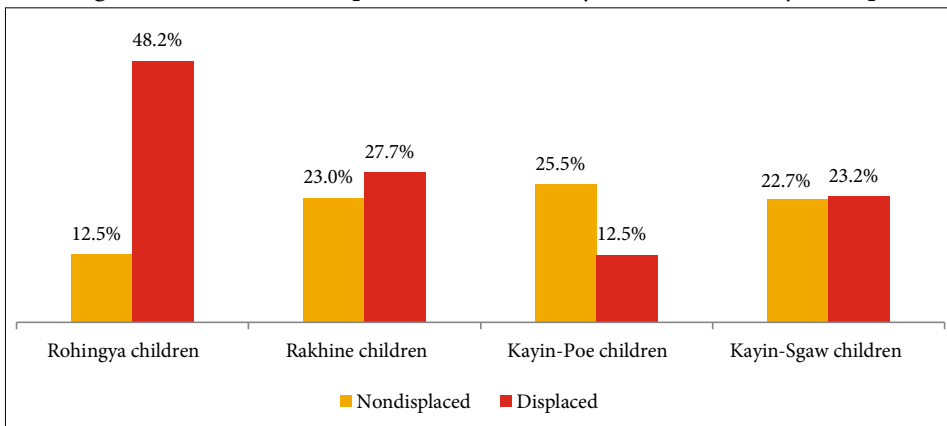
A vast majority of children who participated in the study belonged to ethnic minority groups and reported that the primary language spoken at home was not Burmese (see Table 2, above).

Figure 2: Displacement Status, by Village Type



One in five (19.1%) children were from families who reported having been displaced from where they normally lived since the military coup in February 2021. As seen in Figure 2, more than one-third (38.3%) of displaced children were living in an IDP shelter or camp. About three in five (61.7%) IDP children had been staying in the camp or shelter before the military coup and had not moved since then.

Figure 3: Children’s Displacement Status, by Ethnic Minority Group

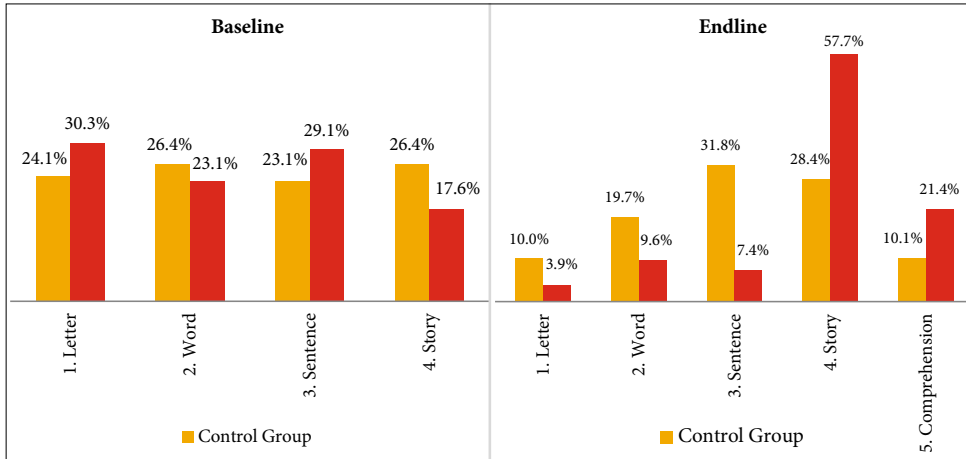


The largest proportion of displaced children belonged to the Rohingya ethnic minority group (48.2%), followed by the Rakhine (27.7%), Karen-Sgaw (23.2%), and Karen-Poe (12.5%).

CHILDREN’S FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY

At baseline, we had a relatively balanced proportion of children across literacy levels (see Table 2). At endline, the literacy levels of the children in the intervention group improved significantly. A higher proportion of CuC children than non-CuC children had reached the high literacy levels—Level 4-Story (57.7% vs. 28.4%, $p<0.05$) or Level 5-Comprehension (21.4% vs. 10.1%, $p<0.05$). However, the number of children from both groups who reached the highest level—comprehension—remained relatively low at endline. The high proportion of children speaking a language other than Burmese at home may be a factor in this, since comprehension requires knowledge of the vocabulary and oral proficiency in the language.

Figure 4: Children’s Foundational Literacy, by Literacy Level, Period, and Group



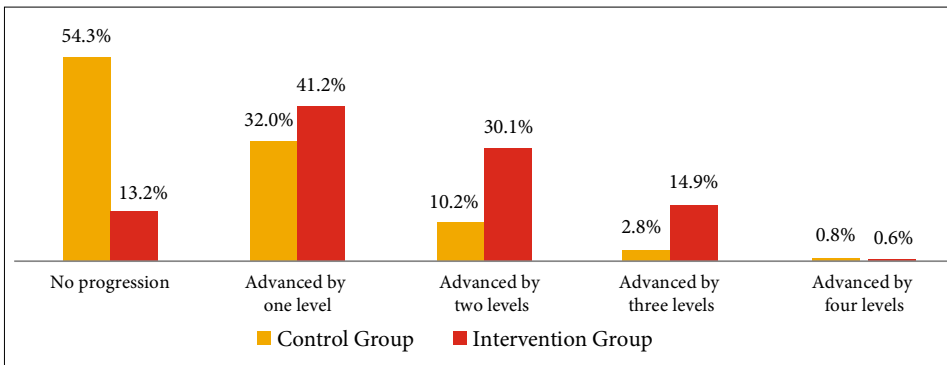
At baseline, we found that children in the control group had slightly higher literacy levels than those in the intervention group. At endline, this was reversed: children who attended the CuCs reached higher literacy levels than those who did not. The overall literacy level of the intervention group children increased by 0.92, which suggests that the CuCs were effective in enabling children to improve their foundational literacy by nearly one level.

Table 3: Mean Value of Literacy Level at Baseline and Endline

	Mean Value of Children's Literacy Level			
	Control	Intervention	Difference	Significance (p-value)
Baseline	2.5	2.3	-0.18 (0.060)	0.003***
Endline	3.1	3.8	0.74 (0.060)	0.000***
Total Difference			0.92 (0.085)	0.000***

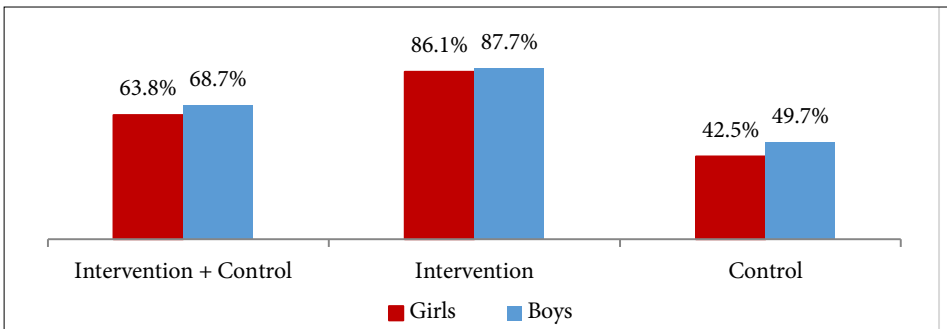
Notes: R-square: 0.22. The statistics in parenthesis show the standard errors. * Means and Standard Errors are estimated by linear regression. Statistical significance: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Figure 5: Children's Literacy Progression from Baseline to Endline, by Group



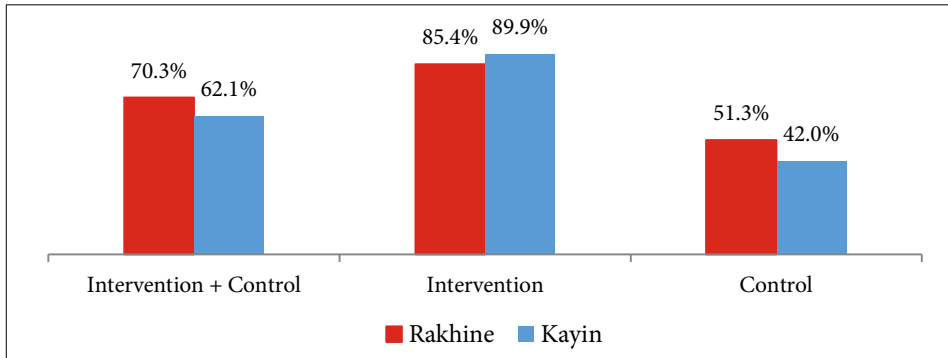
In terms of literacy progress from baseline to endline, more than half (54.3%) of the control group children did not progress, as compared to 13.2 percent of the intervention group children. A much higher proportion of children who attended the CuCs than those who did not advanced by one to three literacy levels.

Figure 6: Children's Literacy Progression, by Gender and Group



Overall, a slightly higher proportion of boys than girls advanced their foundational literacy over time (68.7% vs. 63.8%, $p < 0.05$). This is mainly attributed to the fact that a higher proportion of boys than girls in the control group advanced (49.7% vs. 42.5%, $p < 0.05$). There was no statistically significant difference between the progression of boys and girls in the intervention group. This may suggest that the CuCs were able to support the literacy progression of boys and girls equally.

Figure 7: Children's Literacy Progression, by State and Group



Overall, a higher proportion of children in Rakhine state than in Kayin state advanced their foundational literacy (70.3% vs. 62.1%, $p < 0.05$). However, among the intervention group, a higher proportion of children in Kayin state than in Rakhine state advanced (89.8% vs. 85.4%, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that the CuCs helped the children in Kayin state improve their foundational literacy and achieve a level of progress similar to that of the children in Rakhine state, where the control group made greater progress than those in Kayin state.

EFFECTS OF THE CuC INTERVENTION ON CHILDREN'S FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY

Overall, the results of the regression analysis (see Table 4) showed that, from baseline to endline, children's foundational literacy advanced by about 0.56 levels. However, when we controlled for other variables, such as children's characteristics, wellbeing status, and schooling or learning, the CuCs were able to improve children's foundational literacy by nearly one level (0.85).

Table 4: Regression Results Estimating the Average Effect of the CuC Intervention on Children’s Literacy Levels

	Average Literacy Level (Model 1)
DiD (intervention*time)	0.85***
Intervention group (ref: control group)	-0.15
Time-endline (ref: baseline)	0.56***
Children’s Characteristics	
Girl (ref: boy)	0.12**
Age group (ref: age 10 years or below)	
11-12 years old	0.02*
13 years or above	0.01*
Kayin state (ref: Rakhine state)	-1.35***
Family displaced/moved (ref: not displaced)	-0.15**
Ethnicity (ref: ethnic majority Burmese)	
Mon	0.24
Paoh	0.68***
Rohingya	-1.48***
Rakhine	-1.53***
Karen (Poe)	0.03
Karen (Sgaw)	-0.33*
Psychosocial and Socioeconomic Wellbeing	
High SEL competency	0.16***
Household ability to meet basic needs (ref: unable to meet all)	
Able to meet all	0.32**
Able to meet most	0.26**
Able to meet some	0.21*
Household head’s literacy status (ref: illiterate)	0.19***
Children’s Schooling and Learning	
Current grade (ref: grade 3)	
Grade 4	0.52***
Grade 5	0.85***
Grade 6 or 7	1.34***
Not in school	0.50**
Attending community-based or ethnicity-based school	-0.07
Seeing/reading with family members	0.03
Aspiration for learning: remain or progress in school	0.07
Aspiration for learning: study at a higher level/achieve dreams	0.12**
Constant	2.87***
Observations (N)	2,425
R-square	0.422

Note: Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, *p<0.05, **<0.01 ***<0.001.

In Kayin state, girls and children overall showed a greater increase in their literacy levels than those in Rakhine state. Children from families that were not displaced or had moved due to the coup also showed improved foundational literacy. However, children from the Rakhine, Rohingya, and Karen-Sgaw ethnic minority groups appeared to have greater difficulty improving their literacy than children of Burmese ethnicity. As expected, children's higher literacy levels were significantly correlated with their SEL competencies and the family's socioeconomic status, including the ability to meet basic needs and the head of household's literacy status.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEL AND ACHIEVING FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY

Our results show that children's SEL competency is statistically significant in contributing to higher literacy outcomes. This validates the CuC design principle of combining remedial and SEL activities to improve children's literacy skills.

LIKELIHOOD OF REACHING THE HIGHEST LITERACY LEVEL

In terms of progression and of reaching the highest foundational literacy level, our results (see Table 5) showed that children who participated in the CuCs were twice as likely (OR=2.29) as children who did not participate to reach the highest foundational literacy level (comprehension), and nearly eight times more likely (OR=7.79) to improve their literacy by at least one level.

Children's literacy level at baseline significantly affected their level of achievement at endline. As expected, children who started at a higher literacy level had a greater likelihood of reaching the highest literacy level. On the other hand, children who started at a lower literacy level had a greater likelihood of advancing by at least one level. This is rational, considering that the degree of difficulty as learners progress is likely to be more challenging at each level, which affects their progress. The multilingual context in the two states, in which more than 90 percent of the children speak non-Burmese languages at home, may add to the challenges they face in attempting to reach the comprehension level. Our results also showed that Rohingya children were significantly less likely to reach the highest literacy level than children of other ethnic groups. This is possibly due to their language being closer to Chittagonian than to Burmese, which would hinder their comprehension of the texts they were learning to read.

Table 5: Logistic Regression Results Estimating the Likelihood of Children Achieving the Highest Literacy Level or Advancing by One Level

	Odds Ratio			Odds Ratio		
	Achieve Highest Level (Model 2)	[95% Conf. Interval]		Progress by One Level (Model 3)	[95% Conf. Interval]	
CuC Intervention	2.29*	1.17	4.48	7.79***	5.06	11.98
CuC literacy level at baseline	3.05***	2.34	3.98	0.40***	0.34	0.48
Children's Characteristics						
Girl (ref: boy)	0.84	0.58	1.23	0.81	0.6	1.1
Age group (ref: age 10 years or below)						
11-12 years	1.5	0.87	2.58	1.20	0.85	1.71
13 years or above	1.31	0.68	2.51	1.07	0.64	1.81
Kayin state (ref: Rakhine)	1.31	0.29	5.9	0.03*	0	0.44
Family displaced (ref: not displaced)	0.69	0.36	1.33	0.84	0.56	1.26
Ethnicity (ref: ethnic Burmese)						
Mon	0.39	0.1	1.55	1.18	0.34	4.16
Paoh	1.42	0.38	5.35	1.27	0.34	4.74
Rohingya	0.13*	0.03	0.64	0.02**	0	0.39
Rakhine	0.54~	0.11	2.59	0.01**	0	0.32
Karen (Poe)	0.57	0.18	1.82	0.75	0.25	2.31
Karen (Sgaw)	0.47	0.13	1.63	0.67	0.2	2.27
Psychosocial and Socio-economic Wellbeing						
High SEL competency	1.04	0.7	1.55	1.33~	0.97	1.81
Household ability to meet basic needs (ref: unable to meet all)						
Able to meet all	1.47	0.42	5.21	1.30	0.55	3.07
Able to meet most	1.18	0.35	3.97	1.26	0.55	2.86
Able to meet some	0.79	0.23	2.74	1.23	0.53	2.87
Household head's literacy status	1.75*	1.06	2.91	1.05*	0.74	1.48

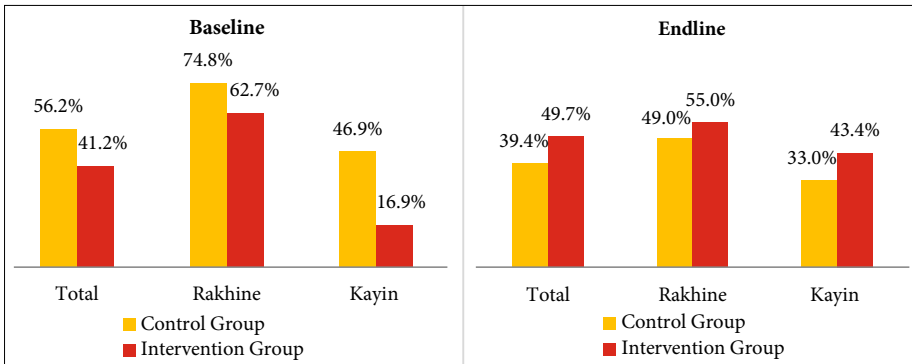
	Odds Ratio			Odds Ratio		
	Achieve Highest Level (Model 2)	[95% Conf. Interval]		Progress by One Level (Model 3)	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Children's Schooling and Learning						
Current grade (ref: grade 3)						
Grade 4	1.06	0.52	2.15	1.98***	1.34	2.94
Grade 5	1.91	0.92	3.98	3.18***	1.94	5.21
Grade 6 or 7	7.40***	3.12	17.54	6.28**	3	13.16
Not in school				0.29	0.01	11.4
Attending community-based or ethnicity-based school	4.56***	2.33	8.91	1.57	0.82	3.02
Seeing/reading with family members	1.33	0.79	2.23	0.90	0.61	1.33
Aspiration for learning: remain or progress in school	2.38***	1.51	3.78	1.50	0.96	2.35
Aspiration for learning: study at a higher level/achieve dreams	1.12	0.66	1.88	1.03~	0.67	1.58
Observations (N)	1,225			1,223		
Pseudo R2	0.318			0.283		

Note: Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, *p<0.05, **<0.01 ***<0.001.

CHILDREN'S SEL COMPETENCY

Nearly half of all children assessed at baseline and endline were found to have SEL scores that indicated their relatively high SEL competency (see Figure 8).

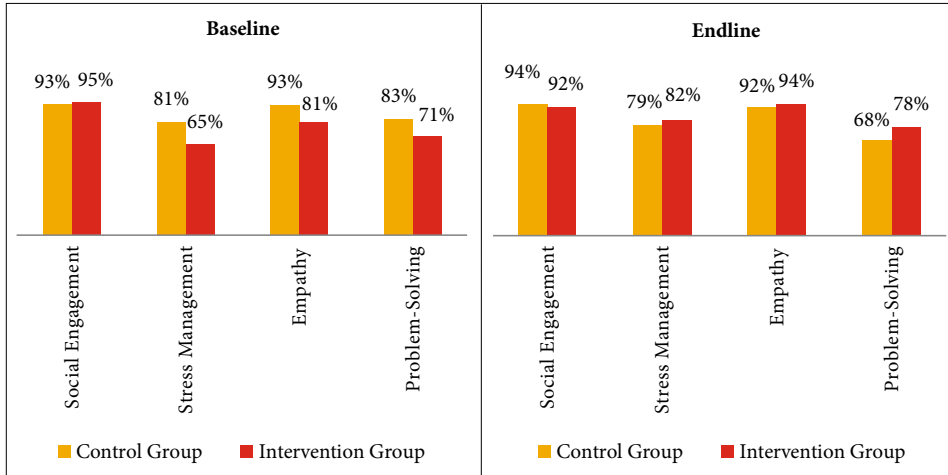
Figure 8: Children with High SEL Competency, by State, Period, and Group



At baseline, we observed that a higher proportion of children in the control group than in the intervention group had high SEL competency (56.2% vs. 41.2%, $p < 0.05$). However, the opposite was seen at endline, when a higher proportion of intervention group children than control group children had high SEL competency (49.7% vs. 39.4%, $p < 0.05$). The increase in the proportion of intervention group children with high SEL competency was mainly due to the increase in Kayin state from 16.9 percent at baseline to 43.4 percent at endline ($p < 0.05$). The opposite result was seen with the control group children in Kayin state, where there was a significant drop (from 46.9% to 33%, $p < 0.05$). Security concerns due to the active conflict in Kayin state likely exacerbated the children’s stress and may have adversely affected their wellbeing and resilience. Because the control group children did not receive any psychosocial support, their SEL skills or competencies may have been negatively affected. The CuCs were designed to support children’s development of SEL and to address the needs faced by children experiencing a learning crisis. Evidence on the increasing number of CuC children in Kayin who have high SEL may suggest that the CuC activities improved SEL competencies even when the children experienced prolonged stress.

Changes in the CuC children’s SEL were observed in their improved stress management skills, which increased from 65 percent to 82 percent; empathy skills, up from 81 percent to 94 percent; and problem-solving skills, which improved from 71 percent to 78 percent.

Figure 9: Children’s SEL Skills, by Period and Group



EFFECTS OF THE CuC INTERVENTIONS ON CHILDREN’S SEL

The logistic regression results showed that the CuCs increased the likelihood that children would achieve high SEL competency. Looking at the effect of the variable of time, we saw that the likelihood of children having high SEL competency declined over three months, whereas children who participated in the CuCs were more likely to show improved SEL competencies in that same time. Over time, the intervention group children were twice as likely (OR=2.4) to show high SEL competency as the control group children, as seen in the odds ratio of the difference-in-difference variable in Table 6.

Children who attended community-based learning were likely to have high SEL competency (OR=1.61). This suggests that community resources also could have contributed to the children’s improved SEL competencies.

Table 6: Logistic Regression Estimating the Likelihood of Children Having High SEL Competency

	Odds Ratio High SEL (Model 5)	[95% Conf. Interval]	
DiD (intervention*time)	2.40*	1.65	3.49
Intervention group (ref: control group)	0.71***	0.53	0.95
Time (ref: period before CuCs)	0.39***	0.3	0.51
Foundational Literacy Level	1.20***	1.09	1.32

IMPACT OF CATCH-UP CLUBS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED MYANMAR

	Odds Ratio High SEL (Model 5)	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Children's Characteristics			
Girl (ref: boy)	0.98	0.82	1.17
Age group (ref: age 10 years or below)			
11-12 years	1.15	0.92	1.44
13 years or above	1.40*	1.02	1.91
Kayin state (ref: Rakhine state)	1.23	0.47	3.2
Family displaced (ref: not displaced)	1.29*	1.01	1.65
Ethnicity (ref: ethnic majority Burmese)			
Mon	0.93	0.47	1.85
Paoh	0.82	0.4	1.67
Rohingya	2.56	0.87	7.48
Rakhine	0.82	0.27	2.46
Karen (Poe)	0.63	0.35	1.12
Karen (Sgaw)	0.37**	0.2	0.69
Socioeconomic Status (SES)			
Household head literacy status (ref: illiterate)	1.61***	1.3	1.98
Household SES (ref: unable to meet all)			
Able to meet all	0.60*	0.36	0.99
Able to meet most of it	0.48**	0.29	0.78
Able to meet some of it	0.65	0.39	1.07
Children's Schooling and Learning			
Current Grade (ref: grade 3)			
Grade 4	1.1	0.86	1.4
Grade 5	1.16	0.86	1.56
Grade 6 or 7	1.08	0.71	1.64
Not in school	0.15**	0.04	0.54
Attending community-based or ethnicity-based school	1.61***	1.26	2.07
Seeing family members (parents/sibling/others) read	1.43***	1.17	1.76
Aspiration for learning: remain or progress in school	1.09	0.86	1.38
Aspiration for learning: study at a higher level/achieve dreams	1.21*	0.98	1.5
Constant			
Observations (N)	2425		
R-square	0.183		

Note: Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, *p<0.05, **<0.01 ***<0.001.

Children's exposure to reading and their future aspirations also significantly influenced their SEL competency. Children who reported that any of their family members (parents, siblings, or others) read at home or read with them were more likely to have high SEL competency. Moreover, children whose future aspirations included being able to study at a higher level or to achieve their dream job were also more likely to have high SEL competency.

ACCEPTABILITY, SUCCESSES, AND CHALLENGES OF THE CuCs

The findings from our FGDs and a triangulation of the monitoring and evaluation data provided evidence of children's and the communities' positive acceptance of the CuCs. Community acceptance was noted as an important factor in the CuCs' success in improving children's literacy and SEL competencies, in boosting children's confidence, and possibly in transforming children's positive learning experiences and educational aspirations.

PLAY-BASED LEARNING AND ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES

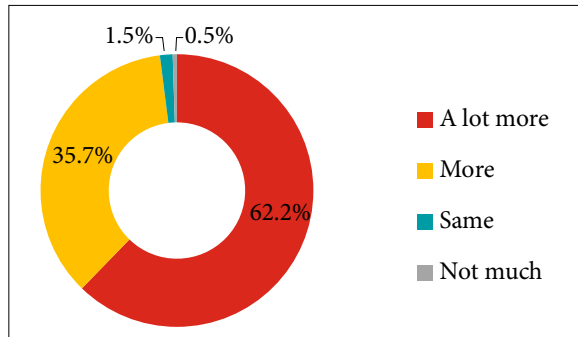
In FGDs with the CuC children, they attributed their positive learning experiences to the CuCs' play-based learning approach and SEL development activities. More than half (54%) of the children reported enjoying the CuC activities, due to their approach of playing while learning. Children in the FGDs in Kayin said that learning while playing makes it easier to remember and learn, and is also fun. This acknowledges the effectiveness of the CuC play-based approach and SEL activities. Children in Rakhine also shared positive sentiments about learning. As one noted, "We are willing to learn from facilitators because their teaching is more interesting and enjoyable."

A vast majority of the children also found their CuC facilitators to be greatly supportive. In the FGDs, children overwhelmingly agreed that their facilitators were nice, patient, and friendly. One child commented on this patience: "I like attending the CuCs, as the facilitators do not scold the children who are lagging, but explain the lessons until the children understand them."

PERCEIVED POSITIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES AFTER JOINING A CuC

The endline survey results show that a vast majority of the children perceived that they had learned many more skills since attending the CuCs. These included reading and writing as well as social and emotional skills. There was no significant difference between boys and girls.

Figure 10: Children’s Perception of Learning Outcomes due to the CuCs

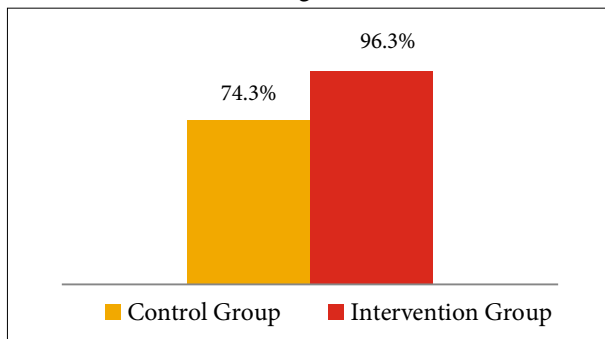


During the FGDs, some children noted how the CuCs have helped them progress in their school lessons and continue learning. As one explained, “At first, I wasn’t doing well. Because of my attendance at the CuCs, I caught up with the lessons and that’s why I’d like to keep going to the CuCs.” The CuCs have also provided learning opportunities for children not in school or those who have dropped out. A boy in Kayin said, “I was happy to come to CuCs because I wanted to study and gain knowledge because I didn’t go to school.”

CONFIDENCE IN LEARNING

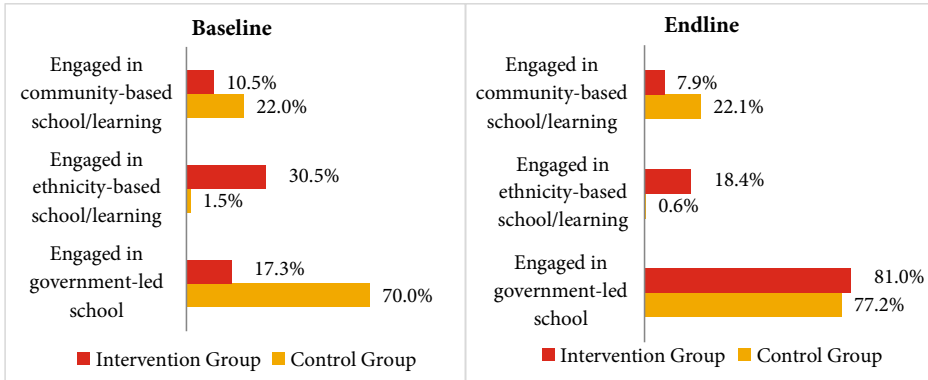
The survey results showed that a higher proportion of children who attended the CuCs reported having more confidence in their learning and in their ability to continue with a formal education than those who did not attend. As one child in Kayin said, “I feel more confident in learning and to go to the formal school.” A child in Rakhine noted similarly that, “after attending the CuCs, I’ve learned to read and that makes me feel confident.”

Figure 11: Children’s Confidence in Their Learning and in Continuing Formal Education



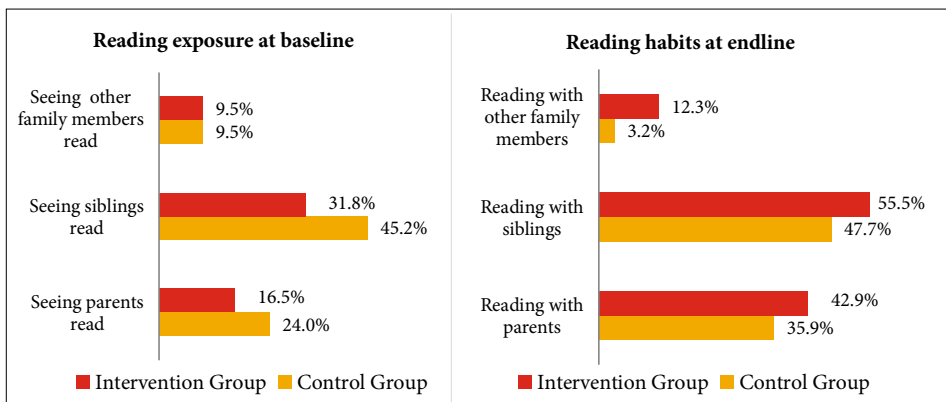
A significant increase in enrollment and attendance at the government-led schools was observed among children who had participated in the CuCs, particularly in Kayin. However, the reasons for this may need to be explored further, such as whether these increases were due to children being more comfortable or confident in engaging with the curriculum taught in the Burmese language.

Figure 12: Children’s School Types



Attending the CuCs also appeared to motivate the children to develop positive reading habits. Children who attended the CuCs increasingly reported reading with their family members, particularly with their siblings. Furthermore, a higher proportion of children in the intervention group than the control group noted that one of their learning aspirations was to be able to read more (59% vs. 43%, $p < 0.05$) or to help their sibling or parents learn to read (59% vs. 49%, $p < 0.05$).

Figure 13: Children’s Reading Exposure and Habits

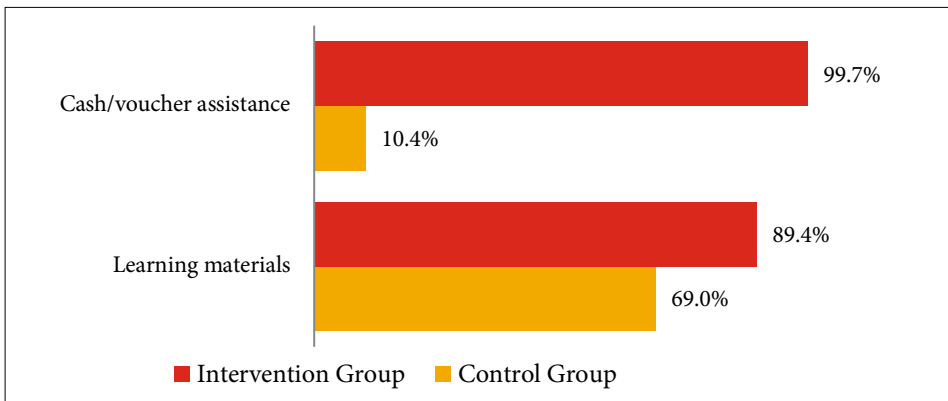


CuC SUPPORT: CVA AND CHILD-PROTECTION SERVICES

As a part of the CuC intervention, financial literacy training and CVA (US\$45) were given to the parents or caregivers of all children attending the CuCs. These offerings were intended to help alleviate any economic barriers to sending children to school and to their attending the CuCs regularly. One in ten (10.4%) of the control group children also received CVA from other programs implemented by Save the Children or other organizations. During one FGD, the project team revealed that they had received positive feedback from parents, who said that the “CVA was very helpful to support my children’s education.” One child also said that, when “studying at the CuCs, I received money, a backpack, and books. That’s why I’m happy and I’d like to keep going to the CuCs.”

Aside from receiving CVA, most CuC children (89.4%) reported receiving learning materials to support their literacy.

Figure 14: Learning Support Received by Children



Child-protection components were included in the CuCs and provided in collaboration with local partners. The CuC facilitators received training in various aspects of child safeguarding and were equipped with additional resources to identify child-protection issues and refer children to social services when necessary. At endline, we found that a much higher proportion of CuC children reported receiving caseworker support and case management services than those in the control group (35.9% vs. 8.3%, $p < 0.05$).

CHALLENGES OF THE CuCs AND UNINTENDED EFFECTS

While almost all children who participated in the CuC activities perceived the program to be beneficial (99.5%), one in five (19.0%) reported challenges in attending these activities. Most of these difficulties were related to travel, such as muddy roads during the rainy season (18.8%), the distance from home to the program location (10.5%), and transportation issues (4.6%), such as the lack of transport or of an adult to accompany the child.

In terms of children's wellbeing, although nearly all CuC children perceived the CuC activities to be enjoyable (99.3%), some reported that the CuCs reduced their playtime (12.9%) or their time to rest or sleep (8.9%). Some children also cited issues of safety or security as reasons they did not attend (3.8%), and some felt too tired to attend, including those with health issues (5.2%). For example, a girl in Rakhine noted that "some of my classmates are falling asleep because they are very tired after school. But I try not to fall asleep and [to] enjoy the CuC session." There were no significant differences in these findings between boys and girls, except that a higher proportion of boys than girls reported feeling too tired to attend the CuCs (6.9% vs. 3.7%).

Children also reported having to juggle attending the CuCs with doing chores at home (6.0%) or doing paid work to help the family's livelihood (5.5%). Child labor is a complex issue in Myanmar. It is common practice and appears to be socially accepted, as families typically expect their children to work during the peak farming seasons (Kennedy 2019). This was mentioned by a couple of girls in Kayin, with one explaining that she "was absent because of feeling tired after doing paid work farming."

The unintended effects of the CuCs included children saying that taking part in these activities interfered with their ability to play and socialize with friends. This suggests that, to incentivize participation and attendance, future enrollment efforts could consider allowing participants and their friends and social circles to participate together, as well as the importance of play-based learning, which is a focus of the CuC approach. Additional unintended problems with attending the CuCs included logistical barriers, such as a lack of transport and muddy roads due to adverse weather, as mentioned above. For the CuC innovation to be replicable or suited to scaling-up, more attention needs to be focused on providing easy access.

CONCLUSION

The study contributes to the generation of evidence and to a contextualized understanding of how remedial community-based learning, combined with play-based activities, child-protection, and economic support, enabled children in two states in Myanmar who are the most affected by discrimination and inequality to improve their literacy and SEL capacities, and to do so in the context of disrupted schooling caused by COVID-19 that has been compounded by ongoing conflict. Children who attended the CuCs made significantly greater gains in learning than children who did not participate. The CuC children were nearly eight times more likely to advance by one literacy level and twice as likely to achieve the highest literacy level—the ability to read a story with comprehension. These children have gained more confidence than those not attending the CuCs. There was a minimal gap in reading results between girls and boys in the intervention group, whereas boys were ahead of girls in the control group.

The protracted crises in Myanmar have impacted the SEL competencies of children in two states, Rakhine and Kayin, particularly their stress management skills. Despite this challenging context, the CuCs have helped children strengthen their SEL competencies. Children in the intervention group were twice as likely as those in the control group to have high SEL competencies, and the children's higher SEL competencies in turn had a positive effect on their literacy outcomes.

Our qualitative findings provide some insights into how the CuCs achieved success. The CuC children particularly valued the play-based learning activities, the SEL activities, and the community facilitators' supportive, positive teaching methods.

Our research also revealed areas where the CuCs could be stronger. Although the intervention group's literacy results were significantly higher than those of the control group, only a quarter of the CuC children achieved the ability to read with comprehension after attending the CuCs for three months. This was attributed to the fact that most of the children speak a language at home other than Burmese, which is the language of instruction in the two states. The CuC activities focused on building literacy skills assumed that the children were proficient in Burmese, as is expected of students at the upper primary level. The research indicates that second language learning should be included for non-native Burmese speakers in the remedial learning support. It suggests further that, in multilingual contexts, the CuCs need to leverage the community's existing linguistic resources by recruiting volunteers who speak both the children's mother

tongues and the primary education language of instruction. Future designs of the CuC instructional approach must use the students' entire linguistic repertoire more efficiently and support their oral acquisition of the school's language of instruction. The CuCs also should promote pedagogical translanguaging and train the community volunteers to use it appropriately.⁷

Some children faced barriers to attendance at the CuCs, such as lack of transport, safety travelling to and from the clubs, and being required to engage in child labor. This suggests the need to combine education, child-protection, and CVA interventions in order to reduce child labor and enable all children to have time for the remedial learning provided by the CuCs. Future research can explore these aspects of the CuCs through randomized control experimentation that examines the impact economic support provided through CVA and child-protection assistance has on children's learning outcomes, including literacy, numeracy, and SEL competency.

Overall, this evaluation study demonstrates that the CuC model is effective in conflict-affected contexts. Through 50-70 hours of engagement in the CuCs, children exposed to political violence and prolonged stress were able to improve their literacy and SEL skills, improve their self-confidence, and develop positive educational aspirations. To boost the reading comprehension of ethnic minority children whose native language differs from the language of instruction, the CuCs plan to adopt additional multilingual approaches and pedagogies. This will enable them to be replicated in Myanmar and in a wider range of multilingual and displacement contexts. It is important to note that this exploratory study has its limitations, primarily in that it only covers conflict-affected areas and displaced populations in Kayin and Rakhine states that have specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all children in Myanmar or other countries.

The CuCs have been successfully implemented in other contexts and have scaled-up rapidly in humanitarian and development settings in eleven countries across four continents: Columbia, Uganda, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Philippines. Most importantly, the CuCs have yielded positive results: at the end of the CuC cycle, more than 70 percent of the participating children can read full sentences.

⁷ Pedagogical translanguaging is a theoretical and instructional approach that aims to improve children's language and content competencies in school contexts by using resources from the learners' entire linguistic repertoire.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank our colleagues Luke Hayman, Than Zaw Oo, Allyson Krupar, Caroline Naw, Caitlin Manning-Riley, Sibani Ghale, Hannah Richard, Marianne Vik, Sarah Morgan, Yuko Nishiguchi, Melissa Burgess, Nicole Dulieu, Mirza Delmo, Ghufuran Elahi Hashmi, and many other colleagues from Save the Children International for supporting this evaluation research.

RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

The study was submitted to Save the Children's Ethics Review Committee and granted ethics approval (SCUS-ERC-FY2022-39) in May 2022, prior to data collection.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SAMPLING CALCULATION

Indicators	Values
Estimate proportion at time: P1, est.	0.5
Estimate proportion at time: P2, est.	0.625
Normal probability value: $Z_{1-\alpha}$	95% (1.64)
Normal probability value: $Z_{1-\beta}$	80% (0.84)
Cluster Design-M (control group)	15
Cluster Design-M (intervention group)	15
# of Cluster 1 (control group)	40
# of Cluster 2 (intervention group)	40
# of Sample 1 (control group)	600
# of Sample 2 (intervention group)	600

APPENDIX 2: VARIABLES CONSTRUCTION AND DEFINITION

Variables	Code	Definition
Foundational Literacy Level		
Level 1: Letter	1	Accomplishing the identification of letters
Level 2: Word	2	Reading words
Level 3: Sentence	3	Reading sentence
Level 4: Story	4	Reading paragraphs
Level 5: Comprehension	5	Understanding the paragraphs
SEL Competency		
High SEL	1	Having a SEL index score above median SEL index
Low SEL	0	Having an SEL index score in the median value or below SEL index
Main Predictors		
CuCs Intervention		
Intervention group	1	Enrolled in CuCs
Control group	0	Not enrolled in CuCs
Time		
Endline	1	End of CuCs cycle (about 3 months)
Baseline	0	Before starting CuCs
Children/Household Characteristics		
Child Age	1	Age 10 years or below
	2	Age 11-12 years
	3	Age 13 years or above
Child Gender	1	Girl
	0	Boy
Child Disability Status		
Child with a disability	1	Parent/caregiver report that their child “cannot do at all” or has “a lot of difficulty” in hearing or/and seeing or/and remembering/concentrating, or/and self-care; or/and walking; or/and communicating
Child without a disability	0	Parent/caregiver report that their child has “some difficulty” or “no difficulty” in hearing or/and seeing or/and remembering/concentrating, or/and self-care; or/and walking; or/and communicating
Location	1	Kayin state
	0	Rakhine state

IMPACT OF CATCH-UP CLUBS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED MYANMAR

Variables	Code	Definition
Displacement Status (since February. 1, 2021)		
Displaced	1	Displaced or moved from where they normally lived due to economic/political crises, including military coup
Nondisplaced	0	Otherwise (not displaced)
Ethnicity	1	Burmese
	2	Mon
	3	Poah
	4	Rakhine (Rohingya)
	5	Rakhine
	6	Karen (Poe)
	7	Karen (Sgaw)
	8	Other
Household Socioeconomic Status		
Household Ability to Meet Basic Needs	1	Meet all basic needs
	2	Most basic needs
	3	Some basic needs
	4	None or hardly meet basic needs
Household Literacy Status	1	Literate (able to read and/or write any language)
	0	Illiterate (unable to read and/or write any language)
Schooling and Learning		
Current School Grade	0	Not in school
	1	Grade 3
	2	Grade 4
	3	Grade 5
	4	Grade 6
Attending Community-Based or Ethnicity-Based School	1	Yes
	0	No
Seeing/Reading with Family Members	1	Yes
	0	No
Aspiration for Learning: Remain or Progress in School	1	Yes
	0	No
Aspiration for Learning: Able to Study at a Higher Level/Fulfill the Dream	1	Yes
	0	No

LEFT FURTHER BEHIND AFTER THE COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES: SURVEY EVIDENCE ON ROHINGYA REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN BANGLADESH

GUDRUN ØSTBY, HAAKON GJERLØW, SABRINA KARIM,
AND EMILY DUNLOP

ABSTRACT

School closures stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic led to the largest disruption of education in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners worldwide. Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh were facing an education crisis even before the pandemic, as the Bangladesh government forbids unregistered Rohingya refugees from accessing the country's public schools. In place of these schools, the UN Children's Fund and international nongovernmental organizations provide nonformal education through informal learning centers in the Rohingya camps. Building on this pre-existing education crisis, the pandemic in Bangladesh led to some of the longest school closures in the world. Using original phone and in-person survey data, we explore the impact the closing of schools and learning centers during COVID-19 had on refugee and host community children in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. While we do not find clear evidence that the pandemic affected refugee education in general, we do identify an especially detrimental effect that the closing of education services had on the attendance of teenage girls among the Rohingya refugees after the learning centers reopened. The heterogenous effects are important because they highlight how the pandemic differentially affected different groups of refugees.

Received April 27, 2023; revised October 3, 2023; accepted November 9, 2023; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world used school closings as a key tool to curb the spread of the disease (Yao et al. 2021), as the virus was spreading rapidly. This led to an almost global shutdown of education systems at the peak of the pandemic in March-April 2020 (UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank 2021). The breadth and length of the school closures are two features that set the COVID-19 pandemic apart from previous large-scale health crises (Smith 2021). While evidence suggests that the school closures may have helped mitigate the spread of COVID-19, at least initially, the detrimental effects the closings had on learning and on student and community wellbeing are increasingly acknowledged (Viner et al. 2022). Marginalized groups were particularly affected (Cone 2020; UNHCR 2022). In this paper, we explore the impact the closing of schools and learning centers during the COVID-19 pandemic had on dropout rates (not returning to school) among one of the most vulnerable groups in the world—the Rohingya refugees in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh (Milton et al. 2017). In doing so, we compare the refugees’ experiences with education to those of the immediate local Bangladeshi population.

First, we expect a decline across all types of education services due to the pandemic (H1). In addition, previous literature highlights the fact that refugees and girls are disproportionately disadvantaged during crises. Before the pandemic, refugee children worldwide were already twice as likely to be out of school than nonrefugee children (UNHCR 2020). In 2020, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and others estimated that 11-20 million girls and young women would drop out of school in the next year, due to COVID-19 (Malala Fund 2020). Building on this literature and the general expectation that the pandemic negatively affected school attendance (H1), we expect the largest dropout rate to be among refugees (H2) and females (H3). We expect the biggest impact to be on female refugees, especially as they reach puberty (H4), given the high rates of child marriage and pregnancy among secondary school girls, which, among other issues, disproportionately affect teenage girls (Bandiera et al. 2020).¹

To investigate our expectations, we use original phone survey panel data that we collected in three waves in 2020 and 2021 in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, among both Rohingya refugees and the host communities located in the Teknaf and Ukhiya subdistricts. These data were collected through 10-minute phone calls with caregivers and other adults in the households. We supplement this with

¹ Each hypothesis is elaborated in greater detail below.

additional analyses from in-person surveys conducted in July 2022. We focus on Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh because the country saw some of the longest closures of education institutions in the world; schools were partially or fully closed for 82 weeks after March 2020, and only reopened for the second time in mid-March 2022.² Moreover, the majority of the Rohingya refugees who arrived in Bangladesh after the big influx in 2017 are unregistered, either with the UN High Commissioner for Human Refugees (UNHCR) or the Bangladesh government, which leaves them without guaranteed access to basic humanitarian protections and services, including formal education.³

While we find a large decline in the use of education services by teenage girls among the Rohingya refugee population after the schools reopened, we do not find clear evidence that the pandemic caused a particular decline in education use for refugees in general, or for girls under age 11, once we differentiate between age groups. Our results are in line with studies from the 2013-2016 West African Ebola epidemic, which showed that school closures caused a drop in enrollment among young girls, even long after the schools had reopened (Bandiera et al. 2020; Malala Fund 2020).

Our study contributes in several ways to the existing scholarship on pandemics and education outcomes. First, we expand the geographic and temporal focus of prior studies, many of which focus on Africa, the Ebola-affected countries in particular. We expand this group of countries to include Bangladesh, one of the most populous countries in the world and home to one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations (UNHCR n.d.). Second, while significant evidence exists to suggest that girls have been particularly marginalized in education because of the COVID-19 school closures, evidence on the effects these closures have on refugees in general, and especially on female refugees, remains scarce (Tanner et al. 2021). We explore these heterogeneous effects by looking at the possible compounding negative effects being a female refugee has on dropout. Finally, our comparison of host and refugee populations enables us to understand the challenges refugees face as compared to the host population.

² In Bangladesh, the schools and informal learning centers in the refugee camps were partially or fully closed for 82 weeks. They first closed in March 2020 and stayed closed until September 2021. Schools closed again in December 2021 and did not open again until March 2022, exceeding the average 22 weeks of school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNHCR 2022).

³ Before the 2017 influx of refugees, the Bangladeshi government allowed officially registered refugee children to access nonformal education services using the Myanmar curriculum. In 2007, it allowed these registered refugee children to use the formal Bangladesh national curriculum in grades 1-7. In 2012, the government changed its position and allowed only informal education to be provided in temporary learning centers and religious schools for registered refugee children from age 3 to age 14. It prohibited use of the Myanmar curriculum in Rohingya refugee camps.

BACKGROUND ON COVID-19 AND THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS IN COX'S BAZAR

Bangladesh is one of the world's top refugee-hosting countries. Though refugees began fleeing neighboring Myanmar in the 1970s, most of the nearly one million refugees now living in Bangladesh fled a campaign of government violence that was unleashed in 2017. Most are members of the Rohingya ethnic group. Approximately 60 percent of the nearly 700,000 Rohingya refugees who have arrived in Bangladesh since 2017 are under age 18. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Rohingya refugee children were already facing an education crisis: "Over 39% of children aged 3-14 and 97% of adolescents aged 15-24 [were] not attending any type of education facility" (Magee, Diwakar, and Nicolai 2020, 20), and the Bangladesh government prohibited their access to formal education (Dupuy, Palik, and Østby 2022). However, many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide nonformal education programs in the refugee camps in southern Bangladesh (Dupuy et al. 2019). Moreover, before the pandemic, 43 percent of 10-year-old students in Bangladesh were proficient in reading and just 25 percent of secondary school graduates achieved basic education competencies (UNICEF n.d.). Specific refugee literacy rates are difficult to come by.

In March 2020, Bangladesh shut down all schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, which is based in Cox's Bazar, defined education as a nonessential activity during the pandemic response; all learning centers in the camps run by NGOs also closed (Pillai and Zireva 2020). All education institutions stayed fully or partially closed for 82 weeks, from March to September 2020; they closed again in December, and only reopened for the second time in mid-March 2021. At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, just 6 percent of adolescents in the host communities said their schools provided learning support, and only 1 percent of adolescents in the camps were enrolled in informal schooling using the internet or media (Rahman 2020).

There is limited systematic research on the effects of these closings in terms of both learning loss and long-term dropout from education services after they reopened. The knowledge gaps are particularly pronounced when it comes to heterogeneous effects, such as differences between girls and boys, refugee and host community students, and urban and rural populations. However, some studies do exist. Gjerløw, Karim, and Østby (2021) found, counterintuitively, that the Rohingya refugees were able to maintain somewhat higher levels of school attendance during the lockdown than the local Bangladeshi population. They argue that this was due to the informal networks of education providers in the

camps, who were able to continue operation despite the lockdown. Nevertheless, once society reopened, the availability of education in the camps was likely far worse than elsewhere in Bangladesh, as it was before the pandemic.⁴

We next focus on what happened to host community and refugee children's use of education services after the government and international organizations resumed their activities. Cox's Bazar is an ideal setting for coming to understand the possible consequences of closing schools when remote alternatives are nearly impossible to implement. This is true for both the refugee population and the local Bangladeshi population. The context, therefore, helps us compare the effects of the school closures on both the refugee and host populations. Below, we situate the case of Bangladesh within the larger literature on school closures and dropouts.

COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES AND DROPOUTS

Extended school closures have wide-ranging socioeconomic effects on children and their families, including learning loss and reduced educational achievement for children.⁵ Experience from other crises shows that the longer children stay out of school, the less likely they are to return (UNICEF 2015).⁶ For example, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that the share of children in low- and middle-income countries that don't learn how to read by the age of ten may increase from 50 percent to 70 percent.

4 The Government of Bangladesh prohibits Rohingya refugees from accessing formal education. However, many NGOs are providing nonformal education programs in so-called learning centers in the Rohingya refugee camps. The Cox's Bazar Education Sector (also known as the Education Cluster) is a coordinating body for the Rohingya response in the Bangladesh subdistrict of Cox's Bazar, including nearby host community support that aims to strengthen the accountability of the education in emergencies response. The Education Sector is globally led by UNICEF and Save the Children. The learning centers teach both cognitive and soft skills, including language instruction and mathematics, as well as drawing, games, singing, and life skills. To date, most of the children have been learning through the Learning Competency Framework Approach, which covers levels one to four and caters primarily to children ages 4-14. The Learning Competency Framework Approach was created as an emergency measure for Rohingya refugee children and is a largely informal learning system. The curriculum that is now being piloted is based on the Myanmar national curriculum, and it provides Rohingya refugee children with formal, standardized education. In response to the pandemic, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner released a statement on March 24, 2020, that announced the closing of all learning centers during the COVID-19 response. For more information on the learning centers and other education options for refugee children in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, see Dupuy et al. (2019).

5 By learning loss, we mean any "general loss of knowledge and skills or reversals in academic progress... due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student's education" (EdGlossary 2013). Learning loss is a combination of the "deterioration" of knowledge that is forgotten over time and the "opportunity cost" of lost learning; that is, the learning students would have gained during a typical year of schooling had schools not been closed (Angrist et al. 2021).

6 By dropout, we mean a pupil no longer attending school in a program or at the level where they started (Depover and Orivel 2013).

Predictions of the consequences of school closures vary. At the onset of the pandemic, Iqbal et al. (2020) estimated that between 0.3 and 0.9 quality-adjusted years of schooling would be lost, based on data from 157 countries.⁷ Others suggested a loss of 0.6 years of quality-adjusted years of schooling after five months of school closure, bringing down the effective years of basic schooling that children achieve during their schooling life from 7.9 to 7.3 years, an increase of 25 percent for insufficient-level scores on standardized tests, especially in the poorest countries (Azevedo et al. 2020). Azevedo et al. (2022) recently suggested that quality-adjusted years of schooling could fall by 1.1 years. In their simulation on school closures in sub-Saharan Africa, Angrist et al. (2021) predicted an effect of close to three years of learning loss. These studies show that large-scale global learning loss is expected (Engzell, Frey, and Verhagen 2021; Gore et al. 2021; Schult et al. 2022; Hevia et al. 2022; Moscoviz and Evans 2022).⁸

Studies on past epidemics largely confirm these predictions. For example, Carvalho et al. (2020), using post-Ebola phone surveys in Liberia, found that, one month after the pandemic, one in four households reported that their children had not returned to school. Similarly, Santos and Novelli (2017) found that the lack of Ebola protocols in some schools led students to enroll in private schools or to drop out completely. In Sierra Leone, school closures resulted in a 17 percent decrease in school enrollment (Bandiera et al. 2020), and an estimated 13 percent of primary school-age children did not return to school in the short term after Ebola, although fewer than 1 percent of households reported that no children re-enrolled (Selbervik 2020; World Bank 2015). Using data from the Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys from before and after the 2013–2016 Ebola pandemic in Guinea and Sierra Leone, Smith (2021) examined changes in school enrollment and dropout patterns. He found that, post-Ebola, youth in the poorest households saw the largest increase in school dropout. He found further that the epidemic was associated with an 8.6 percentage point increase in the probability of the poorest secondary school-age youth in Guinea dropping out, and a 5.6 percentage point increase in Sierra Leone. Although marginalized groups were substantially influenced by the school closures, Yao et al. (2021) found that, about three to four years after the crisis, attendance

7 Quality-adjusted years of schooling refers to effective years of basic schooling that children achieve during their schooling life (Azevedo et al. 2020).

8 There are some exceptions. In a systematic review of studies on COVID-19 learning loss, Moscoviz and Evans (2022) found mixed patterns for learning loss in low- and middle-income countries, with strong effects for learning loss at the secondary level. For example, in rural Bangladesh, Amin et al. (2020) found a 5 percent to 6 percent learning loss, and a study in South Africa showed that students only learned one-quarter of the expected content in their mother tongue (Shepherd et al. 2021). But surprisingly, in other low-income countries such as Burkina Faso, Burundi, and Senegal, there was no evidence of learning loss at the fifth- and sixth-grade levels (Moscoviz and Evans 2022, 7).

returned to the long-term trend, regardless of differences in the occurrence of Ebola among districts. The study also showed no discernable effect on attendance trends for children from vulnerable backgrounds.

During the COVID-19 global school closures, the number of children who dropped out of school increased, even after schools reopened, which contributed further to learning loss. Months after the schools reopened, many students had not returned after the long hiatus because they “took up work, were married or started families or because schools had gone broke, or the teaching staff had left” (Buchholz 2022). Studies in a few low-income countries have looked at the effects of COVID-19-related school closures on dropouts. In a study in Ethiopia, for example, drawing from mixed methods data collected virtually with a pre-existing cohort of 3,066 adolescents at the immediate onset of the pandemic and following the reopening of schools, Jones et al. (2021) found that rural adolescents, girls, and adolescents with disabilities were less likely than their urban peers, male peers, and adolescents without disabilities, respectively, to access distance education during the school closures due to connectivity challenges and discriminatory norms. They also were less likely to re-enroll when the schools reopened. Also in Ethiopia, a self-reported adolescent survey found that 2 percent of children said they would be unlikely to return to school after reopening, citing fear of COVID-19 and, among boys, a commitment to work to support their family (Akmal, Hares, and O’Donnell 2020). Girls were slightly more likely than boys to say they would not return.

There is consensus that the pandemic-related school closures will likely lead to higher dropout rates. There are various ways the disruption of education facilities during a health crisis may negatively affect (re-)enrollment, both of them linked to the demand for and supply of education services. First, parents hesitate to send their children back to schools and learning centers for fear of COVID-19 infection. Adding to this potential reduced demand effect is the fact that poor countries, including Bangladesh, are also facing significant budget cuts, which further limit their capacity to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 (Jones et al. 2021).⁹ This in turn may lead to a reduced supply of education services.

⁹ Bangladesh is considered a “least developed country” according to the United Nations, which means they are considered “low-income suffering from structural impediments to sustainable development” (United Nations 2021). While Bangladesh does rank 129 out of 191 on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2022), which is considered a medium rating, the country also experiences significant inequality, including large refugee populations.

Second, due to the increased poverty stemming from the pandemic, some families may abstain from sending their children back to school. A reduction in household income, an illness, or the death of a breadwinner may increasingly force children to engage in wage labor to help provide for their families. Further factors that may prevent girls from returning to school in the aftermath of a pandemic or epidemic include an increase in adolescent pregnancy (Bandiera et al. 2020; Villegas et al. 2021 Menzel 2019), and an increase in both child marriages and violence against children (Villegas et al. 2021).

Third, school closures, lockdowns, and increased financial stress may increase the risk of child abuse, mental health breakdowns, the emotional exhaustion of caregivers, and higher rates of depression and anxiety. Recent surveys of children have shown that children are at higher risk of lasting psychological distress, including depression, due to school the closures (Banati, Jones, and Youssef 2020; Radesky 2020). Baird et al. (2020) underscore the fact that social isolation during the pandemic exacerbated adolescent girls' psychosocial problems, particularly older girls, due to the intersecting effects of both cultural and pandemic-related restrictions on their mobility. Social isolation and the resulting mental health challenges may prevent some children from re-enrolling in education institutions. This suggests that long-lasting school closures may mean that fewer children return to school after re-opening. In the Bangladesh context, we posit the following general hypothesis:

H1: The long-lasting closure of education services in Bangladesh led to a higher share of host community and refugee children not participating in any education services than before the lockdown.

HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS OF COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES AND DROPOUTS

While school closures may lead to dropout in general, they may have differential effects on different populations, including marginalized groups, refugees (Cone 2020), and girls (Rafaeli and Hutchinson 2020). This leads us to several additional hypotheses.

At the onset of the pandemic, there were concerns about the disproportionate impact school closures would have on vulnerable communities and refugees. However, little evidence exists on the impact such closures have on refugee

communities (Tanner et al. 2021). Most of the literature on these disparate effects focuses on the economic sector (see Dempster et al. 2020; Gorevan 2021). For example, UNHCR (2022) found that parents of refugee children in Costa Rica and Mexico cited unaffordable school fees as a key reason for not re-enrolling their children when schools reopened. In a study that conducted surveys in eight countries, including Bangladesh, Tanner et al. (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the educational opportunities of both refugee and host populations, and that school closures removed protective measures that had been in place for refugees. This increased the risk that they would not return when the schools reopened. However, they also found that, in Bangladesh, teen engagement with education (not necessarily attainment) was higher in refugee households than in the host communities. While there are mixed findings with respect to a “refugee disadvantage,” most of the literature suggests that refugees are worse off than the host communities. Specific to the Bangladesh context, we thus expect the following:

H2: The refugee disadvantage. Refugee children were more likely to drop out of education services than host community children when the schools and learning centers reopened in Bangladesh.

During crises, out-of-school girls in poorer countries may fare worse than boys because they are expected to spend more time at home doing domestic work and are at greater risk of child marriage. However, out-of-school boys also face specific risks, including involvement in child labor, which rose by an estimated 8.9 million children during the pandemic (ILO and UNICEF 2021). Both child marriage and child labor are more prevalent among children above age 11, especially among households in poorer contexts. Since there is a shortage of jobs in our study area, especially for the refugees who cannot take on formal employment, we find it less likely that families will have opportunities to put their children to work. Furthermore, refugees and residents of hard-to-reach locations often receive little or no attention during crises, despite their urgent need for policy support (Bhattacharya et al. 2021). The refugee community in Bangladesh faced additional challenges, such as increased government restrictions. These included several periods of internet shutdowns in the camps, which limited access to online education (Olney et al. 2022).

COVID-19 affected adolescent pregnancy and, therefore, school dropout. In Western Kenya, for example, Zulaika et al. (2022) found that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the sexual and reproductive health of girls and

exacerbated school transfers and dropout. Secondary school girls who remained out of school for six months due to the COVID-19 lockdown had twice the risk of becoming pregnant and three times the risk of dropping out of school than similar girls who graduated just before the pandemic. In Malawi, Kidman et al. (2022) found that only 69 percent of girls surveyed who were ages 13 to 16 returned to school, compared to 85 percent of boys. They also found that marriage and pregnancy contributed to girls not returning to school after reopening. This suggests that the pandemic magnified pre-existing gender gaps in schooling. Taken together, this means there is likely a “female disadvantage,” whereby girls are less likely to return to their schools when they reopen after a crisis. This leads to our third hypothesis:

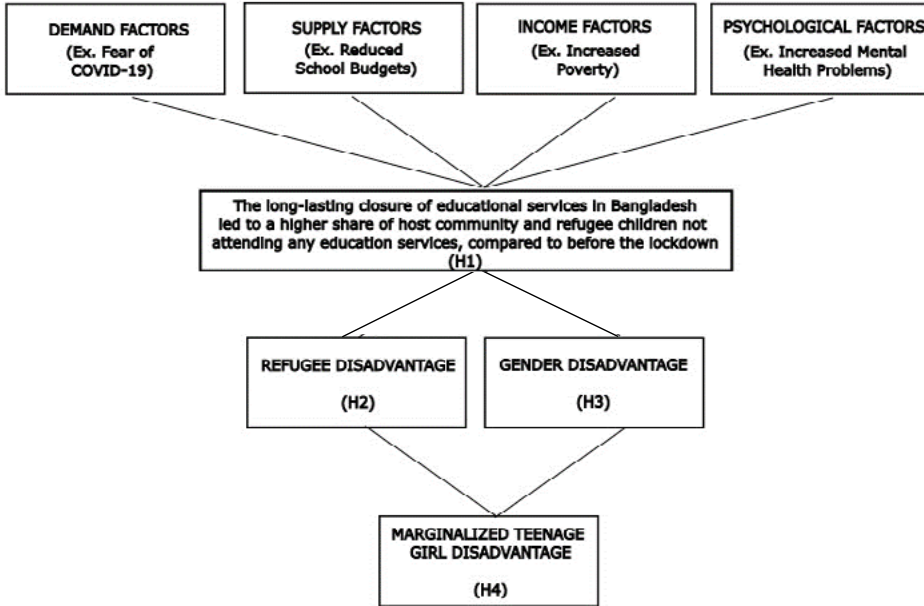
H3: The female disadvantage. Girls were more likely than boys to drop out of education services when schools and learning centers reopened in Bangladesh.

The above literature (e.g., UNHCR 2020; Malala Fund 2020) suggests that girls, especially older girls of childbearing age, and refugees were the groups most likely not to return to school following the pandemic. In line with this, a Refugees International (Cone 2020) report noted that, “within already vulnerable displaced communities, women and girls are at even greater risk” of being adversely affected by the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, refugee girls were only half as likely to enroll in secondary school as boys. Additionally, Corwith and Ali (2022) found that, during the pandemic, South Sudanese girls faced significant adversity, including pregnancy, gender-based violence, and weak social supports. This affected their ability to return to school, although many girls remained determined in their desire to do so. Moreover, Jones et al. (2022) note that adolescents, particularly girls at risk of child marriage, are especially marginalized, not only in their lack of access to resources during the pandemic but also in being marginalized in receiving support for their return to school. Thus, some literature suggests that adolescent refugee girls are the group worst off, as they have intersecting identities that can prevent them from returning to school. In the Bangladesh context, this leads to a natural fourth hypothesis that relates to the interaction between gender, age, and refugee status when schools and learning centers reopened:

H4: The marginalized teenage girl disadvantage. Refugee girls above age 11 were more likely to drop out of education services than refugee boys and host community girls and boys when schools and learning centers reopened in Bangladesh.

Figure 1 details the relationships between the underlying factors and our four hypotheses.

Figure 1: The Relationships between the Underlying Factors Contributing to Dropout, and the Four Hypotheses, Including Heterogeneous Effects



METHODS AND DATA

To investigate patterns in the use of education services in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, we partnered with Innovations for Poverty Action. We conducted three waves of panel phone household surveys: (1) July 18 to August 2, 2020, about four months after the education shutdown in March 2020; (2) June 26 to July 12, 2021; and (3) November 1-17, 2021, about two months after the schools and learning centers reopened. In each wave, we surveyed approximately 600 households, including 300 from the Rohingya refugee camps and 300 from the Bangladeshi community. All households were in Teknaf and Ukhiya in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, the two *upazilas* (administrative units) where the 34 Rohingya refugee camps are located. We opted for these two upazilas to get variation in the longevity of the camps, as Teknaf hosts camps that were established in the 1990s, whereas Ukihya only hosts the newer camps. If we failed to reach any of the households from previous waves, we added new households so that the total number of households included in each wave was approximately 600. The households were selected at random, using sampling frames based on *mauzas* (administrative districts) for the host community and the camp block for the refugee community.¹⁰ This is the same

¹⁰ A mauza is a type of administrative district, corresponding to a specific land area within which there may be one or more settlements.

sampling procedure used by Lopez-Pena et al. (2020). We surveyed both male and female heads of households and only sampled households with school-age children (4-18). The phone surveys were conducted by enumerators who were fluent in the Rohingya language and Bangla so that they could survey all respondents in their mother tongue. They entered the information gathered into the translated Bangla questionnaire. The enumerators were recruited from the pool of enumerators used by Innovations for Poverty Action in Bangladesh, and most had experience from previous similar phone surveys. The enumerators were trained to use the questionnaire, including discussions and clarifications of the survey items. All respondents were informed about the larger study and its purpose so that they could decide whether they were willing to consent. Table 1 shows the number of households that participated in the various unique combinations of waves, separated according to households from the Bangladeshi host community and the Rohingya refugee community. We had a total unbalanced panel dataset of 802 unique households that represented the households with school-age children and youth in Teknaf and Ukhiya.¹¹

Table 1: Number of Households Included in the Phone Survey across Waves

Included in Waves	Frequency among Host Community	Frequency among Refugee Community	Total
1	28	50	78
1 and 2	45	56	101
1 and 3	16	18	34
2	13	17	30
2 and 3	31	54	85
3	58	13	71
1, 2, and 3	226	177	403
Unique households	417	385	802

To supplement our analyses based on the three waves of phone surveys, we conducted a fourth, in-person survey with 1,226 households (612 in the camps and 614 in the host communities) in July 2022. This included individual schooling information on 2,805 children.¹² The in-person survey was also conducted by enumerators with the necessary language proficiencies. We used this survey to learn why, in July 2022, families chose not to send their children and youth to school; this question was not included in our phone surveys.

¹¹ The balance between the host and refugee communities is not worryingly skewed, with 46 percent refugee households and 54 percent host community households.

¹² The in-person survey relied on the same sample procedure as the phone surveys. The overlap with the phone survey samples was not deemed sufficient to include the in-person survey in the time series.

Since the surveys took place over two years, we are unable to test the effects for longer time horizons. Nevertheless, our proposed theoretical mechanisms point to potential medium- to long-term effects, about which we can only speculate. For example, fear of COVID-19 infection is likely to decline over time, but the reduction in the supply of services will be difficult to reverse in the short term. We also propose mechanisms relating to alternative life trajectories caused by the lockdowns, including paid work, pregnancy, and psychological distress. We believe these factors have the potential to permanently change the education levels of the affected cohorts. We leave it to future research to study such medium- to long-term effects.

MEASURING THE USE OF EDUCATION SERVICES

In each wave of the phone survey, we asked the respondents (i.e., caregivers with school-age children in the household) about the use of various education services in their household at the time of the survey and before the initial lockdown in March 2020. We use the responses on these variables to track the use of education services before, during, and after the education shutdown. Table 2 lists these questions as they were asked in the third wave, which was conducted in November 2021.

Note that we are interested not merely in the difference in the enrollment rates of these different groups in November 2021 but in how the groups differ in terms of how much their enrollment declined from before the schools closed in March 2020. While recall bias could increase the measurement error when asking about past education attendance, most households answered this question in the first wave in July 2020, only four months after the lockdown. We believe, therefore, that recall bias will only have had a minimal effect on our measurement.

Table 2: Questions about Current and Past Use of Education Services

Question	Possible Answers
Since September 2021, have any of the boys in your household ages 4-18 attended any of the following learning services? (Tick all relevant answers)*	NGO-based learning center (refugee community only)
	Government school (host community only)
	Private school (host community only)
	Madrasa/religious school
	Community-based/private tutoring outside of your home
	Private tutoring in your home
	Other (specify)

LEFT FURTHER BEHIND AFTER THE COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES

Question	Possible Answers
Since September 2021, have any of the girls in your household ages 4-18 attended any of the following learning services? (Tick all relevant answers)*	NGO-based learning center (refugee community only) Government school (host community only) Private school (host community only) Madrasa/religious school Community-based/private tutoring outside of your home Private tutoring in your house Other (specify)
Before the pandemic started, did any of the boys in your household ages 4-18 attend any of the following learning services on a regular basis? (Tick all relevant answers)	NGO-based learning center (refugee community only) Government school (host community only) Private school (host community only) Madrasa/religious school Community-based/private tutoring outside of your home Private tutoring in your home Other (specify)
Before the pandemic started, did any of the girls in your household ages 4-18 attend any of the following learning services on a regular basis? (Tick all relevant answers)	NGO-based learning center (refugee community only) Government school (host community only) Private school (host community only) Madrasa/religious school Community-based/private tutoring outside of your home Private tutoring in your house Other (specify)

Note: * Only asked in the third wave, conducted in November 2021.

OTHER SOCIOECONOMIC VARIABLES

We asked the respondents questions about their socioeconomic situation that could explain variations in the use of education services between households. First, we asked about the gender, age, and education of the respondent. Second, we asked about the household income over the past month. Third, we asked about the number of male and female children in the household and the ages of the oldest and youngest male and female children. Tables A1 and A2 and Figure A1 in the Online Appendix provide additional descriptive information for these variables.¹³ Online Appendix Tables C1 and C2 list all relevant survey items.

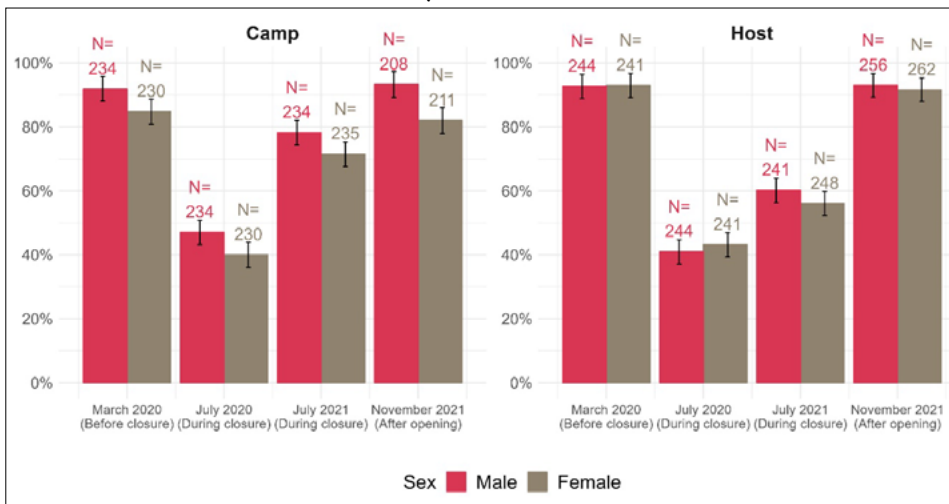
¹³ The complementary tables and materials—referred to as Online Appendix A, B, and C—can be found at <https://www.prio.org/publications/13694>.

Due to time restrictions related to conducting surveys by phone, we did not include questions on the enrollment of individual children in each household. The respondents instead provided us with general information about the girls and boys in the household.¹⁴ We use the information about household-level characteristics to gain additional empirical evidence for or against our hypotheses.

ANALYSES

To answer our first hypothesis, we look at the changes in the reported use of education services between March 2020 and November 2021. Figure 2 shows the percentage of households reporting that they used at least one of the listed education services before the school closures in March 2020. It uses data from the first wave in July 2020 and the same number taken from the third wave in November 2021, after the schools reopened. We divide this number by gender and population. Only households with children of the respective gender are included in the denominator.

Figure 2: Percentage of Reported Use of Any Education Service before, during, and after the School Closure, Separated by Refugee/Host Community Status and Gender



Note: The black bars represent the 95 percent confidence interval (CI). Denominator for each percentage is indicated above the respective bar.

14 Specifically, long surveys would increase attrition.

While there is evidence that females in fewer households used education services in November 2021 than in March 2020 in both populations, neither change is statistically significant. Therefore, this decline could simply be due to random differences in the sample. We do note, however, that there has been a change in the type of education services that households report using. Most notably, the share of Rohingya refugee households using the NGO-run learning centers was more than 70 percent in March 2020 but less than 60 percent in November 2021. There has been a simultaneous increase in the use of religious education services (madrasas), as well as community-led initiatives. These results are available in Online Appendix Figure A1. In sum, we do not find support for the hypothesis that the pandemic led to a general decline in the use of education services, or that there has been a particular decline among females, or that there has been a particular decline among the refugee population. This is a first indication that we do not find support for hypotheses 1-3.

HETEROGENOUS EFFECTS

The overall percentage reported above may hide heterogenous differences between subgroups of households. We investigate this using multivariate regressions. Our dependent variable is the same as in Figure 2. If a household uses any education services for boys or girls, respectively, this can only take the values 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). Since the variable is binary, we use a logistic regression model.¹⁵

To test our expectation that there is a higher dropout rate (or higher dropout tendency) among teenage refugee girls and teenage host community boys, as formulated in hypothesis 4, we regress this variable against a three-way interaction between population, whether the youngest child of the respective gender is older than 11, and time. This enables us to see whether the decline since March 2020 has been stronger among any of the age groups for a particular combination of gender and population, as demanded by this hypothesis. While three-way interactions raise concerns about empty cells (e.g., no observations for a particular combination of variables), this is not a problem in our data, as shown in Online Appendix Tables A3 and A4.

We run regressions separately for the use of education services by male and female children, since we cannot give a score to the age of the youngest child of a given gender unless a family has a child of that gender. Thus, models investigating the use of education services by females only include households with female school-age members and measure whether or not the youngest female is older than 11.

¹⁵ Using a more traditional ordinary least square method results in the model predicting values greater than 1.

Similarly, the models investigating the use of education services by males only include households with male children and youth and measure whether or not the youngest male is older than 11.

In our analyses, we control for several socioeconomic factors. First, we consider the gender, age, and education level of the respondent. Second, at the household level, we control for income in the past month, number of school-age boys, and number of school-age girls. We also include an interaction term between all control variables and time to control for possible time-variant endogeneity.

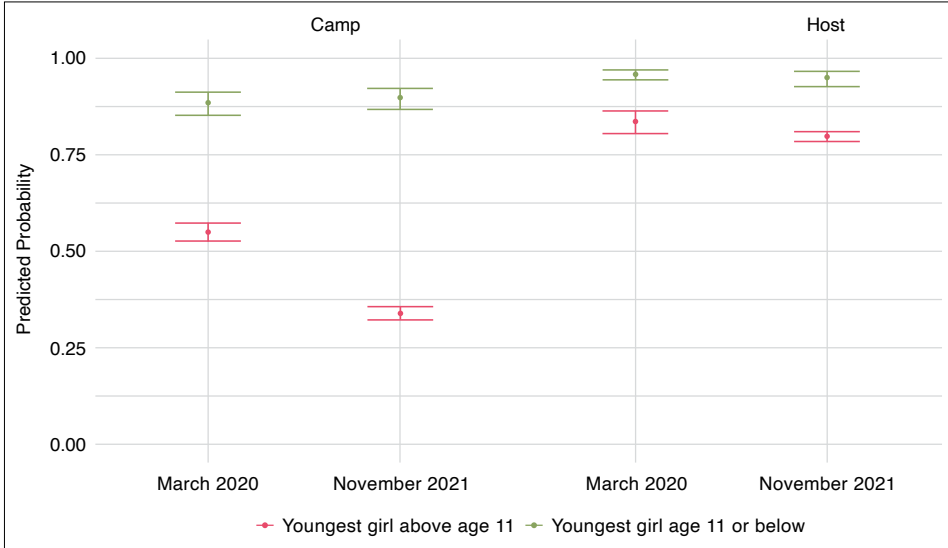
Our quantities of interest are the differences in the probability of using any education services for school-age members of a household between March 2020 and November 2021 for each combination of groups in our three-way interaction term. For H4 to be correct, the decline in the use of education services between March 2020 and November 2021 for refugee females older than age 11 should be greater than for any other combination of population, gender, and age.

Since point estimates from logistic regressions with multiple interactions in tabular format are impossible to interpret in a meaningful way, we instead provide simulated predicted probabilities of the quantities of interest. The full results are available in Online Appendix Table B1, together with the full equation for the logit models. The predictions are calculated as if the respondent is a female without education, and all other variables in the model are held at their mean values.

The results in Figure 3 indicate a dramatic reduction in the use of education services by females above age 11, but only among the refugee population. In March 2020, the estimated probability that a Rohingya refugee household with females younger than age 11 used some education service was about 88 percent. The same probability for households where the youngest girl was older than age 11 was, at the time, 55 percent. In November 2021, the former number was unchanged, while the latter had decreased to 34 percent. For the host population, the difference between March 2020 and November 2021 is negligible for both genders.

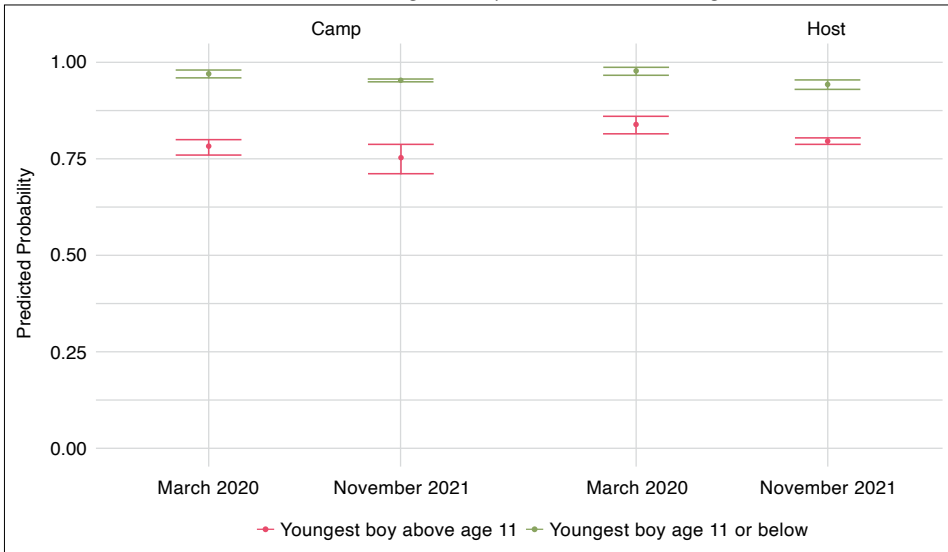
There are fewer education options for individuals above age 11 in the camps, which explains the overall lower probability of older members of a household using education services. However, this cannot explain the reduction over time for households with females older than age 11. Furthermore, the change cannot be explained by females in our sample getting older, since this would equally affect both males and females, as well as refugee households and Bangladeshi households, yet the change only appears for females in refugee households.

Figure 3: Simulated Predicted Probability for Household Use of Any Education Services for Female Members, Divided by Population, Time, and Whether the Youngest Girl Is Older Than Age 11



Note: Vertical bars indicate the 95 percent CI of the prediction, based on population-clustered standard errors. N=1083. The regression formula for the predictions is available in Appendix B.

Figure 4: Simulated Predicted Probability for Household Use of Any Education Services for Male Members, Divided by Population, Time, and Whether the Youngest Boy Is Older Than Age 11



Note: Vertical bars around the expected value indicate the 95 percent CI of the prediction, based on population-clustered standard errors. N=1071. The regression formula for the predictions is available in Appendix B.

Since the underlying the male versus female models have different samples (e.g., households that have children of the respective gender), our results could be driven by differences in the samples. We therefore also run regressions where we restrict the sample to households with children of both genders, thus using the same sample. These results are presented in Online Appendix Table B3 and Figures B1 and B2. They are similar to our benchmark models and support the conclusions.

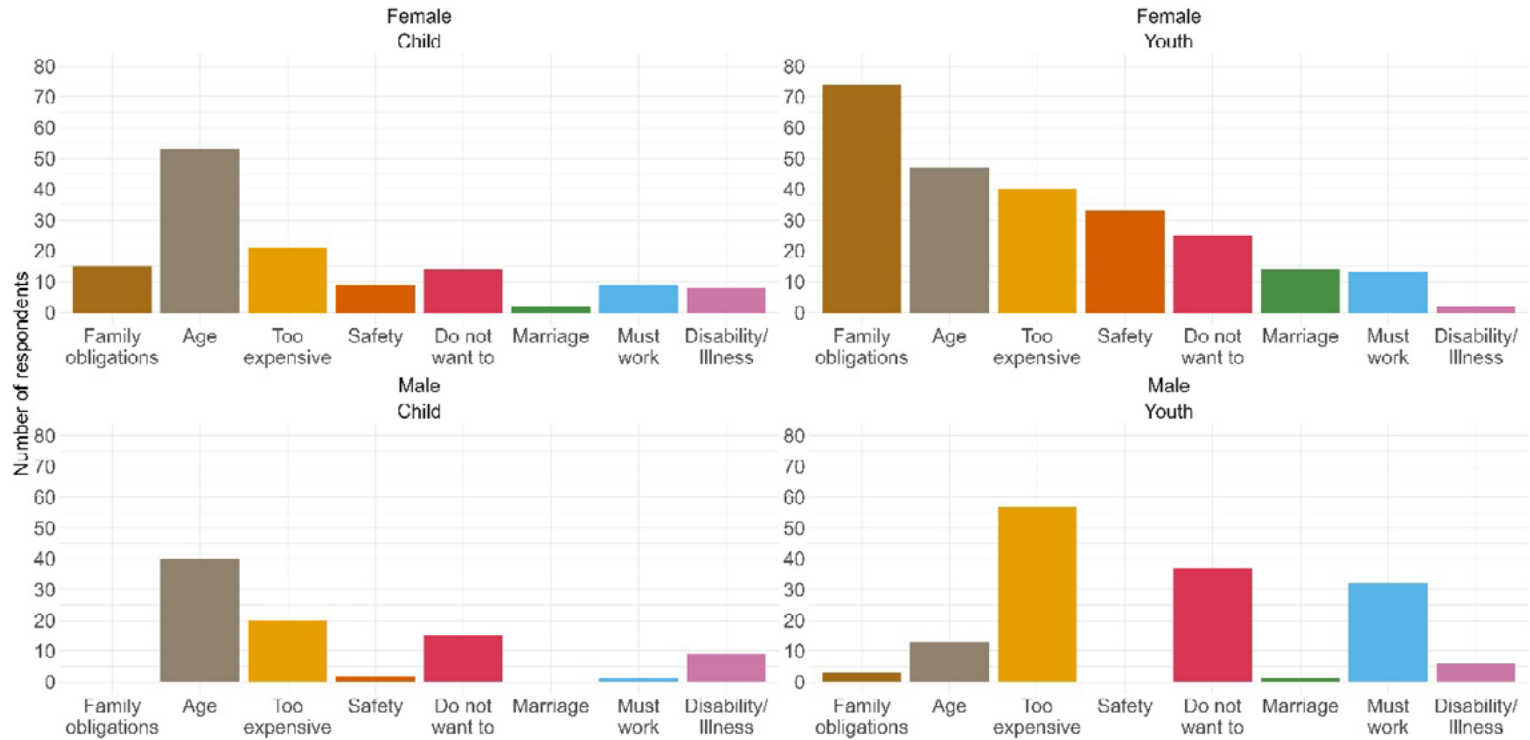
To support this result, in the third wave of the survey conducted in November 2021 we also asked the respondents directly whether all boys and girls who attended some form of education before the pandemic had returned to school. Using this as a dependent variable confirms the same pattern: children from the Bangladeshi host communities have returned to school to a greater degree than the Rohingya refugees. In refugee households, it is less likely that all children returned to their education if all school-age members are older than age 11. This is true for both genders, but the dropout rate among females is greater than among males. Note, however, that this does not give us the relative decline since March 2020 for each group, just a snapshot of the situation in November 2021. These results are available in Online Appendix Table B2, models 1 and 2.

In the third survey wave, we also asked about the number of boys or girls who had attended a learning center, madrasa, and/or private tutoring at least two days in the previous week. We calculate the share of household attendance for each gender by dividing this number by the total number of boys or girls in the household. Using a similar regression design as that above, we again confirm that refugee teenage girls were less likely to participate in any of these three forms of education. As with the previous robustness check, this does not give the relative decline since March 2020 for each group. These results are available in Online Appendix Table B2, models 3-8. Nevertheless, we find clear and strong support for our hypothesis (H4) that female refugee teenagers are especially vulnerable to long-term dropout from education.

WHY DO TEENAGE REFUGEES DROP OUT?

During the in-person surveys conducted in July 2022, we asked the household heads why individual children did not make use of education services. Figure 5 illustrates the most common reasons given for why a certain child was not attending school. For the subsample of refugee households, we present the answers by the child's gender and age.

Figure 5: Reasons Given for Why Children and Youth (above age 12) in Refugee Households Are Not Receiving Any Education, by Gender



Note: The y-axis indicates absolute numbers, since households could choose multiple reasons for not using education services for a particular child. Data from in-person survey conducted in July 2022.

There are several striking differences with respect to gender. First, as expected, the most common reason offered as to why female youth are not receiving an education is that they must attend to family obligations, but this reason is rarely cited for males of similar age.¹⁶ Similarly, being of an age that is too low or too high is an obstacle to education for 30 percent of female youths, whereas being the wrong age is only cited by household adults for 10 percent of male youth. Finally, marriage is a reason given for 10 percent of female youths who do not receive an education but for less than 1 percent of male youths.

Our survey results do not reveal directly whether the pandemic exacerbated some of these gender differences, but we contend that school closures are likely to have increased the rate of teen marriage, as well as the need for labor at home because of pandemic-related economic constraints.

We also observe that females were more affected than males by the deteriorating security situation. For 20 percent of female youths, safety was offered as a reason they did not return to their education, but no respondent mentioned security as an issue for male youths. Any change in the security situation is therefore highly likely to have a much greater impact on girls' enrollment than on boys'. Boys, as expected, were more likely to abandon their education for work; 25 percent of respondents offered this reason to explain why a male youth in their household stopped his education, but only 8 percent cited this explanation for female youths. This may explain why the price of education was also cited more often for male than female youths who were not receiving an education. Paying to educate a male youth as opposed to a female is more likely to be seen as a tradeoff with gaining household income. It is somewhat surprising that male attendance did not drop after the reopening of schools and learning centers. This could indicate that constraints on household income between March 2020 and June 2022 were less significant than expected.

Two caveats with our survey results are that we (1) relied on caregivers' reports on their children's education situation rather than speaking directly to the children/students, and (2) that caregivers did not report on individual children but about the general situation for older and younger boys and girls. As for the first caveat, which applies to both the phone and in-person surveys, it is of course possible that the caregivers (knowingly or unknowingly) gave false answers. As with all

¹⁶ This answer could also imply that girls have to stay home because of social taboos, rather than only because it is strictly necessary to tend to family obligations. Because of the sensitivity of the subject, we could not distinguish between these two reasons.

survey data, we have no way to know this. As for the second caveat (which only pertains to the phone surveys), information about each individual child would have strengthened the causal inference. However, we contend that, by accounting for the gender and age composition of the household and asking gender-specific questions, we are still able to demonstrate systematic group-based differences.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 led to an unprecedented shutdown of society, including the closing of schools and education services around the world. Bangladesh experienced some of the longest school closures in the world. Previous literature has highlighted the fact that refugees and girls are at a disadvantage during crises. Our study contributes to the growing field of literature that examines the potential heterogeneous educational effects of school closures as related to gender and refugee status, and adds nuance to this scholarship that predicts large-scale setbacks.

Using three rounds of original phone survey panel data, we explored the long-term impact of closing schools and learning centers on dropout among refugee and host community children in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our results from repeated phone surveys do not support the hypothesis that the pandemic led to a general decline in the use of education services, contrary to several studies on learning loss and school dropouts during COVID-19 (see Moscoviz and Evans 2022¹⁷). However, we do identify an especially negative impact of the closure of education services when it comes to the significantly greater reduced attendance of teenage Rohingya refugee girls as compared to other groups after the re-opening of the learning centers.

The latter seems to correspond with the overall findings in the literature, which *inter alia* find that learning loss was consistently higher among girls and students with lower socioeconomic status, even in contexts with little or no average learning loss. Taken together, this suggests that the pandemic led to increased educational inequalities. Findings from our in-person survey conducted in July 2022 suggest that security concerns and family obligations constitute a significant threat to girls' attendance at these learning centers and may cause permanent dropout.

¹⁷ Moscoviz and Evans (2022), in a review of the literature conducted two years after the COVID-19 shutdown, found that most estimates of average learning loss are negative, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

The findings presented herein underscore the fact that international humanitarian support for the refugee camps and the host communities must continue to assist the government of Bangladesh in handling the crisis. The international community in particular should target interventions to households with pubescent and teenage girls, as they are most at risk of dropping out. Interventions might include cash incentives, improved security or safe spaces, improved access to the internet in the camps and free SIM cards, and educational interventions that showcase the importance of secondary education for girls. These interventions could improve dropout rates, in particular for teenage girls whose parents do not allow them to leave the home to attend in-person classes in the learning centers. There is a particular need to further develop and evaluate interventions aimed at improving education attendance among young women. We also need a more nuanced understanding of how school closures affect individuals in low-income countries. This should be a main priority for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding for this work was provided by the Research Council of Norway (grant 287047). We would like to thank Nishat Jui, Naomi Kimani, Håvard Strand, Jerin Tasnim, and the participants of the panel on Vulnerable Populations and Conflict Processes at the 2023 ISA Convention in Montreal for their helpful comments and ideas on previous drafts. All errors are our own.

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ADDRESSING ADOLESCENCE: ADVOCATING FOR AGE- AND GENDER- RESPONSIVE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING DURING EMERGENCIES

RENA DEITZ AND HEDDY LAHMANN

ABSTRACT

Adolescents' uniquely gendered experiences during conflict are colored by the broader sociocultural context. Although interventions exist to address young people's social and emotional learning (SEL) during emergencies, little is known of these interventions' gendered effects. We systematically review studies of SEL in humanitarian contexts to determine gendered trends in effects and opportunities. Although existing studies largely fail to disaggregate findings by gender, when they are disaggregated, adolescent girls are consistently shown to benefit more in terms of social outcomes than their male peers, while males, especially older adolescents, frequently have better wellbeing outcomes than female adolescents. Studies that disaggregate findings by both age and gender complicate these trends further and point to the challenge of supporting SEL outcomes as older adolescents move toward adulthood. When programs are incompatible with adolescents' realities or ignore structural issues and gender norms, they do not result in positive outcomes. Programs that are gender responsive show the most promise.

INTRODUCTION

According to robust evidence from high-income settings in the Global North (Durlak et al. 2011; Jones, McGarrah, and Kahn 2019), social and emotional learning (SEL) programming has the propensity to improve academic, wellbeing, and developmental outcomes across ages and genders. Based on this evidence, SEL

Received January 16, 2023; revised October 3, 2023; accepted November 9, 2023; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
Copyright © 2023 by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE).
ISSN 2518-6833

has been used to support children and youth living in conflict settings. However, the realities are different in conflict contexts from those of stable contexts. Conflict has known gendered and age-specific effects on young people (Kirk and Garrow 2003; Kirk 2007; Sommers 2012, 2019), but evidence is lacking on how the effects of SEL programs and approaches vary in specific crisis settings (Deitz, Lahmann, and Thompson 2021).¹ In this study, we examine the gendered effects of SEL in various emergency contexts throughout the adolescent years. We specifically explore what we know so far about the gendered effects of SEL among adolescents affected by emergencies, and how these effects vary throughout adolescence. Our findings demonstrate the need for research on and programming frameworks for interventions in education in emergencies contexts so that future interventions can take a gender- and age-responsive approach.

SEL interventions target the social, emotional, and cognitive competencies that children and youth need in order to interact with others and their environment. These interventions include a variety of approaches, including those that focus on the school or classroom climate, on shifting mindsets, and on building specific skills, either through standalone training or by integrating SEL into the academic content (Yeager 2017). Although we include interventions that target teachers, students, and schools (Norman et al. 2022), we primarily focus on students' social and emotional development.

Research and practice in the Global North demonstrate that, although students of all ages can benefit from SEL, the gains are greater among younger adolescents (ages 9-12) than those who are older (ages 13-17) (Yeager, Dahl, and Dweck 2018). Older adolescents have developmental needs that may limit the impact of SEL interventions (Yeager 2017). Thus, alternative approaches that address the developmental and motivational changes that occur during adolescence may yield greater results among older adolescents who are transitioning into adulthood. For example, SEL programs that focus on the classroom climate and on the mindset of those participating may be more effective for older adolescents (Coelho and Sousa 2018; Yeager 2017). Policies like those detailed in the “Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills USAID Policy Brief” and corresponding *USAID Education Policy* (USAID 2019, 2018) primarily promote SEL for school-age children. The fact that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) differentiates between

1 Terminology associated with SEL approaches and outcomes may vary. We use the term “social and emotional learning” to refer to interventions aimed at building social, emotional, and cognitive skills and abilities in order to support children and youth in their relationships and interactions with one another and their surrounding environment (Deitz et al. 2021). For example, we include interventions aimed at improving soft skills and life skills, as these programs often have objectives and outcomes that are similar to and overlap with SEL.

SEL for younger children and “softs skills” for older youth suggests that the two age groups have different needs and thus require different approaches. However, existing programs rarely differentiate by age when addressing developmental needs.

We find that most programs target a wide age range of young people, the effects of which differ vastly. Some programs even have contradictory effects between genders and null or negative effects when gender-specific and structural issues are not addressed, particularly among older adolescents. These issues include restrictions on girls attending school or certain employment opportunities. We demonstrate that programs targeting adolescents in settings of conflict and crisis do not adequately address developmental differences and needs, particularly gendered structural barriers, including entrenched norms. Moreover, the sparse availability of disaggregated data related to gender and age limits the capacity of programs to address specific developmental needs. Our findings offer insights for future research, policy, and programming related to SEL and education in emergencies.

It is important to note that a broad discussion on the gendered effects of SEL that explicitly engages with the meaning of gender is lacking. While some evaluations report differential effects by the sex/gender binary (i.e., male and female), few studies discuss how SEL explicitly addresses or perpetuates “gendered hierarchical binaries” (Evans 2017, 187) or the normative performance of specific behaviors that reinforce existing hierarchies. Even calls for gender sensitivity in humanitarian aid perpetuate problematic and discriminatory binary framing (e.g., INEE 2019; WHO 2011). A call for “letting go of the gender binary” in guidelines for gender-based violence (Dolan 2014, 496) was met with fierce criticism for not sufficiently highlighting the particular vulnerabilities of women and girls (Ward 2016). Despite these debates, our discussion of gender in this article is limited by how it is represented in existing studies. Therefore, we refer to gender according to the binary used in the existing literature: boys and girls, women and men. However, we recognize the urgent need to move past the limitations of binary thinking about gender in order to capture the experiences of those whose identities are not effectively represented by these two categories. We encourage other researchers to do so.

This article is organized into four sections. In the first section, we situate our study in the literature on gender and adolescent development, specifically within contexts of conflict and crisis whenever relevant and available. We next present our methodology, which stems from a systematic review of the SEL literature in development and humanitarian contexts. In the third section, we present our

findings and show that current SEL interventions do not sufficiently address the needs of adolescents, and that the existing research fails to address adolescents' differing needs based on gender and age, as well as the structural barriers adolescents face. We conclude with a discussion of the results, policy implications, and limitations of the current study and propose avenues for future research.

GENDER AND AGE MATTER FOR SEL DURING EMERGENCIES

Although physical and psychological development differ substantially throughout adolescence, they provide a key window into brain development as it relates to social and emotional competencies. Previous scholarship has touted early childhood as the primary stage in which children should develop social and emotional skills because billions of neural connections, which allow for communication between different parts of the brain, are being formed at this point in their development (Center on the Developing Child 2017). However, it is during adolescence that, as important neural connections become stronger and unused connections are rendered obsolete, the brain architecture is fully prepared for adult life, including behavior and cognitive abilities (White 2009).

Adolescence is not a monolith. There are unique opportunities for social and emotional development in the different phases of adolescence, and various SEL approaches may be more or less effective in each phase. Moreover, it may be possible that SEL strategies differ by gender as a result of both puberty and societal pressures. While biological changes affect gendered traits, socialization is particularly influential during adolescence in shaping gender norms, gendered behaviors, and differential social and emotional competencies (Kågesten et al. 2016; Schwenk et al. 2014; Lahmann 2021). The many changes taking place during adolescence make it a key stage for social and emotional development that may have long-lasting effects, for better or worse.

Due to these ongoing changes, adverse life events that occur during adolescence often have an outsized effect on short- and long-term development (White 2009; Tottenham and Galván 2016). Toxic and traumatic experiences that occur during adolescence, including exposure to violent conflict and displacement, can lead to negative coping behaviors if they go unaddressed (Dahl and Suleiman 2017). Negative coping mechanisms and behavioral issues that emerge or worsen during adolescence can become solidified as young people move into adulthood (Yeager et al. 2018). However, there is also great opportunity for growth and positive

development during adolescence (Choudhury 2017; Dahl and Suleiman 2017), as well as the possibility of course correction through an intervention, such as SEL, when adolescents are at risk for negative adaptation. Therefore, adolescence is a particularly opportune time of life to address adversity and promote social and emotional development, especially in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts.

The developmental literature demonstrates that strategies for cultivating social and emotional skills and abilities differ over the course of a child's development (Yeager 2017; Silvers et al. 2012). Moreover, skills-based SEL programs that are effective in building young children's social and emotional competencies are less effective among adolescents, who prioritize standing out, fitting in, measuring up, and taking hold of their future (Durlak et al. 2011; Yeager 2017). However, SEL interventions often apply the same approaches across different age groups and genders. This effectively means that a developmentally agnostic approach is applied, which may not effect change in adolescents (Yeager et al. 2018).

Despite calls for a focus on context and cultural relevance in SEL (Schonert-Reichl 2019), many interventions around the world rely on imported SEL approaches (Deitz et al. 2021). However, social and emotional priorities vary across communities (Osher et al. 2016). Specific contextual and cultural priorities and nuances affect the uptake and acceptance of SEL interventions and thus may require different approaches. For example, in conflict-affected Northern Nigeria, local teachers prioritize self-discipline, respect, and tolerance, constructs that are not well represented in global SEL frameworks (Bailey et al. 2021).

Drawing from developmental psychology, we examine key developmental and socialization changes that take place across the adolescent transition period, roughly ages 9 to 18, and beyond (Yeager 2017; Silvers et al. 2012). We expand this framing in two ways. First, we do not define adolescence by age because developmental trajectories and gender socialization vary across contexts, cultures, and individuals. Second, we look beyond the research conducted in stable, high-income settings. When available, we include literature from crisis-affected contexts in order to shed light on the ways gender interacts with adolescent development in relevant contexts.

DEVELOPMENT ACROSS ADOLESCENCE

Beginning in early adolescence, biological changes affect how adolescents interact with their environment. Hormonal changes experienced during puberty influence the major physical changes in the brain's neural circuitry. Specifically, connections in the frontal lobe, the region of the brain responsible for many social and emotional processes, such as understanding emotions and social relationships, decisionmaking, and impulse control, are pruned to be more efficient. These changes manifest in adolescent behavior, such as exploring independence, trying new experiences, and seeking rewarding ones (Dahl and Suleiman 2017; White 2009). As adolescents assert independence and agency, their behavior tends to cause more conflict with their parents (Yeager et al. 2018; Zimmermann and Iwanski 2014). Sharp increases in testosterone in both girls and boys make them more sensitive to social status and respect (Yeager et al. 2018). They become more focused on and motivated by being treated respectfully, concern about their social reputation, and feelings of belonging.

The beginning of adolescence is also a peak period for gender socialization, including pressure to adhere to gender norms (Cherewick et al. 2021; Kägensten et al. 2016). A systematic review of factors that shape gender attitudes across 29 countries showed that girls experience constraints on their mobility and other disadvantages primarily “because they are girls,” whereas restrictions for boys focus on ensuring that they are not “the wrong sort of boys” (i.e., that they do not adhere to stereotypical norms or demonstrate traits associated with femininity) (Kägensten 2016, 25-26). Peers are highly influential during adolescence, and relationships with peers and adult mentors are pivotal in shaping long-term gender attitudes and behaviors (Cherewick et al. 2021; Kägensten et al. 2016).

As adolescents get older, adhering to gender norms and ideologies is particularly pivotal in achieving and maintaining a sense of belonging. For example, studies from the United States show that girls start to self-silence in order to demonstrate their adherence to feminine norms of compliance, while boys start to seek solitude and to assert their stoicism at the cost of their close friendships (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Way 2011; Way et al. 2014). A study in Spain demonstrated that boys hold more stereotypes about gender than girls, and that they tend to externalize their beliefs by focusing on the behavior of others. Girls, on the other hand, internalize their beliefs about gender ideology and focus on whether they do or do not reflect them (Villanueva-Blasco and Grau-Alberola 2019). Although these examples from the Global North may differ from the experiences of the adolescents discussed in this paper, similar developmental and social processes

likely influence their adoption of behaviors and ideologies that fit within local gender norms.

Although adolescents increasingly face pressure to adhere to gender and social norms, the frontal lobe, the region of the brain responsible for emotional regulation, does not fully develop until late adolescence and into adulthood. As a result, young people tend to demonstrate fewer emotional regulation strategies. Girls tend to be more emotionally mature than boys, but they also perceive more stress (Schoeps, Montoya-Castilla, and Raufelder 2019). As a result, they are more vulnerable to psychological and emotional disorders and have higher rates of depressive symptoms (Gomez-Baya et al. 2017). Emotional and behavioral disorders and perceived stress during adolescence can have longlasting implications for healthy development into adulthood (Schoeps et al. 2019; Zimmermann and Iwanski 2014). When adolescents develop their emotion-regulation strategies, they differ according to their gendered socialization. While girls and young women tend to rely on emotion-regulation strategies such as seeking social support or dysfunctional rumination, boys and young men are socialized to suppress their emotions, which can lead to avoidance and passivity (Zimmermann and Iwanski 2014).² These are particularly important considerations for programs that aim to support SEL and wellbeing during emergencies, where the risk of intense stress and behavioral disorders is heightened.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES RELATED TO GENDER AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

In addition to the developmental transition that occurs throughout adolescence, adolescents living in emergency contexts must deal with existing gender norms that are confounded by new structural issues. Pre-existing gender inequalities are exacerbated by conflict and crisis, which often lead to the constriction of women's activities and intensified pressure on men to provide for their families (Lafrenière, Sweetman, and Thylin 2019; Lahmann 2021). Just as adult men and women take on new roles in their communities and face new obstacles, so do adolescent boys and girls. For example, during a conflict, when adult men and adolescent boys leave home to fight or are killed in combat, adult women may choose or be forced to work outside the home. In such cases, the eldest daughters often take on childcare responsibilities and household chores. Adolescent boys may be forced to take on the role of head of household and become the primary income generator (UNESCO Bangkok 2006).

2 Dysfunctional rumination is a repetitive focus on worrisome thoughts or negative feelings.

The instability and stressors associated with crises often have gendered effects on young people (Kirk and Garrow 2003; Kirk 2007). Due to safety concerns or increased caretaking duties at home, adolescent girls' worlds often contract and their mobility is restricted. Moreover, during a crisis, girls are half as likely as boys to enroll in school and more likely to miss or drop out of school (INEE 2021). When routes to school are considered unsafe or there are no latrines on the school premises, girls—especially those who are menstruating—often must remain at home. During a crisis, girls and young women also are more likely to be forced into early marriage and to experience domestic and sexual violence. On the other hand, boys and young men are more likely to be recruited as child soldiers, coerced into militancy, or have their schooling interrupted so they can work outside the home (Sommers 2019; Strømme et al. 2020). Increased structural barriers constrain adolescents' ability to access and benefit from a wide range of resources and services.

While theory and practice in gender work with adolescents in developing countries often apply the term “gender” exclusively to girls and young women, the gendered expectations of families, communities, and societies compound structural issues for adolescent boys and girls alike. Although adolescent boys may have more access to social networks through school or other activities outside the home, the instability of a conflict may create barriers to the traditional pathways and roles that boys expect to fulfill in adulthood, thus disrupting their sense of purpose and hope for the future (Sommers 2012, 2019). For example, the expectation that young men will marry and provide for their family members may be altered by the economic instability and fallout caused by conflict (Lahmann 2021). For both boys and girls, the transition into adulthood becomes more difficult to achieve in a conflict context, which compounds the unknown future crisis-affected adolescents must face and increases their anxiety or insecurity about their role status and about fulfilling the expectations associated with adulthood (Bellino 2018; Dryden-Peterson 2017; Zimmermann and Iwanski 2014).

The gendered challenges that boys and young men encounter are profoundly important for their social and emotional development. While the evidence above points to the importance of the distinctive developmental shifts that take place during adolescence and to how they interact with gendered norms, our findings demonstrate that there is a dearth of SEL programming and research that addresses the unique gender pressures, challenges, norms, and behaviors associated with these changes.

METHODS

This study utilizes data from a broader systematic review of SEL evidence across development and humanitarian contexts. The full detailed methodology for the systematic review can be found in Deitz, Lahmann, and Thompson (2021).³ Findings from the systematic review revealed gendered effects on SEL outcomes, particularly among adolescents affected by humanitarian crises. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, we analyzed the results from the studies that specifically focused on adolescents affected by emergencies, including refugees, internally displaced persons, and those living in active crisis, conflict, and postconflict settings. Forty-eight papers met these criteria. Of those 48 papers, 33 disaggregated the data by gender and are the focus of our analysis for this paper (see Figure 1). Table A1 in the Appendix includes a full list of studies and details.

DATA SELECTION

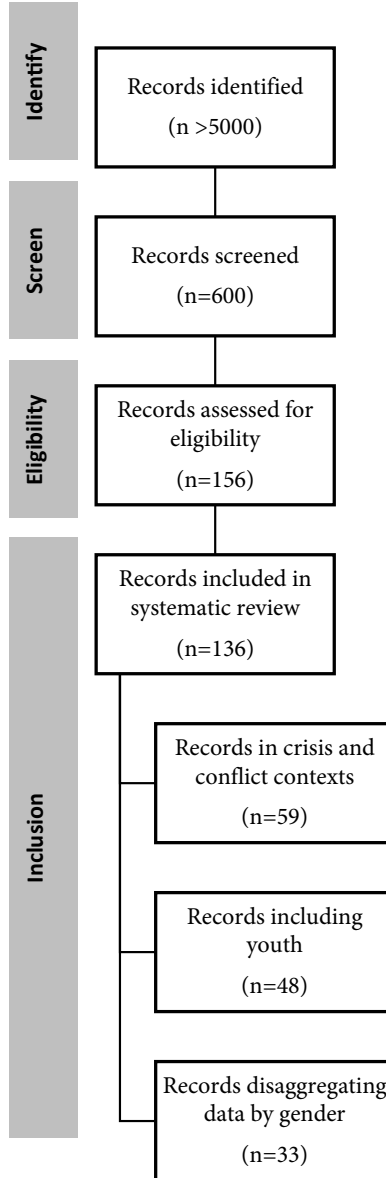
We used the review methodology set out by the Cochrane Collaboration and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, as presented in Figure 1.⁴ First, we identified studies by searching 18 academic databases of peer-reviewed journals and 27 organizational databases, and by direct outreach to relevant networks and organizations ($n > 5,000$). Second, we screened the abstracts of studies with relevant titles ($n = 600$) to see if they met the following criteria: (1) were published between January 2000 and March 2021; (2) occurred in a developing or humanitarian context; (3) targeted children and youth; (4) were an intervention that addressed SEL/soft skills; and (5) were connected to education or learning. Third, we assessed those that met the inclusion criteria for quality assurance ($n = 156$) for their eligibility. We designed a quality assurance checklist based on “principles of high quality studies” (Building Evidence in Education n.d., 16), including methodological rigor, validity and reliability, and cultural appropriateness/sensitivity. Twenty studies were eliminated because they had a low score on the quality assurance review. We then reviewed those that passed the quality assurance check ($n = 136$). We rescreened those 136 articles in two stages for inclusion in this paper: first, for context, including refugees, internally displaced persons, those living in active crisis and conflict settings, and in postconflict settings if the intervention specifically targeted the postconflict response ($n = 59$);

³ Details for all studies in the systematic review can be found at <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-sel-systematic-review>.

⁴ The Cochrane Collaboration and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation are standard bearers for conducting systematic reviews and evidence gap maps. More information can be found on their respective websites, <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/> and <https://www.3ieimpact.org/>.

and, second, for those that included youth in their target population (n=48). Our analysis focused primarily on the articles that disaggregated data by gender (n=33).

Figure 1: Data Selection PRISMA Flow Chart



Note: A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic and Meta-Analyses) flow chart depicts the stages of a systematic review and the number of records identified and included at each stage.

ANALYSIS AND CODING

We conducted an extensive coding process for themes and research questions, which included codes for intervention type, SEL approach, outcomes, age group, target population, country, whether or not girls were included or targeted, and gender responsiveness. We coded all the studies by age group, initially by broad age categories—primary school age (6-14) and youth (15+)—then looked at the specific ages and genders targeted in each study.

We coded for three main outcome categories that were aligned with the existing SEL literature across cultures and contexts, including the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (Skoog-Hoffman et al. 2020), the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2017), and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (McNatt et al. 2018):

- *Social*: interpersonal skills and competencies that enable one to build relationships, work with others, and solve social problems
- *Emotional*: intrapersonal skills and competencies that enable one to recognize, express, and control emotions, and to understand and empathize with others
- *Wellbeing*: health-related knowledge or behaviors related to physical and mental health, which includes building “resilience” and “sense of belonging” and reducing risk behaviors and mental health issues related to mood, thinking, and behavior—including anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other maladaptive behaviors

We coded outcomes by gender and age group, as available in the studies.

FINDINGS

LACK OF DISAGGREGATION BY AGE ACROSS STUDIES

While 33 of 48 (roughly 69%) of the papers we analyzed for this article disaggregated their findings by gender, just 5 of the 48, or about 10 percent, disaggregated the data by age group. Yet the majority (roughly 70%) included age spans of five years or more, and half the studies included an age span of nine years or more. Without data that enabled us to see variation within these large windows of time, it is impossible to know how adolescents respond to programming at different

points in their development and when interventions might be most effective for girls and for boys.

GENDERED EFFECTS ACROSS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND WELLBEING OUTCOMES

We organize the findings that follow by result. We compare and contrast the findings across geographic regions to demonstrate contextually relevant patterns, and to show trends in the ways interventions and studies are targeting, reporting, and affecting outcomes across various settings. Trends across studies revealed that adolescent girls consistently benefitted more in terms of social outcomes than their male peers, while males, especially older adolescents, frequently had better wellbeing outcomes than female adolescents. However, studies that disaggregated findings by both age and gender complicate these trends further and point to the challenge of supporting SEL outcomes, especially as older adolescents move closer to adulthood. Moreover, programs that didn't include gender-responsive or targeted gender approaches for adolescents largely failed to achieve their intended outcomes, regardless of their location.

SOCIAL AND WELLBEING DIFFERENCES BY GENDER

Studies across geographic regions showed markedly different outcomes by gender among adolescents: girls had greater social gains and boys had greater gains in wellbeing. Four of these studies took place in the West Bank and Gaza (Veronese and Castiglioni 2013; Peltonen et al. 2012; Khamis, Macy, and Coignez 2004; Loughry et al. 2006). In a study of a strengths- and play-based intervention used to enhance children's wellbeing and foster their natural adjustment to stress in two refugee camps in the West Bank, girls ages 7 to 15 had greater gains than boys of similar age in their perceptions of their social relationships and of their lives in general (Veronese and Castiglioni 2013). A peer-mediation training program to support mental health and promote social functioning amid the ongoing armed conflict in Gaza had similar results. While the program had no overall effect on the primary outcomes of PTSD, symptoms of depression and psychological distress, or aggression among early adolescents (ages 10-14), it did have an effect on prosocial behavior and friendship quality, which was especially strong among girls with "high military trauma" (Peltonen et al. 2012). In cases of extreme trauma, Peltonen and colleagues suggest "that intervention could facilitate girls' successful seeking of support and intimacy when in life threat" (2012, 43).

Adolescent girls may have fewer opportunities to gather with their peers than adolescent boys, who may be granted greater social freedom than girls, even in unstable contexts. SEL and other types of programs may provide a unique opportunity for girls to build strong, positive social relationships, which may be one reason for the greater treatment effect. This also may explain why a classroom-based intervention (CBI) in the West Bank and Gaza only had positive effects for adolescent girls, who demonstrated stronger prosocial strengths than boys, specifically in familial and peer relationships, while adolescent boys (ages 12-16) who experienced the intervention saw no statistically significant differences in their social strengths than the control group (Khamis et al. 2004). Adolescent girls' (ages 12-16) responses to the intervention mirrored the benefits of younger participants (ages 6-11).

An out-of-school program in the West Bank and Gaza also found gendered differences in the effects on behavioral and emotional problems (Loughry et al. 2006). Although the groups were selected to include children in two age groups (ages 6-11 and 12-17), the analysis did not disaggregate between the cohorts. Overall, the treatment did not improve boys' emotional and behavioral problems. Only in Gaza (not in the West Bank) did boys' tendency to internalize problems improve. Externalizing and internalizing problems improved across both locations among girls. The authors explain that a wide range of humanitarian activities were targeting children and youth in the region at the time of the study, and that young people in the control group may have participated in other equivalent programs that may have had similar effects. It is important to note the ongoing context of unpredictable active conflict that may not be consistent between the West Bank and Gaza, which may affect boys and girls differently, and may differ from studies that took place in displacement or postconflict settings.

In the Middle East and elsewhere, male adolescents consistently experienced greater gains in wellbeing than female adolescents. Studies of cognitive-behavioral interventions focused on skill-building in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Burundi showed different mental health effects between boys and girls, including potentially harmful effects. Among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, only male participants' mental health outcomes improved for measures of depression and anxiety (Kazandjian, Militello, and Doumit 2019). In Sri Lanka, adolescent girls (ages 9-12) who received the treatment had worse outcomes than their peers in the control group (Tol et al. 2012). A randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a similar program in Burundi had a negative impact on PTSD among girls in the treatment group (Tol et al. 2014). Similarly, only male participants in a yoga-based intervention in Colombia had a statistically significant reduction in depression (Velásquez et al. 2015).

Finally, two studies of CBIs, one each in Nepal and South Sudan, found that only male participants experienced improved emotional wellbeing (Jordans et al. 2010; Laser Pulse 2020).

OLDER ADOLESCENTS' GENDER-SPECIFIC NEEDS ARE NOT MET BY EXISTING PROGRAMMING

Among the few studies that disaggregated data by age group, we see more positive outcomes trends among younger than older adolescents, especially when the same intervention targeted a wide age range. Several studies targeting refugee children and adolescents indicated differences in wellbeing outcomes by age and gender, and also demonstrated the complexity of and challenges in improving outcomes among older adolescents (Metzler et al. 2021; Metzler et al. 2014; Metzler et al. 2015; Kazandjian et al. 2019; Lilley et al. 2014).

The CBI in the West Bank and Gaza described above showed promising results for younger children and early adolescents (ages 6-11) who may not yet have been exposed to the societal pressures associated with adulthood (Khamis et al. 2004). In contrast, coping skills and mechanisms declined for both male and female participants in the older age group (ages 12-16), who reported feeling more burdened by difficult circumstances. Self-reliance and optimism improved for females in the older age group but declined for males; this occurred at the age when males would be expected to take on the role of provider or breadwinner in the face of acute economic obstacles. Similarly, self-esteem among older adolescents only improved for females. For older adolescent boys, particularly among those ages 15-16, emotional wellbeing and sense of self were not affected or even declined.

Three studies of child-friendly spaces for Syrian refugee children and adolescents (ages 6-14) in Iraq and in Jordan also showed distinct differences in outcomes by age group. These studies showed positive outcomes for younger children, negative outcomes in wellbeing and resilience among older children in Jordan, and protection concerns among older children, especially girls in Iraq. Caregivers' protection concerns also increased in Iraq, and resilience outcomes among caregivers in Jordan declined (Metzler et al. 2014; Metzler et al. 2015; Lilley et al. 2014). A study of a similar child-friendly spaces intervention for refugee children and adolescents (ages 6-17) in Ethiopia showed similar trends: older male Somali refugee adolescents in Ethiopia reported greater concerns about protection (Metzler et al. 2021).

WITHOUT GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING, INTENDED OUTCOMES ARE OUT OF REACH—ESPECIALLY FOR GIRLS

Both boys and girls face structural barriers in terms of access to and the benefits of interventions in conflict- and crisis-affected contexts. For example, participatory action research in Iraq and Egypt revealed that older adolescent refugee and displaced girls (ages 15-25) had more difficulty than boys in participating in an arts-based program, due to safety concerns and household chores (Lee et al. 2020). The studies discussed in this section demonstrate that SEL interventions do not always lead to positive outcomes, even when they target female participants. In order to benefit from such interventions, the program must consider and address participants' gender- and age-specific needs. However, only nine studies of those we reviewed employed gender-responsive or targeted SEL approaches. Those nine had promising results.

Two studies that investigated soft-skills programs for youth in Jordan exemplify the importance of gender responsiveness in programming for girls. The Youth For Future program in Jordan aimed to build boys' "positive life skills," provide work training, and provide a sustainable network of community support and employment opportunities for middle and late adolescents (ages 15-24) (Moubayed et al. 2014). Although young women were explicitly recruited for and retained in the program, the work training they received was considered culturally inappropriate, in that they were trained for jobs not accessible to young women. Thus, the intervention did not lead to sustainable employment for girls. A soft-skills and employment-support program that targeted young women (ages 15+) in Jordan had similar results. Although an RCT showed that the program helped to reduce depression and improve these young women's life outlook, the effects were not sustained and did not lead to long-term employment (Groh et al. 2012; Groh et al. 2016).

Two studies in Asia further exemplify this trend among programs that include or target girls. A vocational training program offered in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam included girls but did not include either targeted curricula or outreach to support their engagement—this despite the fact that the labor market reports (Younes and Porter 2019) emphasized the need for greater inclusion of females in the workforce. While some social and emotional outcomes improved immediately after the intervention, almost all positive effects had dissipated three months after it ended; positive self-appraisal was maintained. In Pakistan, the Creating Opportunities through Mentoring, Parental Involvement, and Safe Spaces (COMPASS) program specifically targeted adolescent girls (ages 12-19).

COMPASS provided life skills and vocational training for refugee and displaced adolescent girls, parent/caregiver discussion groups, and support for service providers. The program improved both social and wellbeing outcomes but did not have any effect on the primary outcomes related to health and gender-based violence, which are likely to be influenced by external factors (Asghar et al. 2018).

Two “girl empowerment” programs related to COMPASS in Pakistan, described above, also did not achieve the primary desired outcomes (education, protection, and livelihoods) when implemented in Ethiopia and Liberia. In Ethiopia, COMPASS had no effect on the education, employment, or transactional sexual exploitation outcomes among the participants (girls ages 13-19) (Stark et al. 2018). Girl Empower in Liberia targeted a narrower age range, girls 13 to 14 years old who were on the cusp of early and middle adolescence. While the program found positive effects on gender attitudes, life skills, and sexual and reproductive health—skills that girls are likely to have autonomy over—the effects on sexual violence, schooling, psychosocial wellbeing, and protective factors were not statistically significant (Özler et al. 2020).

When both boys and girls participate in an intervention, gender-specific needs may not be met unless there is targeted programming. Similar SEL intervention programs in Sri Lanka and Burundi negatively affected girls’ wellbeing. An RCT of the Sri Lankan program that consisted of cognitive behavioral techniques (psychoeducation, strengthening coping skills, and guided exposure to past traumatic events through drawing) and creative expression (cooperative games, structured movement, music, drama, and dance) that targeted adolescents (ages 9-12) showed no main effects on the targeted outcomes. However, when the results were disaggregated, girls actually showed worse outcomes than their female peers in the control group. In comparison, the intervention had positive effects on anxiety and PTSD outcomes among boys (Tol et al. 2012). An RCT of a similar program in Burundi that targeted adolescents ages 8 to 17 also showed a negative impact on PTSD among girls in the treatment group (Tol et al. 2014). Positive effects were found among younger children in both Sri Lanka and Burundi.

Similarly, in South Sudan, a CBI that added a psychosocial support class to education programming demonstrated more positive effects for male than female students, especially for emotional wellbeing (Laser Pulse 2020). The intervention effects also differed on other factors that spoke to structural barriers the participants faced; for example, older students in rural government schools located in protection-of-civilian camps had larger effect sizes than those in urban community schools

and younger students not in protection-of-civilian camps. However, the authors of that study did not conduct additional analyses to understand the nuanced interactions between gender and other identities.

In contrast to the disappointing results on broader outcomes described above, an economic empowerment program that addressed the specific barriers adolescent girls face led to large economic gains for participants in Liberia. The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women program primarily targeted late adolescent women (ages 16-27) with six months of skills training, followed by six months of work placement and support. It had strong positive effects on earnings and employment, and moderate positive effects on social and emotional competencies related to worry, life satisfaction, self-confidence, and perceptions of social abilities (Adoho et al. 2014). The program also addressed systemic barriers that traditionally restrict girls' ability to succeed in job-training programs and enter the workforce. For example, trainings were held at different times to accommodate participants' schedules, and they provided free child care. The training was followed by job placement support to ensure that participants were able to secure a job. Moreover, if the trainees secured jobs, the training providers were given a financial bonus. Targeting these kinds of structural issues that adolescent girls face is essential to achieving the broader results that SEL programs aim to produce.

DISCUSSION

We found important distinctions in adolescents' responses to SEL interventions in conflict- and crisis-affected contexts by gender, especially as the participants age. In light of the important developmental shifts and profound changes that take place during adolescence and their implications for social and emotional development, research should investigate the varied effects of interventions by gender and age in order to account for these changes. The disaggregation of results is the bare minimum. About 69 percent of the studies we analyzed disaggregated findings by gender. We would like this to be 100 percent, but we are encouraged to see that disaggregating by gender, particularly among adolescents, is being done more often than not. However, few studies disaggregate by age, which leaves unanswered the question of what works for whom. Additional research is needed to understand the drivers of the differences, especially the nuanced interactions between gender, age, and context.

Pivotal social, emotional, physical, and physiological changes take place over the course of adolescence, which deeply influences gendered behaviors and norms. The pathways to improving quality of life and mental health outcomes may differ by gender. Our findings suggest that certain “ingredients” of the intervention, such as specific coping methods or strategies, may lead to different effects for adolescent boys than for girls. For example, cognitive reframing may work better for girls (i.e., Kazandjian et al. 2019), while active behavioral skill-building approaches may work better for boys (i.e., Jordans et al. 2010). We do not mean to suggest that developmental shifts occur at the same time or in the same ways across gender, age, or context. Rather, we argue that delivering the same intervention to children and young people across wide-ranging age groups, and in particular adolescents during emergencies, can be problematic because conflict and crisis are inherently gendered.

Importantly, when structural issues and norms are not addressed, the intended social, emotional, wellbeing, academic, and livelihood outcomes cannot be achieved. The specific stressors caused by war and crisis may differ between boys and girls and differentially affect how they respond to interventions. Our findings suggest that adolescent girls tend to have greater gains in social outcomes, while adolescent boys show greater gains in emotional outcomes. These differences may be due in part to the structural issues they face in their respective roles in society and how interventions address those issues. As girls transition into adulthood, their movement outside the home may be restricted, or they may be pulled out of school and married off, especially during times of instability or conflict. These restrictions on girls’ movement and their engagement with society may reduce their access to educational and SEL programs. However, if these barriers are addressed, SEL and other programs may provide unique opportunities for girls to gather with their peers and to foster their social skills and relationships, which is known to lead to more positive effects on social outcomes.

The way we talk about gender in SEL and education in emergencies needs to focus more on masculine characteristics and stressors that are unique to male adolescents. As our findings show, the unique gendered expectations and norms put on older adolescent boys may prevent them from achieving some of the social and emotional benefits that girls enjoy from an intervention. Boys may be subject to the burdens of providing for their family or filling adult roles without sufficient resources, or they may face forced recruitment into armed forces. Moreover, the transition into adulthood bombards boys with the reality of obstacles or barriers to their ability to fulfill the role of family provider. As a result, interventions like the one in the West Bank and Gaza may have negative effects on SEL competencies, such as self-reliance and optimism (Khamis et al. 2004). By teaching adolescent

boys to evaluate their difficult future with greater clarity, an SEL intervention may in fact lead to a sense of hopelessness or spur a negative reaction by not addressing the very structural issues young men are facing as they move toward adulthood. The effects of SEL programs on adolescents, particularly in late adolescence, show that programs that overlook the external realities and pressures do not improve social emotional skills or wellbeing. Targeting the structural issues that adolescent girls and boys face is essential to achieving the broader results that SEL programs aim to produce.

Programs must recognize and respond to the existing context within which the intervention works. Even when existing norms, such as those around women's employment, may be objectionable to those who are funding or implementing a program, simply ignoring the issues does not help participants. Training young women without addressing the employment context around them will ultimately be ineffective. Although interventions may be unable to overhaul existing norms, they could raise awareness about broader issues. Furthermore, SEL interventions that do not address the structural issues surrounding gendered norms for young men, such as expectations to marry and provide financially despite economic obstacles and hardships, may even produce negative responses.

It is essential to localize approaches by seeking a deeper understanding of the norms and barriers that affect the boys and girls the SEL interventions are meant to support. Participatory design and employing members of the community as SEL instructors should be regular practice in SEL interventions in order to enhance the relevance of the content and outcomes. SEL programming that attempts to influence thinking around gender norms and roles for young adolescents may also be a promising approach, as demonstrated by the positive effects in a low-income setting (Cherewick et al. 2021). While outside of the scope of this paper, we urge program designers and researchers in emergency contexts to consider broader structural questions that are related to gender identity and norms, including the binary nature in which gender is presented and assessed.

As SEL continues to expand in the humanitarian space, the ways conflict and crisis interact with gender norms and gendered lived realities need to be addressed across all stages of program implementation, including participant recruitment, intervention approaches, policy recommendations, and research. The bare minimum of what should be done is to include disaggregated demographic information by age and gender, as well as the differing effects, but even that is rare among existing research. Programs cannot be effectively tailored to address the unique needs that emerge for adolescent girls and boys if they do not contend

with the changes and the differences in their roles in society as they transition into adulthood. In order to better understand the unique differences and needs of adolescent boys and girls, and to build better gender- and age-responsive programming, we recommend that SEL interventions in emergency situations deliberately target adolescent groups with a smaller age range and explicitly consider the developmental shifts that take place during this period of life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND DISCLOSURES

We would especially like to acknowledge the research team that supported the data collection, Tressa Thompson, Dana Burde, Matthew Jukes, the team at USAID, and Dexis Consulting. This research is supported in part by USAID Task Order No. AID-OAA-TO-16-00024 under Contract No. AID-OAA-I-15-00019-Research for Effective Education Programming-Africa (REEP-A).

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APPENDIX

Table A1: Review Studies and Details

Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Aber, J. Lawrence, Lindsay Brown, and Ha Yeon Kim	2019	Raising Learning Outcomes for Girls in Conflict-Affected Contexts	6-14	Niger	Impact evaluation
Adoho, Franck, Shubha Chakravarty, Dala T. Korkoyah, Mattias Lundberg, and Afia Tasneem	2014	The Impact of an Adolescent Girls Employment Program	15+	Liberia	Impact evaluation
Asghar, Khudejha, Yana Mayevskaya, Marni Sommer, Ayesha Razzaque, Betsy Laird, Yasmin Khan, Shamsa Qureshi, Kathryn Falb, and Lindsay Stark	2018	Promoting Adolescent Girls' Well-Being in Pakistan: A Mixed-Methods Study of Change over Time, Feasibility, and Acceptability, of the COMPASS Program	6-14, 15+	Pakistan	Mixed methods
Betancourt, Theresa S., Ryan McBain, Elizabeth A. Newnham, Adeyinka M. Akinsulure-Smith, Robert T. Brennan, John R. Weisz, and Nathan B. Hansen	2014	A Behavioral Intervention for War-Affected Youth in Sierra Leone: A Randomized Controlled Trial	15+	Sierra Leone	Impact evaluation
Blattman, Christopher, Julian C. Jamison, and Margaret Sheridan	2017	Reducing Crime and Violence: Experimental Evidence from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Liberia	15+	Liberia	Impact evaluation
Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII)	2017	Education Crisis Response Year 3 End-line Assessment Report, December 2017	6-14, 15+	Nigeria	Descriptive quantitative

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Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Dexis Consulting Group	2018	Monitoring and Evaluation Support for Collaborative Learning and Adapting (MESCLA) Activity: Honduras Empleado Futuros Pilot Impact Evaluation Phase I: Findings and Recommendations	15+	Honduras	Impact evaluation
Dexis Consulting Group	2020	Performance Evaluation: Honduras Empleado Futuros Workforce Development Activity	15+	Honduras	Descriptive quantitative
Doumit, Rita, Chant Kazandjian, and Lisa K. Militello	2020	COPE for Adolescent Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: A Brief Cognitive-Behavioral Skill Building Intervention to Improve Quality of Life and Promote Positive Mental Health	6-14, 15+	Lebanon	Descriptive quantitative
Education Development Center, Inc.	2016	Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDEV) Program FY15 Impact Evaluation Report	15+	Philippines	Impact evaluation
Eyber, Carola, Keven Bermudez, Marisa Vojta, Kevin Savage, and Fustave Bengheya	2016	Evaluating the Effectiveness of Child Friendly Spaces in IDP Camps in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo: Goma Field Study Summary Report	6-14, 15+	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Mixed methods
Groh, Matthew, Nandini Krishnan, David McKenzie, and Tara Vishwanath	2012	Soft Skills or Hard Cash? The Impact of Training and Wage Subsidy Programs on Female Youth Employment in Jordan	15+	Jordan	Impact evaluation

Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Groh, Matthew, Nandini Krishnan, David McKenzie, and Tara Vishwanath	2016	The Impact of Soft Skills Training on Female Youth Employment: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Jordan	15+	Jordan	Impact evaluation
Harding, Richard, Gao Wei, Liz Gwyther, and Elvis Miti	2019	Improving Psychological Outcomes for Orphans Living with HIV in Tanzania Through a Novel Intervention to Improve Resilience: Findings from a Pilot RCT	6-14, 15+	Tanzania	Impact evaluation
Jordans, Mark J. D., Ivan H. Komproe, Wietse A. Tol, Brandon A. Kohrt, Nagendra P. Luitel, Robert D. Macy, and Joop T. V. M. De Jong	2010	Evaluation of a Classroom-Based Psychosocial Intervention in Conflict-Affected Nepal: A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial	6-14	Nepal	Impact evaluation
Kazandjian, Chant, Lisa K. Militello, and Rita Doumit	2019	Sex Differences on Quality of Life and Mental Health Outcomes When Using a Brief Cognitive-Behavioral Skill Building Intervention with Adolescent Syrian Refugees: A Secondary Analysis	6-14, 15+	Lebanon	Descriptive quantitative
Khamis, Vivian, Robert Macy, and Veerle Coignez	2004	The Impact of the Classroom/Community/Camp-Based Intervention (CBI) Program on Palestinian Children	6-14	Palestine	Impact evaluation
LASER PULSE Project	2020	Impact Evaluation Psychosocial Support on Children's Well-Being, Literacy, and Math Outcomes in the South Sudan Integrated Essential Emergency Education Services Activity: Final Report	Early childhood 3-5, 6-14	South Sudan	Impact evaluation

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Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Lee, Laura, Vanessa Currie, Neveen Saied, and Laura Wright	2019	Journey to Hope, Self-Expression and Community Engagement: Youth-Led Arts-Based Participatory Action Research	15+	Egypt, Iraq	Qualitative
Lilley, Sarah, Abduljabar Atrooshi, Janna Metzler, and Alastair Ager	2014	Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces Iraq Field Study Report: A Save the Children Implemented CFS in Domiz Refugee Camp	6-14, 15+	Iraq	Impact evaluation
Loughry, Maryanne, Alastair Ager, Eirini Flouri, Vivian Khamis, Abdel Hamid Afana, and Samir Qouta	2006	The Impact of Structured Activities among Palestinian Children in a Time of Conflict	6-14, 15+	Palestine	Impact evaluation
Malhotra, Deepak, and Sumansiri Liyanage	2005	Long-Term Effects of Peace Workshops in Protracted Conflicts	15+	Sri Lanka	Impact evaluation
Mandal, M., A. Cannon, L. Parker, I. Halldorsdottir, and E. Millar*	2019	Evaluation of Services for Orphans and Vulnerable Youth in Botswana	15+	Botswana	Impact evaluation
McLellan, Iain, and Jackson Bamwesigye	2012	Mid-Term Evaluation of the Akazi Kanoze Youth Livelihoods Project	15+	Rwanda	Mixed methods
Metzler, Janna, Abduljabar Atrooshi, Emad Khudeda, Delkhaz Ali, and Alastair Ager	2014	Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces: Iraq Field Study Report. A MoLSA-Implemented CFS in Domiz Refugee Camp	6-14, 15+	Iraq	Descriptive quantitative

Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Metzler, Janna, Kevin Savage, Marisa Vojta, Makiba Yamano, Alison Schafer, and Alastair Ager	2013	Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces: Ethiopia Field Study Summary Report	6-14, 15+	Ethiopia	Impact evaluation
Metzler, Janna, May Ishaq, Sabrina Herмосilla, Enala Mumba, and Alastair Ager	2015	Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces Jordan Field Study Report: A CFS Implemented by World Vision and partners in Zarqa, Jordan	6-14, 15+	Jordan	Mixed methods
Metzler, Janna, Mesfin Jonfa, Kevin Savage, and Alastair Ager	2021	Educational, Psychosocial, and Protection Outcomes of Child- and Youth-Focused Programming with Somali Refugees in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia	6-14, 15+	Ethiopia	Impact evaluation
Miller, Kenneth E., Gabriela V. Koppenol-Gonzalez, Ali Jawad, Frederik Steen, Myriam Sassine, and Mark J. D. Jordans	2020	A Randomised Controlled Trial of the I-Deal Life Skills Intervention with Syrian Refugee Adolescents in Northern Lebanon	6-14, 15+	Lebanon	Impact evaluation
Moubayed, Layla, Khaled Qubajah, Wala'a Aqrabawi, Maram Barqawi, and Dima al-Naber	2014	Final Performance Evaluation of the USAID/Jordan Youth for the Future (Y4F) Project	15+	Jordan	Mixed methods
Mueller, Joanne, Collin Alie, Beatrice Jonas, Elizabeth Brown, and Lorraine Sherr	2011	A Quasi-Experimental Evaluation of a Community-Based Art Therapy Intervention Exploring the Psychosocial Health of Children Affected by HIV in South Africa	6-14, 15+	South Africa	Impact evaluation

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Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Nigmatov, Vadim	2011	Youth Theater for Peace (YTP) Programs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Final Evaluation	15+	Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	Qualitative
NORC at the University of Chicago	2021	Education Crisis Response (ECR) Nigeria	6-14, 15+	Nigeria	Qualitative
NORC at the University of Chicago	2021	Workforce Development Activity (Empleando Futuros) Honduras	15+	Honduras	Qualitative
NORC at the University of Chicago	2021	Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDEV) Program Philippines	15+	Philippines	Qualitative
O'Callaghan, Paul, Lindsay Branham, Ciarán Shannon, Theresa S. Betancourt, Martin Dempster, and John McMullen	2014	A Pilot Study of a Family Focused, Psychosocial Intervention with War-Exposed Youth at Risk of Attack and Abduction in North-Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo	6-14, 15+	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Impact evaluation
Omari, Hassan Al, Maysoon. Al A'alem, Haddel Abu Shama, and Rania Al Sweity	2015	Cultivating Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment Program (CISLE): Summative Evaluation	6-14, 15+	Jordan	Mixed methods
Özler, Berk, Kelly Hallman, Marie-France Guimond, Elizabeth A. Kelvin, Marian Rogers, and Esther Karnley	2020	Girl Empower—A Gender Transformative Mentoring and Cash Transfer Intervention to Promote Adolescent Wellbeing: Impact Findings from a Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial in Liberia	6-14	Liberia	Impact evaluation

Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Peltonen, Kirsi, Samir Qouta, Eyad El Sarraj, and Raija-Leena Punamäki	2012	Effectiveness of School-Based Intervention in Enhancing Mental Health and Social Functioning among War-Affected Children	6-14	Palestine	Impact evaluation
Posner, Jill, Prabina Kayastha, D. Davis, J. Limoges, C. O'Donnell, and K. Yue*	2009	Development of Leadership Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy: Adolescent Girls across Castes as Peer Educators in Nepal	6-14, 15+	Nepal	Descriptive quantitative
Stark, Lindsay, Ilana Seff, Asham Assezenew, Jennate Eoomkham, Kathryn Falb, and Fred M. Ssewamala.	2018	Effects of a Social Empowerment Intervention on Economic Vulnerability for Adolescent Refugee Girls in Ethiopia	6-14, 15+	Ethiopia	Impact evaluation
Tol, Wietse A., Ivan H. Komproe, Mark J. D. Jordans, Aline Ndayisaba, Prudence Ntamutumba, Heather Sipsma, Eva S. Smallengange, Robert D. Macy, and Joop T. V. M. de Jong	2014	School-Based Mental Health Intervention for Children in War-Affected Burundi: A Cluster Randomized Trial	6-14	Burundi	Impact evaluation
Tol, Wietse A., Ivan H. Komproe, Mark J. D. Jordans, Anavarathan Vallipuram, Heather Sipsma, Sambasivamoorthy Sivayokan, Robert D. Macy, and Joop T. V. M. de Jong	2012	Outcomes and Moderators of a Preventive School-Based Mental Health Intervention for Children Affected by War in Sri Lanka: A Cluster Randomized Trial	6-14	Sri Lanka	Impact evaluation

GENDER, ADOLESCENCE, AND SEL

Author	Year	Title	Age Group	Country	Research Method
Velásquez, Ana María, María Adelaida López, Natalia Quiñonez, and Diana Patricia Paba	2015	Yoga for the Prevention of Depression, Anxiety, and Aggression and the Promotion of Socio-Emotional Competencies in School-Aged Children	6-14	Colombia	Impact evaluation
Veronese, Guido, and Marco Castiglioni	2013	“When the doors of Hell close”: Dimensions of Well-Being and Positive Adjustment in a Group of Palestinian Children Living amidst Military and Political Violence	6-14, 15+	Palestine	Qualitative
Yankey, Tsering, and Urmi Nanda Biswas	2012	Life Skills Training as an Effective Intervention Strategy to Reduce Stress among Tibetan Refugee Adolescents	6-14, 15+	India	Impact evaluation
Yankey, Tsering, and Urmi Nanda Biswas	2019	Impact of Life Skills Training on Psychosocial Well-Being of Tibetan Refugee Adolescents	6-14, 15+	India	Impact evaluation
Younes, Julie, and Amy Porter	2019	Final Performance Evaluation of the USAID-LMI COMET Activity	15+	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam	Mixed methods

HOPING AGAINST THE ODDS: UNDERSTANDING REFUGEE YOUTHS' ASPIRATIONS FOR GAINING OVERSEAS SCHOLARSHIPS

HASSAN ADEN

ABSTRACT

Why do young refugees in the Dadaab camps in Kenya aspire to gain resettlement-based scholarships for tertiary education when the odds of getting them are minimal? The existing literature sheds light on the strong educational aspirations of refugee youth. However, our understanding is obscure of why they persistently pursue lofty educational goals when the chances of achieving them is not optimistic, especially through emergency education programs. This study contributes to our understanding of this puzzle, theoretically and empirically. In the study, I draw from ethnographic research, including semistructured interviews and future aspiration mapping exercises with Form One students, as well as interviews with their teachers. I then present several interconnected explanations that address the research question. First, students believe that success in education is a way for them to get out of the camps. Second, they imagine that getting an overseas scholarship will resolve their difficult economic conditions and academic restrictions. Third, they believe that, by working hard to succeed and being motivated by the dream of getting an education abroad, their chances for other tertiary education will increase. In this study, I argue that the cultural logic of hoping to achieve a better future through education sustains young people's motivation to pursue overseas scholarships, which outweighs the low odds of attaining them.

Received January 29, 2021; revised December 6, 2021, and February 17, 2022; accepted March 30, 2022; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.

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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

Faisal, 22 years old, was born and raised in the Ifo camp, one of the refugee camps in the Dadaab camp complex in Kenya. When I collected the data for this article in the second half of 2019, Faisal was a Form One student at Gedi Secondary School, one of the fee-paying private secondary schools in Ifo camp.¹ Faisal's parents returned to Somalia in 2013 when he was in the third grade of primary school. After he insisted that he wanted to continue his education and his school principal intervened to convince his parents, they agreed to leave him behind with relatives. Faisal hopes to succeed in his education and to be able to transform his life, as well as the lives of his parents, his community, and his nation. He aims to receive an *A* grade when he sits for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE)—the final secondary school examination. In the first year of high school, his average grade has been swinging between a *B+* and an *A-*, which gives him confidence that he will receive a good grade on the national exam. After that, he hopes to apply for the prestigious and competitive scholarship of the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) to study medicine in that country. Faisal dreams of returning to his homeland, Somalia, when he graduates from university so that he can participate in the rebuilding and development of his country.

Like Faisal, most of the high school students in the Dadaab camps, whether they are performing well or not, pursue the WUSC scholarship program in earnest. However, when the hope of getting good grades fails, young people may become frustrated and experience psychological strain. Research from various displacement contexts across the world has shown that education and schooling give young people increased capacity to adjust psychologically, as well as a sense of security, normalcy, stability, and structure in the midst of crises (Burde et al. 2017; Shohel 2022). Emerging research from across the world has also documented the strong educational aspirations of young refugees, and their ambitions to pursue tertiary education as a pathway to achieving spatial, social, economic, and cognitive mobility and to contribute to nation-building in their war-torn countries (Morrice et al. 2020; Molla 2019; Dryden-Peterson 2017; Bellino 2018). Research also has shown that young people's educational aspirations are often frustrated by global and local structural challenges. These challenges include limited access to crucial education resources and opportunities, a lack of effective policies to address the challenges affecting refugee education, and exclusion from the right

1 Form One, equivalent to ninth grade in the United States, is the first year of high school in the Kenyan education system.

and freedom to translate their acquired knowledge and skills into meaningful economic value (Bellino 2021; Abamosa 2021; Morrice et al. 2020).

The research referred to above provides us with insight into some similarities between what young refugees aspire to achieve with their education and the challenges confronting them as they pursue their valued goals. However, it does not help us understand explicitly why young refugees, particularly those living in protracted emergency contexts, may persist in pursuing difficult-to-achieve educational goals, even when the obstacles are insurmountable and failure may lead to hopelessness and psychological strain. With this study, I aim to broaden our understanding of this puzzle, conceptually and empirically. I do so by addressing the question, Why do young refugees in the Dadaab camps of Kenya aspire to gain resettlement-based scholarships for tertiary education when the odds of getting one are minimal? Addressing this question will help us understand what logics sustain young refugees' motivation to pursue their educational aspirations when facing a complex web of constraints. I draw from ethnographic research, including semistructured interviews and future aspirations mapping exercises with Form One students, as well as semistructured interviews with their teachers.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first research study to examine the phenomenon of young refugees' aspiration to earn resettlement-based scholarships for tertiary education from the students' perspectives. For several reasons, understanding their aspirations from their own perspectives and from the context of their protracted experience in refugee camps is pertinent. First, it will demonstrate the imaginative power of these young refugees—their capacity to visualize and prepare for the future despite uncertainty, precarity, and exclusion from citizenship rights and freedoms. As such, it will broaden our understanding of the young refugees' sense of agency and resilience. Appreciating their agency and resilience conceptually and practically challenges the institutionalized global discourse and practices that present young refugees from a deficit-based perspective. Others often perceive refugee youth, and refugees in general, through a deficit lens in victim narratives wherein they lack agency and control, regardless of whether they are seeking academic success, economic assistance, or asylum. The tendency to stress the negative aspects of the refugee experience may lead to an internalization of the deficit narrative, thus creating an assumption that refugees' vulnerability is permanent, which is far from reality (Symons and Ponzio 2019; Ryu and Tuvilla 2018). Second, broadening our understanding of young people's experiences across spatial, social, and cultural contexts may enable effective policy and practice interventions to support young people more effectively as they pursue their valued educational aspirations.

**REFUGEE YOUTHS' EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS
AND STRUCTURAL MARGINALIZATION**

A growing body of research has demonstrated young refugees' strong aspirations for their education and their hope to leverage a tertiary education to achieve various mobilities. Research in contexts of protracted displacement, where the refugees' future prospects are often characterized by uncertainty, has shown that young refugees view education as a tool to achieve spatial, social, economic, cognitive, and temporal mobility (Dryden-Peterson 2017; Bellino 2018; Dryden-Peterson 2021). Michelle Bellino (2018) explores the educational aspirations of young refugees in Kenya's Kakuma camp and the challenges they face after they graduate from high school. Bellino demonstrates that young refugees see education as a means to achieve social, economic, and spatial mobility and to fulfill their civic responsibility to contribute to nation-building. She also notes that young refugees see being educated as a way to gain symbolic capital that will affirm their value in a society that has systemically undervalued and excluded them, first in their home country and later as refugees.

Refugee youths' aspirations to achieve various mobilities through education are often described as a navigational strategy to overcome the future uncertainties they face (Chopra 2020; Dryden-Peterson 2017; Bellino 2021; Dryden-Peterson 2021). Drawing from the experiences of Congolese and Somali youth in Uganda and in Kenya's Dadaab camps, respectively, Sarah Dryden-Peterson (2017) argues that, in the face of uncertainty, young refugees envision that their education might enable them to achieve physical and cognitive mobility. Cognitive mobility refers to their ability to apply their education across time and space. In her most recent work, Dryden-Peterson (2021) describes how the experience of uncertainty situates young refugees at the juncture of future-building and placemaking. In the face of uncertainty, the future young refugees envision is bound not by geography but by the opportunity to achieve their valued aspirations (Chopra 2020).

Despite the normative values young refugees attach to their education, as noncitizens their education does not often guarantee them meaningful economic and social value or the freedom of physical mobility, particularly in countries in the Global South. Even when refugees have access to inclusive, good quality education and tertiary education opportunities, their ability to translate the knowledge and skills they acquire into valued mobilities is often constrained by their lack of citizenship rights and freedoms. The legal conundrum confronting refugees' ability to convert education into mobilities remains a central paradox in young refugees' schooling in exile, especially in the Global South (Bellino and

Dryden-Peterson 2018; Zeus 2018; Kiwan 2021; Bellino 2018). While the kind of future refugee youth imagine they will achieve through education and the broader structural challenges confronting them is similar across contexts in the Global North and South, the legal barriers to translating education into social and economic value are a unique challenge for refugees in the Global South.

FRAMING HOPE AGAINST THE ODDS

In this study, I rely on hope theory as the analytical lens through which to interpret the empirical data. “Hope” is understood as people’s perceived ability to develop meaningful goals, envision a pathway to achieve those goals, and motivate themselves to strive toward those goals. “Hoping” is a positive motivational state in which one has an optimistic view of the future and is grounded in a sense of having successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (plans to meet goals) (Snyder 2002, 250). Goals, pathways, and agency thus form the foundation of hope theory.

Based on a sociological and anthropological perspective on hope, rather than on the more individualized perspective found in the psychology literature, I understand hope as a relational and historical phenomenon that consists of valuative processes that provide values to the social world, especially in times of crisis (Jansen 2016). Hope has existed across time and cultures, and has been relied on in imagining and pursuing both individual and collective goals (Cohen-Chen and Van Zomeren 2018). Hope may emerge as a result of hardship or in conjunction with societal endeavors, such as those aimed at creating “promising spaces” and conditions for better lives and futures (e.g., humanitarian actions) (Sliwinski 2016); through financial aid programs for college studies (Dynarski 2000); and through resettlement opportunities for refugees experiencing protracted camp situations and other precarious conditions (Horst 2006). Hope is thus shaped, sustained, facilitated, or frustrated by the social and cultural circumstances in which people are embedded, whether local, global, or interactions between the two.

A large body of research in the social and medical sciences demonstrates the benefits of hopefulness. Hope is associated with and used to predict a variety of positive outcomes, including mental and physical wellbeing, self-satisfaction, self-worth, and academic and scholastic achievements (Marques, Lopez, and Pais-Ribeiro 2011; Snyder 2002). On the other hand, hopelessness or a lack of hope is associated with negative outcomes such as mental health problems: stress, substance abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Hopelessness negatively affects

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how people perceive themselves, their own situations, other people, and even the world (Malmberg et al. 2010; Zhang et al. 2013).

Having high hopes is a more desirable cognitive process than having little hope. “High-hoppers” tend to be more effective in pursuing and achieving their goals. As a result, they are more likely to experience more positive emotions than those with little hope, who tend to struggle to overcome hurdles along the way and are more likely to fail to achieve their goals and to experience negative emotions (Snyder 2002). Having high hopes can give people a sense of power to influence their future, as well as a sense of meaning in life during times of crisis. People with high hopes draw from the positive illusion that influences their perceptions of reality but do not indulge in a significantly distorted reality or delusions. As Snyder et al. (2002, 1,005) point out, high-hoppers deal with the constraints of reality but they marginally bias that reality in a positive sense. Positive illusions are associated with positive psychological adjustment and a sense of agency. People who view themselves and their world positively often feel they have the power to influence changes in their world (Wells and Iyengar 2005). In situations of crisis and during traumatic experiences, for example, people with high hopes find benefits and meaning in having a positive illusion of their ability to adjust psychologically and to enhance their wellbeing (Wright, Crawford, and Sebastian 2007).

While hope may be a universal principle indicating human strength that everyone can access and develop, how people use and understand it varies across cultures. Due to humans’ diverse experiences, people’s goals differ in size, value, importance, specificity, and time frame (Rand and Touza 2020; Ægisdóttir, Gerstein, and Çinarbaş 2008). What is a valuable goal to one group may be irrelevant or inappropriate to another. For example, refugees who lack the right to free movement may have a strong desire for it, while such a desire is irrelevant to people who already enjoy this right.

While individuals from various social and cultural groups may face similar challenges, such as fear, lack of courage, and lack of support, some challenges, such as lack of access to social, economic, and cultural capital, are unique to groups that are marginalized by society on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, and other identity markers (Lopez et al. 2000; Appadurai 2004). These social and cultural adversities, however, do not fully frustrate people’s hopes. Even when adversity appears insurmountable, hopeful people can maintain a sense of optimism about the future while acknowledging the magnitude of the problems they are facing. For example, research has shown that resilient students may succeed in their educational aspirations despite the odds against them (Floyd 1996;

O'Connor 2002; Lethale and Pillay 2013). Against this background of knowledge, and using perspectives of hope theory as a starting point, I now offer an analysis of the rationales behind the Dadaab refugee youths' sustained aspirations and motivation to pursue and win a resettlement-based scholarship, despite their poor odds of receiving one.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The Dadaab refugee complex is in the northeastern part of Kenya and is comprised of three camps: Ifo, Dagahaley, and Hagadera. The first two camps are in Dadaab subcounty, while Hagadera is in the neighboring Fafi subcounty; both subcounties are part of Garissa County. At the end of August 2021, the Dadaab complex was host to 228,308 registered refugees and asylum seekers (REACH Initiative 2022). Children under age 18 account for 57 percent of the camps' population. The camps were established in 1991 as temporary settlements for Somali refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia. Sadly, the Dadaab camps turned into permanent settlements, due to the protracted conflicts in Eastern and Central Africa, where most of the refugees had been displaced. While the majority of these refugees are Somalis, the camp also hosts Ethiopian, Ugandan, Eritrean, Congolese, Burundi, Tanzanian, Yemeni, Rwandese, and South Sudanese people (UNHCR 2021). Formally accredited education in the Dadaab camps takes place in two settings, the public and private schools.

This article is based on six months of ethnographic fieldwork I conducted between May and November 2019 at two secondary schools in the Dadaab camps, one private secondary school and one public. During my fieldwork, I lived on a block in the Ifo camp, visited the schools daily, and observed lessons in the Form One class. I interacted with students during breaks and also with teachers in the staff room. I also visited some of the students' homes in the evenings to observe them as they did their evening homework. Despite the insecurity in the camps, and in the entire northeastern region of Kenya, I was able to live in the Ifo camp because I regard Dadaab as my native hometown. Ifo is the camp where I spent the first 20 years of my formative life and where I attended primary and secondary school. I was also fortunate to serve as a teacher in both primary and secondary schools for two years before being offered an opportunity to resettle in Sweden. I lived in Sweden for eight years before returning to conduct this research. I still have a large number of relatives and friends in the camps.

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I share a culture, nationality, and language with the Somali community, which makes up most of the refugee population in the Dadaab camps and is the primary focus of my research. These features, taken together, gave me the confidence to live among the refugees and to conduct my research with relative freedom. My firsthand knowledge about the evolution of education in the Dadaab camps as a student, a teacher, and now as a researcher gives me a longitudinal perspective and the potential to bring new insights to our understanding of refugee youths' educational aspirations and experiences (Chavez 2008). Furthermore, my cultural and linguistic connection with the key informants gives me a distinct advantage, in that it contributes to a more authentic interpretation of the research data.

I draw from semistructured interviews I conducted with 19 ethnic Somali Form One students ($n=39$), and from mapping exercises ($n=19$) on students' future aspirations and relationships. I also draw from the in-depth ($n=14$) semistructured interviews I conducted with teachers. The age range of the students interviewed is 18 to 25 years. This age bracket is very high for Form One students, considering that the entry age for secondary school in the Kenyan education system is 14 or 15. One explanation for the delay in refugee students' formal schooling is that most of the parents prioritized Islamic education for their children over secular education during their foundational years. As a result, many children remained in Quranic schools until they completed or memorized the Quran—a process that can take five to ten years.

With most of the students, I conducted a three-phase series of interviews. The first phase focused on students' educational trajectory, experiences with education, and life in the camps. The second phase focused on their future aspirations, perceptions of the value of education and the role it can play in their future, their envisioned future opportunities, and the challenges they will face when striving to succeed in their education and fulfill their aspirations. During the second phase, I also conducted mapping exercises of students' future aspirations, in which they reflected on the future—where they hope to be in ten years and what plans and actions they have been undertaking or are planning to undertake to get there. In the third phase, I focused on the students' relationships in order to find out how they either support or constrain their education. In this phase, I also conducted relationship mapping exercises, wherein students reflected on the forms of support and type of constraints their social relationships posed in terms of their education and future aspirations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis for this study took place in two phases, during and after my fieldwork. While in the field, I gradually reviewed my fieldwork notes, listened to interview recordings, and read interview transcripts and the students' mapping exercises. I appreciated the data analysis conducted in this phase for two reasons. First, it enabled me to feed new insights into the interview protocols, to seek answers from informants in subsequent interviews, and to do follow-up interviews with previous informants. Second, as someone undertaking ethnographic research where I grew up and in a school where I studied and taught, I was able to critically question my perceptions, experiences, and beliefs about life and education in the Dadaab camps.

The data analysis in the post-fieldwork phase proceeded in several stages. First, all the interviews conducted in Somali were transcribed and then translated into English. The interviews conducted in English were also transcribed. Some of the transcription and translation of interviews was done by research assistants. Second, I reviewed the transcripts to make sure they were accurately translated and transcribed. During this review process, I took notes on emerging themes and interesting quotations. Third, themes I identified in the review process were used to create a codebook, which later was used to develop NVivo codes (themes). The codebook gave me the foundation on which to systematically code all the interviews using NVivo software. Coding interviews with NVivo enabled me to manage the data efficiently, access information quickly, identify key themes in the data, and cross-compare different themes. Although the initial development of the codebook served as a building block, I continued to change the overall framework of codes for the major themes and subthemes in the coding process.

After completing the coding process, I began preparing for this article by doing several rounds of reading through the themes relevant to this study, and taking notes about my reflections on and interpretation of the information. This study's overarching theme of interest was coded as "future aspirations," which included the subthemes of higher education, work and career, family and marriage, resettlement, return, and other aspirations. While the future aspirations theme is central to this study, writing this paper was also informed by my analysis of several other connected major themes, such as challenges, relationships, and coping mechanisms. The writing process involved progressive interpretation of the data.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Some of the shortcomings in this study stem from certain aspects of the research methodology. Like most ethnographic research, this study focuses on a single case (Dadaab camps), a single ethnic group (Somalis), and one school level (Form One). The study's focus is on Ifo camp and Form One students at Ifo Secondary School and Gedi Secondary School. It could be claimed that, because of the small number of cases, the study findings are not representative of the aspirations and experiences of students at other levels. For example, Form Four students, who are about to graduate, may have a different vision of the future than they did when in Form One. They may be influenced positively or negatively by previous graduates, and by their own performance trajectory over the four-year period. Nevertheless, my aim in this study is not for generalizability based on "sample-to-population logic" (Yin 2013, 325). I suggest that analytical generalization, which implies abstraction based on conceptual ideas that can be relevant to other cases (Yin 2013), is a suitable logic here, rather than case- and population-based generalization.

RESETTLEMENT-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS

Based on my interactions and interviews with secondary school students in the Dadaab camps, the research data revealed that most of the young people aspire to receive a resettlement-based scholarship in order to pursue their tertiary education overseas. This is true for students across the public and private secondary schools, whether or not they are performing well. Students most often refer to the WUSC program. Some students expressed their general desire to study in Canada, while others mentioned specific universities, such as the University of Toronto and the University of Calgary.

The WUSC scholarship program combines a tertiary education with an opportunity to secure a permanent residency permit, which enables recipients to live in Canada with the prospect of becoming citizens. This program has been the only consistent resettlement-based scholarship available to students in the Dadaab camps. The WUSC program, which is the only one of its kind in the world, is a joint effort of students and faculty/staff members across universities and colleges in Canada, who work together to mobilize the financial, human, and material resources needed to facilitate refugee students' resettlement process in Canada (Peterson 2010). The WUSC program supplements the resettlement programs that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees coordinates with resettlement countries to provide lasting solutions for refugees.

The refugee students' pursuit of the WUSC scholarship is often a cumbersome and challenging journey, as the number of positions available annually is limited and the eligibility grades are incredibly high (Peterson 2010). At present, the standard for refugee candidates in Kenya is a mean grade on the KCSE exam of *B+* and above for boys, and a *B* and above for girls. These grades are often difficult to attain because of the refugees' poor quality education, which results in their poor performance on the KCSE exams. These intertwined issues often are due to numerous challenges, such as overcrowded classes, scarce learning facilities, limited trained teachers, and overreliance on untrained secondary school graduates to teach in the secondary schools. Since 2007, besides students' poor performance, schools in the Dadaab camps have been experiencing frequent recurrent cancellation of students' KCSE results, due to exam irregularities. The cancellation of their KCSE results not only forces students to retake the exam, it also discourages them from investing as much energy in it as they did the first time.

UNDERSTANDING THE ASPIRATION TO EARN A RESETTLEMENT-BASED SCHOLARSHIP

One of the reasons behind the Dadaab youths' aspiration to receive a resettlement-based scholarship is the belief that success in education will grant them an "exit license" from the confines of the camp. The young people describe life in the camps as "humiliating," "not having a good future," and "not being free."

Kowsar is a 20-year-old student who was raised by and lives with her elderly grandmother. Her family moved to Dadaab in 2011, due to the recurring war in her hometown of Kismayo, the port city in the southern Lower Juba region of Somalia. Kowsar does not foresee any prospect of returning to her hometown or even to Somalia because of the enduring insecurity and political instability. The Al-Shabaab terrorist group still controls a vast area of the region they fled from. Nevertheless, Kowsar believes that, if she continues to put enough effort into her schoolwork, she will be able to get an overseas scholarship to study and live in Canada. This belief in her ability, which stems from her success in her primary school studies, reinforces her hope and expectation of earning the eligibility grade for the WUSC program. When Kowsar was in primary school, she was an exceptionally high-performing pupil. As a result of her extraordinary talent, she had skipped two grades, second and fourth. Missing out on two foundational school years did not compromise her performance in the subsequent grades, and she ended up earning the second highest grade on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in her school. While discussing her experiences with refugee life and her aspiration to receive an overseas scholarship, Kowsar said this:

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Living in a foreign country and being a refugee motivates me, and that my country, my people, and my relatives need me... The name of this place we are living in is a humiliating one. We are called refugees. If someone asks you, "Where do you live?" You will answer, "Kenya and specifically in a refugee camp," which is a humiliating name... This encourages me to work hard so as to get out of this place... I know that there are grades that if any student gets, they will be taken to Canada. If I work hard and get these grades, then I will get the chance to go as well.

Indeed, a belief in hard work and the sheer determination to succeed in and through education is embedded firmly in the educational culture of the young people in the Dadaab camps. These young people are made to believe that, if all other things fail them, education will not. Consequently, they persistently strive to succeed, despite all the hurdles in their path. The inspiration to invest in education is conveyed through their parents, siblings, and teachers, and through their peers. This is well illustrated by the story of Kabi, a 19-year-old student who was born and raised in the Dadaab camps. Kabi started his schooling in 2011 at Horyaal Primary School in the Ifo camp, where he was admitted in grade one. From first grade up to the sixth grade, Kabi's examination marks were low because of his lack of effort. On one end-of-term exam he took in sixth grade, Kabi had the lowest mark in his class. On that day, as students happily interacted and shared the good news of their grades with each other, Kabi was grieving and sad. He was approached by a girl, a classmate, who had emerged as the best student in his class. The girl consoled him and advised him to put more effort into his learning; she also promised that she would help him as much as she could. From that day on, with the help of this girl, Kabi started reviewing all his subjects from grade one through the sixth grade. After two years of hard work, Kabi was able to pass the KCPE with good marks. One of his teachers in the primary school tried to motivate him to work harder by offering him rewards, even though he was not among the top-performing students who were supposed to receive prizes.

When Kabi joined Form One, he started to fall back into his old habits and began to disregard his school activities because of the influence of his peers, whom he describes as "troublesome backbenchers." Through the entire first school term, he was sloppy when writing notes, and as a result he scored a C+ on the first end-of-term exam. Kabi had a positive reaction to this poor performance, and at the beginning of the second term he decided to move to the front desks, next to the two highest performing students. His new friends occasionally advised

him to concentrate on his readings when other students were storytelling, and they helped him recover from his poor performance in the previous term. At the end of the second term, Kabi scored an A- on the final exam—a substantial improvement in a short period of time. Encouraged by newfound confidence in his ability to perform well if he made a sustained effort, Kabi believed that he would be able to score at least an A- on the KCSE. Kabi was also hopeful and optimistic that success in school would give him and his classmates a pathway out of the hardship and suffering in the camps. While discussing his life in the camps and his hopes of creating a sustainable future through success in education, Kabi said:

Life in the camps is tough. There is not sufficient food, and you hear that all the medicine has been stopped. The only thing that keeps people here is education...If there were no education, we would not have stayed here. Previously, people used to stay in the camps for resettlement purposes, but such opportunities are not as they were before...To get resettlement and live a beautiful life, one needs to get a higher grade [on the examination]...I am also hoping to get a good grade, and I seek help from God to achieve it. Because I do not think there are other ways to get out of the refugee life other than through succeeding in my education.

In some instances, even when students make a sustained effort and have been performing well on the school-based examinations, when they receive the KCSE results their grades often turn out to be far lower than what they had been expecting. The KCSE is almost in the same format as school-based examinations; the only difference is that independent examiners grade them. In such circumstances, some young people refuse to accept first-time failure as an actual failure and sustain their determination to succeed. They attempt the KCSE for a second time, or a third, or even more. Some succeed the second time around, others in the third, and some others never make it, no matter how many times they sit the KCSE.

Yusuf (a pseudonym) is a 23-year-old assistant refugee teacher. Yusuf told me that he registered for the KCSE for the third time in 2019, and he was hoping to succeed this time around. Sadly, based on the information I received after leaving the field, none of the students in the class of 2019 in all three camps were able to earn the eligibility grades for the WUSC scholarships.

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Abdisamad, another Form One student who is 18 years old, told me that one of his elder brothers who scored a C on the 2018 KCSE decided to register for a second time in 2019, in order to boost his grades for the WUSC program. He also has a cousin who failed the KCPE in the past but decided not to give up, and in the second attempt he not only passed but scored good marks, which earned him a full scholarship to study for free in a private secondary school outside the camps. When the same cousin did his KCSE, he scored a high grade on the first attempt and got a WUSC scholarship, and he now studies in Canada. Abdisamad himself received a full scholarship for his secondary education from one of the private secondary schools in the Ifo camp, after emerging as the highest performing pupil from the Abdul-Aziz Primary School on the 2018 KCPE. Abdisamad believes in the power of hard work, persistence, and being well organized to put one on the pathway to success. Abdisamad discussed his future goals:

When I received the scholarship to study at Gedi Secondary School, I set goals for myself that I should be better organized to attain a good grade in the KCSE and to seek a scholarship to study in Canada. My hope is to receive a good education in Canada, study well, and go on to have a good life.

Considering the different experiences of the young people presented above, it is fair to suggest that, while hard work, motivation, and the sheer determination to succeed are crucial, they are insufficient if students lack the capacity to identify the causes of their failure and to address them effectively.

**RESOLVING PRECARIOUS ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
AND ACADEMIC UNFREEDOM**

Other interconnected factors that ground students' persistent pursuit of overseas scholarships is the hope that receiving a scholarship will give them opportunities to access a good quality tertiary education and the chance to pursue their desired career, and will put them on the pathway to translate their acquired knowledge and skills into meaningful economic value.

Saido is a 20-year-old student who hopes to study engineering with a specialization in oil engineering. Like some of her peers, Saido believes that the opportunity to access good-quality programs such as engineering and medicine are not possible in Africa, particularly in Kenya. While discussing her aspiration to earn a WUSC scholarship, she said:

I was inspired when the WUSC candidates visited our school last time. They encouraged us to put more effort into our education...so that we can get the WUSC scholarship. And I am determined to achieve it...The scholarship will help me study any course I want. In Africa, you cannot get any course you want to study, but outside of Africa, you can.

Libaan is an 18-year-old student who aspires to study medicine in Canada. When I asked him why he wants to study there, he said, “It is essential for me because the quality of universities in Canada is much better than those in Africa, especially in Kenya, where I live. That is why I want to study my university education in Canada.”

Indeed, refugees’ access to good-quality tertiary education is not a matter of its availability in Kenya but a matter of access to the desired programs, which are often expensive to offer, due to the limited funding available for refugees’ tertiary education. Moreover, even when refugees are able to access their desired career path when they graduate, they are confronted by a strict citizenship regime that denies them the possibility to convert acquired knowledge and skills into meaningful economic value, as they lack the right to hold wage-paying jobs.

Hussein is a 30-year-old refugee teacher who is trained as a secondary school teacher. He obtained his bachelor’s degree in education through funding from the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees project. Hussein expressed his frustration at not being able to reap the rewards of his struggle and hard work to get an education:

I am now working as an incentive refugee teacher. When I look at my job class level, it is a bachelor’s degree, but the salary I am paid is not close to the salary a Kenyan teacher receives. It is not fair that a teacher like me is paid 70,000 KSh while I am paid 10,000 KSh. You may sometimes think of giving up, but I always reflect on how incentive teachers, like me, taught me when I was younger. So, I always consider this as a service I am delivering to my society and not the money. If I today go back to Somalia, I am a very skilled man who can do a lot of things.

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Like Hussein, many graduates in the Dadaab camps remain trapped in incentive-paying voluntary jobs, rather than actual salaried jobs. The incentive payment is strictly regulated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Kenyan government harmonization policy, which establishes the minimum and maximum incentive wages refugees can receive, based on their skills and work experience. In Dadaab camp, the incentive scale is set between US\$30 and US\$120 monthly, while in Kakuma it is US\$30-US\$90 monthly (Morris and Voon 2014, 32).

ENHANCING CHANCES FOR OTHER TERTIARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Students believe that, by working hard to get a good grade on the KCSE and being motivated by their dreams of an overseas tertiary education, their chances of getting local tertiary education opportunities that require lower grades will improve. When I asked students about their contingency plans in the event that they are not awarded a WUSC scholarship, many of them were optimistic about the prospect of getting a DAFI scholarship from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund, which offers refugees in the Global South opportunities to study at the local universities in their host countries.

For example, when I asked 18-year-old student Libaan what his next actions would be if his aspiration to receive a WUSC scholarship failed to materialize, he explained his contingency plans:

I expect that not to happen, *Insha'Allah*. But if it happens, my next plan will be to study at a university in Kenya. If someone gets a good grade but does not qualify for WUSC, there are always other chances available like the DAFI scholarship, which is funded by organizations, and that will be my next plan. If I do not get either scholarship, I will stop school there and go back to my homeland [Somalia] and look for a job there, maybe physical work.

The DAFI program offers a hope-reviving opportunity for many young people whose aspiration to get an overseas scholarship is thwarted. It serves as an alternative “exit license” from the camp, because those with DAFI scholarships relocate to Nairobi, as their programs are full time and often require in-person attendance. Earning a DAFI scholarship is a more plausible possibility than a WUSC scholarship. However, we cannot disregard the possibility that some of the young people who initially aspired to earn an overseas scholarship may fail to achieve eligibility grades for either scholarship. Getting into the DAFI program

provides young people with a sense of comfort and relief after many years of being locked up in the camps—often without the opportunity to socialize with people or experience life outside the camps. Through this program, refugees can achieve *de facto* integration—an informal opportunity to participate in the social and economic activities in Kenya. The *de facto* integration may sometimes create opportunities for *de jure* integration, such as gaining naturalization by marrying a Kenyan national. In fact, the DAFI-sponsored graduates hardly ever return to the camps to live and seek incentive jobs. Instead, they negotiate their way, formally or informally, and establish themselves in Nairobi through self-employment or by finding employment through their network of family and friends.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this study, I examined the rationale behind Dadaab refugee youths' persistent pursuit of resettlement-based scholarships for tertiary education, even when the odds of getting one are minimal. I identified several interconnected reasons for this: (1) students believe that success in education is the pathway to an “exit license” out of the camps; (2) they imagine that getting an overseas scholarship will resolve their precarious economic condition and the academic unfreedom they experience; (3) they believe that, by working hard to succeed and being motivated by the dream of a tertiary education abroad, their chances of accessing other tertiary education opportunities will increase. These findings suggest several empirically and conceptually significant issues. First, using the hope theory perspective, the educational aspirations and challenges confronting refugee youth in the Dadaab camps reveal some features similar to and some different from other refugee and nonrefugee youth worldwide. The Dadaab youth, like other youth, seek a higher education as a means to achieve social and economic upward mobility and other valued freedoms (Bhabha, Giles, and Mahomed 2020; Marginson 2016). However, complex structural and cultural barriers, which are beyond the young people's power to influence, limit their ability to achieve their goals (Morrice et al. 2020; Bellino 2018; Franceschelli and Keating 2018).

Across the world, and especially in the Global South, young people face a significant disjuncture between the historic possibilities ascribed to education and the current opportunities available to them, due to structural barriers such as limited employment opportunities. Structural challenges that cause such tensions often have a disproportionate effect on the aspirations of young people from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, such as refugees, indigenous peoples,

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and racial and ethnic minorities (Abamosa 2021; Bhabha, Giles, and Mahomed 2020, 2; Zipin et al. 2015).

Second, on the conceptual front, the Dadaab refugee youths' aspirations to earn an overseas scholarship are shaped and in some ways sustained by the refugee experience of precarity, unfreedom, and humiliation, and by the cultural logic that education is a pathway to prosperity. The narrative of the transformational power of education is prevalent among refugees in the Dadaab camps and the Somali community. Young people have been made to believe that, by excelling academically and getting a WUSC scholarship, they will be able to secure a better and more sustainable future for themselves and their families, and for their larger community. Young people quite commonly use the logic of having responsibility for their family and the greater community to sustain their desire for an overseas scholarship. The use of collectivist cultural logic as a motivation to continue learning and working toward valued goals has been shown to be a common feature among refugee youth across numerous cultures, including Somali, South Sudanese, and Congolese communities (Dryden-Peterson 2017; Bellino 2021). Young people also rely on their rich cultural strengths as a resource that enables them to confront and negotiate obstacles, often by seeking support through familial connections, role models, peer-to-peer support systems, and formal institutional support systems (Abu-Amsha and Armstrong 2018; Dahya and Dryden-Peterson 2017).

Third, the logic of hard work and sheer determination as the path to success against all odds is integral to the educational culture of the young refugees in the Dadaab camps. As reflected in the findings, some of the young people in the Dadaab camps do not regard failing the national examinations (the KCPE and the KCSE) on the first attempt as a failure but as a stepping stone in their strategy to do better on subsequent attempts. These crucial cultural capacities are transferred from one generation of students to the next through the stories of peers who have achieved remarkable success. Again, the culture of hard work as the path to success against all odds is not unique to Somalis and the refugee youth in the Dadaab camps. As Bellino (2020) notes, hard work is also common among students from numerous cultures in Kenya's Kakuma camps. Arguably, the cultural logic of hoping to achieve a better and more sustainable future through education shapes and sustains young people's motivation to pursue overseas scholarships, which outweighs the poor odds of attaining them.

The young people's capacity to pursue lofty educational goals is a strength, not a weakness, because through this endeavor they can gain crucial cultural skill sets, such as effective planning, risk management, coping skills, and a strong sense of resilience (Snyder 2002). Nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize that, while young people may pursue their educational aspirations with great tenacity, their ability to deploy effective strategies to succeed and to manage failure is a treasure that is unevenly awarded to them. Such differential capacity might make some of them experience a "more brittle horizon of aspirations" (Appadurai 2004, 69), which often forces them to adjust their goals to what is feasible. Others may encounter failure without any social or structural resources or the psychological ability to manage it. Some young people who experience such a startling and acute encounter with failure may lose the "capacity to have any hope about anything" (Berlant 2011, 24). Moreover, due to the lack of professional support for effective grief management in the camps, experiencing failure may cause some of the youth to suffer from toxic psychological strain—an antecedent of suicidal behavior (Zhang et al. 2013). In fact, on May 29, 2019, during the third week of my fieldwork trip to the Dadaab camps, a student who was a second-time candidate for the KCSE committed a harrowing and heartbreaking act of suicide. His teachers believe that the student was overwhelmed by stress as a result of failing to achieve the expected grade, combined with his inability to manage the situation.

The story of young people in the Dadaab camps and their educational aspirations suggests two extreme ends and the double-edged effects of having high hopes. At the completion of secondary school, one student might have phenomenal success that defies the odds, while another might face extreme failure, which can lead to hopelessness, depression, and suicidal thoughts. However, these two extremes are rare, as most of the students find themselves in the middle at the end of the secondary school journey.

In conclusion, I argue that marginalized youth having high aspirations—while powerful and important to their wellbeing and in providing value to the social world—is not sufficient to ensure that they will have a meaningful future. It is crucial that structural and cultural constraints do not block these young people's hopes, and that they are fostered or guided through dedicated programs. Future studies may consider examining the navigational capacities of young people across different protracted emergency settings, which would help us understand further how young people work to achieve their educational aspirations and what strategies they adopt to negotiate and navigate everyday hurdles related to their schooling.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the students, teachers, and parents at the Dadaab refugee camps for sharing their experiences and insights during my fieldwork. I also extend my appreciation to Cindy Horst, Michael Schulz, colleagues at the Peace Research Institute Oslo migration center, and two anonymous reviewers for offering constructive and critical feedback during the various stages of writing this article.

FUNDING

This study was funded by the Research Council of Norway. Project: *Refugee Education: Building Durable Future (REBuild)*, Project No. 274650.

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BANGKIT SEMANGAT—RAISE THE SPIRITS: TEACHERS' VULNERABILITY, RESILIENCE, AND VOICE IN POSTDISASTER INDONESIA

CHRISTOPHER HENDERSON

ABSTRACT

The recent discussion paper on teachers presented at the United Nations Transforming Education Summit emphasizes the inclusion of teachers in social dialogue at the global and local levels. However, the requisite structural arrangements are not yet in place for teachers' voices to be heard or their perspectives acted on, especially in humanitarian settings. Only now are humanitarian actors beginning to understand the ways in which teachers respond to and work during complex emergencies. Humanitarian actors are also coming to realize how rarely teachers' perspectives inform the technical guidance documents that determine the conditions in which they work (Adelman 2019; Falk, Shephard, and Mendenhall 2022; Pherali, Abu Moghli, and Chase 2020). Based on an ethnographic study with teachers who experienced the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake in Bantul, Indonesia, this article contributes to a nascent body of literature on teachers' work, their vulnerability and resilience, and the importance of their voices during emergencies. As Marchezini (2015, 370) states, "It is necessary to look at survivors not merely as affected people, but as subjects with their own cultures and coping strategies." With insights from teachers' own narratives and the recurring concept of bangkit semangat (raise the spirits), I contend that the absence of teachers' voices from global policy and guidance means that we have an inadequate understanding of teachers' agency and fail to recognize their potential to realize, reimagine, and rework global recommendations at a local level.

Received January 4, 2023; revised March 27, 2023; accepted April 19, 2023; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

As multiple recruitment and retention issues affect the teaching profession, the compounding effects of COVID-19 on teachers already burdened by conflict or sudden-onset disasters has redoubled our need to understand their experiences and include their perspectives in research, policymaking, and practice. At the recent United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES), the discussion paper for Action Track 3 on Teachers, Teaching, and the Teaching Profession highlighted this view and emphasized the need to include teachers in social dialogue in order to improve policymaking and programming (TES 2022). While teachers' voices should be centered in education policy and practice, the requisite structural and institutional arrangements are often not in place for their voices to be heard or their perspectives acted on, especially in emergency settings (Bangs and Frost 2012). In practice, institutional partnerships wherein teachers can articulate their strengths and the complex challenges they face are vital to the development of intersectoral ways of working for children, adolescents, and their communities (Falk et al. 2022). Moreover, partnerships that value and respond to teachers' voices help to strengthen their sense of self-efficacy, which is a known factor in improving the learning and development outcomes of children and adolescents (Bandura 1994; Bangs and Frost 2012; Falk et al. 2022). In this light, COVID-19 and the TES summits have compelled my interest in our understanding of and resourcing for the myriad and pre-existing challenges of teachers' work in emergency settings, for which teachers' voices are key (INEE 2021; Mendenhall, Gomez, and Varni 2018).

Teachers are vital professionals but tentative leaders in the emergency response and recovery process. As such, humanitarian actors often sideline teachers' own expertise when formulating global policy and practice guidance (Mundy et al. 2020). Researchers in the education in emergencies (EiE) field have only recently introduced evidence on the ways teachers respond to and work within complex crises. At the same time, they are beginning to realize how rarely teachers' voices actually inform the policies and programs that relate most to their work (Adelman 2019; Dryden-Peterson 2022; Falk et al. 2022; Pherali et al. 2020). A lack of funding, researchers' poor access to teachers, teachers' workload, and tight contract timelines for consultants are oft-cited reasons for the omission of teachers' voices from technical guidance documents and policies (Ali 2018; Burns and Lawrie 2015; Falk et al. 2019; Kirk and Winthrop 2013; Mendenhall et al. 2018). As reflected in the recently published report titled *Teacher Wellbeing Resource Mapping and Gap Analysis* (INEE 2021, 27), this occurs because humanitarian agencies and consultants are only able to "talk to supervisors or managers but skip talking to teachers, who are the real experts."

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The Yogyakarta earthquake struck Bantul, Indonesia, at 5:54 AM on May 27, 2006, measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale. It claimed 5,778 lives, injured 36,299, and destroyed 900 schools (OCHA 2006; UNICEF 2006b; World Bank 2012). Using interview data from a 2016 ethnographic study with teachers (n=5) in Bantul, the epicenter of the quake, this article is my contribution to an emerging body of literature on teachers' work in emergency settings. Situated alongside a global-level framing of teachers' work during emergencies, I present a temporally and contextually situated account of teachers' experiences after a sudden-onset disaster. To achieve this, my research is guided by the following two questions: (1) How do teachers cope with the professional responsibilities of teaching in the aftermath of an environmental disaster? (2) What nuance and relevance can we gain when teachers' voices are included in the process of making global policy and practice?

To provide a practitioner-oriented narrative of teachers' work in complex emergencies, I aim to elevate and center the voices of Indonesian teachers from classrooms in postearthquake Bantul—what Khoja-Moolji (2017, 252) describes as a “subaltern epistemic position.” I employ the concepts of vulnerability and resilience as an analytical tool for understanding the duality of teachers' positionality in postdisaster settings, which in turn provides a conceptual grounding for my analysis of teachers' work in Bantul. I then introduce how teachers' work has been framed at the global level through a brief review of technical guidance documents produced before and following the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquakes. From my perspective as a practitioner-scholar, I contend that humanitarian actors have tended to frame teachers' work within a deficit paradigm by focusing more on what teachers cannot do and on what they lack and need, rather than on asking teachers what they value, what they are doing well, or how to institutionalize local capabilities most effectively in global policy and practice (Ali 2018; Pherali et al. 2020).

I then present my sample and the ethnographic methods I used to conduct my study. Following this, I introduce empirical findings from my critical discourse analysis (CDA) of five life-story interviews, which I facilitated with teachers who taught in Bantul. I then compare these findings with the themes that emerged from my review of EiE guidance documents, which brings forward the under-addressed realities of teachers' experiences and capabilities following sudden-onset disasters.

As my concluding discussion infers, I suggest that the EiE sector has been more influenced by global-level voices and the associated norms of “discourse communities”—within which a text is acceptable so long as it “represents the community episteme”—than by the insights of local-level teachers (Porter 1986, 39). Due to an oversight of teachers’ own capabilities and the misalignment of global guidance with local knowledge, I echo the TES Action Track 3 call for improved social dialogue between teachers, policymakers, and practitioners, from which the conceptualization and implementation of culturally and contextually responsive policies, programming, and practices should come.

CONCEPTUALIZING VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN POSTDISASTER SETTINGS

Disaster discourse has often reinforced pre-existing and unequal social arrangements between global and local actors (Bankoff 2007). Through this prioritization of expert global voices and corresponding technical terms, the global discourse reflects a hierarchical “politics of disaster” more than specific policies, practices, or perspectives at a local level (Button 1999). Moreover, disaster survivors are often rendered as passive individuals with minimal agency within the larger sociopolitical realm (Lavell 1994). In a Foucauldian sense, the postdisaster context is a site for biopolitics—a form of transnational and state governance of survivors’ bodies. Figuratively and literally, “salvation by external heroes” (Marchezini 2015, 365) becomes the prevailing narrative. In this sense, due to their elevated positionality within disaster response mechanisms, global-level actors can undermine local cultural knowledge as normative “best practices” take precedence.

A passive positioning of disaster survivors can come from the frequent use of the term “vulnerability” to situate individuals in postdisaster contexts. As the literature conveys, vulnerability exists when people lack sufficient adaptive capacity to anticipate, cope with, and recover from the impact of a disaster (Wisner 2006). At the same time, however, we can critique how vulnerability is employed, especially when it reinforces individuals’ marginality within disaster response systems and downplays the agency that affected individuals possess (Bankoff 2007). Thus, to the extent that humanitarian practitioners envisage their role as protecting individuals’ vulnerability, conceptualizing disaster-affected individuals this way also contributes to their stigmatization as “helpless victims of an unjust society” (Gaillard, Cadag, and Rampengan 2019, 864). In this regard, individuals are rendered vulnerable by the inequitable distribution of power and resources that exacerbate risk (Gaillard et al. 2019).

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Mirroring vulnerability, resilience is a state achieved by having strong local knowledge and effective systems to adapt to the conditions brought on by a disaster (Shah, Paulson, and Couch 2020). In global guidance documents, the concept of resilience refers to an individual's ability to "resist, absorb, accommodate, and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner" (UNDRR 2006, 27). Resilience is similarly framed as the ability to evolve in response to unexpected social and environmental changes (Robards and Alessa 2004). Moreover, introducing a capacities-based conceptualization, resilience can be seen as an individual's capacity to mitigate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stressors (USAID 2012, 5). As indicated, however, global guidance traditionally frames resilience as an individual trait more than a collective one.

A more recent iteration of resilience extends this model to include "transformative capacities," which refer to the collective "ability of communities and institutions to establish an enabling environment for systemic change" (Shah 2019, 26). A critique, however, is that the resilience paradigm assigns responsibility for recovery to the disaster-affected communities, which assuages policymakers' own liability for having created disaster risks through inequitable resourcing or political anomie (Barrios 2016; O'Malley 2010). For actors in a position of power, the concept can divert attention away from systemic sources of vulnerability, such as poor disaster mitigation measures or the disenfranchisement of communities. In such cases, resilience acts like a Band-Aid and fails to ameliorate the root causes of risk (Barrios 2016; Shah 2019).

Structural challenges notwithstanding, so-called vulnerable individuals can still have the agency to rise above the shortcomings of the government and humanitarian sectors to provide community-level services, even with limited resources (Shah et al. 2020). In this sense, individuals who are positioned as having low resilience are in fact highly resilient and agentic, especially when they improvise in the face of overwhelming odds (Bandura 1994; Barrios 2016). Understanding resilience in this way echoes how it can be the reason a community is able to build back better (Oliver-Smith 2015; Schuller 2016; Shah et al. 2020). While the mantra "build back better" can hide "deeply seeded structural inequalities" (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014, 10), communities can also see a crisis as an opportunity to leverage available support or resources to improve physical infrastructure and social support systems. In such circumstances, the idealization of resilience can carry inherent risk. When schools are vulnerable to protracted or recurring hazards and political anomie, we need to ask what it is that resilient but marginalized teachers are actually building back to. As Schuller (2016) asks, "is it a condition of disaster vulnerability, underdevelopment, and dependence?" (cited in Barrios

2016, 31). Or might cultural knowledge, the experience of disaster, and teachers' agency determine new ways of building forward?

EiE GUIDANCE ON SCHOOLING AND TEACHERS' WORK

Based on global guidance from the decade following the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, which coincides with the consolidation of EiE as a discrete field (Winthrop and Matsui 2013), I pay particular attention to how vulnerability and resilience coalesce to position teachers as either agentic professionals in emergencies, or as passive victims within a deficit paradigm who are in need of support. It is also important to note the discursive and negotiated nature of global guidance at the local level, which includes teachers' resistance to globally imposed norms as a form of local agency and resilience (Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson 2015; Smith and Henderson 2022).

To the extent that schooling during emergencies provides safe and inclusive education and psychosocial support, such functions are not possible without the expertise and resilience of the teachers, whose own needs have historically been under-addressed in EiE funding, policy, and practice. In global guidance from the time of the Yogyakarta earthquake, much of which still resonates, schools are positioned to provide children and adolescents with the knowledge and skills needed to respond to the challenges that complex emergencies present. Schooling is also promoted as a symbol of normalcy, in that it provides the everyday routines around which social stability can be achieved (INEE 2010; Burns and Lawrie 2015; UNICEF 2006a; UNDRR 2006). Moreover, as outlined by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 2006a), by providing social-emotional learning and psychosocial support, teachers help children and adolescents regulate the trauma experienced during an emergency. On such occasions, teachers are expected to provide "shape and structure to children's lives and instill community values" (UNICEF 2006a, 18). The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards (2010) also promote this notion, in that being able to attend school promotes dignity among traumatized children and adolescents, as it provides safe learning spaces and access to psychosocial and protection referral mechanisms.

In sudden-onset emergencies, teachers' work deviates from the norm, as the disruption creates additional psychosocial challenges that need to be incorporated into regular learning programs. This context thus "presents opportunities to build back better by introducing innovations and changes to the system, curriculum,

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and learning practices” (UNICEF 2006a, 6). However, in technical guidance documents, the theme of teachers needing professional development support to realize these opportunities is prevalent, with only rare mention of teachers’ existing knowledge, capabilities, or strategies. Participatory approaches are more commonly promoted, such as UNICEF’s (2006a, 71) encouragement of humanitarian actors to work with teachers to “develop creative ways of providing learning opportunities in the new conditions.” UNICEF also guides practitioners to coach teachers in “life skills and psychosocial support based on culture- and community-specific ways of dealing with stress and trauma” (73).

Teachers who suddenly find themselves in an emergency setting will often question their own efficacy, which can lead to the erosion of morale and professional engagement (Burns and Lawrie 2015). For example, a recurring theme is the need for teachers to provide psychosocial and social-emotional support to children, either as service leaders or in making referrals to child-protection professionals. A role for teachers in this instance is to provide a program of teaching and learning within a predictable and routine structure (INEE 2010). However, global guidance also refers to the additional vulnerabilities teachers must contend with, citing their struggle to uphold the minimal expectations of humanitarian actors because they lack access to adequate “pre-service preparation, in-service training, or in-service support” (Burns and Lawrie 2015, 19).

Echoing the conceptualizations offered above in terms of understanding teachers’ vulnerabilities, INEE (2010, 9) defines them as “a characteristic or circumstance that makes [teachers] more susceptible to the damaging effects of a disaster.” Adding to this, the environmental and socioeconomic contexts in which teachers work play a role in determining the degree of vulnerability they experience (INEE 2010). Structural factors, such as low and irregular pay or poor working conditions, also prompt many teachers to look for alternative employment and demotivate them from making any additional effort to bolster their skills (Mendenhall, Pacifico, and Hu 2019).

Within these framings, in which teachers’ voices are entirely absent, we rarely encourage consideration of the cultural assets or support systems that enable many teachers to prevail, despite their untenable work conditions. Nor is there guidance encouraging the inclusion of teachers in policy and practice decisionmaking. As such, when we consider teachers’ capacities and capabilities during emergencies—which include family, community, and faith-based structures and networks—we need to understand how the “expected” and “expanded” scope of teachers’ roles is conceived of and supported (Falk 2023; Mendenhall et al. 2019). We also need

to contemplate how the inclusion of teachers' voices can bridge the underserved spaces between global guidance and local practice (Reyes, Kelcey, and Diaz Varela 2013).

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Due to intersecting political and geophysical emergencies, this study is situated in a period of profound vulnerability and global intervention in economically and politically peripheral parts of Indonesia. At 7:28 AM on December 24, 2004, the Indian Ocean Tsunami struck the coast of Aceh on the island of Sumatra, killing an estimated 220,000 people and causing an unprecedented influx of international humanitarian agencies. Just 18 months later, at 5:54 AM on May 27, 2006, a shallow magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the town of Bantul, which had a population of 64,000, just ten kilometers south of Yogyakarta city on the island of Java. In total, 5,778 people across the Yogyakarta region were killed and 70 percent of Bantul's population was displaced (World Bank 2012). Just before these events, following an already fractious process of education system decentralization through Education Act 20/2003, in which decisionmaking authority was transferred from Jakarta to the local *kabupaten* (subnational administrators), the Indonesian government had begun to implement Teacher Law 14/2006. This policy sought to improve the status of Indonesian teachers in order to elevate expectations for teachers' work and to influence student achievement and national development (Jalal et al. 2009).

Prior to the fall of President Suharto in 1998, which marked the start of the country's transition from 30 years of autocratic and centralized rule to a decentralized democracy, there was minimal focus on skills-based teaching (Bjork 2004). Instead, value was placed on the dimensions of teachers' work that related to civic duty and public order. A teacher under Suharto's paternalistic *Orde Baru* (New Order) regime demonstrated competence through *kesetiaan* (loyalty), *tanggung jawab* (responsibility), *ketautan* (obedience), *kerjasama* (cooperation), and *kejujuran* (honesty) (Bjork 2004). As civil servants, teachers answered to Suharto's government first, not to students or parental boards (Bjork 2004). In policy, practice, and public discourse, teachers of this era were state functionaries who were positioned as transmitters of directives from central superiors, rather than as representatives of their communities (Nilan 2003; Sriprakash 2011). Although teachers were grossly underpaid, they were not undervalued by the communities they worked in. Although teachers often took other jobs to make

ends meet, they were not without political and social commitment to their teaching duties (Nilan 2003). By 2006, the pressure to find additional work and the residual mindset of the previous government's designations mitigated teachers' capacity to act as agents of change in a rapidly reforming post-Suharto state. As Bjork (2004) highlights, a teacher who subscribed to Orde Baru values was more likely to receive recognition and tangible rewards than a teacher with individual leadership skills, initiative, or a learner-centered approach.

METHODS

This study, which focuses on the nature of teachers' work immediately following a sudden-onset disaster, learns from the narratives of five Indonesian teachers. To produce a teacher-centered and practitioner-oriented analysis of teachers' own framings of their work, my approach provides a contextually and culturally situated understanding of the tensions between global constructions of teachers' work and their own lived experiences, capabilities, and needs.

The method I used in Indonesia was the individual life-story interview. Given the complex nature of the narratives I sought, life-story interviews "bring order to our experiences and help us to view our lives both subjectively and objectively while at the same time assisting us in forming our identities" (Atkinson 2001, 122). Supplementing this view, and pointing to the interacting layers of influence the participants conveyed, life-story interviewing also provided a "nuanced view of people's past or present experience," which helped illustrate the ways teachers' narratives link with wider history and politics (Lewis 2008, 126).

In developing a grounded understanding of Indonesian teachers' experiences in a period of protracted vulnerability, Ryen (2001, 14) states that "social reality and how we talk about reality are intertwined." As such, through life-story interviews and a semiparticipatory process in which the teachers decided where the interviews took place and defined the themes we focused on, they were able to contribute to the research and knowledge production process. In this setting, it was also critical that my methods reflected culturally compatible processes that participants could comfortably relate to, contribute to, and gain insight from.

To navigate these issues and provide space for narratives from a “subaltern epistemic location,” I used a Javanese concept to communicate my semistructured interview approach to participants (Khoja-Moolji 2017). *Ngobrol-ngobrol* refers to a familiar and everyday style of conversation in communal spaces that is fluid and colloquial yet leads toward critical issues and resolutions. In choosing this term, I drew guidance from *talanoa*, which is an indigenous and decolonial method used throughout the South Pacific (Koya 2013; Tuhiwai Smith 2012; Vaioleti 2006). By engaging with *talanoa*, researchers are required to “partake deeply in the experience” rather than asking predetermined questions, to listen, and to step back to analyze (Vaioleti 2006, 24). I also used *ngobrol-ngobrol* to promote a grounded and inductive way of gathering data in a “comfortable, non-threatening manner” (Koya 2013, 141) that was familiar to the participants and helped create a space defined by their own terms of engagement.

I used CDA to analyze my findings. This enabled me to demarcate themes, to code and enumerate dominant representations, and to delineate frames of reference from the *ngobrol-ngobrol*. CDA also enabled me to analyze “opaque and transparent” dialectics between actors, institutions, and contexts that emerge in the postdisaster setting (Shah and Lopes Cardoso 2014; Wodak 2006). Similarly, as a tool for juxtaposing teacher narratives and global guidance, CDA enabled me to push beyond the nuances conveyed and move toward a more complex analysis of how the interviews reflect local social norms in the form of beliefs, concepts, and practices (Rogers 2004).

My interview sample included five participants (two females, three males) from the district of Bantul, who were selected to take part in hour-long, individual life-story interviews over a six-week period in 2016. The interviews were framed in my recruitment advertisements as *ngobrol-ngobrol* (conversations). Posters were distributed via the local teacher association and placed in seven staff rooms across a purposive sample of large and small elementary schools in a mix of semi-urban and rural locations. Due to my own funding constraints, time limitations, and the period needed to build appropriate relational trust, only five participants out of twelve volunteers were selected for interviews. Thus, these findings are not representative. Selection criteria related to their personal proximity to the 2006 earthquake, their diverse range of experience and roles in their respective schools, the mix of semi-urban and rural locations, and to achieve gender balance.

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Table 1: Research Participants from Bantul District, Yogyakarta

Name*	Gender	Age	Faith	Years Teaching	School Setting	Grade-Level Taught
Ibu Rita	F	53	Catholic	25	Semi-urban	3rd
Ibu Maya	F	36	Islam	11	Rural	5th
Pak Johor	M	55	Islam	22	Rural	Principal
Pak Faris	M	48	Islam	24	Semi-urban	6th
Pak Zihairi	M	46	Islam	21	Semi-urban	5th

Note: * indicates pseudonyms

I cofacilitated each of the five life-story interviews in the Indonesian language, with support from Pak Siswa Widyatmoko of Universitas Sanata Dharma in Yogyakarta. I then produced translated transcriptions in English, along with annotated field notes. After that I uploaded dual-language transcripts to NVivo for open coding, closed coding, and discourse analysis (Saldaña 2015). Across the transcripts, I enumerated recurring emic terms and organized participant statements into three emergent literature-informed etic categories. Based on my literature review and post-hoc consultations with teachers, three distinct but interconnected themes frame my findings: (1) teachers' memories of the earthquake; (2) teachers' values and beliefs; and (3) teachers' priorities and activities.

The data used for this article come from a larger study on teachers' work at the intersection of Indonesia's globally influenced policy reforms and disaster vulnerability in the early 2000s. My own positionality within this research invariably influenced my approach to the interviews, the teachers' interactions with me as a researcher, and my interpretation of the findings. Before conducting this study, I worked as a development consultant on teacher professional development projects in Indonesia for three years, and I speak Indonesian with confidence. Moreover, I was a teacher in New Zealand in 2011, when a series of earthquakes devastated Christchurch city, closed my school, and significantly disrupted teachers' work and wellbeing. I provided this backstory to the research participants, which created a sense of common understanding and enhanced their confidence in my research intentions. Finally, as a current producer of technical guidance for international humanitarian agencies, my analysis is inherently reflexive and self-critical.

FINDINGS

TEACHERS' MEMORIES OF THE EARTHQUAKE

In relaying what happened after 5:54 AM on May 27, 2006, all teachers described the *goyang-goyang* (violent shaking) and related its severity to their distance from the epicenter. This was a visceral memory for them. As Pak Zihairi conveyed, he lived beyond the Bantul epicenter, which lessened the severity of the quake: "I experienced just the shaking, but not the full power of the epicenter. In Bantul it was more powerful...so many victims there died of falling objects." Teachers also described *hancur dan robloh* (destruction and collapse). Ibu Maya recalled her ability to run outside as her house collapsed around her. She related the collapse of the school to the fact that children lacked a safe place to come together in the community. She also recalled having to live in a tent for many weeks with collapsed houses all around her while she tried to work. Ibu Rita encouraged me to picture the physical environment as she described running errands among the detritus of upended lives. Pak Faris was resigned to the fact that his school was destroyed because of the community's relative poverty, stating that "the buildings were very old and poorly maintained, so of course they collapsed."

In the early parts of our conversations, *lari* (run) was a frequent reference. Running away from harm was presented as a matter of the magnitude of the event, the participants' physical safety, and their emotional recovery. As Ibu Rita remembered, the *goyang-goyang* (shaking) was so strong that she was unable to run. Ibu Maya and Pak Johor referred to running as a way of escaping a possible tsunami, even though Bantul is 20 kilometers from the coast. The teachers reminded me that the 2004 tsunami in Aceh still weighed heavily on their minds. As Ibu Maya shared, "Whenever there were aftershocks, we would run in panic to higher ground...I only felt safe when I reached the mountain." Pak Johor refers to "the north" as the place he ran to where there is higher ground, and where he felt safe from the violent aftershocks. Pak Faris, on the other hand, talked about needing to "run away from the community for a while," which referred to his neighbors and colleagues as well as the physical environment responsible for his hardship. Ibu Rita also referred to running away. She went to stay with her daughter in Salatiga, 95 kilometers from Bantul. Both Rita and Faris then explained that they only returned to Bantul once they felt "recovered and prepared."

Surprisingly, across all five interviews, the term *korban* (victim) was not as significant as I anticipated, even when I asked if participants considered themselves to be victims. When it was used, however, it was in reference to colleagues and community members affected by the earthquake, rather than to the teachers themselves. But the word's meaning also ranged across a spectrum. Ibu Rita and Pak Johor used *korban* most often. Pak Johor stated that "when we say we are *korban* it's not all the same...Some people experienced their houses collapsing, their bodies broke, or they died, or maybe they had many family members perish, maybe then it's different to my experience, maybe they are more broken than me personally...So in that respect I am not a victim." Pak Zihairi similarly described how "there were so many gravesites dug in the fields for victims...it was like the earthquake ate them all up." Pak Faris, on the other hand, spoke of his resistance to being a victim, yet stated that being a victim was inevitable, as the situation was so much bigger than Bantul: "It was easy to become hopeless...so we all became victims...we had to make an effort to accept the calamity all around us." Interestingly, Pak Faris' Indonesian phrasing conveyed the situation as a divine plan. As such, his spiritual acceptance of the situation mitigated his victimhood. Ibu Maya, however, was more direct about who was a victim. She singled out her grade-two class at the time: "One of my students died. It was a young girl who had only just become part of the class, which made us all victims, really." She also distinguished that, while some children were not "victims of injuries, we had to keep in mind that their parents had died."

Like *korban* (victim), the participants did not use the word "trauma" as often as I expected, even when I probed for examples of trauma. When they did use it, Ibu Rita and Ibu Maya broke into laughter, which I interpreted as a way of coping with difficult memories or as an expression of discomfort. For example, Maya burst out laughing when she said that the earthquake "even made brave men less brave, as they already had a lot of trauma to deal with." She also spoke with a joyful tone when describing her main role as "lifting the students' spirits for learning...so that they lost the feeling of fear and recovered from the trauma of the quake." Ibu Rita recalled the challenge of going back to school while still dealing with her own trauma. As she narrated, she laughed loudly and slapped her khaki covered knee, as if amused by the absurd memory of teaching amid her own despair. Pak Johor was somber by comparison. He remembered that "we were experiencing so many aftershocks...[that] for months the situation was very traumatic." Pak Faris' use of trauma related more to the teaching rationale at the time: "We did not rush straight for mathematics or Indonesian language lessons...because we first had to help the students manage their trauma."

A final word that appears often within this theme is *putus asa* (hopeless). However, all participants framed *putus asa* from a position of avoidance. In other words, no matter how difficult the situation became they could not become *putus asa* (hopeless). Ibu Rita used *putus asa* on numerous occasions to explain her focus at the time, reflecting that “you cannot surrender, you cannot despair...Our work, it’s about providing spirit, about not feeling hopeless.” Pak Zihairi quipped that this is a feature of Javanese culture. As he explained, “This is what we’re like...that’s what teachers stick to, we don’t become hopeless...If we do we become victims, too.” What is insightful here is the teachers’ discomfort with being considered *korban* (victims) of the earthquake.

TEACHERS’ VALUES AND BELIEFS

Ibu Maya regularly used the word *bangkit* (to rise) during our conversation. This came from her affinity with the saying “*bangkit dari kejadian*” (“rise above the situation”), which she said “became like a national belief.” This harks back to the Suharto-era culture of teachers transmitting government directives, as well as reflecting broader Javanese beliefs, as each teacher repeated similar phrases during our conversations. Ibu Maya extended the notion of rising up to include the act of rebuilding, stating that first “we had to lift each other’s spirits,” and then that “the way we rise up is the way we rebuild our schools and homes, that’s how we show that we can stand up for ourselves.” While none of the men used *bangkit* as much as their female counterparts, both used the similar term *berusaha* (enterprise) to describe their beliefs about teachers’ work postdisaster. As Pak Johor commented, “to keep your spirits up, you must be enterprising, you must accept the challenge in front of you.” Pak Faris saw also enterprise as a mental exercise. He stated that “one requires enterprise to move beyond the calamity all around.” None of the participants described rising up or being enterprising as specific mental health strategies. However, both terms connect with ideas of agency and self-efficacy as related to concepts of teacher wellbeing in an emergency.

Pak Johor, who was the oldest and most earnest participant, reflected on Japan’s occupation of Indonesia during World War II. He used the Indonesian transliteration *kolonialisme* (colonialism) to describe this time and attributed to it a sense of unity among Indonesians: “After the earthquake it was a very hard time, but we also had colonialism before...It was over 50 years ago, but it made Indonesians united.” He continued, “To overthrow Japan we had to be united... so I think our strength comes from this.” A second term Pak Johor used often is *kesatuan* (united), which holds prominence in the Indonesian psyche and is based on *sumpah pemuda* (the youth pledge), also known as Indonesia’s document of

independence from 150 years of Dutch colonialism, which occurred in 1965. Despite its paradoxical association with the Orde Baru anticommunist pogroms of 1965, in which approximately one million people were massacred, many Indonesians to this day offer their allegiance to the national motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*," which means "Unity in Diversity" in old Javanese. As Pak Johor uncritically stated, *kesatuan* "is like an adhesive, it allowed us to become independent...and until now we have not been colonized again." Pak Faris similarly believed that his community "has a way of moving forward in a united way."

A sense of pride in the opportunity to promote Javanese culture and what Indonesian anthropologist Tania Li (2007) terms as the ubiquitous "will to improve" colored many of my conversations with the participants. Building on the concepts above, Pak Johor referred to the importance of *gotong-royong* (reciprocal aid), which he believed is a product of the *sumpah pemuda* generation. Rita mirrored Johor's centering of *gotong-royong* alongside her Javanese identity, stating that, "when disasters strike, you need to carry Javanese proverbs with you...stories of mutual dependence, tales of togetherness in particular." Pak Faris also believed that *kebudayaan Jawa* (Javanese culture) was key to their response: "It is a fact that Javanese people support each other, we help each other out." Ibu Maya framed her heritage differently. She claimed that "Javanese people, we do not dwell on painful memories like this." She then positioned her Javanese and professional identities within a taxonomy: "First I am a Muslim, then I am Javanese, next I am a mother and a wife, and only then am I a teacher." This comment stood out, as global guidance often privileges professional identities over personal, spiritual, or domestic ones. Maya's comment reminds us not only of her full identity, but also of how her primary sociocultural affiliations are presented as assets for her work.

At the same time as it centers the importance of schools in the postdisaster context, technical guidance at the global level often silos education, health, or child-protection priorities, thereby isolating schools from other institutions or wider sociopolitical considerations. On this point, the participants introduced *masyarakat* (society) into our conversations. Pak Faris noted that teachers' roles "are about more than students, we work for the whole of society." Or, as Pak Zihairi articulated, "as teachers we are a part of society, and we therefore support the society with our efforts." After a brief pause, he explained more fully: "Because we are teachers, we are leaders in school, and because the school is part of the community, we are leaders in the community, too." These comments read like remnants of the Suharto-era teacher competency frameworks when,

as “state functionaries,” teachers’ collective *kesetian* (loyalty), *tanggung jawab* (responsibility), and *kerjasama* (cooperation) were better recognized and rewarded than individual critical thinking or creativity.

Referring to first responders from the military, health, and child-protection sectors, Pak Zihairi also noted that teachers’ work “complements others’ roles during a crisis.” This speaks to the idea that teachers are also frontline workers in a crisis, but contradicts the fact that many teachers left the community after the quake. Nevertheless, Pak Faris took a longer-term view of teachers’ work and influence. He offered the logic that “our community was burdened with the impact of the quake, and if children did not pass their national exams they might never rise, and they would become a burden to society.”

TEACHERS’ PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Ibu Maya regularly referred to *bantuan* (help). Her use of the term was not in the passive sense of being helped but in the active sense of helping or getting help for others. As Ibu Maya stated, “We got the fire service and the police to help... They assisted with getting people like my grandmother away from the rubble... In our village I lost 43 friends...so we were forced to bring in extra help.” Ibu Maya also framed getting help as a way of being able to “shift your focus to the school.” At the same time, she noted that the school was the site “where people were coming together to help each other out.” When I asked whether external help made a difference, she was adamant that I understood how “we cleaned up, we organized our belongings, but we didn’t wait around for help.” Ibu Rita often used *bantuan* in a similar way, stating that “our role was all about finding the right help for people in our community.” Ibu Rita was well connected to a network of Catholic churches, so she focused on coordinating help from congregants: “We could try and find help from private donors...I was able to find people to help from the churches.” Ibu Rita believed that people’s wellbeing depended on their own social networks. She saw teachers as brokers of help, from private donors as well as government services. As she stated, “If teachers or your school did not have networks, you would not get help, this included from the government also.”

Pak Faris also referred to *bantuan* (help), albeit in a slightly different way. He noted how difficult it was to provide help amid such difficulty: “Before we could help others, we had to come to terms with the many deaths all around us.” For Pak Faris, this created tension, a cultural trait that was difficult to reconcile with his present reality: “In Java we feel compelled to help each other out, but maybe we cannot in the middle of such calamity?”

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I was surprised by how infrequently the words *mengajar dan belajar* (teaching and learning) were used in relation to teachers' decisionmaking after the earthquake. This points to teachers seeing their roles more broadly than academic development alone. In many ways, perhaps due to the scripted nature of Indonesia's curriculum, teaching and learning are things the teachers had little control over. Therefore, the extent to which the participants could comment on decisions around teaching and learning was limited. At first, this lack of commentary contrasted with their emphasis on supporting students' success on exams amid the disaster's disruptive effects. The way they talked about *mengajar dan belajar* spoke more to the psychosocial and social-emotional preparedness needed so that teachers could teach and children could learn. This was also how they saw humanitarian agencies. For example, Pak Faris described how "different agencies helped us set up activities for learning...They happened near the field, they raised the emergency tents, meaning we could teach again...Once help arrived, we could teach some great stuff." Ibu Maya stated similarly that, "before we could help with teaching and learning, we had to help the head of school to raise students' spirits."

Along with teaching and learning, teachers emphasized the importance of *hiburan* (entertainment). They felt *hiburan* was key to getting children back to school, and this was one of the few times they referred to international humanitarian agencies. As Ibu Maya recalled, "They started to provide entertainment for the children at school and then children would return home but want to come back to school again for the entertainment." Pak Zihairi also saw *hiburan* as key to children's psychosocial wellbeing and to teachers' wellbeing as well. As he stated, "The main thing to do was to make sure children were ok, that they were entertained and happy, and I feel some of us also did better if we did that for them." Pak Faris agreed that, in terms of teachers' work immediately after the quake, "it was just the basics; providing motivation and entertainment was our main job." Across all five *ngobrol-ngobrol* (conversations), whether we talked about work roles, trauma, help offered, or teaching and learning, the word that was used time and again with utility and versatility was *semangat* (spirit). More often than not, *semangat* was paired with *bangkit* (rise), in that teachers' work immediately after the earthquake was to *bangkit semangat* (raise the spirits).

Ibu Maya relayed that, because "we still had exams coming up and students had to progress to the next level," her main role was "to raise spirits and keep children learning, even if it was in a field under a tree." But she also related *semangat* (spirits) to students' psychosocial needs: "I raised their spirits so that they lost their fear and trauma." After hearing many participants use *semangat*, I

asked where the concept originated. Ibu Maya replied, “from all the government response centers to our schools, it was the same message: ‘Let’s rise up...raise the spirit!’ is all we heard from them.”

Ibu Rita also used *semangat* multiple times in our conversation. At the outset of our *ngobrol-ngobrol* (conversations), she said that “our neighborhood had very little, but...we still had our spirits, we were still breathing.” Later in the conversation she also reflected on teachers’ collective effort to raise the community’s spirits, stating that, “when help finally arrived, they found that we could already rise up, that we already had the spirit to help ourselves.” On this note she added, “We weren’t broken...we just had to keep going, keep teaching together, and that’s what we did.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I contend in this article that, in the guidance, humanitarian actors in the field of EiE have positioned the work, identity, and capabilities of teachers within a deficit paradigm, while paradoxically centering their importance to disaster preparedness, response, and the recovery process. Given the consequences of current political, health, and environmental crises and the many human resource issues that humanitarian agencies are facing, humanitarian actors are compelled to recommend improved teacher development and performance. Humanitarian actors’ involvement in complex emergencies is predicated on the identification of gaps and the provision of funding and solutions—what Li (2007, 7) critiques as the “the practices of problematization.” Thus, the frames of reference that humanitarian actors employ illustrate a gap between teachers’ perceived capacity to perform and the level of performance required to achieve best practice norms. The complex dynamics of emergency settings can therefore lead to the creation of a passive sense of dependency, which in turn strengthens the humanitarian sector’s own influence at the local and global levels.

As stated earlier, Porter (1986) refers to the producers of global texts as belonging to discourse communities. In this sense, as authors of policy and practice guidance, humanitarian actors are constrained by “intertextual preferences” (44). It is apparent, therefore, given the similar frames of reference and the positioning of teachers in emergency settings, that global guidance is bound by shared ideologies and standards rather than by the nuance and capabilities of the contexts they represent. As a consequence, and as Alfaro (1996, 268) suggests, because “texts are subliminal purveyors of ideology” they “influence and alter the subject.”

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The EiE guidance we produce therefore defines for global audiences how teachers' work is conceived of and supported. But a key detail missing from this guidance is how teachers conceive of and value their own experiences, define the nature of their own work, and articulate the policy- and practice-level support they need. Although the values and actions of the Indonesian teachers interviewed for this study overlap with global guidance, they refrained from presenting themselves as vulnerable or deficient. Moreover, if humanitarian actors observed intently and listened closely to subaltern perspectives, it might become clear to them that global recommendations can be realized in local and culturally unique ways. For, as Marchezini (2015, 370) states, "it is necessary to look at survivors not merely as affected people, but as subjects with their own cultures and coping strategies."

In this research, I endeavored to answer the following questions: (1) How do teachers cope with the professional responsibilities of teaching in the aftermath of an environmental disaster? (2) What nuance and relevance might we gain when teachers' voices are included in the process of global policymaking and practice? To the extent that this research seeks to make the value of teachers' voices in EiE guidance clear, it also highlights the value of working with and building on teachers' own cultural norms. Cultural factors such as kinship, shared history, faith, and ethnicity are known to bind people together and to inform collective action in a time of crisis (Maldonado 2016; Shah et al. 2020). In local communities we find complex networks, knowledge of how things get accomplished, "the intricacies of local politics," and systems of reciprocal aid that can be strengthened by global actors, and they should not be not overlooked (Maldonado 2016, 52). Indeed, just as *bangkit semangat* (raise the spirits) resonates with Indonesian teachers, culturally located framings of vulnerability and resilience can effectively guide the disaster preparedness, response, and recovery processes of humanitarian actors as well. Moreover, this research shines light on transformative capacities and the extent to which cultural assets can be incorporated into policymaking and practice (Khoja-Moolji 2017; Pherali et al. 2020; Shah 2019). As such, there is an opportunity for future research to investigate how locally derived and culturally grounded concepts can inform teacher professional development and support mechanisms, and the extent to which, if at all, this has a transformative effect on teachers' resilience, motivation, and retention during emergencies.

To the extent that vulnerability and resilience can frame the duality of teachers' work and agency in emergency settings, the teachers I interviewed contested their own vulnerability. They also did not use *ketahanan*, the Indonesian term for resilience. The closest they came was to describe an acceptance of the situation and the desire to rise up and move forward together. Through the government-inspired

mantra of *bangkit semangat*, the teachers outlined the collective cultural and psychological resources they had to navigate the complexities of the postdisaster context. The memories and issues the teachers chose to share thus reveal a collective yet cautious and fragmented sense of agency and capability amid the disruption and material deprivations before them.

The teachers also talked about their own self-efficacy in the ways they helped students and others, acts that were identity affirming and rewarding. This showed that they had community and family connectedness that included elements of spiritual faith and an understanding of shared histories (Maldonato 2016). Each teacher experienced and compartmentalized memories of considerable trauma and loss, but this rarely became the focus of our *ngobrol-ngobrol* (conversations). Like Pak Johor's reference to a shared colonial history, Ibu Maya's personal taxonomy of her many identities, and the residual influence of Suharto-era directives, what these teachers shared are the ways in which multiple social and cultural factors intersected to provide them and their colleagues with a sense of collective resilience. As such, to the extent that global texts champion teachers as frontline professionals, humanitarian actors need to prioritize and uplift—or *bangkit semangat*—teachers as contributors to and collaborators in nuanced and contextually connected policy and practice.

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VOICES OF REFUGEE YOUTH: REFLECTIONS ON A PARTICIPATORY, YOUTH-CENTERED STUDY

KATRINA BARNES, REBECCA DALTRY, AMY ASHLEE,
AIME PARFAIT EMERUSENGE, KHALID KHAN, ASMA RABI,
AIMÉE MUKANKUSI, JULIA PACITTO, DAVID HOLLOW,
AND BETHANY SIKES

ABSTRACT

Involving young refugees in the research process has significant potential to address current gaps in refugee research in a rigorous, equitable, and empowering way (Clark 2004; Haile, Meloni, and Rezaie 2020). This field note is a report on Voices of Refugee Youth, a research initiative in Pakistan and Rwanda that aims to build the evidence base for postprimary refugee education, while also increasing young refugees' access to and representation in this field of research. The purpose of this field note is to reflect critically on the participatory approach adopted by the initiative, whereby young refugees work as coresearchers who advise, collect data, and contribute to the deliverables. In the note we highlight the benefits of this approach, but also problematize it to offer valuable lessons about involving young refugees meaningfully in the research process. We conclude that participation must be approached with flexibility in order to facilitate different levels of participation, based on the skills or knowledge level of the young refugees in question. It is critical that participation is accompanied by rigorous training that responds to participants' contexts and experience levels and addresses ethical issues, such as positionality-based bias.

Received January 14, 2022; revised September 22, 2022, and February 8, 2023; accepted March 15, 2023; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

In this field note, we use the case of Voices of Refugee Youth, an ongoing research initiative in Pakistan and Rwanda, to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of involving refugee community members as active decisionmakers in the research process.¹

The initiative has the dual aims of building evidence for postprimary refugee education and of increasing young refugees' access to and representation in this field of research. The former is being achieved through a longitudinal panel study of 1,126 refugee students in secondary and higher education. The latter is being achieved through the involvement of 31 youth researchers who work as core contributors to the research process, while concurrently receiving training in applied research that will enable them to earn a graduate-level accreditation.

The aim of this field note is to contribute to refugee education and to education in emergencies (EiE) research by outlining the participatory principles upon which the research initiative was designed, and then to reflect critically on the effectiveness of the approach adopted. We posit that a flexible approach to participation, which is designed around the young refugees' existing knowledge and supported by rigorous training, can enhance the relevance of the methodology and the quality of the findings. The field note is coauthored by four refugee youth researchers, whose involvement has increased refugee access to a historically inaccessible academic space while simultaneously enriching that space.

We focus in this field note exclusively on the approach taken; the findings from the longitudinal study itself will be documented in a future publication.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN CONTEXT: PRINCIPLES, BENEFITS, AND CHALLENGES

Youth have long been left out of conversations about the issues that involve them (Clark 2004; Women's Refugee Commission 2022). This has been increasingly recognized in declarations such as the Transforming Education Summit's 2022 Youth Declaration (UN 2022), which advocates for the meaningful engagement of young people in education policy and decisionmaking. Participatory research approaches are one valuable way to ensure that youth voices inform the research

¹ The research is funded by Dubai Cares. It is run in a partnership between Jigsaw, Refugee Education UK, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

that affects young people. These diverse approaches are all underpinned by the core principles of democratic decisionmaking, the inclusion and amplification of marginalized voices, and opportunities for mutual learning among the participants (Duarte et al. 2018). In practice, participation may involve research stakeholders who set the research agenda, act as consultants, or conduct research alongside the researchers (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor 2015; Haile, Meloni, and Rezaie 2020).

Using participatory methods in education research that concerns both youth and refugees has a number of instrumental and ethical benefits. Participatory approaches have been found to help build trusting relationships that ultimately lead to higher quality research. Youth-centered approaches, for example, can result in more robust and honest responses during data collection, as the respondents may prefer to discuss sensitive issues with their peers (Clark 2004; Haile et al. 2020). As insiders, youth researchers may offer new insights into which questions will be most relevant to their peers and identify context-based issues that other researchers may miss (Kirby 2004). However, this level of involvement is not without risks. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that “insider” researchers are inevitably and inherently biased and that they make assumptions about their research subjects; this can, however, be somewhat countered by increased awareness of that bias. Haile et al. (2020) highlight that, from an ethical perspective, community researchers may be vulnerable to conflicted loyalty between their research team and their community.

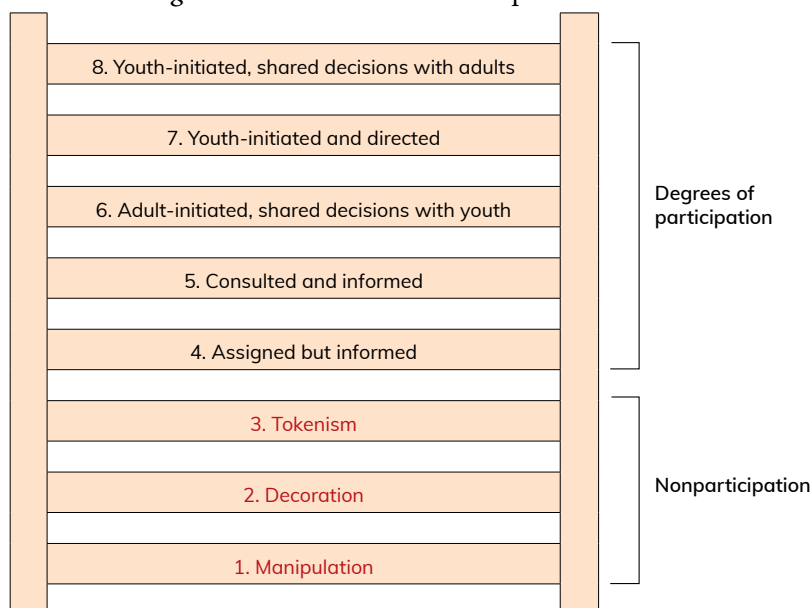
Conversely, participatory approaches may help to ensure that research is ethically sound and that it benefits the participants. Participation can be particularly important when working with vulnerable groups, as it can help prevent using damaging “helicopter research” practices (Haelewaters, Hofmann, and Romero-Olivares 2021). It also can improve the accessibility and usefulness of research findings for the communities with whom the research was conducted (Clark 2004) and ensure that the participants’ contributions are recognized (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor 2015).

These instrumental and ethical benefits are strongly aligned with the mandate of Voices of Refugee Youth. From its inception, the UK-based research team deemed it essential that refugee youth be involved in decisionmaking, given ongoing concerns that the attitudes and preferences of local actors in EiE settings continue to be overlooked (Foulds et al. 2021). In light of this, and echoing Abu-Amsha et al. (2019), the ultimate aim of the UK-based team was to enable those who have been displaced by conflict to shape the education they and their communities need to rebuild their lives.

The UK-based team also wanted to ensure that the voices of young people were heard, given the significant number of refugee children and youth in Pakistan and Rwanda. There are reportedly 1.35 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan, more than half (51.3%) of whom are ages 0-17 (UNHCR 2022). In Rwanda, these figures stand at approximately 127,000 Burundian and Congolese refugees, 49 percent of whom are children (UNHCR 2021). These youth-heavy populations highlight the need for increased youth representation in refugee education research.

In order to define the scope of refugee youth participation in Voices of Refugee Youth, the UK-based team drew from the Ladder of Participation (see Figure 1), which is a model used to define participation levels for projects that involve children and youth. Developed for the UN Children’s Fund by Roger Hart in 1992 (and adapted by the authors), the ladder presents eight “rungs” of participation, each describing the characteristics associated with different levels of decisionmaking agency, control, and power:

Figure 1: The Ladder of Participation



Source: Adapted from Hart (1992, 8)

Significantly, Hart also warns against making maximum participation an uninterrogated goal in itself: “It is not necessary that children always operate on the highest possible rungs of the ladder. . .programmes should be designed which maximize the opportunity for any child to choose to participate at the highest level of his ability” (1992, 11). The design of Voices of Refugee Youth, therefore, was

based on the understanding that each activity in the research process may offer different opportunities for refugee youth participation, and different limitations.

APPLYING PARTICIPATORY PRINCIPLES: CREATING AND FACILITATING THE YOUTH RESEARCHERS' ROLE

Two cohorts of refugee youth were recruited for Voices of Refugee Youth: 15 in Pakistan (nine male, six female) and 16 in Rwanda (ten male, six female). In this section, we detail three crucial elements that facilitated their participation: recruitment, remuneration, and training. We then summarize the role the youth researchers played in the participatory design.

RECRUITMENT

To recruit youth researchers, a terms of reference was sent to all refugee higher education students in Pakistan and Rwanda with whom the UN High Commissioner for Refugees had contact as registered recipients of refugee scholarships. The terms of reference detailed the purpose of the initiative, the anticipated activities and responsibilities, the eligibility criteria, and the required skills in order to ensure that the applicants were fully informed (Kirby 2004). The applicants had to have refugee status, be less than 30 years old, and be studying at the university level or have recently graduated. Those who were shortlisted were invited to attend an interactive, in-person training week, during which the candidates participated in modules covering the research cycle, designs and methodologies, data-collection tools, and research ethics. Candidates underwent a series of observations and interviews during this training week, after which the final participants were selected. This approach was taken to ensure that those who were selected had a solid grounding in research principles. This process was key to helping those selected to develop the research skills they would need to participate, and also rewarded the unsuccessful candidates, who had dedicated time to the recruitment process, by giving them valuable learning opportunities.

REMUNERATION

In line with Bradbury-Jones and Taylor's (2015) recommendation that remuneration be "country, culture and context sensitive" (164), fair rates of pay were discussed with the young refugees during the consultation visit, and again before the final decisions were made about which activities to remunerate youth researchers for, and what the amount should be. A number of different payments were made

throughout the project, and the youth researchers always agreed to the rates in advance. The payments were made for attending training (including compensation for missing work at other jobs), for days worked during data collection, and for communication and transportation expenses.

TRAINING

An accredited training program was delivered via a combination of in-person and online sessions at different points during the study.² Each unit corresponded with a stage of the research cycle (design, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination) and consisted of practical tasks relevant to the youth researchers' assigned activities. Their knowledge and skills were assessed at the end of each unit, and those who met the criteria earned an internationally accredited qualification in applied research. Training was deemed essential to ensure that the participants could fulfill their roles at the different stages without feeling overwhelmed (Hart 1992). Moreover, as an education program in itself, the training made a valuable contribution to the EiE sphere by equipping conflict-displaced refugees with the skills to secure future employment opportunities.

YOUTH RESEARCHERS' ROLE

While the aim was for the youth researchers to participate in every stage of the research process, it was anticipated that their level of participation would vary at each stage, depending on their knowledge, skills, and interests. Nonetheless, the intention was for the scope of the youth researcher role to remain within what Hart (1992) identifies as Levels 4 to 6 on the Ladder of Participation. At every stage, the youth researchers were in constant contact with the UK-based team, to whom they reported their progress. They were encouraged to raise concerns and ask for support when needed.

The research study tracked a cohort of 1,126 young refugees engaged in postprimary education in Pakistan and Rwanda at three data points over a three-year period. The youth researchers were tasked with a consultative role in the tool design stage. They provided feedback on the quantitative and qualitative tools drafted by the UK-based team, including a longitudinal panel survey, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. These tools were designed to explore the factors that were influencing the refugees' education experiences, how education has affected

² The course is accredited by John Carroll University, which is itself accredited by the Higher Learning Commission—a national accreditation agency of the United States.

their lives and aspirations, and how they think various education actors could improve refugees' education and employment prospects.

The youth researchers were given a more autonomous role in the data-collection stage. They were tasked with identifying research participants in keeping with the sampling criteria developed by the UK-based team. The youth researchers also took responsibility for administering all the surveys and for organizing and facilitating focus groups and interviews in Pakistan and Rwanda.

In the latter stages of the research process, the youth researchers returned to a consultative level of participation. They offered context-based interpretations of the data at the analysis stage, and made both written and spoken contributions to the research deliverables.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

In this section, we explore the effectiveness of the participatory approach adopted for Voices of Refugee Youth. We detail the level of participation achieved at each stage of the research cycle, then critically reflect on the benefits, limitations, and key sector learnings resulting from these experiences.

THE DESIGN PHASE

From the inception of Voices of Refugee Youth, the UK-based team was aware that, while seeking to place refugees from low- and middle-income countries at its center, the initiative was nonetheless driven by funding, research experience, and motivation from high-income contexts. There is an inherent risk that research conceived outside of the implementation context will not reflect the realities and needs of those within that context (Haelewaters et al. 2021).

The young refugees' consultative role (Level 5 in Hart's model) during the consultation stage of the research design provided an important opportunity for them to shape the research according to what they felt would be most feasible and which education issues they felt were important to address. These refugees' educational experiences were used as a foundation on which to develop the research questions, while questions around the training structure and content, how to align activities with typical availability, what the study's geographic focus should be, and their views on reasonable remuneration shaped the research design.

This input ensured that the initiative was both useful for the refugee community (Clark 2004) and accessible to the youth researchers.

The youth researchers' consultative role during the design of the data-collection tools enhanced the quality of the tools, as they drew from their valuable contextual knowledge to suggest which questions might yield the most useful data. For example, they recommended that the interviews in Pakistan include questions about the recent switch from the Afghan to the Pakistani curriculum. This resulted in a rich addition to the qualitative data and provided a foundation on which to develop contextually specific policy recommendations.

THE DATA-COLLECTION PHASE

Youth researchers played a central role in the data-collection activities. Although the task was essentially prescribed (Level 4 on Hart's ladder), the youth researchers were able to make important decisions during this process (Level 6), such as when and where to collect the data, and whom the participants should be (provided that the sampling criteria were applied). They worked collaboratively and independently, troubleshooting issues as required and drawing from their training to decide what contextually relevant, probing questions to ask in each interview. The extensive focus on research ethics during the training ensured that the wellbeing of the youth researchers and their participants was safeguarded throughout the process (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor 2015).

With this level of autonomy, the youth researchers were able to use their context, age, and language knowledge to establish trust with the participants. According to the researchers, the participants identified with them as community members, which enabled the participants to feel more relaxed, and therefore perhaps be more open, than they might have been with figures from outside the community (Kirby 2004). This was particularly notable in Pakistan, where female youth researchers remarked on the how the combination of their gender, age, and community status enabled them to create safe spaces in which their female refugee peers could be interviewed.

As previously noted, there was a risk that the youth researchers' findings would be skewed by assumptions they made based on pre-existing knowledge of their own community, rather than on what they discovered using the research methods. For example, they may have inadvertently asked leading questions based on their experience, or emphasized certain parts of respondents' answers in their note-taking based on what resonated most with them. However, the emphasis during

the training program on adopting a critical mindset and constantly reflecting on questions of positionality helped to mitigate this risk. The youth researchers reported that the training prompted them to gather participants' experiences objectively before applying their own perspective.

The dual role of researcher and community member occasionally challenged the youth researchers' professional agency during the research process. This was a particular concern for the female youth researchers in Pakistan, who reported being pressured by school principals to conduct interviews when teachers or other students were present, which reportedly made the participants uncomfortable and unwilling to answer questions fully. Navigating hierarchies and power dynamics remains a key challenge to youth-led data-collection approaches (Kirby 2004). Organizations that implement a participatory approach must be prepared to provide appropriate support, such as formal documentation of the research permissions, so that youth researchers can assert their authority confidently.

Finally, the youth-led data-collection approach yielded linguistic benefits. As members of their participants' linguistic communities and being proficient English speakers, the youth researchers were able to translate data-collection instruments and conduct the data collection in the participants' preferred languages. However, the youth researchers' lack of formal translation experience may mean that some details were lost in translation (van Nes et al. 2010). In addition, their proficiency in written English varied, which resulted in some of the English transcripts being of poorer quality. These limitations may be mitigated by ensuring that the research team has the linguistic capacity to assess the quality of the translations of tools and transcripts, and to rigorously assess applicants' spoken and written English proficiency during recruitment.

THE DATA-ANALYSIS PHASE

The youth researchers' participation was arguably most limited during the data analysis. The UK-based team did most of the work in this area, and the youth researchers contributed their contextual knowledge toward the end (Level 5 on Hart's ladder). For example, the data revealed some significant differences in the survey responses from Burundian and Congolese participants regarding their educational aspirations. Members of the Rwanda-based cohort, a mixture of Burundian and Congolese nationals, were able to use their knowledge of these communities to suggest why the different groups might have had differing opinions.

This division of responsibility between the UK-based and the youth researchers was determined by two practical limitations. First was the infeasibility of sharing analysis among more than 30 researchers, and second was the fact that, although the analysis methods were covered in the training, observations conducted during the training suggested that the youth researchers would need significantly more practice to be able to analyze participant data to the standard required. Organizations seeking to involve youth researchers to any extent in analysis activities should, therefore, factor in significant time and money to deliver a sustained period of training in data analysis.

THE DISSEMINATION PHASE

The youth researchers had no role in making decisions about how to disseminate findings, as the deliverables were agreed to with the donor prior to the youth researchers becoming involved. The youth researchers' involvement in the development of the agreed-to deliverables varied from being consulted for input (as in this field note; Level 5 on Hart's ladder) to making decisions about the core content (as in the forthcoming youth advocacy reports; Level 6).

The coauthorship of written deliverables highlighted some key issues about youth researcher participation. In some instances, the youth researchers wrote independent contributions, which were then submitted to the UK-based team for amalgamation. However, this approach resulted in the UK-based researchers having to make significant edits to conform with the level of linguistic formality, structure, and analytical depth expected in research reports. This raised questions about how to edit written contributions without compromising the authenticity of the original voices—especially when the youth researchers did not write in their first language.

This example highlights the importance of assessing the appropriate modality for youth researchers' participation in disseminating findings, including the benefits of spoken authorship. During the training program and the drafting of deliverables, the youth researchers displayed strong analytical skills, but accessing these skills often required verbal prompting—just as teachers ask their students questions to prompt greater consideration of a topic under study (Vogler 2005). Moreover, the majority of the cohort were able to express themselves more fully in spoken English than in the written form. Using some form of coauthorship, such as holding collaborative sessions in which decisions can be made in discussion with others, can enable youth researchers to express themselves freely, unencumbered by concerns about their written English proficiency. This example also illuminates the ethical implications of imposing the educational and academic standards of high-income contexts on

those who not only have not been educated in these systems but who have often also missed significant periods of their own education due to displacement.

CONCLUSION

Voices of Refugee Youth has shown that, when the level of participation is flexible, youth participation in research can have a number of benefits. Consultative participation facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the research context, while ensuring that the findings are relevant and useful to the participants. When refugee youth have access to higher levels of decisionmaking in activities such as data collection, they are able to use their “insider” status to increase participants’ trust, thereby strengthening the quality and equity of the findings. Challenges, including possible positionality-based bias and insufficient skills, can be addressed by ensuring that training is based on a clear understanding of the youth researchers’ context and prior knowledge, and that it includes constant opportunities for reflection on the complexities of the researcher-community member role. In parallel, research organizations that are considering adopting a participatory approach must ensure that refugee researchers are not made to feel that they are representing all refugees, speaking on behalf of all refugees, or becoming experts on all refugee issues.

The benefits of the participatory approach were also felt by the youth researchers themselves. They reported that the practical training dramatically enhanced their research knowledge and skills, which they felt will enable them to participate in future research and increase their employability more generally. These skills, in combination with a greater understanding of the education issues experienced in their own communities, also will enable them to confidently drive future education advocacy for their communities.

Voices of Refugee Youth has sought to maximize the opportunity of engaging with youth as researchers. In this field note, we have articulated how pre-existing power structures may impede this engagement, especially during data-collection and dissemination activities. However, we hope that, in addition to increasing knowledge of effective participatory approaches in refugee research, this field note will lead those in positions of power to consider how they might adapt their conventional ways of operating to include refugee voices. With a little thoughtful facilitation, these voices stand to enrich existing knowledge spaces and ultimately to make a vital contribution to our understanding of postprimary refugee education issues.

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EDUCATION SYSTEMS RESPONSE TO COVID-19: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RESEARCH TO USAID'S EDUCATION AND RESILIENCE AGENDA

JENNIFER FLEMMING, RITESH SHAH, NINA WEISENHORN,
JULIE CHINNERY, AND GWENDOLYN HEANER

ABSTRACT

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems have grappled with the complexity of protecting the wellbeing of learners and educators, along with ensuring learners' continued engagement with learning. This has led to an increasing number of calls to strengthen education-sector resilience to future shocks and stressors, particularly for the most marginalized, in order to maintain momentum toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. Resilience has been and continues to be a key focal point for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), both across the agency and within its education portfolio. In this paper, we reflect on case study research in five contexts—Colombia, Georgia, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Zambia—during the COVID-19 pandemic and apply it to USAID's resilience framework for education. We identify practices and structures used in each context that were either operationalized or could be leveraged further to absorb, adapt, and ultimately transform these education systems when facing a pandemic and other types of stressors and shocks.

Received August 13, 2021; revised June 20, 2022; accepted September 13, 2022; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.

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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems worldwide have grappled with the complex task of protecting learners and educators from health-related risks, while also ensuring students' continued engagement with learning during the recurring school closures. Longer-term recovery efforts focus on returning to in-person learning, addressing learning loss, and meeting learners' needs to ensure their psychosocial wellbeing. National education authorities and institutions also hope to learn from the response to COVID-19 in order to improve preparedness and minimize future disruptions to the provision of education. Hence, since March 2020, a central discourse has emerged within the international community on the need to build back better and strengthen education-sector resilience beyond the immediate effects of a pandemic.

For the US Agency for International Development (USAID), strengthening individual, household, community, and system resilience has been and continues to be a key focus across the agency and in its education portfolio. The *USAID Policy Framework* (2019) stresses the importance of a resilience-focused approach to programming in order to ensure that its investments are not compromised by complex crises and natural disasters. Strengthening resilience by building capacity across the various levels of a system is considered vital to enabling partner countries to prevent, mitigate, and recover from crises that might otherwise set them back (USAID 2018).

In 2019, USAID published a white paper articulating the bidirectional relationship between resilience and education outcomes, and the implications for education programming (Shah 2019). The white paper acknowledged common critiques of resilience; namely, unclear definitions and its confusion with the concept of self-reliance (O'Malley 2010; Mitchell 2013). Resilience is becoming an increasingly commonplace objective in the education in emergencies (EiE) community, but often with poorly defined parameters (Shah, Paulson, and Couch 2019). The white paper therefore emphasized that improving and sustaining education outcomes are the ultimate goals of resilience, and that resilience must be seen as a process rather than an end state.

COVID-19 provided an opportunity for USAID to test the principles and framing of education-sector resilience outlined in the white paper. Using five country case studies conducted between September 2020 and April 2021, we explore in this field note what we have learned about the dynamics of resilience and its relation to COVID-19. While the case studies were initially conceptualized to track how

national education systems supported learning continuity and a return to learning following the closure of education facilities, it became clear while analyzing these responses that the white paper helped us understand what was occurring and why. Our research plan, implementation, and analysis were adapted to produce findings and recommendations that were most relevant to USAID, and to the national, regional, and local actors in each context.

In this field note, we begin by tracing USAID's conceptualization of the education-resilience relationship and how it has become a concept that guides the agency's work in the education sector. Next, we briefly describe how the case study research was carried out and initially analyzed based on the principles of the USAID Return to Learning Toolkit. Using the data generated by the case studies, we then apply concepts taken from the white paper to demonstrate the interrelationships between COVID-19 as an acute shock turned stressor to education systems, and the subsequent ways these dynamics shaped a system's ability to respond in ways that either mitigated or exacerbated existing educational vulnerabilities. Finally, we explore whether and how institutional responses (1) recognized and capitalized on existing strengths and capacities in the system, and (2) identified opportunities to further catalyze actions that were locally led during COVID-19 that could support systems-level transformation over the long term.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE EDUCATION-RESILIENCE CONNECTION: USAID'S JOURNEY, 2012-2020

USAID's 2012 resilience policy (USAID 2012) recognized that recurrent crises were leading to ever-increasing humanitarian needs, eroding development gains, and limiting sustainable and inclusive growth in USAID partner countries. USAID defines resilience as "the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth" (9). This definition emphasizes that developing greater resilience is a way to achieve sectoral development outcomes and reduce humanitarian needs over the long term. Initially, USAID's resilience programming was focused on increasing food security in response to drought and targeted drought-prone regions in Africa. Over time, the uptake and understanding of USAID's resilience policy expanded beyond the food-security sector to influence policies and programming in other

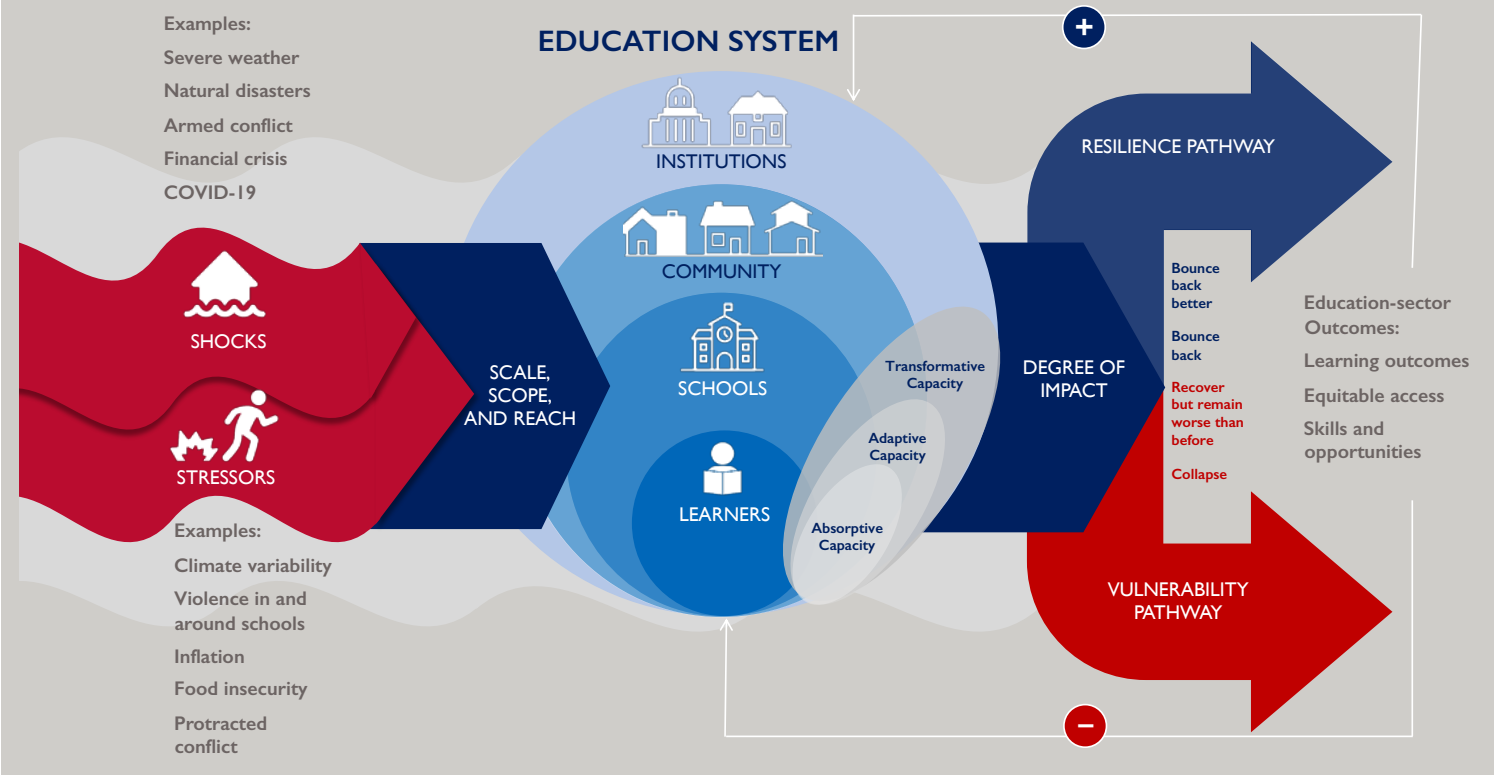
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sectors, including health and education (e.g., *USAID Education Policy*; USAID 2018). This led to the institutionalization of resilience at USAID with the release of the 2019 *USAID Policy Framework*. Meanwhile, the uptake of resilience approaches in USAID's education sector was largely motivated by research on poverty “escape routes,” which found that the education level of the head of household was a source of resilience, particularly in accessing secondary education and for women (Diwakar, Eichsteller, and Shepherd 2021). At that time, USAID was shifting its focus to address underlying vulnerabilities and promote inclusive growth through actions that help households, communities, and institutions minimize exposure to, adapt to, and recover from the shocks and stressors they face.

At the same time, the international development landscape was moving toward a renewed call to improve the coherence of humanitarian and development assistance, including in the education sector. This movement was championed at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, which recognized that crises were affecting a record number of people globally each year (UNOCHA 2016). New evidence concurrently demonstrated the links between inequitable access to quality education and the likelihood of violent conflict and household vulnerability (Omoeva, Hatch, and Moussa 2016; Cooke 2015). Concepts originating in the disaster risk reduction literature were brought into conversation with humanitarian and development programming under the labels of preparedness, response, and recovery from crises. These developments led a range of organizations to embrace a focus on resilience in education programming across the humanitarian-development nexus, as they began to note its appeal in protecting and mitigating against known risk factors.

In 2018, USAID commissioned the drafting of a white paper to adapt the conceptual framework of resilience to the USAID education sector. The white paper provided an evidence-based case for greater investment in education, due to its potential to address the root causes of vulnerability and to promote transformative development. Specific attributes of education—such as its capacity to affect populations at scale, the demand for it from crisis-affected populations, and the portability of the skills and dispositions it provides—were also noted. The white paper presented a framework for understanding how resilience operates in the education sector, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Resilience and Education Framework



Source: Adapted from Shah (2019)

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First, the white paper noted the interdependent nature between shocks—which are short-term, acute deviations from long-term development trends—and stressors—which are chronic, long-term pressures that undermine the stability of the system. Shocks often occur alongside stressors in EiE contexts, which compounds pre-existing risk factors for vulnerable learners and communities and reduces the system's potential to maintain education outcomes during prolonged crises. Second, the white paper made it clear that shocks and stressors are not experienced uniformly across a population; they vary according to the level of exposure and the population's sensitivity to them. Sensitivity is shaped by individual, household, community, and institutional characteristics that either reduce or increase the impact of uniform risk exposure on individuals or population groups. This influences their ability to deploy resilience strategies and leads to differential educational outcomes. Third, the white paper identified resilience capacities as the types of assets, skills, resources, and networks that are used to anticipate and deal with exposure to a combination of shocks and stressors, and to reduce overall sensitivity and vulnerability to these risks. Resilience capacities take three forms:

- Absorptive capacities, which are used to minimize exposure and sensitivity to shocks and stressors through coping strategies and risk-mitigation measures in an attempt to prevent permanent, deleterious impacts
- Adaptive capacities, which are used to make choices or pivot strategies in response to longer-term shocks or stressors in order to improve wellbeing outcomes
- Transformative capacities, which enable conditions for systemic change to occur through governance structures, funding mechanisms, policies and regulations, and norms and structures, and also facilitate long-term resilience at the individual, household, and community levels

Fourth, the white paper noted that, in any given crisis, these capacities can and should function concurrently. Because resilience manifests through social processes (i.e., the socioecological framing at the center of Figure 1), there is a critical need for the nested capacities and responses of individuals, communities, and institutions to be connected through effective governance, coordination, communication, and partnership mechanisms. A particular action, relationship, network, or resource is only an effective resilience capacity when an enabling environment exists and endures. It is the relationship between a particular set of shocks and stressors, a populations' exposure to them, and the capacities that are leveraged across an

education system in response that determines whether education and wellbeing outcomes are maintained, improved, or suffer (Béné et al. 2016).

The white paper was a first step toward institutionalizing a resilience-focused approach across USAID’s education programming. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the USAID Center for Education identified an opportunity to apply concepts from the white paper. It developed the Return to Learning Toolkit, which highlights “how short-term responses can contribute to building transformative resilience capacities both during and after a crisis” and identifies opportunities to build resilience capacities through crisis-response planning and implementation (Boisvert, Weisenhorn, and Bowen 2020).

CASE STUDY RESEARCH: TRACING THE RETURN-TO-LEARNING PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

In September 2020, the USAID Center for Education commissioned a set of case studies to document localized actions undertaken by education system actors between March 2020 and April 2021. The intention was to document the process by which education authorities navigated school reopenings during or after the prolonged crisis created by COVID-19. Within this study, attention was given to how and with what effect countries (1) reached and retained marginalized populations; (2) adapted instructional time, curriculum, and learning support; (3) modified exams and learner promotion practices; and (4) re-engaged and prepared infrastructure for a safe, equitable, and inclusive return to learning.

Beyond this, USAID sought to understand how useful the *Return to Learning Framework* (Boisvert et al. 2020) was for conceptualizing, planning, and implementing the education response to COVID-19. What became clear once the research commenced and subsequent waves of COVID-19 led to recurrent disrupted education was that many elements of the *Return to Learning Framework* were not well suited to such a dynamic context. It was then that the explanatory potential of the *Education and Resilience Framework* (Shah 2019) became more resonant, particularly in terms of understanding outcomes and lessons learned from this period.

Case study research was conducted in Zambia, Lebanon, Nigeria, Colombia, and Georgia.¹ These countries were purposefully selected to provide a diverse range of contexts in terms of geographic location, other known preexisting risk factors,

¹ Full case study reports for each country, as well as the *Synthesis Report*, can be accessed at <https://www.eccnetwork.net/resources/resilience-return-learning-case-studies>.

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and previous experience with and response to crises. The researchers collaborated closely with the USAID Center for Education, and with the USAID Mission in each country. The research team consisted of four global-level and one in-country researcher per site.²

Data collection was carried out between December 2020 and April 2021 using two methods: (1) ongoing review of country-level documentation (official national reports, strategies, and policies published between March 2020 and April 2021); and (2) four waves of primary data collection through key informant interviews with actors in the education sector, which focused mainly on institutional-level planning, decisionmaking, and processes. The in-country researcher conducted these interviews with representatives of government agencies, donor agencies, universities, local and international nongovernmental organizations (I/NGOs), civil society organizations, and the private sector. At the end of each wave, the global and country researchers and the USAID team came together to discuss and review the emerging findings. After each workshop, lines of inquiry for the subsequent wave of data collection were agreed to, based on emerging areas of interest. In total, 234 interviews were conducted across the five countries, as per Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Interviewees for Study

	Colombia	Georgia	Lebanon	Nigeria	Zambia	TOTAL
Government officials	14	22	14	8	6	64
Donors	2	3	9	5	4	23
UN or World Bank	1	2				3
International and local NGOs	7	8	9	7	13	46
Civil society	12	8		5	5	22
Private-sector education actors	5			3		8
Principals, teachers		14	38			52
TOTAL	43	57	70	27	37	234

² Research protocols reflected a “do no harm” principle, informed consent was obtained for all interviews, and confidentiality was upheld in all reporting. Ethical protocols for the research were agreed to and approved by USAID.

In analyzing the data for each case study, we first mapped out the ways COVID-19 interacted with the pre-existing stressors and shocks the education system was facing. We then documented national-level responses against each of the five return-to-learning priorities presented in the USAID toolkit.³ We explored the outcomes of these decisions, particularly in terms of ensuring equitable and inclusive access to education, supporting learners' wellbeing, enabling learners' continuity of learning with minimal learning loss, and building the overall resilience of the education system. A synthesis report was produced from these case studies, which assessed whether and how the *Education and Resilience Framework* could help USAID and other education actors understand and explain what was observed across the five countries (see Heaner et al. 2021). In the remainder of this field note, we focus on the conclusions made based on this report.

RESILIENCE, EDUCATION SYSTEMS, AND COVID-19

Across the five case study countries, large variations in the response to COVID-19 were noted during the research timeframe. Many of these differences can be understood by how COVID-19 interacted with the other shocks and stressors these countries were facing, the degree to which exposure and sensitivity to COVID-19 was accounted for in the decisionmaking process, and the education system's ability to leverage pre-COVID-19 capacities and afford space for emergent capacities to respond quickly or innovatively to localized needs.

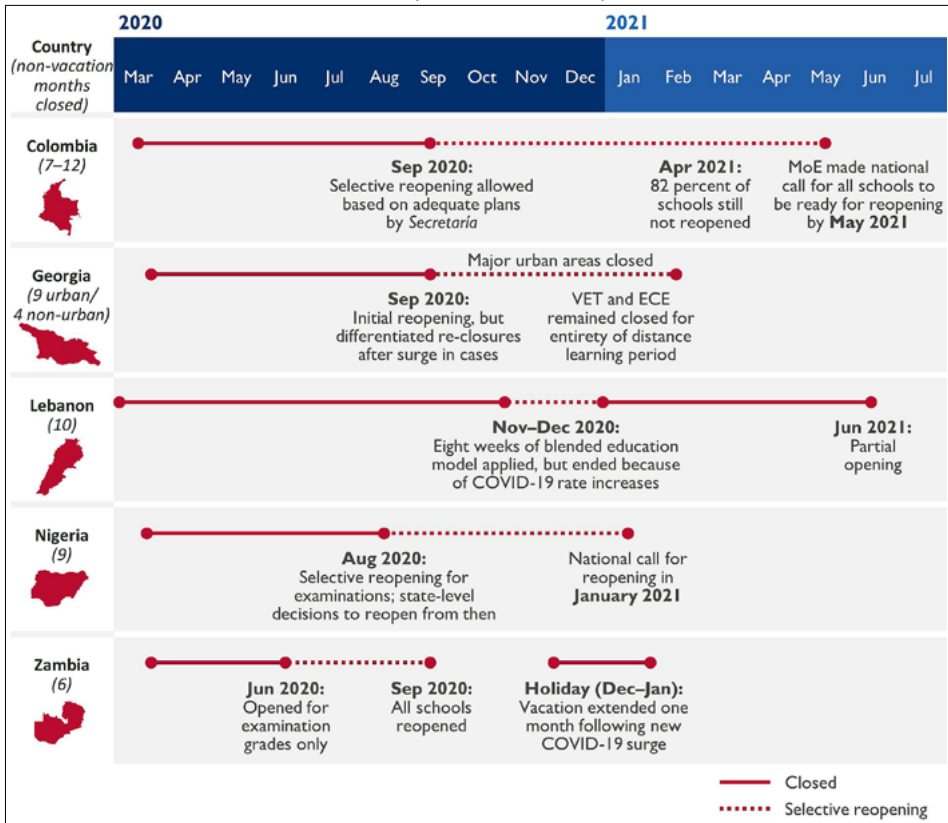
THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF SHOCKS AND STRESSORS

Our research highlighted how the pandemic evolved from being perceived and acted on as a single shock to becoming a chronic stressor within the education landscape. Early public health guidance that prioritized minimizing exposure to a new infectious disease led to abrupt and widespread school closures that lasted for weeks or months (see Figure 2). Shortly thereafter, education systems launched short-term responses to sustain educational engagement, which were typically provided through distance learning platforms, and planned for a return to in-person school before subsequent COVID-19 waves forced the schools to cancel or delay reopening. Figure 2 highlights these variations from country to country between March 2020 and July 2021.

³ These are (1) (re)engaging all learners, especially the most marginalized, in learning; (2) developing comprehensive plans for reopening learning institutions, ensuring the physical safety of students, teachers, and school administrators, whether meeting in person or remotely; (3) making modifications to instructional time, curriculum, and learning support to prioritize core learning objectives; (4) being strategic and methodical in making changes to examination and promotions procedures; and (5) ensuring that responses take into account the professional, safety, and psychosocial needs of education personnel.

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Figure 2: Timeline of School Closures, Reopening, and Total Months Closed, Public Primary and Secondary Schools



Source: Heaner et al. (2021)

It became clear that global guidance developed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, including USAID’s own Return to Learning Toolkit, was not sufficiently adaptable to the pandemic as it evolved into a longstanding stressor on education continuity. National responses reflected varying awareness of the changing nature of the crisis and the need to put in place longer-term solutions to keep children engaged and learning. For example, in northern Nigeria, where radio programs serving marginalized learners since 2017 were redeployed in response to COVID-19, the state education boards in Adamawa, Sokoto, and Borno states (with I/NGO support) recognized the low uptake of these and other distance learning modalities. In response, they established community-based learning centers, where learners could gather and listen to educational radio programming in person. In Zambia, initial guidance and efforts to provide distance learning during the school closures (via radio, television, and internet-based instruction) proved ineffective in terms of student engagement, largely because of the low

percentage of households across the country with access to these modes of learning. Thus, the national response evolved toward prioritizing school readiness for safe in-person learning and away from the alternative modes of education delivery characteristic of the initial months of the pandemic.

Interactions between COVID-19 and other shocks and stressors also became increasingly visible as the pandemic continued. In Lebanon and Zambia, acute financial and political crises intersected with COVID-19 and eroded the effectiveness of institutional, community, and individual assets, resources, and skills. COVID-19 also acted as a catalyst for exacerbating social dynamics, particularly between displaced populations and host communities in Nigeria, Lebanon, and Colombia. In Colombia, the government responded by granting temporary protective status to Venezuelan migrants, which enabled them to access formal schooling and other social services. In contrast, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon did not provide clear guidance for responding to the educational needs of refugees; instead, nonstate education actors, such as I/NGOs and civil society organizations, stepped in to collaborate on the creation of strategy and guidance to ensure that refugee populations would have continued access to education.

Local capacities existed in some contexts that had preexisting stressors, and they were built on further to respond to disruptions of education. In Lebanon, Nigeria, and Zambia, for example, established education-sector working groups composed of both government and nongovernmental actors were able to quickly mobilize technical and financial resources for the COVID-19 response.

In Lebanon, which has the world's highest ratio of refugees per capita (UNHCR 2018), the core plan underpinning the education-sector crisis response was collaboratively crafted in 2014 at the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis by the Government of Lebanon, UN agencies, and other sectoral stakeholders. It set in place mechanisms for state and nonstate actors to contribute to and jointly develop formal and nonformal education programming for both Lebanese and Syrians. Thus, interagency coordination had been well established before the onset of COVID-19 in response to the prior, ongoing crisis. This enabled them to quickly mobilize the later response and to maintain refugee learners' access to education.

EXPOSURE AND SENSITIVITY

Countrywide school closures were enacted across all five case study countries at the onset of COVID-19 (see Figure 2). Education decisionmakers—such as ministry staff at both the national and local levels—presumed that all segments of

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society were equally at risk for COVID-19 exposure. However, it quickly became apparent that certain populations were more exposed to the virus and more sensitive to its direct and indirect effects. Over time, the public health response shifted to a more targeted approach in order to protect the most vulnerable. There was varying capacity across the five countries' education responses to capture and acknowledge the differential risk exposure and the related effects on groups of learners, educators, and communities.

For example, exposure to COVID-19 was tied strongly to population density, and it became increasingly apparent that there were lower case rates in rural areas than in urban areas. In Georgia, this led to a trajectory for reopening the schools in the eight largest cities that differed from the rest of the country. While all schools returned to in-person learning in September 2020, school-level monitoring and tracking of COVID-19 case rates showed that the risk of exposure at school was too great in the major cities. As a result, these schools resumed distance learning until February 2021.

The COVID-19 experience emphasizes that a starting point for response efforts in any crisis should be to identify the populations that are most exposed and most sensitive to the risk(s). Education systems that both identified differences in sensitivity and exposure to COVID-19 and had mechanisms to respond to these needs were poised to mitigate the negative effects on education. Georgia's differentiated response, described above, used these concepts effectively.

In Zambia, the national COVID-19 *Education Contingency Plan* explicitly emphasized the need to reach the most marginalized learners, noting that "efforts must aspire to reach all children in Zambia with an appropriate platform, with due consideration for girls, children with disabilities, refugees and migrants, and other vulnerable groups" (Ministry of General Education of Zambia 2020, 4). When Zambia received funding from the Global Partnership for Education in May 2020, they used it to serve marginalized learners in specific provinces. Zambia's response, however, was an exception. In other contexts, and despite evidence that particular groups were more sensitive or more often exposed to the effects of COVID-19, discrete education programming and resourcing to address this heightened vulnerability appeared to be limited.

THE FUNCTIONALITY OF RESILIENCE CAPACITIES

Across all five country contexts, resilience capacities visibly manifested themselves with varying degrees of impact on the system. This was determined by the extent to which such capacities (1) were acknowledged, (2) were supported by other levels of the system, and (3) could maintain their function in the face of other political, social, and economic stressors and shocks.

Where countries or more localized actors in the system had a track record of learning from, adapting to, and seeking transformation of the factors underpinning education system vulnerability, there was perhaps a stronger ability to both recognize and draw from the resources already available. This was most evident in Georgia, where significant efforts had been made to build school- and district-level leadership in recent decades. This decentralized capacity was leveraged during COVID-19. The national guidelines for school reopening gave latitude to district and school leaders. Additionally, prior investments in regional capacity allowed for better monitoring and reporting of COVID-19 effects from the school to district to national level. With many of these structures in place, the Government of Georgia was able to respond to more localized needs.

The education sector in Colombia had been similarly decentralized down to the regional *secretaría* level in 2002. When the ministry of education began developing reopening plans after the initial COVID-19-related school closures, they were delegated to the *secretaría* level to develop region- or school-appropriate reopening plans that took into account each area's contextual needs and strengths, as well as the prevalence of COVID-19 in each area. The ministry required that these plans be submitted for approval and designed additional approaches to monitor the efficacy of the implementation. By the end of 2020, the ministry had a solidified strategy, using the G20 model, to offer further support from the national to the regional levels of government, including targeted assistance to *secretarías* that were struggling to implement their plans.

In some contexts, a limited state-led response led nongovernmental education actors to take an active role in responding to COVID-19. This was particularly true in Zambia, Lebanon, and northern Nigeria, where the well-coordinated structures of interagency working groups may be understood as a capacity in themselves. In these contexts, the technical and financial resources mobilized by external actors to support or supplement government-led efforts were vital to mitigating negative outcomes for learners.

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The Zambian government's COVID-19 *Education Contingency Plan* was itself a collaborative effort among the Ministry of General Education and the Education Technical Working Group, which were comprised of a network of stakeholders in the education sector that included international and national NGOs, donors, UN organizations, the World Bank, and civil society organizations. The plan was produced within weeks of the first recorded case of COVID-19 in Zambia, which was one of the first ten countries to apply for and receive direct assistance for its pandemic education response through the Global Partnership for Education's accelerated funding mechanism. This effort to quickly mobilize the planning, funding, and, ultimately, the implementation of a COVID-19 response plan was dependent on the strong interagency cooperative structures already in place.

In northern Nigeria, the EiE working group, which was comprised of 50 partner organizations, mobilized quickly and in collaboration with both national and state education authorities. Members of the working group collaborated on perception surveys, needs assessments, and on sharing resources and tools. The group also emphasized reaching the most marginalized learners, which led them to prioritize radio instruction and community-level implementation of education activities.

ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR SUPPORTING RESILIENCE CAPACITIES

Through our research, we found that diverse actors and approaches across the education system—as well as redundancy and multiple entry points—supported its resilience. Decentralized planning and response capacity appeared to allow for more flexible and context-specific decisionmaking. Specific regions or decentralized actors were best positioned to make decisions about the appropriate and relevant actions for their location, schools, and learners. A system's ability to differentiate responses ensured that schools did not have to apply guidance uniformly, and that learners in less affected areas could continue in-person education.

However, empowered regional or district-level education action was most effective when national guidance and technical and financial support were available. National guidelines and priorities were set for both Colombia and Georgia but were left to subnational actors to implement. Colombia notably aimed to offer continued technical support to the secretaría level, which was different from past crises. Continued monitoring and support from the national level ensured a safe and effective return to learning.

Nigeria also operates on a decentralized education governance model, with much of the authority for education situated at the state level. During COVID-19, the ministry of education produced national guidelines for schools to reopen, but the ultimate decisions were made at the state level and, in the northern states, in cooperation with I/NGOs working on the EiE response there. The research found considerable challenges in monitoring the progress of reopening efforts at the state level, and in assessing learners' educational needs in specific states during COVID-19. As such, with limited information to report to national actors, these states operated without sufficient context-specific support from the ministry.

COVID-19 also offered space for innovative approaches to education challenges to emerge. Innovations arose out of necessity and functioned largely as absorptive responses, with potential to grow into adaptive or transformative capacities. For example, in Lebanon, a nonformal education-sector needs assessment prompted actors to pivot their delivery modalities and to invest additional resources through WhatsApp and similar applications. And yet the nonformal education response remained marginalized in the national response and reached only some learners (i.e., refugees), due to the existing national education policy. Nonetheless, opportunities exist to apply low-cost, technology-based solutions from the nonformal education subsector to support all learners' academic and wellbeing outcomes.

In Georgia, informal networks of teacher support emerged quickly once the schools closed and distance learning began. New channels of professional learning and peer support—largely Facebook groups—flourished as a place to discuss policies, classroom practices, and pedagogical ideas and solutions. One Facebook group, with a 300-person membership pre-COVID-19, grew to more than 30,000 participants during the pandemic. While state-led efforts supported teachers formally, informal networks were able to offer swift, personalized support as teachers adapted to distance learning and eventually to the return to in-person instruction. These networks were effective because they were driven by teachers' needs and interests.

CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE

USAID's education and resilience white paper, and the subsequent research conducted during COVID-19, provide both a theoretical framework and concrete evidence of how resilience dynamics function in the education sector. There are several implications for USAID's future work.

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First, the return-to-learning process and response must work along a continuum of preparedness, response, and recovery actions. For USAID and its partners, this requires greater attention in the medium- to long-term approaches to recovery that identify and target learners who have become more vulnerable due to the pandemic, and preparedness measures that protect them from future shocks and ongoing stressors.

Second, the pandemic reaffirms the importance of risk-informed planning and processes across all USAID education programs and responses. Tools, such as the USAID Rapid Education and Risk Analysis and the USAID Political Economy Analysis, need to be used more throughout the program cycle, along with increasing adaptive management approaches in all contexts, but especially in complex EiE contexts. Additionally, in the Return to Learning Toolkit and other USAID COVID-19 guidance and tools, concepts of exposure and sensitivity to risk must be starting points for ensuring a focus on equity and inclusion across all education-sector investments.

Third, resilience capacities do not manifest in the same way across countries or over time. Local strategies, networks, and resources remain absorptive in nature and are insufficient during times of crisis if they are not linked to institutional capacities that enable them to be adaptive and, ultimately, transformative. Additionally, the ability of resilience capacities to protect learning and wellbeing outcomes may be mediated by the complexity, intensity, duration, and scale of shocks and stressors. COVID-19 has reminded us that resilience should not be conflated with self-sufficiency.

Finally, and perhaps most important, COVID-19 has reaffirmed the idea that resilience should be seen as a process rather than an outcome. Capacities across the education system are only resilient if they result in maintained and improved education outcomes. However, the pandemic also highlights that achieving these outcomes is strongly linked to resilience capacities in other sectors, such as governance, health, and social protection. Using the concept of resilience and the collective outcome of maintaining and improving wellbeing in times of crisis provides an opportunity to program and plan in order to achieve longer-term, systems-oriented, and sustainable educational outcomes for all.

DISCLOSURES

Funding for this research and article was provided by the USAID Center for Education under the Education Support Initiative, under contract AID-OAA-M-15-00016 to Dexis Consulting Group and subcontracted to GK Consulting. The third author of this manuscript is an employee of USAID.

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily the views and opinions of USAID.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CONNECTED LEARNING: UNVEILING THE POTENTIAL AND THE LIMITS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN DADAAB REFUGEE CAMP

HAEUN KIM, MIRCO STELLA, AND KASSAHUN HITICHA

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, York University, through the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees Project, has provided higher education in situ to refugee and local teachers in Dadaab, Kenya, one of the world's largest and longest standing refugee camps. In 2020, COVID-19 aggravated the insecurity and marginalization already present in Dadaab, which had profound effects on the education infrastructure and tested the university's capacity to continue to offer equitable and quality education. In this field note, we explore and reflexively capture the innovative responses to the complex challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and unpack the limits and the potential of distance education in Dadaab.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, York University (YU) in Toronto, Canada, has been delivering in situ university programs to refugees and locals in Dadaab, Kenya (Giles 2018). YU leads the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) Project, which is a development project involving Kenyan and Canadian universities and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). These organizations are working together to improve the quality of education in northeast Kenya by

Received August 15, 2021; revised October 12, 2021; accepted October 26, 2022; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
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ISSN 2518-6833

offering internationally recognized and accredited certificates, diplomas, and degrees to untrained refugee and local teachers (Dippo, Orgocka, and Giles 2013). In 2018, YU began offering a tuition-free master of education program to BHER students in Dadaab who had completed an undergraduate degree. Since its launch, BHER has enrolled more than four hundred students in accredited tertiary programs. The project has developed considerable expertise in delivering blended university degrees in Dadaab, as it had to find solutions to continue programs through times of regional insecurity and violence, political strife, and environmental challenges (Duale, Munene, and Njogu 2021). Despite BHER's extensive experience, COVID-19 tested the boundaries of its capacity to continue offering equitable and quality education, and also pushed the limits of students, instructors, and project staff members alike.

This field note is a reflection and analysis of YU's response to the complex challenges encountered while offering online tertiary programs to refugee students in an encampment during the COVID-19 pandemic. We, the three authors, reside in Toronto and Dadaab; our collaboration signifies our desire to develop reciprocal relations in the creation of research and knowledge, particularly in the field of refugee and migration studies. We begin the article by contextualizing Dadaab and the BHER Learning Centre (LC), the hub of our programs. We describe the impact COVID-19 had in Dadaab, and then describe the potential and the limits of distance learning in times of crisis. We conclude with a reflection on the importance of place and human encounters as a foundation for connected and online learning, along with recommendations for future practice.

CONTEXT OF PLACE AND PRACTICE

DADAAB, KENYA

Dadaab is an isolated border town located in the semi-arid North Eastern Province of Kenya, 90 kilometers west of the Somali border (Giles 2018). In 1991, refugee camps were established around Dadaab to host an influx of refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia (Mohaghan 2021). Dadaab has since been home to three generations of refugees, hosting more than a half-million people at its peak. As of May 2021, more than 226,000 refugees were living in three camps surrounding Dadaab: Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley. Ninety-six percent of the refugees are Somali, the remaining 4 percent are from different parts of Eastern and Central Africa (UNHCR 2021). The insecurity, poverty, and historic marginalization in North Eastern Province means that there are few opportunities for residents

to earn teaching certifications, and trained teachers are unwilling to work in the region (Waswa 2012; Mwangi 2019). BHER was formed to help address the educational needs of refugees and locals in Dadaab through teacher training.¹

THE BHER LEARNING CENTRE

The construction in Dadaab of an on-site university campus for teacher-centered tertiary programs was a novel response to urgent educational needs (Dippo et al. 2013). Before BHER, the only university opportunities in Dadaab were international scholarships for select, top-performing students who moved out of the camps, and some limited technical and vocational education and training courses (Wright and Plasterer 2012). The LC was constructed in 2013 in Dadaab town, in an effort to boost opportunities for education in situ. The infrastructure enabled the project to reach a greater number of students at a cost benefit while maintaining the delivery of high-quality programs, as well as ensuring the safety of students, faculty, and staff in a marginalized and volatile region (Dippo et al. 2013).² The LC comprises three seminar rooms, three lecture halls, two computer labs, and administrative offices, all equipped with wifi and reliable electricity. Security guards and a dedicated project staff are on site to help the students with academics, information and communications technology (ICT), and logistics. In a region characterized by scarce resources, insecurity, and political tension, the LC offers a reliable, well resourced, safe space for students to come together, to learn, and to collaborate.

The LC serves as the hub for all BHER activities at which learning communities are fostered. Instructors from Canada and students from the refugee camps meet both face-to-face and online at the LC. YU programs follow cohorts of students through a blend of in-person and online distance learning models (Picciano et al. 2021). As most students are working teachers, face-to-face courses take place in the months of August, December, and April, when the Dadaab schools are on break. Instructors travel from Canada to teach intensive in-person classes during this time. Students then take online courses during the fall (September-December) and winter (January-April) semesters, meeting with instructors via Zoom once a week. The project pays a stipend for transportation and lunch to students who travel to the LC to attend classes. While not perfect, the LC and its infrastructure equalize the playing field for many learners: female students are able to learn and

1 The BHER admissions target is 75 percent refugee, 25 percent local.

2 Although the cost of constructing a local campus in 2013 was sizable, it proved to be more cost-effective for multiple cohorts of students than other higher education delivery modes, such as relocating students to local Kenyan universities or giving them scholarships abroad.

collaborate alongside male students in a safe space; a childcare/nursing room is available to students with young children; and students from households with no connectivity can access the internet (Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, and Adelman 2017; Brugha, Hollow, and Gladwell 2020). Even when Canadian instructors could not enter Dadaab for security reasons, the LC remained open, and students continued to collaborate and work together without instructors. The in-situ infrastructure has been and continues to be a critical part of our programs' successes.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 resulted in numerous programmatic disruptions: (1) the cancellation of on-site courses in April, August, and December 2020; (2) program and financial restructuring; (3) institutional delays (e.g., postponed in-person exams, delayed graduation audits because university staff members worked from home) in Kenya and Canada due to university closures in both countries; and (4) a ten-month closing of the LC in Dadaab. Program activities were halted to protect the health and safety of our students and staff, who were our utmost priority. The closing of international borders meant that no instructors or staff members from Canada were permitted to travel to Kenya. In compliance with directives from the World Health Organization and the Government of Kenya, the LC closed on March 20, 2020, and the field staff returned to Nairobi. We were unable to reopen until January 27, 2021.

The cancellation of face-to-face sessions and the closing of the LC created significant challenges to learning and access. The lockdown and restrictions on movement in Kenya meant that students could not convene. Instructors and project staff members had to quickly reimagine courses so students could complete the coursework safely and successfully while studying individually, with no computer labs and only an unreliable power supply and networks.

POTENTIAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

During the ten-month LC closure, students studied in their respective camps. YU continued to offer courses; we were able to retain most of the students in the undergraduate and graduate programs (96% completion rate in certificate; 95% retention in undergraduate; 100% retention in master's). For the purposes of this discussion, we contend that program's success can be measured by high retention

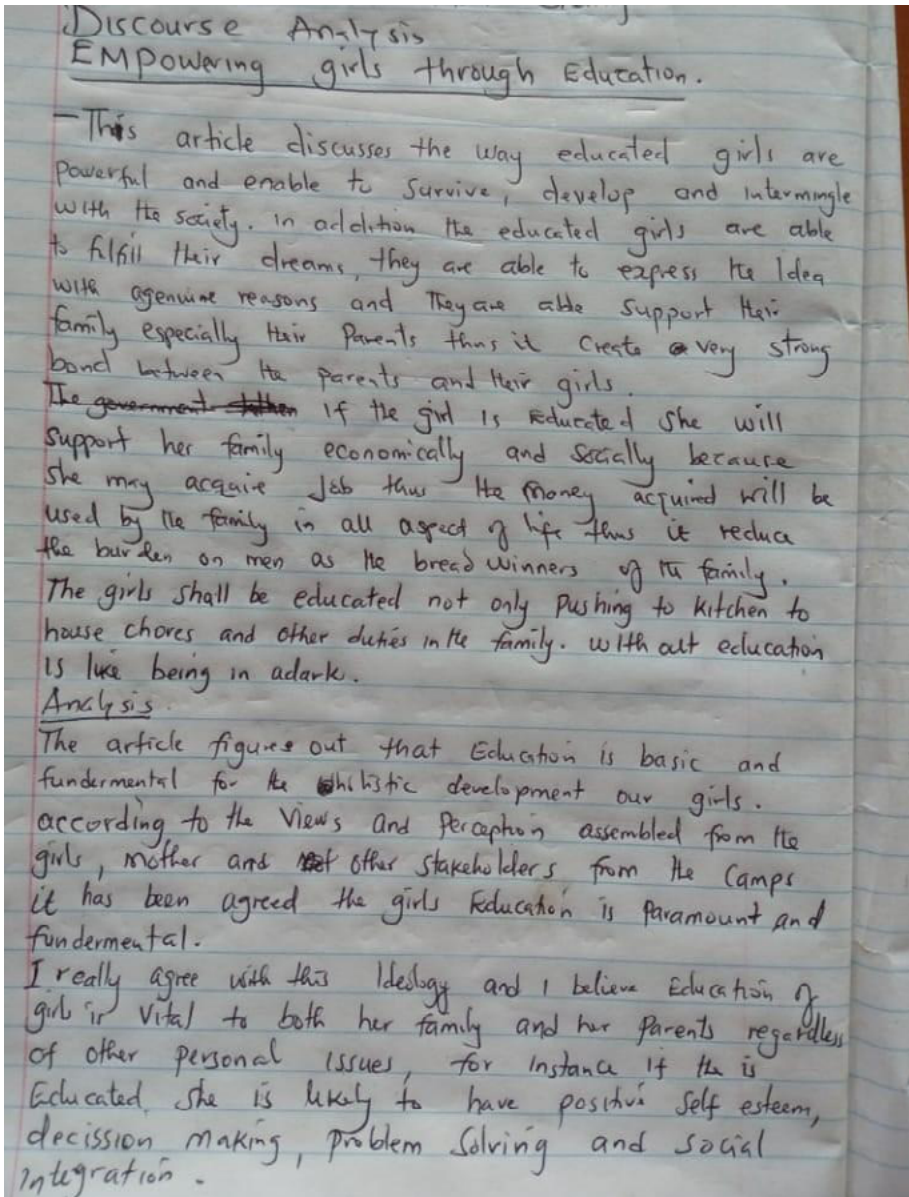
rates, which means we were able to have a “successful” year despite COVID-19 by tapping into the potential of technology and distance education.

ADAPTATION OF COURSES AND TECHNOLOGY TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

The prolonged closure of the LC meant that BHER had to secure the resources and infrastructure needed for students to study on their own. While there were procurement challenges and delays, the project secured laptops for graduate students, tablets for undergraduate students, and data bundles for all. Technology and internet connection were made available, but the coursework had to be adapted into low-bandwidth models because of the unreliable power supply and connectivity in the camps. Courses were redesigned at the onset of the pandemic, when international travel became impossible; however, a continual recalibration of course designs took place throughout. As online teaching commenced, student engagement was a challenge. Many instructors responded with emergent and ongoing replanning and by re-spatializing the “flows” (i.e., pacing) of courses. Examples of this include changing the pace of courses by switching to biweekly or even three-week cycles to complete the readings, which allowed the courses to slow down and afforded students ample time to review previous readings and materials. One instructor used a careful evaluation to structure a system of differentiated instruction, which involved creating smaller cohorts within the classes of students who had similar outcomes and goals. These cohorts functioned as focused learning communities in which students encouraged and supported one another in an otherwise overwhelmingly challenging time.

Conference calls facilitated by local peer mentors were implemented in other courses to enable students’ real-time collaboration and discussion of readings across the camps. Instructors adopted differentiated resources (e.g., interactive summary notes through Otter.ai, Zoom Whiteboard) to supplement the weekly classes. In addition to the traditional way of submitting digital assignments using learning management systems, students were able to submit select assignments via smartphones using voice notes and photos of handwritten texts on WhatsApp (see Figure 1). Ad hoc strategies took place in each course, based on key updates from the field staff members, who made weekly phone calls to the students. The university developed greater acceptance and flexibility in terms of creative online solutions. This meant that, as the project staff liaised continually with instructors and students, they were able to adopt creative and multipronged solutions for engagement, assessments, retention, etc.

Figure 1: Handwritten Assignment Submitted via Photo Sharing on WhatsApp



CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

Having to rely solely on distance education prompted instructors and staff members to interact and collaborate in new and creative ways for the benefit of the students. The field staff in Kenya and instructors in Canada worked together to develop and support differentiated instruction for the students. Working across Zoom,

WhatsApp, and GoogleDrive, the instructors and field staff prepared assessments and summaries and coordinated teaching sessions based on student evaluations. Continual communication throughout this process was crucial: staff members and instructors met using a blend of synchronous meetings via phone and video calls, while collaborating asynchronously on shared cloud platforms to develop detailed documentation of students' ongoing progress. The field staff typically provided logistical support in order to create an optimal learning environment for YU instructors in Canada to teach in, but COVID-19 created a need for new solutions. The cofacilitation of coursework by both instructors and staff members in Canada and Kenya was an innovative strategy that enabled the delivery in Dadaab of a weeklong, graduate-level remedial workshop across time zones. The field staff worked on course content with students in the morning in Kenya (night-time in Canada), provided formative assessments that were uploaded online, then in the afternoon (early morning in Canada), the YU instructor and teaching assistant would use feedback from the field staff to work online with students in the afternoon via Zoom. This represented a noteworthy pedagogical innovation that we hope to repeat and adapt in the new academic year.

We note here that stepping out of our typical roles represented a “beautiful risk” (Biesta 2013), but it also required the staff members and instructors to share a strong commitment. Prior collaborations, strong collegiality, and understanding across great distances generated the motivation and synergies to implement these solutions.

LOCAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

To support undergraduate students during COVID-19, the project staff and instructors worked closely with, and relied heavily on, local peer mentors, who were on-site BHER master's students in Dadaab. BHER had implemented the peer mentorships before COVID-19, but the pandemic expanded these opportunities for master's students. The peer mentors attested to becoming better adult educators through this experience, as they learned to be more flexible and to build and maintain trust with the students. While the experience was challenging, the additional responsibilities enabled the peer mentors to ascertain which strategies worked and which did not, and to feed that knowledge back into the project. Local capacity-building had implications beyond the academic programs, as the peer mentors also collaborated on supporting a refugee-led project to distribute soap to BHER students across the Dadaab camps.

LIMITS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

While YU students completed the 2020-2021 academic year and remained on track to complete their programs within the project funding cycle, we remain critical of our “success.” Students were successful in passing their courses, but this does not necessarily translate into a satisfying and quality learning experience. Momentum, community, and the dialogue of learning were fostered through intangible face-to-face encounters embedded in the blended model, and were sorely missed when we moved fully online. The following section explores the limits faced while delivering distance education during COVID-19.

CONNECTIVITY, HARDWARE, AND ENVIRONMENT

Despite our best efforts to secure the resources and infrastructure needed for the students, we were limited by the overall infrastructure of the camps. The refugees do not have access to an electric power grid, so charging devices was a significant challenge. The function of the cell towers in the camps is also spotty. Without the LC, inequities among the students became more evident. The students’ different social and geographic locations and the physical limits of the camp appeared more significant than ever, which led to wider performance gaps. Even for those with connectivity, studying in the camps amid the heat, noise, and internet traffic was extremely challenging, as one student noted:

The home environment was also not like the Learning Centre where you easily interact and socialize with fellow students. It is not conducive for reading and concentration. The outside environment is very hot during the day, and noisy. This is unlike the learning center where I have the advantage of enjoying air conditioner while in the learning room...I have to sleep too early and wake up at around midnight so that I focus on my work, as the internet past midnight is always strong.

The lack of ICT support emerged more clearly every time YU updated the online security and access requirements for the e-learning management systems from Canada, which further disrupted students’ learning experience.

FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTERS, RELATIONALITY, AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF A LEARNING COMMUNITY

BHER's blended model enabled us to hold three face-to-face sessions at the LC each year. These sessions were a regular convergence of operational staff, instructors, and students from Kenya and Canada. When everyone came together physically in the place of learning, the moments of interruption in the online coursework enabled the administrative staff and instructors in Canada to better understand the context and challenges, which helped them improve the course and program design. It also enabled students to build a trusting relationship with their instructors. The stories and affective bonds stemming from those moments represented the promises (in a political-Arendtian sense; Orlie 1995) we made to each other. Our face-to-face commitments refreshed our subsequent online interactions, as we enjoyed new energy, motivation, and shared understandings of each other and of new ways of being together. These regular face-to-face encounters were critical in gearing up momentum and building the relationships that laid the foundations for a strong social, cognitive, and teaching presence in the virtual learning communities, and for the overall success of the online programs (Lomicka 2020). The loss of these repeated cycles of face-to-face interaction became increasingly evident as the pandemic progressed, as the students' engagement and performance began to drop.

FROM COLLECTIVE TO INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

Social distancing and movement restrictions meant that students could no longer come together physically. This made doing collective work very difficult, so instructors and students had to focus on doing individual work online. Learning divorced from the community translated into a heightened focus on knowledge as ready-made "content"—skills, tasks, concepts, and parceled-out knowledge that was "reduced to the bones" (Yosso 2005). The content and knowledge were further removed from students' lived experiences, and the possibilities for more critical and collaborative engagement were reduced or limited. To account for these challenges, instructors and peer mentors were continually lowering their expectations, which at some point was no longer fair or beneficial to the students. It tied education to "what is," which essentially meant "handing over the responsibility for education to forces outside of education" (Biesta and Säfström 2011, 541).

The individualized learning experience was an unfortunate necessity for online learning during COVID-19. But it meant that each student was left to their own devices—both literally and figuratively. This was reflected in the stale and unrehearsed quality of the work submitted.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: HUMAN ENCOUNTERS

The last decade has seen the rapid emergence of connected learning (CL) in higher education projects like BHER. CL is described as “the development and exchange of knowledge and ideas among students and faculty through the use of information technology that enables learning not bound by geographical limitations...in the contexts of higher education in displacement/fragility” (CLCC 2017, 2). These projects aim to use “technologies to decrease rather than increase disparities” and to “create universal learning-on-demand opportunities” (Chambers 2010, cited in Wright and Plasterer 2012, 50) in the margins, including in refugee camps, where the demand and need are greatest.

Universities in the Global North and South have been developing and delivering degrees, diplomas, and courses using a variety of blended learning models. They have been making use of ICTs such as Open Education Resources, Massive Online Open Courses, and others (Giles 2018; Crea and Sparnon 2017; O’Keeffe 2020). Students also benefit from on-the-ground technical assistance, academic counseling, and a variety of open resources (digital and non), while also interacting and collaborating with peers and mentors, face-to-face and/or online. Blended designs steer away from fully online and individualized experiences, which often lead to high attrition rates (O’Keeffe 2020). They also would be nearly impossible in precarious and low-resourced contexts like refugee camps (Brugha et al. 2020). CL projects built with a community-centered approach to ICT (Dippo et al. 2013) promise a more sustainable design that has a wider reach, as well as extensive social impact at the local level (Wright and Plasterer 2012).

There is need for more research on CL in contexts of crisis, especially from the grounded experiences of students whose perspectives have thus far received limited attention. There also is a need to describe and explore in greater detail the daily practice of educators, as well as the overall foundational material and intangible infrastructure required to deliver and sustain quality online learning. We learned that the physical infrastructure of the BHER LC enabled relational infrastructures that optimized online engagement and learning, not only between instructors and learners but among the learners themselves. It is critical to explore the purposes of education beyond programming and accreditation, and to pay greater attention to the relationships that sustain and embed the pedagogies adopted. This discussion is timely, considering that the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a “redoubled reliance on technology as the primary convening mechanism” (CLCC 2020, 4), also birthed much favorable and critical discourse on the value and meanings of online distance education (Picciano

et al. 2021; Azubuike, Adegboye, and Quadri 2021; Oppong Asante, Quarshie, and Andoh-Arthur 2021). The immediate effect COVID-19 had on conditions of displacement, specifically on education in protracted refugee situations, has begun to surface through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' 2020 report, *Coming Together for Refugee Education*. However, the contextualized and long-term impact will only be seen in the years to come. For those who were engaged in CL in contexts of crisis during COVID-19, there is a sense of responsibility to document the breakdowns, the limits encountered, and the creative responses in order to help rethink and inform future strategies and practices.

We conclude that our success with distance learning during the pandemic was only possible because of the relationships, community, and infrastructure we had built over the previous decade of offering blended programs, which were centered around moments of connection through in-person interaction. Human encounters fostered a common purpose (learning) and forged relationships between instructors and learners and among the learners themselves that were rooted in a dedicated place—the Learning Centre. These encounters enabled rich online learning to take place in an otherwise difficult and volatile environment. Even though fully online programming is ideally suited to and completely justified in emergency health crises like COVID-19, by itself it is not enough to provide the types of robust education so desperately needed in these regions (Moser-Mercer, Hayba, and Goldsmith 2018). We strongly encourage any university or education institution considering working in such contexts of displacement to plan for and develop in advance various forms of blended instruction, and the physical infrastructure needed to deliver the programs. Blended engagement in a dedicated physical space, where safety and resource inequities are addressed, enables the development of online and face-to-face learning communities that are engaged in active learning and sustained through a sense of “connectedness” (Rovai 2002).

Strong collaboration among local partners is also essential to the successful delivery and completion of programs. BHER programs hinge on partnerships and creative solutions. The commitment of students, instructors, and operational staff members to implement proactive and collaborative responses to contextual changes is critical. We recommend, finally, that CL programs for emergencies include capacity-building opportunities in their design. Local graduate students previously trained as peer mentors were critical to our programmatic response. The pandemic demonstrated that, amid volatility, local experts can find lasting solutions for their communities. The ingenuity and commitment of our local partners and peer mentors makes it possible to maintain a sustainable learning model, both within and beyond COVID.

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A CAPABILITIES RESPONSE TO THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF DISTANCE LEARNING FOR THE MOST EDUCATIONALLY MARGINALIZED CHILDREN DURING COVID-19

KATE SYKES

ABSTRACT

The Transformational Empowerment for Adolescent Marginalised Girls in Malawi (TEAM) project provides complementary basic education to adolescents who have been left behind by the mainstream education system. Its students are primarily girls who face multiple intersecting barriers to learning, including disability, child marriage, motherhood, poverty, and harmful gender norms. Distance learning provided by the Government of Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic relied on students proactively accessing centrally created lessons through technologies such as radio and the internet. In this field note, I argue that such an approach does not meet the needs of the most educationally marginalized children, who require holistic support to overcome barriers arising from their individual characteristics, available resources, and lived environment. I contrast the mainstream approach with the TEAM Girl Malawi response, which used a capabilities framework that led to three key innovations. First, a paper-based mode of delivery was complemented by in-person support from teachers. Second, the lesson content prioritized resilience and social-emotional skills as the foundation for learning, and teachers adapted a core curriculum to individual students' learning needs. Third, teachers' roles were expanded to include child protection and community engagement. I conclude this field note by identifying learning points based on students' experiences and learning outcomes, which demonstrate how future distance learning responses during a pandemic can be inclusive of all learners.

Received August 14, 2021; revised June 17, 2022; accepted October 26, 2022; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.
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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Malawi closed all schools in 2020 from the end of March through October, and again during January and February 2021. Like many COVID-19 responses around the world, the provision of government-led distance learning relied on students proactively accessing lessons that were provided through technologies such as radio and the internet. In this field note, I argue that such an approach does not meet the needs of the most educationally marginalized students, who frequently face multiple intersecting barriers to learning.

TEAM Girl Malawi provides complementary basic education (CBE) for six thousand of the most educationally marginalized young people who are out of school in three geographic districts in Malawi. The five-year project is funded by UK Aid, and the CBE is delivered by a partnership that includes Link Education International, Link Community Development Malawi, Theatre for a Change, CUMO Microfinance, Supreme Sanitary Pads, and CGA Technologies.

TEAM Girl Malawi is framed within Sen's (1985, 1992) capability approach, whereby a combination of individual characteristics, access to resources, and the lived environment interact to affect a person's opportunity to do and become all that they have reason to value (Mitra 2006)—in this case, to be educated. The capability framework influenced the design of TEAM Girl Malawi's distance learning response, which offers three key elements that the government's offer does not. First, a paper-based mode of delivery is complemented by in-person support from teachers. Second, the lesson content prioritizes resilience and social-emotional skills as the foundation for learning, and teachers adapt a core curriculum to individual learning needs. Third, teachers' roles are expanded to include child protection and community engagement.

THE CAPABILITY APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Sen's (1985, 1992) capability approach is a framework for understanding human welfare as the freedom to live a life one has reason to value. Sen distinguishes between "functionings," which are being and doing particular things, and the capability to achieve these functionings. TEAM aims to provide participants with the capability to achieve the "functioning" of being educated. For an inclusive education project, a capability approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of barriers to education than a human capital approach, which

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limits understanding of education to its economic ends, and can therefore reinforce gender and disability inequalities (Robeyns 2006; Drèze and Sen 2002; Nussbaum 2000), or a human rights approach, which assumes that equal treatment or the provision of inputs such as books, desks, and pencils will lead to equal outcomes for all (McCowan 2011; Robeyns 2006; Unterhalter 2003). TEAM draws from Mitra's (2006) definition of disability within a capability framework, which maps out the ways in which capabilities are derived from a combination of individual characteristics (e.g., impairment, race, age, gender), resources, and environment (physical, social, economic, political).

EDUCATIONAL MARGINALIZATION AND THE TEAM CAPABILITY APPROACH

Complementary basic education is community-based, accelerated learning for out-of-school children and youth. In Malawi, the government delivers some CBE and authorizes nongovernmental partners, including TEAM, to extend delivery to specific geographic areas or populations. The government's CBE program is aimed at 9- to 13-year-olds who have dropped out of school, whereas TEAM targets the most marginalized adolescents (ages 10-19) who have never been to school, or who dropped out without gaining functional literacy and numeracy.

The project uses a capability framework to consider how learners' individual characteristics, available resources, and lived environment interact to enable or constrain their learning. The majority of these learners are girls; all are experiencing poverty, 32 percent are orphans, 17 percent have children, 13 percent are married, and 13 percent have a disability. TEAM recognizes that the intersection of these characteristics and barriers increases marginalization. About three in five of the girls who reported bullying as a barrier to education had a functional disability, and 61 percent of those who reported a lack of parental support as a barrier were responsible for doing household chores for six or more hours each day (Reeves et al. 2020).

Before the COVID-19 school closures, TEAM students attended CBE learning centers part-time; the learners and local community arranged the hours classes were held. With the government's support, TEAM adapted its CBE curriculum to ensure that the topics and content were relevant to the learners' ages and life experiences, including their lack of previous schooling. TEAM students also participated in a girls club run by volunteer primary school teachers, where they learned about sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Before the pandemic, students were taught at a learning center in groups of 60, with four teaching staff. The pupil-teacher ratio was 15:1, as compared to the government's CBE ratio of 40:1. In keeping with the government model, teaching was delivered by facilitators, who were high school graduates selected for their good standing in the community and their passion for supporting marginalized young people. The facilitators attended a 14-day residential training on the CBE curriculum, various disability models, how to understand the learners enrolled in CBE and the marginalization they face, and techniques for adapting teaching to be inclusive of all learners. They learned to use local materials to produce additional teaching resources that were based on their students' needs. The TEAM staff provided continuous professional development through lesson observations and feedback, and at end of term meetings, where the facilitators gathered to discuss their challenges and areas needing improvement.

TEAM also strengthened community-based child-protection systems and used interactive radio and drama productions to build community support for the rights of marginalized young people. TEAM provided food packages to all learners, and piloted a training for parents and guardians in which they gained new skills to help reduce family poverty.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MOST EDUCATIONALLY MARGINALIZED

In 2020, the CBE centers in Malawi were closed, along with the schools, from late March through October. Prolonged school closures such as this increase the likelihood that the most vulnerable learners will permanently drop out of school (Asim, Carvalho, and Gera 2020). One-third of Malawi's rural workers were unable to continue with their usual economic activities during the shutdown period, and 8 percent of farmers had to delay the harvest (Moylan and Fuje 2020), which increased poverty and food insecurity for the families of learners who were already among the most vulnerable. In some instances, TEAM students were pressured to get married, due to the increased amount of time spent at home and the pressure on the family income created by the pandemic. There also was a risk that some of the learners would become pregnant (Davies 2021), which would affect their ability to attend or focus on their education when the learning centers reopened. In addition, missed time in class led to the fear that learners would not manage to complete the curriculum and graduate from CBE, and then not be able to move on as planned to further education or vocational training. Finally, there were increased concerns about child protection, which

stemmed from the negative effect the pandemic and associated lockdowns would have on adolescents' mental health, the increased risk of domestic violence due to family stress, enforced proximity to potential abusers, and a lack of contact with protection systems (Girls' Education Challenge 2020).

DISTANCE LEARNING FOR THE MOST MARGINALIZED

In April 2020, the Government of Malawi and a range of nongovernmental partners collaborated on developing the country's first Education Cluster COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. The first objective of this plan was "to ensure continuity of teaching and learning for all children including those with disabilities and special education needs while schools are closed due to the COVID-19" (Government of Malawi 2020). However, while CBE is part of the government's basic education provision, the plan did not specifically refer to CBE.

The revised National COVID-19 Preparedness Response Strategy and Plan July 2021-June 2022 (Government of Malawi 2021) included a single reference to CBE relative to decongesting classrooms, but none to distance learning. While the government focused on distance education for mainstream students during the school closures, any such provision for CBE students was left to independent nongovernmental projects. This meant that resources were slow to appear, and they varied in availability and quality.

In order to inform adaptations to the project, TEAM Girl Malawi conducted a rapid assessment in June 2020 of learners' access to technology, their preferred methods for continuing to engage with learning, their available time and parental support, and any risks they faced, such as gender-based violence, child marriage, and anxiety. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the survey was conducted with the 287 learners who had mobile phone access, who represented only 12 percent of the project participants. Although all participants are classed as experiencing poverty, TEAM Girl Malawi assumed that the respondents represented those with the highest level of household income in the project and who therefore had better access to learning resources and a lower risk of child abuse related to economic stress (Girls' Education Challenge 2020).

The findings of the rapid assessment, which accounted for the above assumptions, were used to shape the project adaptations within the capability framework. This resulted in three key innovations that differed from the government's provision of distance learning.

A paper-based mode of delivery is complemented by in-person support from teachers. As outlined above, the government's provision of distance learning focused on students enrolled in mainstream schools. The first Education Cluster COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan included plans to "review and adapt learning content of education programmes for radio and self-study (including online versions) for ECD [early childhood development], primary and secondary to ensure they meet diverse needs of learners" (Government of Malawi 2020). No specific provision was made for CBE, so an important opportunity to reach the most marginalized learners was missed. Facilitators in the government-funded CBE program were encouraged to help the CBE learners listen to the primary school radio lessons in the areas where they were broadcast, but the program did not align with the CBE curriculum. Care Malawi, a nongovernmental organization, produced radio programs on the CBE curriculum that were broadcast in the limited areas where the organization works.

Another action in the plan was to "promote home learning for all children including girls and children with disabilities and special education needs" (Government of Malawi 2020). This was done by messaging via mass media, phone, and interpersonal communications. These messages emphasized the role of children who, with their parents' support, were guided to proactively access the radio programs. The plan recognized the lack of connectivity (i.e., internet and radio access) in some parts of Malawi, which reflects the experience of about one-third of the world's children (UNICEF 2020). Moreover, a July 2020 U-Report poll in Malawi found that 64 percent of households with school-age children had not accessed the radio programs.¹ The government plan also included "capacity building of teachers...to support home learning for all children including those with special education needs" (U-Report 2020), but this was not implemented during the school closure period.

TEAM participants' access to technologies for distance learning was low. Of those surveyed by TEAM, 44 percent had access to radio (the rate was lower for girls and in rural areas), and 31 percent had access to the internet. The project assumed that access to the internet and radio was lower among the 88 percent of participants without mobile phones who were not included in the survey.

TEAM therefore adapted paper-based CBE and the girls club learning materials for self-guided study, which was complemented by limited face-to-face teaching by the facilitators. Learners were put into groups of five and given guidance on self-study and socially distanced peer support, and they met weekly with the facilitators, each

1 U-Report is a social messaging tool and data-collection system developed by UNICEF to improve citizen engagement, inform leaders, and foster positive change.

of whom was responsible for three small groups. In-person teaching was achieved as safely as possible with social distancing, masks, additional handwashing facilities, and extra staff training in keeping with government guidelines. These sanitation materials were also accessible via the government's CBE. Similar small group meetings would have been possible in mainstream schools, although they would have been more labor intensive, due to the higher pupil-teacher ratio. At the time, this was not possible in the schools, as the teachers unions were in a dispute with the government over additional risk pay, even when additional sanitation materials were provided. This reflects a long-running tension between the government and teachers over remuneration.

Lesson content prioritizes resilience and social-emotional skills as the foundation for learning, and teachers adapt a core curriculum to individual learning needs. Twenty-one percent of the rapid assessment respondents reported feeling more anxious and stressed while the learning centers were closed. The TEAM staff understands that resilience and social-emotional skills are an essential foundation for effective learning, and they worked to emphasize this in two ways. First, the small group girls club sessions included activities to support learners' resilience during times of stress, along with practical knowledge of COVID-19 prevention. Drama activities helped learners identify and express their emotions, share how COVID-19 and the learning center closures affected their lives, deal with challenges, and develop strategies to support one another.

Second, the facilitators continued to employ an inclusive education pedagogy in the CBE classrooms. Rather than taking a standardized approach to teaching learners who have specific challenges, the facilitators are problem-solvers who address the multiple barriers faced by their students. This approach enables a girl who is working to support the family, has a young child, and has a hearing impairment to attend lessons or study at home at a time that accommodates her work schedule; to attend a learning center that has day care for her child; and to receive lessons from a facilitator who uses additional visual communication to ensure that she can access the curriculum. The facilitators also meet regularly with learners who have disabilities and their parents to discuss how best to support them, and to develop an individual education plan if necessary.

During distance learning, students completed a weekly learning journal. They discussed their journals with the facilitators, who were then able to provide individualized support as needed, such as spending more time on specific topics or creating additional learning resources. The facilitators continued to use the project guidance on adapting teaching to accommodate various disabilities, and to receive

support via a WhatsApp “helpdesk” staffed by the project. The Midline Evaluation (DaSilva and Murray 2022) found that 80 percent of the facilitators sampled reported using at least one type of inclusive pedagogy, such as participatory teaching methods, activities for different learning styles, or differentiated teaching.

This focus on social-emotional skills and adaptability contrasts with the government-led mainstream responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which relied on all students being able to access the same centrally created internet and radio lessons. While the government and parents recognized the challenges the students with disabilities would face in accessing content, disabled people’s organizations, such as the Malawi Union of the Blind (2020), criticized the lack of accessible content.

Teachers’ roles were expanded to include child protection and community engagement. The increased risks to child safety experienced globally during the school closures have been widely recognized (Minardi, Hares, and Crawford 2020). The TEAM rapid assessment noted that learners perceived an increase in the risk of sexual (8%) and domestic (6%) violence and marriage requests (7%) during the initial period of school closures, as well as the need to engage in paid work (11%). In May 2020, the project received a significant increase in safeguarding reports, including child marriage and pregnancy.

Roles and responsibilities for child protection are broadly distributed in Malawi, including statutory bodies, community groups, and traditional authorities. The government and many nongovernmental partners, including TEAM, are working to increase awareness among parents and the general population of children’s rights and the responsibility to protect them. The government’s first preparedness and response plan states as a priority the “community mobilisation of parents and guardians...[for] addressing violence against children at home” (Government of Malawi 2020). However, sharing these responsibilities widely risks a lack of clarity about who is ultimately responsible for identifying and addressing child abuse.

The loss of the schools as a place where trusted adults would be able to check on children’s welfare on a near-daily basis was detrimental to child protection during the school closures. Recognizing that a facilitator would be the only trusted adult to see most learners on a regular basis, TEAM increased the facilitators’ training via WhatsApp. They also expanded their responsibilities to include being a main point of contact and support for learners with child-protection concerns. In order to ensure that the most vulnerable would stay enrolled and continue

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to learn, this was extended to include following up at home when learners were absent and advocating for learners whose family's priorities had shifted during COVID-19. The Midline Evaluation (DaSilva and Murray 2022, 53) noted that “improving child protection is where community members have most clearly felt the project’s impact.”

The adjustment to teaching approaches enabled the facilitators to fulfill these additional safeguarding roles. Their stipends were maintained throughout this period, which was a strong motivation, as many people lost their income during lockdown.

IMPACT OF THE TEAM DISTANCE LEARNING APPROACH

ACCESS

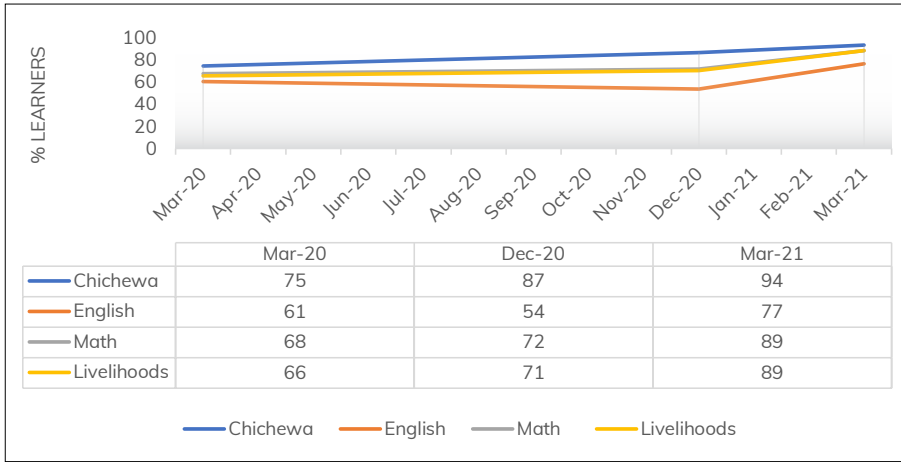
The average attendance rate recorded by the TEAM project during the distance learning period was 57 percent, compared to 60 percent before the school closures. Girls noted that their continued attendance was due to having take-home work to practice learning outside of lessons (48.6%); teachers’ accommodation of learners who needed extra support (39.6%); the flexible location of CBE and girls clubs (36.3%); having small groups and study circles during the COVID-19 closures (35.6%); and the flexible timing of CBE and the girls clubs (29.7%) (DaSilva and Murray 2022).

LEARNING

To assess whether learners are performing “very well” (score over 60%), “fairly well” (40%-60%), or “struggling to cope” (under 40%), TEAM uses their performance on end-of-term tests. Between March 2020, just before the learning centers closed, and December 2020, the end of the distance learning period, the percentage of students performing “fairly well” or “very well” increased slightly in Chichewa (a Bantu language spoken in Malawi), math, and livelihoods and dropped slightly in English.² Scores in all subjects improved further between December 2020 and March 2021, when there was a return to larger group teaching and another four-week shutdown in January-February 2021, when distance learning resumed (see Figure 1).

² “Livelihoods” classes teach a combination of agriculture, home economics/domestic science, and income generation.

Figure 1: Number of Learners Performing “Fairly Well” or “Very Well” on End-of-Term Tests



The Midline Evaluation conducted in July 2020 with learners who were enrolled in the TEAM CBE program during the distance learning period supports the improvement trend, as 88 percent of the girls improved their score in literacy and 86 percent in numeracy between baseline and endline.

Link conducted a tracer study by phone in October 2020 with a random sample of 18 boys and 90 girls who had participated in the original rapid assessment. Of those responding, 94 percent felt that the content covered by the girls clubs was “very useful” or “somewhat useful,” and they provided examples of having applied the knowledge gained there on contraceptives, emotional wellbeing, and COVID-19 prevention. One stated, “Now I do things without fear and with confidence and focus.” While this sample is not representative of the wider cohort, the Midline Evaluation also recorded improved life-skills scores, which are taught through the girls clubs, for 83 percent of girls.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES AND BEYOND

The TEAM experience demonstrates that, to ensure that the most marginalized learners are not left behind, whether during an emergency response or in “normal” times, education planners must consider how learners’ individual characteristics, access to resources, and lived environment interact to affect their capability to engage with distance learning. For the most marginalized learners who are living in extreme poverty and in remote locations, face-to-face teaching delivered in a

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safe way during a pandemic is the only method that guarantees their continued learning. This becomes even more important for learners who face multiple barriers and need a flexible approach to the curriculum content and pedagogy, which can only be provided by teachers who can adapt to the learners' individual needs. Integrating social-emotional content with academic learning is another essential aspect of supporting the students who experience the most challenges to continued learning, especially during times of increased stress. Finally, integrating child protection into teachers' roles provides young people with continued access to a trusted adult, which helps prevent dropout for reasons of child marriage, pregnancy, and child labor.

In order to achieve these measures, governments responding to school closures should enable teachers to fulfill their students' needs by providing additional training, support, safety equipment, and teaching resources. The Government of Malawi's investment in distance learning focused on radio rather than print materials, which excluded many of the most marginalized. TEAM's focus on the individual learner would be more challenging in government CBE and primary schools, where the pupil-teacher ratio is higher, but it could be achieved if the school staff members were adequately motivated and supported. The Malawi government was able to provide safety and sanitation equipment to facilitate safe face-to-face teaching, but this was undermined by the remuneration dispute with teachers. A capability perspective suggests that investing in teachers, rather than in distance learning approaches that use technology, offers the best value for the money in terms of the number of learners who will be reached, and in ensuring that no one is left behind.

DISCLOSURES

The author is employed by Link Education International, the lead partner on the TEAM Girl Malawi project.

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PREPARING CHILDREN FOR AN UNPREDICTABLE WORLD IN THE MIDDLE OF A CRISIS: LA ALDEA'S APPROACH

ANA MARÍA RESTREPO-SÁENZ AND EMMANUEL NEISA CHATEAUNEUF

ABSTRACT

No one was prepared when COVID-19 hit. While education systems all over the world turned to distance learning, countries like Colombia faced a significant challenge: only 75 percent of Colombian teachers had received training in online teaching, 64 percent of school principals considered the technology available to schools to be insufficient, and only 67 percent of 15-year-old students had internet access (OECD 2019). And what about the families living in at-risk contexts and facing additional economic and health pressures? The time was ripe to scale up La Aldea—a flexible, learner-centered strategy whose content and methods are designed to meet the needs of the child at the end of the proverbial “last mile.” La Aldea is a strategy created by ClickArte, a Colombian organization that specializes in designing and implementing educational projects. Using its print books, radio shows, digital content, songs, and games, La Aldea was disseminated throughout the country via UNICEF Colombia’s education in emergencies strategy. It also provided online training sessions to 4,220 teachers. It ultimately reached 87,667 families and children. This immediate, comprehensive, multimedia, multistakeholder plan was adapted to reach every child in Colombia’s formal and nonformal education settings in migrant and conflict-affected communities. La Aldea’s education strategy is composed of carefully crafted stories whose main characters are animals found in Colombia (such as macaws, tapirs, owls, and anteaters, among others). The stories and activities that make up La Aldea are metaphors of society: children, families, and teachers can self-identify with the situations being portrayed, hence giving schools material to integrate playfully into the teaching curricula, while at the same time nudging children’s cognitive, citizenship, and social-emotional skills—and, of course, COVID-19 awareness.

Received August 14, 2021; revised April 4, 2022; accepted October 26, 2022; electronically published December 2023.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 9, No. 1.

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ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19-related school closures created a unique opportunity to rethink how to enable student learning when children are not attending school, and to do so in a way that also provides critical social-emotional elements associated with resilience, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the world. La Aldea is a multifaceted education strategy composed of stories available in print books, radio shows, digital content, songs, games for parents, children, and teachers, as well as teacher training sessions. Inspired by the use of fables in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the stories that make up La Aldea are metaphors for society as described through the characters and the village (*aldea* in Spanish) they live in. The objective is to demonstrate that current real-life themes can be integrated into the mainstream curriculum by using carefully crafted stories for children in a playful manner.

La Aldea benefitted 87,667 children ages 6 to 14, including Venezuelan migrants, who were attending primary and secondary schools in communities in Colombia that were dealing with conditions of poverty, including poor connectivity. In 2020, 130,000 printed copies of La Aldea books (which contained QR codes to connect to digital content such as songs and videos) were distributed in formal and nonformal education environments in 17 regions of Colombia, making it one of the most widely distributed books in that nation. More than six radio shows that included La Aldea's stories were produced. In addition, 4,500 teachers from 600 public education institutions, along with 130 tutors, were given a 1,000-hour training in the La Aldea strategy.

THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT

Donor and international aid agencies refer to Colombia as a context with multiple concurring emergencies. Situations related to armed conflict, the environment, and migration are a constant in the country. In terms of armed conflict, the Colombian government signed a peace treaty in 2016 with the FARC-EP guerrilla organization, Latin America's oldest and largest insurgent group. What led to the conflict, and has continued since it ended, is a deep struggle over various economic, political, social, and environmental challenges. After more than 60 years of internal armed conflict, Colombia had more than seven million internally displaced citizens. Moreover, 17.5 percent (DANE 2020) of the country's population now lives in multidimensional poverty, making Colombia one of the economically most unequal countries in Latin America. According to INDEPAZ (2021), after

the signing of the peace treaty, the armed conflict was merely reconfigured: it is estimated that around 93 illegal armed groups continue to threaten the population with kidnappings, killings, bombings, and curfews.

Environmental hazards are also an issue in Colombia. According to the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (2010), 90 percent of the population has been exposed to at least one hazard and 80 percent to two or more. Severe floods, hurricanes on the northern coast, landslides, and droughts are common. This high vulnerability to climate hazards affects the vulnerable populations the most, making them still more vulnerable. Additionally, of the more than 5.2 million Venezuelans who have fled their country due to political and economic instability, the International Rescue Committee (2020) calculates that 1.7 million are living in Colombia, 460,000 of whom are school-age children.

The quality of education available to many children in Colombia is at great risk. Families often lack the resources to buy books or pay for internet access. Others have been displaced from their hometowns due to ongoing conflicts between illegal armed groups and gangs. In some towns, the schools have been repeatedly flooded or were destroyed in a storm. Those who do attend school in their hometown find the classrooms overcrowded and lacking enough seats because so many families have migrated there. For school-age migrant children in Colombia, the situation is even worse.

And then, with so many families and communities already facing multiple emergencies, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Even though the government allocated a higher budget to the education system in 2020 than to any other sector (USAID 2020), the investment was not enough to respond to the needs of the nearly 10 million enrolled students.

EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA

Since 1994, schools in Colombia have adhered to the National Law on Education (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1994), which established basic competency guidelines instead of a national curriculum. The law also included an autonomy principle that allows schools and teachers all over the country to create classes and study plans according to the local need, but still following the general guidelines. Of the 9.6 million students enrolled in preschool and in basic and secondary education, 81.4 percent attend the public system (Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2021); of the 44,000 school venues in the country, 80 percent are located in rural areas. In terms of quality of education, Colombia has scored below the mean on

three of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) tests (math, reading, and science). Of the Latin American countries assessed by OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Colombia's overall score rates below Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, and Costa Rica and above Argentina, Panamá, and the Dominican Republic (ICFES 2018).

THE EDUCATION SECTOR DURING COVID-19

On March 15, 2020, after the first COVID-19 case was reported in Colombia, the national government announced a nationwide closing of the schools. They asked schools and local education authorities (known as *secretarías*) to adjust their study plans according to their specific needs, and to offer their students online education options. At that time, only 75 percent of Colombia's teachers had received training in online teaching, 64 percent of school principals considered the technology available to their school to be insufficient, and only 67 percent of 15-year-old students had internet access (OECD 2019). What was to be done? The majority of schools, in the public sector for the most part, remained closed until the first trimester of 2021, which created an education void for the most vulnerable students, who had limited access to the internet and other suitable electronic devices.

The main problems and risks generated by the COVID-19 emergency included the following:

- **School closings:** COVID-19 put children's education in Colombia at risk. Many of them lost contact with their school and were struggling to continue learning. Homes had to become the learning environment and parents had to become teachers, including those who didn't finish their primary education.
- **Home as school:** With no clear pedagogical strategies in place, parents were overwhelmed and underresourced.
- **Survival skills:** Families needed critical information on COVID-19 in order to fight the pandemic at home. The information available needed to be meaningful and usable.
- **Emotional crises:** Confinement and the fear of catching COVID-19 brought the need for skills to cope with emotional issues and their consequences to the forefront. Lack of work, money, food, and other basic needs led to an increase in domestic violence, which made children and women particularly vulnerable.

- **Lack of connectivity:** While some digital strategies were available for distance learning, most children in rural areas did not have connectivity, computers, or high-quality cell phones. This scenario left most of them unconnected to digital education.
- **Inadequate training and pedagogic strategy for distance learning and teaching:** Teachers were responsible for keeping their students connected to learning. They needed to plan distance learning lessons, create printed lessons for their students, and assess students' learning progress—often without any tools.

THE LA ALDEA APPROACH

In contrast to irrelevant, exclusive, prescriptive education systems that systematically fail those in need, the La Aldea strategy offers an agile, child-centric “fable universe” in which children, teachers, and parents are able to interact with printed books, videos, songs, and radio shows that present fables containing metaphors of society. By offering carefully crafted stories and activities using this multiplatform content—print, radio, and digital—current real-life themes can be integrated into the mainstream curriculum. These contents also can be used as interactive materials for out-of-school children and youth in any given context. This helps children develop the 21st-century skills that will help them thrive in an unpredictable world.

The content of La Aldea is a direct reflection of today's world. The main characters, Colombian animals such as macaws, tapirs, owls, and anteaters, face all sorts of social, political, economic, and health dilemmas in the stories. For example, in one story, a virus strikes the village and the animals have to deal with biohealth standards and all the dilemmas the real world was facing. Enrique is a migrant chameleon who hosts a radio show to help fellow migrants understand and process their emotions. By reflecting what the world is going through, the La Aldea content is relevant, engaging, and helpful for users in different contexts. All contents are piloted with its target audiences. To make sure the content responds to users' needs and interests, ClickArte is in constant contact with them through WhatsApp and Facebook groups, as well as teacher training webinars.

The world the La Aldea materials present to their users stands out among education offerings, as it is fun and full of colors and challenges. The stories and their characters mirror today's children and create an emotional relationship that not only enables children to learn but also supports their family's involvement.

When learning with La Aldea, children don't feel like they are at school. The idea that there is no single right answer lightens their experience, and instead of the interactions between a teacher or a parent and a student being about knowing or not knowing, it concentrates on experimentation and discovery, which can completely shift the relationship. Play, conversation, and engagement become the student's inner teacher, curiosity arises, and self-confidence appears. Children work with the books and the associated digital content at their own pace, which gives them the freedom they need to really learn. The entire strategy of La Aldea is based on the following elements:

- **Offers a flexible, multifaceted learning platform and instruments:** La Aldea offers fun, engaging content that is easily adaptable to existing curricula and is accessible by print, radio, and digital platforms. Aimed at delivering entertaining, quality educational content that fosters curiosity, critical thinking, social-emotional wellbeing, and resilience, these contents enable teachers and families to cope with an emergency. This kind of content could easily be adapted to school communities around the country.
- **Provides parents support to re-envision their role:** La Aldea encourages parents to engage in meaningful conversations and activities with their children, and supports teachers by giving them extra tools and training in how to lead different types of conversations in the classroom.
- **Focuses on social-emotional learning:** La Aldea provides children, teachers, and parents with the skills they need to decipher, understand, listen, and cope with emotions—within themselves and in others.
- **Builds teacher communities:** Teacher training sessions have created a sense of belonging among La Aldea's learning communities all over the country and have turned peer exchange into a habit.
- **Reaches a critical mass efficiently during an emergency:** Despite the logistical challenge, more than 130,000 La Aldea books were distributed to children and teachers in 17 regions of Colombia. La Aldea provided an anchor for the learning process and became the link between teachers and families. ClickArte also distributed digital resources to families and cultivated partnerships with local radio stations to broadcast audio La Aldea content.

LA ALDEA'S ROLLOUT DURING COVID-19

With all of Colombia's children in need of a fast education response to the COVID-19 school closures, La Aldea had to be flexible enough to scale-up quickly and to support a variety of learning communities—rural, urban, migrant, and indigenous. In less than a year, the strategy was adopted by school communities across the country. This demonstrated that, despite the differences among territories and local contexts, it was possible to use a “one size fits all” teaching strategy. Each region, from La Guajira and Bogotá to Arauca and Nariño, was able to adapt La Aldea to its own realities and needs.

Fifteen days after the Colombian government announced the closing of all the nation's education institutions in March 2020, the La Aldea materials began to be disseminated by UNICEF Colombia as an emergency education strategy. By the end of April, a comprehensive printed, digital, and radio emergency content strategy was offered to students, teachers, and families across the country.

Because lack of connectivity was a main challenge facing learning communities during COVID-19, La Aldea was based primarily on printed books that could reach children in even the most remote areas of the country. In 2020, the two La Aldea books were among those most widely distributed in Colombia: 112,054 books were sent to students nationwide, which provided them with their own learning materials to use at their own pace—even in conditions of low or zero connectivity. These two books, which were translated into the Wayuu indigenous language, were the entry point for 232 activities, 3 songs, 5 yoga and social-emotional management videos, 7 audiobooks, 6 radio shows, and 2 resource repositories in Google Classroom for teachers.

The main features of La Aldea's contents that enabled the strategy to respond to the emergency were:

- **Offers inclusivity and relevance:** La Aldea's stories tackle current and universal issues that can be adapted into different formats and languages. La Aldea is responsive to the needs of communities, which distinguishes it from other initiatives. The 2020 strategy encouraged school communities to generate conversations and think about such topics as viruses, confinement, social-emotional wellbeing, fake news and information regarding the virus, and a variety of other issues important to any child, teacher, or family.

- **Connects teachers, students, and families:** La Aldea offers opportunities for collaboration between teachers, students, and families, thereby engaging the entire school community. As school communities became disconnected from their physical learning environment, it was important to glue the community together around a common strategy. La Aldea, with its relatable situations and characters, provided a universe in which children, teachers, and parents could unite, and it became a platform where they could create and have discussions, despite their physical separation.
- **Focuses on play and creativity:** La Aldea enables children to have fun while learning and ensures that they still meet their learning goals. This was essential during the COVID-19 school closures, as children and their families genuinely needed to set aside time just for learning. That said, La Aldea's approach is that learning must grow out of learners' inner curiosity and willingness to play, rather than because it is an obligation.

To create rapid and sustainable strategies for providing distance education and strengthening social-emotional skills in an emergency context, it was essential to involve caregivers. In 2020, 4,220 teachers and tutors in Colombia received the La Aldea books and digital resources; 2,631 of them also went through 888 hours of training and implementation support. The teacher training spaces, besides offering an opportunity to develop and strengthen professional skills, were valued as favorable environments in which to create communities of emotional wellbeing, as creative laboratories, and as spaces where teachers from different territories who had different areas of knowledge could exchange experiences. The La Aldea universe allowed students, families, teachers, and tutors to find multiple ways to stimulate the learning process.

In 2020, ClickArte worked with 421 rural and urban education institutions from 21 of the country's 96 education *secretarías*, which were from 66 municipalities in 17 of Colombia's 32 regions. Even though a country like Colombia is fragmented racially, socially, and geographically, it is possible for its citizens to share a democratic ideal in which quality education will be provided to everyone. The openness and flexibility of the La Aldea strategy enabled communities to differentiate what aspects they adopted. Some were more inclined to produce theater performances, drawings, songs, and choreography, while others chose to hold debates and produce written essays, among other types of exercises. La Aldea proved adaptable to a variety of contexts in the regions where it was implemented.

A SUCCESS STORY

Building a sustainable network of partners and organizations that could reach children and learning communities in different regions of Colombia was paramount to spreading and scaling up the La Aldea strategy. In 2020, La Aldea built a network of 23 organizations—among them UNICEF Colombia, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, World Vision, the Lego Foundation, and the World Bank—to implement this nationwide emergency education strategy. As few organizations had a ready-made strategy, the network kept growing during the emergency, which allowed the consolidation of funding and the coordination of the work of international aid agencies, local nongovernmental organizations and national and local governments. This created momentum and enabled La Aldea to be widely recognized as one of the most impactful emergency responses to the education crisis brought on by COVID-19. This is why, in June 2021, the Interamerican Development Bank selected La Aldea as one of the most impactful strategies for the enhancement of 21st-century skills in Latin America and the Caribbean (HundrEd 2020).¹

One of the main elements making La Aldea a sustainable strategy is that it goes beyond the emergency and brings to the fore three fundamental aspects of education: relevance, quality, and equality. Teachers and school communities in Colombia continued to use the strategy in 2021, as the schools began to reopen. In 2021, more than 50,000 children and 2,000 teachers who belong to 160 school communities were using the new season of La Aldea. This demonstrates the need to connect what happened during the emergency with the return to “normality.”

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The model through which La Aldea was implemented in 2020 depended on teachers’ willingness to be part of the strategy. One important lesson from that year was the need to generate better communication with the local government, school principals, and UNICEF Colombia’s local agents. If all these stakeholders were to buy into the strategy, teachers then would be more motivated to be part of the training sessions.

1 La Aldea was chosen from more than 380 projects in 16 countries in Latin America.

Given the timing and the urgency of the implementation of La Aldea, there was no time to give feedback to the teacher trainers on how the La Aldea content was being implemented in classrooms around the country. An observation methodology was integrated into the 2021 implementation work plan to ensure a better quality implementation. A measure of the strategy's impact on teachers, students, and families has not yet been performed.

Families' increased involvement in the education system is the greatest asset resulting from COVID-19. To preserve education quality and access, families must be involved and consider the education content their children are working on to be a valuable aspect of their daily lives.

Creating multiplatform curricula to reach students living at the last mile ensures that children from vulnerable backgrounds will have access to better education services, even if they are unable to enroll in the formal education system.

Education curricula should always enable children, parents, and teachers to navigate the uncertainties brought on by an emergency or any other personal or social situation they are facing. This is a lesson brought to us by COVID-19 that should be maintained in regular times.

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BOOK REVIEW

MEANINGLESS CITIZENSHIP: IRAQI REFUGEES AND THE WELFARE STATE

BY SALLY WESLEY BONET

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS, 2022. IV + 256 PAGES

\$27.00 (PAPER), \$108 (HARDCOVER)

ISBN 978-1-5179-1112-6

*America is not at all what I thought it would be.
Sometimes I wish I never came. (113)*

Meaningless Citizenship is a powerful scholarly work that unveils the grim realities of American exceptionalism by delving into the lives of four Iraqi refugee families displaced by imperialism, war, and occupation. Having sought refuge in America, these families were confronted by the hollowed-out remnants of a welfare state destroyed by neoliberalism. Filled with aspirations for a brighter future, these Iraqi refugees arrived in Philadelphia in search of a stable life for themselves and their children. Instead of a better life, they encountered exclusion and more suffering. *Meaningless Citizenship* exposes the stark contradictions and profound failures of refugee resettlement in America—the very nation that caused the displacement of these Iraqis and the destruction of their home country.

Drawing from a comprehensive four-year, multi-sited, and multilingual ethnographic study, Sally Wesley Bonet documents how refugees acquire an understanding of US citizenship through their encounters with state institutions, such as public schools, assistance programs, resettlement agencies, and welfare offices. Taking the family as her unit of analysis and moving beyond the narrow focus of schooling, Bonet shows the daily struggles faced by Iraqi refugee youth and their parents as they find themselves entangled in institutions that shape them into laboring subjects. Using the stories and lived experiences of these refugees and their families, Bonet questions and challenges Western notions of democratic citizenship, humanitarianism, multiculturalism, tolerance, and acceptance of the “other.” She then offers recommendations for how to rethink and improve the refugee resettlement program in America, based on the brutal realities faced by these Iraqi refugees.

In chapter 1, Bonet describes how the American refugee resettlement program serves the interests of capitalism by shaping refugees into laboring subjects through the principle of self-sufficiency, which is defined as finding immediate employment and avoiding reliance on public assistance. As she recounts the Iraqis’

pre-resettlement hardships of war, loss, and displacement, Bonet demonstrates how this principle affected these traumatized refugees, who were forced to take any job available in order to survive in America. Before the limited support they received disappeared and financial obligations accumulated, including refugee travel loans, they agreed to unfavorable terms and conditions of work. Lacking essential language skills, qualifications, and easily transferable work experience, they found themselves trapped in poverty and low-paying jobs, which put them in league with impoverished Americans.

Chapter 2 describes the paradox of America's welfare system using the rigid and punitive encounters the refugees had with the welfare office. Bonet documents how the welfare officers offered insufficient and diminishing support, accompanied by a punitive and controlling approach aimed at removing the refugees from public assistance as quickly as possible. One refugee in Bonet's study described her experience with welfare agents, who are supposed to provide support through various forms of public assistance: "The welfare agent is constantly monitoring you. They try to reduce your food stamps and penalize you for every small amount of money you receive. That's how it goes for us" (59). Bonet then describes the intense scrutiny and reduction of welfare benefits that subjected the refugees to tremendous stress and put them in a precarious situation. This system ultimately shattered their aspirations to achieve financial independence, due to their fear of losing welfare benefits—which is the inherent result of the design of the neoliberal welfare system. Bonet explains the refugees' frustration as the rights they envisioned and believed they were entitled to remained elusive. Tired of the restrictions of the refugee label, they questioned and rejected the empty promises of citizenship: the American refugee resettlement system failed to deliver on its obligations.

Embedded in these refugees' aspirations for the good life is their desire to access education. Education remained a top priority for the Iraqis in this study, as they saw it as a bridge to social mobility. In chapter 3, however, Bonet highlights how these aspirations were left unfulfilled. The young refugees in the study were enrolled in an underperforming and underfunded school in Philadelphia, a consequence of budget cuts resulting from neoliberal policies. The challenges they faced further complicated their efforts to realize full citizenship. The refugee students received schooling, but without the necessary supports needed to complete their education, all while grappling with the effects of trauma and interrupted schooling resulting from their experiences in Iraq. The school system failed to provide the essential supports for the refugee students as they transitioned within and beyond school, and at the same time it reinforced structural inequalities and deficit narratives.

Bonet also documents instances of discrimination, bullying, marginalization, and Islamophobic remarks by both teachers and students, which deeply affected the Muslim Iraqi refugee youth, in particular in the post-9/11 context. Over time, these refugee youth became aware of their status as outsiders, which ate away at their aspirations and hopes for integration into American society through education.

The pursuit of postsecondary education was another dream that proved unattainable for older refugee youth. Bonet explains in chapter 4 that refugees often did not have transcripts that documented their educational attainment, and they were placed in classes without any regard for their age, previous education, or premigratory conditions resulting from the war in Iraq. In certain cases, interruptions in their education meant that they could not complete their schooling, as they had reached the age limit for public education. These rigid education policies and neoliberal reforms pushed these young people into low-wage jobs. Bonet found that adult education programs also did not respond to the refugees' unique needs and caused them to lose their motivation to learn. Bonet illustrated that, as the refugees struggled to find time for studying while also having to work to sustain themselves, their attempts to access and continue secondary and postsecondary education caused them extreme stress and anxiety. This predicament also hindered their language learning and integration into American society, and impeded their sense of belonging to a nation-state. Bonet describes the repeated instances of exclusion the adult refugees experienced, which caused them to question America's exceptionalism and its liberal ideals.

In chapter 5, Bonet examines access to healthcare as another fundamental human right the refugees had hoped to have in America. Unfortunately, it was another right that remained elusive for them. Bonet asserts that many of the health issues experienced by refugees were either caused or worsened by the challenges they faced both before and after resettlement. She offers evidence that demonstrates how the bodies of Iraqi refugees were weakened by the impact of America's actions prior to and following their resettlement. During the war, Iraq's healthcare institutions were severely damaged, putting millions of Iraqis' lives at risk. Bonet explains that, in the United States, issues such as language barriers, a lack of transportation to healthcare centers or hospitals, and the time constraints imposed by health insurance providers prevented refugees from accessing the medical care they needed. This created additional stress and anxiety, which particularly affected women refugees. Participants in the study also revealed that their pain and ailments often were disregarded by physicians. Moreover, with their lack of knowledge and necessary skills, the refugees found it a significant challenge to

navigate the complex American healthcare system. Bonet's research highlights how the refugees' experiences before and after resettlement ultimately affected their health and wellbeing. As one refugee expressed, "Life here is like dying every day" (171), which emphasizes the ironic nature of their living in America. In the final section of the book, Bonet offers valuable recommendations for policy and practice in the hope of enhancing healthcare programs for refugees and having a positive impact on their lives.

Meaningless Citizenship is a valuable resource for both scholars and practitioners. It offers deep insights into the intersection of education in emergencies and citizenship. The author highlights the systemic barriers and shortcomings of the refugee resettlement program through the personal narratives and lived experiences of resettled Iraqi refugees, thereby challenging the idea of America as an ideal destination for refugees. The book makes a significant contribution to understanding the challenges and experiences faced by refugees in their encounters with state institutions. Sally Wesley Bonet's critical analysis of and theorizing about citizenship under neoliberalism and capitalism reveals a troubling dynamic, wherein the welfare state is progressively emptied and citizenship, narrowly defined, increasingly positions its citizens as laboring subjects.

SAMAYA MANSOUR

Columbia University

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and do not represent Columbia University.*

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BOOK REVIEW

***BECOMING RWANDAN: EDUCATION, RECONCILIATION, AND
THE MAKING OF A POST-GENOCIDE CITIZEN***

BY S. GARNETT RUSSELL

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019. 272 PAGES

\$32.95 (PAPERBACK), \$125.00 (HARDCOVER), \$32.95 (E-BOOK)

ISBN 978-1-978-80286-5

In *Becoming Rwandan: Education, Reconciliation, and the Making of a Post-Genocide Citizen* by S. Garnett Russell, we learn how the Rwandan government, in the wake of the 1994 genocide, utilized education as a catalyst to foster peace and reconciliation. Within the pages of this thought-provoking work, Russell reveals a paradox: despite the Rwandan government's incorporation of global discourse into national policy documents, the manner in which global discourse models are interpreted and used by students and teachers deviates from the government's intended goals. This has given rise to unforeseen consequences, including the exacerbation of tensions among Rwanda's main social groups, the Hutus, Tutsi, and Twa. The ramifications of these unintended outcomes raise a portentous question: Could they undermine the sustainability of peace in Rwanda over the long term? Russell's work urges us to explore this critical link between education and postconflict reconciliation.

Russell's research methods are comprehensive. She skillfully uses both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a glimpse into Rwandan classrooms, of teachers' perspectives on the curriculum, and of students' interpretations of how they have learned about the Rwandan genocide and national identity. Her research begins with a thorough examination of national-level data that delves into education policy documents as well as history, civics, and social studies textbooks. The heart of her data, however, is survey data collected from 15 schools and 536 students in three geographically and ethnically distinct provinces across Rwanda, and from the interviews and observations that accompany this data from 7 of the 15 schools. What makes this work exceptional is Russell's ability to seamlessly weave the voices of students and teachers into a backdrop of government policies, official documents, and Rwandan textbooks.

It is common for researchers and development practitioners conducting fieldwork in sub-Saharan Africa to become entangled with value-laden judgments and deficit-centered thinking. Russell's work stands out because of the exceptional care she takes in elevating the voices and experiences of those involved in her study. She

refrains from imposing overpowering analysis and allows the participants' voices to speak for them. The true strength of this book, however, lies in the resounding power of the participants' voices. These are individuals who either directly bore witness to or escaped the Rwandan genocide, or students who learned the history from their family members.

The book is organized into six chapters that offer complex insights into the Rwandan government's strategic use of education as a peacebuilding instrument. The government's aim was to foster a cohesive narrative of *Banyarwanda* (74), a unified Rwandan people without distinction between the Hutus, Tutsi, or Twa. Russell uses a wide array of literature and frameworks to underpin her arguments, which renders each chapter invaluable to both researchers and practitioners who are studying or seeking to understand education in emergencies. The treasure of this text are chapters three, four, and five, which draw most significantly from Russell's data.

In the third chapter, Russell provides an overview of civic identity and nationalism before and after the Rwandan genocide. She establishes that the government today is promoting unity through a civic version of national identity that emphasizes a "unified Rwandan citizenry through an emphasis on unity and reconciliation, a common culture and language" (60). What sets this chapter apart is how Russell highlights that, despite the absence of explicit ethnic distinctions, the unified narrative has given rise to new divisions among students. She argues that students' identities remain deeply intertwined with their familial experiences during the civil war and genocide, and that they manifest in subtle yet consequential ways within the school environment. She illustrates how labels like "survivor" or "returnee" from specific countries like Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Burundi subtly encode ethnic connotations, with "Tutsi" implicitly linked to survivors and "Hutu" inferred for those who are not. Furthermore, the abrupt transition from French to English as the country's official language has left its mark on education, giving rise to disparities in students' capacity to comprehend and engage with the content, thereby limiting the potential for open discussion. These unintended consequences cast a shadow over the Rwandan government's aspiration to foster a patriotic and nonethnic identity.

In chapter four, Russell demonstrates how the Rwandan government strategically and selectively employs human rights discourse as a means to secure international credibility. She demonstrates that discussions concerning human rights and violations of these rights are often approached indirectly. She argues that teachers are more inclined to discuss "sensitive topics related to human rights

in abstract terms or in relation to other countries” (130). Russell observes that this tendency is further exacerbated by a reliance on rote teaching methods. This didactic approach, she argues, significantly constrains the space available for open discussion, critical thinking, and active engagement—all elements central to fostering a student-centered learning environment. This chapter provides instances where the government promotes gender equality and children’s rights and yet concurrently “silences” (100) any discussion of violations of political and civil rights in Rwanda.

In chapter five, Russell compares the intended curriculum as envisioned in the textbooks to what actually occurs in class, drawing heavily from the survey and interview data with students and teachers. Her argument hinges on the examination of the role the official curriculum plays in crafting a singular narrative of the Rwandan genocide, which frequently clashes with individual and familial recollections of the recent past. Insights she gathered from both educators and students demonstrate that this narrative excludes counternarratives, and also instills fear in teachers and students and deters them from engaging in candid discussion of the genocide for fear of being accused of disseminating a “genocide ideology” (180). This juxtaposition highlights a critical tension that arises from the government’s desire to foster a unifying narrative while simultaneously sidelining the dialogue and reconciliation efforts needed to process the past. As a researcher interested in history education and teacher identity in postconflict settings, I couldn’t help but contemplate the concept of teacher agency in this chapter. One particular instance that struck me was the perspective of Emmanuel, a Tutsi genocide survivor who candidly states that teachers “must be neutral, even if it’s difficult” (157). Russell also provides a platform to illuminate the challenges teachers confront when tasked with educating about the genocide.

However, in the book’s concluding chapter, Russell argues that the book “highlights the crucial but often overlooked role of teachers, who may carry their own memories of the conflict but who are responsible for conveying the government interpretation of the past to a future generation of citizens” (190). The portrayal of teachers as “conveyors” of the government’s interpretation gave me pause. This depiction seemed to reduce teacher agency to that of passive facilitators of government directives. I found myself wondering whether there were instances when teachers actively resisted the prescribed way of teaching history or civics, a perspective that could offer a more nuanced understanding of the role educators play in shaping the narratives of the past.

This book is a must read for all audiences, including researchers, practitioners, educators, and anyone interested in the field of education in emergencies, as it sheds light on the complex role of education in postconflict settings. Russell paints a vivid picture of how a government, in the aftermath of a traumatic event like the Rwandan genocide, can use education as a tool for peacebuilding and reconciliation. However, she also highlights the challenges and unintended consequences that can arise when implementing a global education discourse within a national context. *Becoming Rwandan* provides valuable insights into how education reform and policy can impact social cohesion, identity formation, and the reconciliation process. Russell's work serves as a poignant reminder that, in the realm of postconflict education, the path to genuine reconciliation is neither straightforward nor guaranteed. And yet, education can have real power in creating a new national identity and promoting human rights and reconciliation. This text compels us to challenge our assumptions and to recognize that, within "politically restrictive environments," the transformative power of education may not always be realized fully. Russell urges us to consider the complex relationship between education and peacebuilding with a more nuanced understanding and reminds us that the pursuit of lasting and durable peace may require a multifaceted approach, including new policy and renegotiation of educational priorities.

ORELIA JONATHAN

Harvard University

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and do not represent Harvard University.*

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BOOK REVIEW

***TEACHING PEACE AND CONFLICT: THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF
SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS IN PEACEBUILDING***

**EDITED BY CATHERINE VANNER, SPOGMAI AKSEER,
AND THURSICA KOVINTHAN LEVI**

SPRINGER, 2022. XIV + 205 PAGES

\$129.99 (PAPER), \$129.99 (HARDCOVER), \$99.00 (E-BOOK)

ISBN 978-3-031-04675-9

Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding is a cross-national analysis of the content and discourses contained in textbooks in conflict-affected societies, and the policies and actors that shape them. This analysis is presented to the reader with two basic premises: (1) education can be a victim, accomplice, or transformer of conflict, and it often plays multiple roles, as presented in the Intersecting Roles of Education in Conflict (IREC) framework; and (2) proposed changes in curricula or education policy with the aim of peacebuilding are disconnected from the way content is actually represented in textbooks. This is seen, for example, in the representation in textbooks—or the lack thereof—of class, gender, ideal citizenship, ethnolinguistic groups, and religious groups. This disconnected content often plays the “accomplice” role in situations of conflict.

This book makes three important contributions to the field of education in emergencies. First, it presents the IREC framework, which builds on Bush and Saltarelli’s (2000) seminal work on the two faces of education, in which they illustrate the positive and negative roles education plays in scenarios of ethnic conflict. The role of textbooks is expressly included in Bush and Saltarelli’s seven elements of the negative face of education, which point out “the role of textbooks in impoverishing the imagination of children and thereby inhibiting them from dealing with conflict constructively” (34). Although the negative face of education may be conflated with the IREC framework’s accomplice role, the latter is in fact more active, as it implicates actors who shape policy, curriculum, and pedagogical practices. The IREC framework could also be seen as building on Pherali’s (2016) work on education as victim and perpetrator, which similarly expands its negative face from passive to active.

These frameworks ultimately assert that the relationship of education to peace and conflict is as a victim, a perpetrator, and a transformer. IREC goes one step further in illustrating that this role is not static by suggesting that education, or textbooks in this volume, can oscillate between these roles, which contain

elements of transformation alongside perpetration and victimhood. In this volume, the IREC framework is used in conjunction with other theoretical frameworks employed in the education in emergencies field, notably Dunlop's use of Davies' (2005) passive and active elements of conflict, Kovinthan Levi's use of Davies' (2003) interruptive democracy, and Galtung's (1969) work on structural violence.

Second, it contributes to the scholarship that sees textbooks as a site of importance in peace and conflict studies. The role of textbooks—and of education in general—in national identity formation and in “legitimizing knowledge” (Russell and Tiplic 2014) makes them key targets during times of political volatility, as the content can be used to control and shape narratives. This includes textbooks as victims when they are destroyed (Kalhoro and Cromwell, this volume; Fishburn 2008; GCPEA 2022) or banned (Cole and Barsalou 2006; Bentrovato 2017); as accomplices to conflict, as they can help to define and exacerbate existing tensions, thereby reinforcing state authority and neglecting dissent and critical thinking (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Lall 2008); and, when textbooks interrogate the roots of conflict, violence, and inequality, as transformers (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Novelli and Smith 2011; Bajaj 2019; Knutzen and Smith 2012). This book's editors, Catherine Vanner, Spogmai Akseer, and Thursica Kovinthan Levi, provide a framework with which to analyze the multiple roles these textbooks play and where intended transformer roles have ultimately become accomplices to conflict.

Finally, it provides a concrete example of the role comparative analyses play in education in emergencies. Each of the nine case studies in this volume traces a curricular or policy change in response to conflict, with the aim of peacebuilding and social cohesion. Most of the case studies analyze the content of the textbook itself, notably in civic education and social studies (Levi, Nazari, Shahzadeh, Halilovic-Pastuovic, Akseer); representations of gender (Shahzadeh, Vanner et al.); and adapted courses focused on peacebuilding and equality (Dunlop, Akseer).

Readers also have the opportunity to compare the different ways in which textbooks play the accomplice role in one context, as subsequent chapters focus on Afghanistan (Nazari, Akseer) and South Sudan (Skårås, Vanner et al.). Skårås considers the absence of history textbooks to be an accomplice role, as it allows narratives to be shaped solely by teachers in education contexts and by the community outside of education. Vanner et al., by contrast, examine how primary school textbooks play the accomplice role by reproducing social norms, by neglecting the root causes of inequality, and by not allowing a critical interrogation of the ideas presented in the textbooks. Kalhoro and Cromwell do not analyze the content of the textbook itself, looking instead at the intersection

of curriculum, education governance, and pedagogy. There is the only case study to explicitly examine teacher training and pedagogical practices through the IREC lens. Halilovic-Pastuovic's study of segregated education in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides an analysis of the "two schools under one roof" policy, facilitated by the international community, which resulted in separate curricula and textbooks for the Bosnian population and the Croatian population. The aim was temporary postconflict stability, but this segregation has continued to do what the author describes as "extreme othering" (186).

An underexplored area in this volume, which is covered explicitly by Halilovic-Pastuovic and Akseer and noted in the concluding chapter, is a macro-analysis of the role international actors play in shaping the content of textbooks to reflect their own interests. Nazari's content analysis includes a discussion on government accountability, in particular the use of terms such as "insecurity" instead of "war" in order to "alleviate the government's responsibility in contributing to conflict" (97). A critical analysis of the international community's accountability is similarly important because key donors have increasingly been inserting military and security agendas into education and international assistance (Novelli 2010). If textbooks often play an accomplice role in conflict-affected societies, those that shape the content are also complicit. These motivations are investigated by Shahzadeh, who explores the role of education officials in shaping content in Jordan, and by Kalhor and Cromwell, who discuss the influence political religious groups in Pakistan have on Musharraf's curricular reforms.

This volume might have demonstrated the value of the IREC framework for analytic purposes by distinguishing itself more significantly from related theories (i.e., Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Pherali 2016). The IREC framework is presented as distinct, in that the intersecting victim, accomplice, and transformer roles exist simultaneously, whereas the victim and perpetrator roles of education have previously been presented as discrete and opposing. However, the transformer role is presented as an intention or a possibility, not as a role that has been actualized. For example, Nazari discusses the transformer role in abstract terms: "Social values are promoted at an abstract level, rendering education a transformer of conflict by encouraging concepts of peace, stability, and equality" (99). Shahzadeh speaks to the "transformative potential" of textbooks, in the event that they are eventually revised. To play a transformer role, a textbook would have to directly challenge inequality, injustice, and the roots of violence. However, in most of the cases in this volume, the textbooks played the accomplice role, thereby overshadowing and negating the possibilities of transformation. Some authors in this volume consider the transformer role somewhat differently, their views

being rooted in their varied conceptions of the relationship between conflict and peace. Kovinthan Levi, for example, argues that, if students are to challenge injustice with the aim of creating a more peaceful society, there is an inevitability of conflict. This contrasts with Nazari's definition of a transformer of conflict as that which "encourag[es] stability" (93).

This volume demonstrates that textbooks, and education more broadly, are crucial to the peacebuilding process in conflict-affected contexts. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the transformative role of education is prioritized and enabled in that process.

MYURI KOMARAGIRI

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

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or the University of Toronto.*

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BOOK REVIEW

YOUTH-LED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA

EDITED BY IBRAHIM BANGURA

ROUTLEDGE, 2022. XVI + 260 PAGES

NO-COST OPEN ACCESS (PDF AND EPUB),¹ \$136.00 (HARDCOVER)

ISBN 978-1-03-218237-7

Sub-Saharan African countries have the youngest and fastest-growing populations in the world. In 2022, the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimated that the population of sub-Saharan Africa will double by 2050, accounting for half of global population growth. The future truly belongs to Africa's youth. And yet, local, national, and supranational politics rarely pay attention to the voices and experiences of these youth, while academic scholarship—African Studies, the social sciences, and our own field of education in emergencies (EiE)—pays too little attention to the voices of Africa's young activists.

Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa, Ibrahim Bangura's edited volume, shines a much-needed light on the youth-led struggles for social, economic, and political transformation, from South Africa to Tunisia, and from Guinea to Sudan. Moreover, the volume makes an important contribution to EiE by highlighting research conducted by African scholars whose knowledge remains underrepresented in the EiE field. Bangura's introduction sets the stage well by taking up the idea of youthhood and what it means in African contexts, and critically situating youth-led social movements in Africa within the new social movements literature. Bangura points out that, in addition to youth in Africa having the fastest growing demographic globewide, youth-led movements in Africa differ from those commonly studied in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, which illustrates the need for this volume.

Several themes emerge throughout this edited volume. Many of the chapters deal with the role of social media as a common feature of 21st-century youth movements. For some of the contributing authors, such as Edmore Chitukutuku in chapter 4, social media have made youth-led movements possible, even in the face of brutal state crackdowns on public protest. For others, including Festus Kofi Aubyn and Osei Baffour Frimpong in chapter 5 and Philip Bob Jusu and Saatchi Sen in chapter 6, "hashtag activism" often fails to remain relevant long enough

1 Available at <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003253532>.

to bring about lasting transformation. In chapter 12, Simbarashe Gukurme and Godfrey Maringira demonstrate the use of social media and public protest in South Africa to challenge racism, patriarchy, and colonialism in higher education and in society more broadly.

“Gerontocracy”—the exclusion of youth from decisionmaking at most levels of society—is another common theme with parallels to gender-based exclusion. Arguably, gerontocracy and patriarchy are two faces of the same coin. Mohamed Gibril Sesay, Mohamed Bakhit, and Justin Crowell explore some of these parallels in chapter 9. Nevertheless, the contributors to this volume could have taken a more intersectional approach to youth activism and to the different types of violence used by governments against youth protesters. Feminist scholars have generated a vast field of research related to the gender, peace, and security agenda that provides opportunities for cross-fertilization with the new UN Security Council Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda.

In the conclusion, Bangura discusses several key takeaways from this volume. One is the power and profusion of youth-led social movements in the 21st century, especially since the 2011 Arab Spring. Another is the heavy-handed, often violent way the state suppresses youth activism, which breeds mistrust between youth and the state. A third is the tendency for changes in state leadership to revert to elitist, autocratic governance that continues to exclude youth from positions of power.

This volume might have benefitted from better organization of some of the themes discussed above. As it stands, the book consists of an introduction, 13 contributed chapters, and a conclusion. Each chapter touches on several of the themes and key takeaways mentioned above, which clearly made it challenging to organize the volume. Nevertheless, I would have preferred the volume to be organized around the themes to make them more explicit for the reader.

Bangura asks the reader to ponder how the success of youth-led movements can be measured, and what it would take to make the political, social, and economic realities in today’s African nations reflect the aspirations of youth-led social movements. The youth-led social movements discussed in this volume illustrate the need for the international community to support democracy and equality on the African continent, starting with its youth. They further highlight the educational role social movements play in raising the consciousness of Africa’s youth. Research on EiE should pay more attention to the formal, informal, and

nonformal learning that occurs in and through youth-led social movements, particularly in Africa. The findings presented in this volume also suggest that EiE practitioners should include youth as essential stakeholders and participants in their communities, and in the coordination of EiE.

DEANNA R. PITTMAN

California Institute of Integral Studies

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and do not represent the California Institute of Integral Studies.*

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CONTRIBUTORS

HASSAN ADEN (hasade@prio.org) is a Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo. His primary research interests are education in emergencies (EiE) and refugee education. His current project is a comparative analysis of education governance between schools funded by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and nationally accredited refugee-led schools in Kenya's Dadaab camps. He holds a PhD in peace and development research from the University of Gothenburg.

SILVIA MILA ARLINI (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8381-3773>, <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Silvia-Arlini/research>) is a Research and Evaluation Specialist at Save the Children International in the Asia Regional Office-Singapore. She leads a wide range of formative research, multisectoral humanitarian needs assessments, and evidence-based policy and program evaluations in both development and humanitarian contexts. Her research interests include children's education, migration and displacement, poverty, inequality, children's wellbeing, children's rights, protection, and disability inclusion. She holds a PhD in Southeast Asian studies from the National University of Singapore.

AMY ASHLEE (amy@reuk.org) is a Research Manager at Refugee Education UK, where she manages the organization's research on refugee education issues in the UK and globally. She specializes in child- and youth-centered research methods and has extensive experience in research and policy for nongovernmental organizations, UN agencies, government departments, and university partners. Her academic research focused on the intersection of forced displacement, psychosocial wellbeing, and education. She holds a master's degree in international child studies from King's College, London.

KATRINA BARNES (katrina@jigsaweducation.org) is a Research Manager at Jigsaw. Her recent work has focused on participatory methods in refugee education research, the role of EdTech in displacement and development contexts, and minoritized language use in education in low- and middle-income countries. An experienced teacher with a background in language education, she has a particular interest in pedagogy, curriculum design, and education for social and environmental justice. She holds an MEd in research in second language education from the University of Cambridge and an MA in translation and interpreting from the University of Westminster.

EMMANUEL NEISA CHATEAUNEUF (emmanuel@click-clack.la) is the Cofounder and CEO of Click+Clack, a pedagogical agency specialized in designing learning materials and implementing educational projects in Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and El Salvador. He has led projects that have served more than 400,000 children and 8,000 teachers in Latin America for organizations such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNHCR, the European Union, and more than 800 education institutions.

NORA CHARIF CHEFCHAOUNI (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/nora-charif-chefchaouni-49367a196/>) is the Global Head of Education Programs at Save the Children International. She has more than 17 years of international development and humanitarian experience as an education expert and technical leader. She specializes in EiE, community engagement in education, and social and emotional learning. She is a Fulbright Scholarship recipient and has a graduate certificate in humanitarian leadership from Deakin University, a master's degree in international affairs from Science Po Paris, and a master's in international education from the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

JESSICA S. CHIA (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jessica-s-chia/>) is a Monitoring, Impact, Evaluation, and Learning Manager for the World Wide Fund for Nature's Plastic Smart Cities initiative in Asia. She previously was a member of the research and evaluation team in Save the Children International's Asia Regional Office, where she worked on studies focused on education and multisectoral humanitarian needs assessments for programs in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. She is interested in health, gender equity, children's rights, and wellbeing. She holds a master's degree in public health with a global health specialization from the National University of Singapore.

JULIE CHINNERY (julie.danielle.chinnery@nrc.no) is an EiE advisor currently based in Warsaw, Poland, where she works as a Regional Advisor with the Norwegian Refugee Council on the Ukraine response. She has worked with humanitarian and development agencies in various locations across the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America. In 2020-2022, she worked as a consultant on various research projects, including investigations of the impact of COVID-19 on the resilience of education systems across the globe.

CONTRIBUTORS

REBECCA DALTRY (rebecca@jigsaweducation.org) is a Researcher at Jigsaw. She has an MA in international education and development from the University of Sussex, where she formed a particular research interest in the intersections between development, education, and faith/worldview, as well as topics related to gender, youth, conflict, and citizenship. With a background in education and youth-centered development, she has experience conducting primary and desk-based qualitative research in the education and refugee space, in addition to working alongside schools and communities in Eastern Africa to develop participatory, youth-led development initiatives.

RENA DEITZ (rena.deitz@nyu.edu) is a PhD candidate at New York University. She has developed and studied education and social and emotional learning programs across diverse contexts and populations. Her research focuses on how children's holistic development and related interventions manifest across culture and context, and the influence of foreign aid. She holds a master of arts in international education from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a bachelor of arts in international relations from Tufts University.

EMILY DUNLOP (emily.dunlop@cornell.edu) is a Postdoctoral Associate at Cornell University in the department of government. She has a PhD in international education from New York University. Her research and teaching focus on the intersection of political institutions, education, and perceptions of inequality in conflict-affected countries and emergencies. Her current projects explore how to improve teaching and learning outcomes in political science education. Her work has been published in *Compare: An International Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, and *Africa Spectrum*.

AIME PARFAIT EMERUSENGE (aimeparfait@jigsaweducation.org) is a Research Assistant at Jigsaw. He holds a bachelor's degree in management from Southern New Hampshire University. Before joining Jigsaw, he participated in a research project on history dialogues at Princeton University and coauthored an anthology titled *The Right to Research*. He also worked as a youth researcher on the Voices of Refugee Youth project from 2019 to 2022. His research interests include education for refugees, education technology, and the relationship between education and environmental issues.

JENNIFER FLEMMING (jf@redbarnet.dk) is a researcher currently based at the MHPSS Collaborative in Denmark, where she leads research on school-based mental health and psychosocial support programming for children in crisis in Kenya, Colombia, and Greece. Over the last decade, she has worked with various humanitarian agencies to develop frameworks and toolkits, guide research agendas and data-collection practices, and support program learning in EiE, mental health and psychosocial support, youth programming, resilience, and participatory data-collection processes.

HAAKON GJERLØW (haagje@prio.org) is a Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo. His research interests include governance in and the economic consequences of democracy and autocracy. His work has appeared in *World Development*, *Comparative Politics*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Electoral Studies*.

MYA GORDON is a Research and Evidence Advisor for Save the Children International. She coordinates global research and evaluation on Catch-up Clubs and other education programs. Her research interests are catch-up and remedial learning, social and emotional learning, and the use of digital support in these areas. She is currently overseeing research on the scalability and cost modelling of Catch-up Clubs. She holds a master's degree in the social anthropology of development and has more than 15 years' experience in monitoring and evaluation in development contexts, including South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania.

GWENDOLYN HEANER (gh@gkconsulting.org) is the Managing Director of GK Consulting LLC, which provides ethical and actionable research and evaluation services around the world. Her research interests include youth livelihoods, religion and culture, and EiE, particularly in Liberia. She is passionate about working with local researchers to help plan and lead GK's work.

CHRISTOPHER HENDERSON (cjh2227@tc.columbia.nz) is a doctoral fellow at Teachers College, Columbia University, where his research focuses on the professional development and mental health of teachers in contexts of forced displacement. His mixed methods dissertation focuses on the motivation of Rohingya refugee teachers in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. He is also an EiE specialist at the Geneva Graduate Institute. A former teacher, for the past ten years he has undertaken numerous research and design consultancies for development and humanitarian agencies, including UNICEF, the World Bank, UNHCR, and Sesame Workshop.

CONTRIBUTORS

KASSAHUN HITICHA (hitichakassahun@gmail.com) is an Ethiopian-Oromo refugee educator residing in Kenya. He graduated from York University through the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees Project, where he earned a BA in educational studies and an MEd in language, culture, and teaching. His research explores the factors that affect the academic performance of students in the Dadaab refugee camps' secondary schools. He worked as a secondary school teacher for more than a decade and as a peer mentor for undergraduate students in Dadaab. He now works with the Open Society University Network as a lead facilitator for their programs.

DAVID HOLLOW (david@jigsaweducation.org) leads Jigsaw and is Research Director at the EdTech Hub. He is also a board member for Refugee Education UK and Justice Defenders. He is committed to helping organizations use rigorous evidence to bring about lasting change in education. He has worked in the international education and humanitarian sectors for 15 years, during which time he has engaged with a variety of donors, governments, international nongovernmental organizations, and community-based organizations. He has a PhD from the University of London, where his doctoral research focused on evaluating the impact of technology on education in sub-Saharan Africa.

SABRINA KARIM (smk349@cornell.edu) is the Hardis Family Assistant Professor of Government at Cornell University. She is the coauthor of *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping* and *Positioning Women in Conflict Studies*. Her research focuses on conflict and peace processes, specifically on international involvement in security assistance to postconflict states, gender reforms in peacekeeping and domestic security sectors, and the relationship between gender and violence. She also directs the Gender and Security Sector Lab and is principal investigator of the National Science Foundation CAREER award for "The Domestic and International Politics of Global Police Violence."

KHALID KHAN (khalid.smpetro@gmail.com) is a youth researcher who worked on the Voices of Refugee Youth study from 2019 to 2022. An Afghan refugee living and working in Pakistan, he is particularly interested in exploratory research. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in business studies from the Institute of Management Sciences in Peshawar, Pakistan. He won the United Nations Development Programme's Youth Innovation Challenge in 2020 and holds a Hanns Seidel Foundation scholarship, which is awarded to promising Afghan refugee students in Pakistan.

CONTRIBUTORS

HAEUN KIM (haeunkim@yorku.ca) is a doctoral student at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her research interests include language learning in displacement, language education policy, emancipatory literacy, EiE, and comparative and international education. Her current work focuses on the intended and unintended effects of English language education on refugees living in displacement. She worked for more than six years for the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees Project, where she helped untrained refugee teachers complete accredited university programs in Dadaab, Kenya.

HEDDY LAHMANN (heddy.lahmann@nyu.edu) is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Deputy Program Director for the international education program at New York University, where she teaches courses in education and conflict, human rights education, and education for international exchange. Her research focuses on arts education for the purposes of peacebuilding and holistic child development. Her current work includes a study on the marginalization of arts education in public school systems globewide, and a project to develop and examine edutainment programming to support girls' learning in Afghanistan.

AIMÉE MUKANKUSI (aimee@jigsaweducation.org) is a Research Assistant at Jigsaw. Her main research interests are refugee education and education technology. She has worked as a youth researcher with Voices of Refugee Youth, where she explored the effects of postprimary education on refugees in the Kiziba camp in Rwanda. She also has studied higher education among refugees in Kiziba as a research intern at the City University of New York. Since joining Jigsaw, she has worked on a study with the EdTech Hub on optimizing mobile phone messaging to promote school attendance in Ghana.

GUDRUN ØSTBY (gudrun@prio.org) is a Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and Deputy Editor of the *Journal of Peace Research*. Her research interests include the link between armed conflict, migration, health and education, refugee education, conflict-related sexual- and gender-based violence, horizontal inequalities and conflict, and the effectiveness of development aid. Her work has appeared in several journals, including *Demography*, *International Journal of Educational Development*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Population and Development Review*, *Review of Educational Research*, *Social Science & Medicine*, and *World Development*.

CONTRIBUTORS

JULIA PACITTO (julia@jigsaweducation.org) is a Research Manager at Jigsaw. Her research interests include refugee education and forced migration, girls' education, and EdTech for marginalized learners. She specializes in qualitative research methods and has been the lead on numerous qualitative and mixed methods research and evaluation projects focused on refugee and girls' education, as well as wider issues of forced migration. She holds a DPhil in international development and an MSc in forced migration and refugee studies from the University of Oxford.

ASMA RABI (asma@jigsaweducation.org) is a Research Assistant with Jigsaw. She has a bachelor's degree in media studies and mass communication, a diploma in social innovation and research studies from John Carroll University, and is currently pursuing her master's degree in development studies. She has worked previously with international research think tanks and organizations, including GIZ, the World Food Programme, and ODI. She has a particular interest in women's rights and child protection.

ANA MARÍA RESTREPO-SÁENZ (anarestreposaenz@gmail.com) is an education consultant with more than 12 years of experience in the education-social field, especially with vulnerable populations in Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, and the United States. Her research interests focus on EiE and early childhood care and upbringing during emergencies. She is a psychologist with a master's degree in education.

RITESH SHAH (<https://profiles.auckland.ac.nz/r-shah>) is a Senior Lecturer of comparative and international education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. His research and teaching focus on the role and function of education in societies affected by conflict and crisis. For the past four years, he has sought to map out how resilience has been conceptualized and understood in the EiE community, and he has developed tools, resources, and guidance for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) on how to support a focus on resilience in their education programming.

NISHTHA SHRESTHA (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6826-7786>) is a Research and Evaluation Officer for Save the Children International in the Asia Regional Office-Singapore, where she is involved with projects in humanitarian and development contexts. She received her PhD in psychology, with a focus on child and adolescent mental health. Her research interests include trauma, art-based therapy, low-cost interventions, disaster preparedness, education, and child

protection. Through her work, she hopes to create a safe and healthy childhood for every child and promote mental health as a global necessity.

BETHANY SIKES (bsikes06@gmail.com) is an Evidence Communications Officer at Tearfund, where she uses her interdisciplinary training to translate evidence of impact for various audiences. She is an experienced interdisciplinary researcher in the international development sector and is passionate about the effective collection and sharing of evidence. She specializes in qualitative data analysis, participatory research methods, and mixed methods research studies. She has a master's degree in development practice from Emory University. Before joining Tearfund, she managed large mixed method evaluations and research studies at Jigsaw.

MIRCO STELLA (mste17@yorku.ca) is an international doctoral candidate and graduate research fellow at the Center for Refugee Studies, York University. His transdisciplinary research is currently focused on graduate education for refugees. His multiple interests include theories of postdevelopment and decolonization, critical pedagogy, radical democracy, and cosmopolitics. His doctoral research, which focuses on his experiences as an educator in the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees master's program, investigates both the limits and the politics of hope that arise from the process of developing and teaching a graduate research course for students living in conditions of prolonged encampment.

KATE SYKES (kate@linkededucation.org.uk) is a Project Manager at Link Education International, where she works to improve access to quality education for the most marginalized children and young people in sub-Saharan Africa. Her 15 years of experience in international development has centered on human rights and education. Her particular expertise is in girls' education, school improvement planning, community engagement, social accountability monitoring, and inclusive pedagogy in Malawi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda. She also has a strong interest in child protection, is a trained safeguarding investigator, and is a panel member in Scotland's children's hearings system.

NINA WEISENHORN (nweisenhorn@usaid.gov) currently leads education programs for the USAID Mission to Afghanistan. Her professional expertise and experience have focused on the intersection of policy, programs, and evidence on education in conflict- and crisis-affected contexts. She has worked for USAID for more than seven years, previously serving as a senior advisor on education in crisis and conflict in the USAID Center for Education. She previously worked for the International Rescue Committee in various capacities.

JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)*, a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal, aims to fill gaps in education in emergencies (EiE) research and policy. Building on the tradition of collaboration between practitioners and academics in the EiE field, *JEiE*'s purpose is to improve learning in and across service-delivery, policymaking, and academic institutions by providing a space where scholars and practitioners can publish rigorous quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research articles, and robust and compelling field notes that both inform policy and practice and stir debate. *JEiE* provides access to the ideas and evidence needed to inform sound EiE programming, policymaking, funding decisions, academic program curricula, and future research.

JEiE specifically aims to:

1. **Publish rigorous scholarly and applied work** that sets the standard for evidence in the field
2. **Stimulate research and debate** to build evidence and collective knowledge about EiE
3. **Promote learning across service-delivery organizations, academic institutions, and policymakers** that is informed by evidence
4. **Define knowledge gaps and key trends** that will inform future research

To achieve these goals, *JEiE* seeks articles from scholars and practitioners who work across disciplines and sectors on a range of questions related to education in countries and regions affected by crisis and conflict. *JEiE* is part of and works closely with the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), today an open global network of more than 18,000 individual members affiliated with more than 4,000 organizations and institutions in 190 countries,

to collect new research articles and field note submissions and to distribute high-quality published work. This large global partnership of activists, academics, policymakers, and practitioners in education enables *JEiE* to make a unique and powerful contribution.

STRUCTURE OF *JEiE*

According to the INEE Minimum Standards, education in emergencies is defined as “quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, nonformal, technical, vocational, higher and adult education.” *JEiE* publishes research related to education activities in the context of natural disasters and fragile or conflict-affected states, conflict-sensitive education, attacks on education, education for peacebuilding, peace education, education for resilience and disaster risk reduction, and forced migration and education.

ISSUES AND CONTENTS

Each issue features peer-reviewed articles written by researchers and practitioners in the field of EiE. The three sections of *JEiE* are:

EiE Research Articles (Section 1): Articles in this section have a clear research design; use an explicit, well-recognized theoretical or conceptual framework; employ rigorous research methods; and contribute evidence and advance knowledge on EiE. Articles that develop new EiE theoretical or conceptual frameworks or challenge existing ones are also welcome. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods articles are appropriate.

EiE Field Notes (Section 2): Articles in this section address innovative approaches to EiE; progress and challenges in designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives; and/or observations and commentary on research work. Articles in this section typically are authored by practitioners or practitioner-researcher teams.

EiE Book Reviews (Section 3): Articles in this section offer a critical review of a recently published or upcoming book, or of substantial studies, evaluations, meta-analyses, documentaries, or other media that focus on EiE.

Please see our website (<https://inee.org/journal>) for more information and detailed submission guidelines.

JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

DANA BURDE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE).

JEiE was established in response to the growing need for rigorous research to strengthen EiE evidence, support policy and practice, and improve learning in and across organizations, policy institutes, and academic institutions. *JEiE* facilitates EiE knowledge-generation and sharing, thus contributing to the professionalization of the EiE field.

<https://inee.org/journal>
journal@inee.org
ISSN 2518-6833