

## Editorial Note

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

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# EDITORIAL NOTE

**SAMANTHA COLÓN, NATHAN THOMPSON, AND DANA BURDE**

In 2024, 295 million school-age children worldwide lived in conflict-affected and fragile countries, and more than 103 million children were unable to attend school—an increase of 31 million since 2023 (Save the Children 2024). As of December 2024, children made up an estimated 40 percent of the global refugee population and 49 percent of internally displaced people (UNICEF 2024). With the intensification of conflict, poverty, and environmental disasters, it is expected that displacement will continue to increase. This will aggravate the education crisis and leave many more displaced children without access to school, while those who are in school will continue to struggle to meet basic learning standards. These statistics underscore the deepening crises affecting children worldwide while stressing the need for immediate, targeted interventions to safeguard their right to an education. Despite the overwhelming challenges—growing education gaps, increased violence and exploitation—many global efforts on the part of policymakers, program planners, scholars, and advocates remain focused on finding solutions and providing hope.

The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)*, now in its tenth year of publication, continues to offer free, open-access, peer-reviewed discussions of the education challenges facing students and other stakeholders worldwide, and of programs and policies that may support their learning, development, wellbeing, and future livelihoods.

The five research articles, two field notes, and three book reviews presented in *JEiE* Volume 10, Number 1 explore questions about displacement, identity, and the right to belong in Jordan, Nigeria, Palestine, and the United States. They review initiatives in Colombia and Ethiopia that focus on teachers' wellbeing, training, and professionalization, as well as the opportunities and challenges of refining and scaling-up play-based learning for refugee and host communities in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Tanzania, and Uganda. The authors featured in this issue also provide new insights into the displacement, migration, and resettlement experiences of populations from Iraq, South Sudan, Somalia, Syria, and beyond, and join debates centered on the agency, power, and deservingness of vulnerable, marginalized, and crisis-affected groups.

These debates are particularly important as US President Donald Trump begins his second administration and political tensions increase around such issues as internationalism and isolationism, migration and belonging. Meanwhile, the recent wave of rejections of incumbent leaders and political parties worldwide has exacerbated the uncertainty of the global political landscape. Against this backdrop, the scholars who contributed to this issue examine urgent and ongoing questions about how to ensure safe, effective, and quality education for all students amid political and social forces that may be antithetical

to this pursuit. In Syria, for example, the former members of the paramilitary now in the transitional government have moved quickly to revise the country's curriculum and textbooks—with no apparent consultation with educators or a transparent public process for instituting the changes (Abdulrahim 2025). Such abrupt, unilateral decisionmaking at the top of an education system may undermine teachers' sense of professional identity and their motivation, both of which Coetzee and her coauthors (2025) suggest in this issue are critical elements of teachers' wellbeing and their ability to foster an effective educational environment.

Occupation and war also undermine attention to vulnerable students and their communities. Children in Gaza and Ukraine face increasingly desperate conditions this winter. They are forced to confront the cold and darkness with only meager shelter and minimal access to humanitarian aid. The impact on education systems in these regions has been particularly devastating. Gaza has experienced significant destruction of its education infrastructure: 57 incidents of attacks on education were recorded in Gaza in October 2024 alone, including forced evacuations, airstrikes, and arson (INEE 2025). In Ukraine, the war and ongoing energy crisis have seriously disrupted education (UN OHCHR 2024). These parallel crises that are depriving children of essential, quality education are affecting a generation of children in both regions.

Some international nongovernmental organizations are responding to this displacement and destruction of infrastructure by bringing lower-tech education programming directly into the homes of displaced children and their families, and by building caregivers' and parents' capacity and confidence to provide young learners with education continuity (see Abdulrazzak et al. 2025, in this issue). Others are addressing this issue by emphasizing the importance of place-based education as a way to build students' awareness of their cultural heritage, which, they argue, is fundamental to their identity formation (see Wagemakers 2025, in this issue).

The research and field work featured in this issue of *JEiE* highlight the need for education that responds to context. Taken together, these articles underscore the need for education systems that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse cultural and sociopolitical conditions in which they operate. Creating such systems will help to bridge divides and foster understanding, compassion, and the provision of effective education in an increasingly polarized and violent world.

The first two research articles in this issue explore attitudes toward play-based learning and its implementation in East Africa and Lebanon. In "Understanding Perspectives and Practices of 'Learning through Play' in East African Refugee and Host-Country Schools," Abraha Asfaw, Silvia Diazgranados, Betty Akullu Ezati, Jonathan Kwok, Christina Raphael, Anne Smiley, and Peter Ssenkusu consider existing play-based learning practices in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda and discuss how to sensitize education stakeholders to the value of incorporating evidence-based learning through play (LtP) practices into their

teaching. Drawing from observations, interviews, and focus group discussions with 205 teachers, parents, and head teachers and 160 students, Asfaw and his coauthors observed that, although these stakeholders recognized the developmental benefits of play, many of them saw play and formal learning as mutually exclusive. The data suggests that several practices in use at the research sites, including guided play and games, storytelling and role-play, and energizers, either met the criteria for LtP or were LtP adjacent, although more teacher-centered practices were also common. Having referenced these practices against constructivist pedagogies and the literature on play-based learning, the authors then develop a typology of classroom-based LtP activities, their aim being to encourage policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to strengthen the ability of education systems to promote LtP. They encourage education decisionmakers to invest in targeted support that will enable teachers to identify practices proximal to LtP and to gradually increase their implementation of quality LtP practices. Asfaw et al. suggest that supportive school-based leadership, enabling school policies, parental involvement, teacher professional development, addressing the capacity and structural limitations for teachers in refugee-hosting contexts, and framing LtP as connected to active learning methods are among the factors that may support the robust implementation of LtP.

The next research article, “Navigating Remote Early Childhood Education in Hard-to-Access Settings: A Qualitative Study of Caregivers’ and Teachers’ Experiences in Lebanon,” by Somaia Abdulrazzak, Duja Michael, Jamile Youssef, Lina Torossian, Ola Kheir, Diala Hajal, and Kate Schwartz, extends the notion of the vital role parents, caregivers, and teachers play in realizing the potential of play-based learning. The authors review the qualitative factors that may have contributed to the effectiveness of a remote early learning program (RELPE) and of Ahlan Simsim Families (ASF), a parenting support intervention, for Syrian refugees in Lebanon during the country’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the August 2020 Beirut port explosion.<sup>1</sup> In July 2022 and January 2023, after the RELPE and ASF interventions, Abdulrazzak et al. analyzed data from 71 interviews and 9 focus group discussions in order to understand the experiences of teachers, early childhood development facilitators, and caregivers. Based on these data, the authors theorize that teachers’ and caregivers’ adaptability, their commitment to early childhood education, and flexible programming that accommodated family schedules promoted the success of RELPE and ASF. The caregivers’ recognition of the two programs’ value and their willingness to embrace play-based learning drove their engagement. The study highlights the importance of program design, teacher training, and collaboration in meeting families’ diverse needs. Abdulrazzak and her coauthors, applying Weisner’s (2002) ecocultural framework, conclude that programming that is flexible and responsive to families’ needs can have a positive impact, even in the absence of established routines or when routines are undermined by conflict, instability, or crisis.

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1 See Schwartz et al. (2024) for details on the RELPE and ASF impact study.

The next research article also evokes the challenges of addressing teacher capacity and training among hard-to-reach populations. In “It Would Help If We Actually Knew about the Initiative’: The Barriers Female Refugees Face in Accessing Incentive Teacher Training in Ethiopia,” Andie Reynolds identifies program-specific and structural challenges that curtailed refugee girls’ participation and retention in a teacher training initiative in Ethiopia. Longstanding investments in training refugees to become teachers who deliver primary education to refugees in Ethiopia were bolstered when, in 2018, the Ethiopian government, supported by international funders, began to offer scholarships to refugees so they could study to become qualified primary school teachers at teacher training colleges. The initiative has faced major challenges in recruiting participants, particularly female refugees. In February and March 2020, Reynolds led a situational needs assessment at 14 refugee camps in Ethiopia, which included input from 685 participants in the form of survey data, focus group discussions, and semistructured interviews. Reynolds lays out the design and rollout issues related to the initiative itself, including poor recruitment, a lack of awareness of the initiative among adolescent refugee girls, and delays in training and scholarships due to funding shortfalls. Meanwhile, the low incentive payment (most of these teachers received the equivalent of US\$12-\$14 per month), a low supply of teachers, limited opportunities for career progression, and a scarcity of eligible refugee girls situate the initiative in the ongoing structural issues facing refugee education in Ethiopia. Reynolds provides participant-driven recommendations to address these barriers. The article begs reflection on the invisibility of these refugee girls: if upper primary refugee girls living in refugee camps are to serve as teachers for the lower grades in the very camps they reside in, what support do they deserve to continue their own education after primary school? Why have they been overlooked in the coordination and implementation of a teacher training initiative that needs their labor?

The final two research articles in this issue use innovative qualitative methods to shed light on intergroup contact, belonging, and social hierarchy. In “America Will Educate Me Now’: What Do Iraqi Refugees with Special Immigrant Visas Deserve and Who Decides?” Jill Koyama examines how notions of deservingness and worthiness shape Iraqi refugees’ higher education experiences and investigates what these refugees feel they are owed after having served with the Allied Forces during the Iraq War. Koyama draws from ethnographic observation and interviews she conducted while working as a researcher and educator in Wayside, New York. In order to understand and frame the college-going experiences of 13 Special Immigrant Visa holders from Iraq who resettled in Wayside, Koyama unpacks the colonial relationships implied in the assimilation of refugees and their preparation for economic productivity through higher education degree programs. She finds that, because of these refugees’ ambition to earn advanced degrees, combined with their previous service to the country in which they now reside, they position themselves as deserving of—and even owed—a higher education. Koyama reflects on how this conclusion resonated with residents of Wayside amid national discourses that were hostile to newcomers during the years of her study (2011-2018), which culminated in President Trump’s executive order to enforce a ban on immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries. With her emphasis



on the political mobilization of deservingness and the effect of crisis on those it has touched, even across the buffers of time and geographic distance, Koyama makes an important contribution to the education in emergencies (EiE) field.

In the final research article in this issue, “Schools as Sites of Social Reproduction: Student Interactions in Diverse Secondary Schools in Nigeria,” Marlana Salmon-Letelier and S. Garnett Russell present a comprehensive mixed methods study in which they explore student friendships and interactions in diverse secondary schools in Nigeria over the course of one academic year. Salmon-Letelier and Russell highlight students’ perspectives within Nigeria’s ethnically, religiously, and linguistically divided society through survey data, analyses of students’ social networks, and individual student interviews. The study considers how academic spaces—classrooms, for example—and nonacademic areas—dormitories, common areas, and spaces for religious observance—in Nigeria’s Federal Unity Colleges create an environment in which students can enact their ethnic and religious identities in relationship to other students of the same or a different background. Salmon-Letelier and Russell find that incidents of separation or exclusion often involve at least one identity marker, although these markers often intersect and overlap, as suggested by the fact that the Hausa Muslim students experience more instances of ostracization and exhibit more insular friendship networks. Finally, they find that students who are in their final year at the Federal Unity Colleges and thus have had the most exposure to this diverse space may have more flexible boundaries when interacting across identity groups and more moderate opinions toward students who are unlike them than the students who are in their first year at these colleges.

Our field notes section begins with a critical reflection on a program that also centers on belonging and placemaking in a divided region. In his field note, “Cultural Heritage and Education: A Place-Based Educational Project in Jericho, Palestine,” Bart Wagemakers argues for the importance of children’s awareness of their cultural heritage to their identity-formation, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Wagemakers describes the Cultural Heritage and Education-Jericho (CHE-J) project’s aim to increase young learners’ appreciation of their heritage, of cultural artifacts and places of significance to their shared histories, and of their sense of belonging and ownership over these artifacts, sites, and histories. He reviews the purpose, design, and adaptation of the CHE-J project, as well as constraints on its implementation during the program pilot in the West Bank, Palestine, in December 2021. The five CHE-J activity modules address learning outcomes related to geography, archaeology, and history, among other themes. The CHE-J pilot in the Ein el-Sultan refugee camp in Jericho included an excursion for students and teachers to the Hisham’s Palace archaeological site, and culminated in a final assignment to create an exhibit or perform a play in which students brought to life their personal relationship with their city. Wagemakers positions the CHE-J project as a potentially promising approach to cultural heritage education in other conflict-affected settings, provided it is adapted to the specific conditions of those contexts.

The authors of our second field note also provide a proof of concept for a modular intervention that can be adapted to a variety of EiE settings. In “Coaching-Observing-Reflecting-Engaging: An Intervention for the Development of Teacher Wellbeing,” April R. Coetzee, Felicity L. Brown, Vania Alves, J. Lawrence Aber, Juliana Córdoba, and Mark J. D. Jordans introduce the CORE intervention. CORE, which stands for Coaching-Observing-Reflecting-Engaging, provides teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to create a classroom environment that supports learning. It does so in part by helping teachers hone their social-emotional competencies and improve their own wellbeing. Coetzee et al. outline the theory of change underpinning the development, field-testing, and adaptation of the CORE intervention in Chocó, Colombia. CORE draws from acceptance and commitment therapy and from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning social-emotional framework to address the structural, professional, and situational challenges facing teachers in EiE settings. The authors detail the wellbeing workshops and the cycle of mentorship modules and support that mobilize the CORE principles. Finally, Coetzee et al. review the perceptions of the relevance, acceptability, and feasibility of CORE among the educators who participated in the pilot, thus informing the CORE programming team’s approach to consolidating the intervention for future adaptation, adoption, and scaling.

We complete this issue with three book reviews that again touch on the themes of belonging and connection to place, especially in the refugee experience, as well as the ability of students and their communities to claim agency and stake out their future. In the first book review, Farzanah Darwish reviews Sarah Dryden-Peterson’s book *Right Where We Belong: How Refugee Teachers and Students Are Changing the Future of Education*. Dryden-Peterson draws from more than 600 interviews and 15 years of ethnographic case study research across 23 countries, including Uganda, Somalia, Lebanon, and South Africa, to shed light on the innovative, community-driven approaches to supporting refugees’ integration, resilience, and belonging that are being implemented in these countries. She blends the intimate, humanizing stories of refugees she has encountered in her research with actionable, evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educators alike. She emphasizes the importance of flexible forms of education grounded in mental health support, community engagement, and culturally relevant curricula and educational materials. Darwish writes that readers of *JEiE* will appreciate the book’s exploration of the power of refugee-led education to drive local solutions and cultivate refugees’ agency in shaping the trajectory of their education, their lives, and their communities.

The next piece in this section is Ozen Guven’s review of *Citizen Identity Formation of Domestic Students and Syrian Refugee Youth in Jordan: Centering Student Voice and Arab-Islamic Ontologies* by Patricia K. Kubow. Focus group discussions with Syrian refugee and Jordanian students who attend double-shift schools in Amman form the backbone of Kubow’s investigation of how these students construct their social and civic identities, and the role of curricula and school-based interactions in that process. Guven highlights Kubow’s finding that the Syrian and Jordanian students center their shared language, religion, history, and geography in reporting how they navigate the inclusion of newcomers

in Jordan's state education system. Kubow tracks these students' experiences with global trends in refugee education policy in which refugee students are increasingly included in host-country education systems, albeit frequently in a segregated way, such as enrolling them in double-shift schools rather than making the school systems more fully integrated. Guven points to Kubow's application of an ontological philosophical inquiry, where the students and their environment are in a constant dynamic process of "becoming," as contributing to the book's innovative ability to bridge citizenship education and EiE.

In his review of *Laboratories of Learning: Social Movements, Education and Knowledge-Making in the Global South* by Mario Novelli, Birgül Kutan, Patrick Kane, Adnan Çelik, Tejendra Pherali, and Saranel Benjamin, João Souto-Maior extends the discussion of the transformative role of education, communities claiming agency and taking power, and looking to the future. Novelli and his coauthors contribute to social movement theory by looking at the fine-grained innerworkings and relationships of four grassroots social movement institutions in Colombia, Türkiye, South Africa, and Nepal. Souto-Maior notes that the authors shed structural and functionalist perspectives toward social movement institutions and instead adopt the position that social movements are the product of dynamic, internal microlevel processes, including the knowledge-making that happens in the process of these institutions fighting for a better future. This learning can be explicitly pedagogical (e.g., teach-ins) or informal, incidental or experiential, and can occur through actions and encounters with others involved in the movement. Souto-Maior lays out Novelli et al.'s observation that much of the process of making meaning in social movements in the Global South is based in building and mobilizing diverse coalitions, framing social movements in endogenous knowledge of historical power relationships (e.g., with the Global North), and setting locally relevant, practical agendas for capitalizing on newfound power. Souto-Maior writes that the book is a must-read for those in the EiE sector who work on issues of social justice or human rights—which without a doubt includes many readers of *JEiE* Volume 10, Number 1.

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