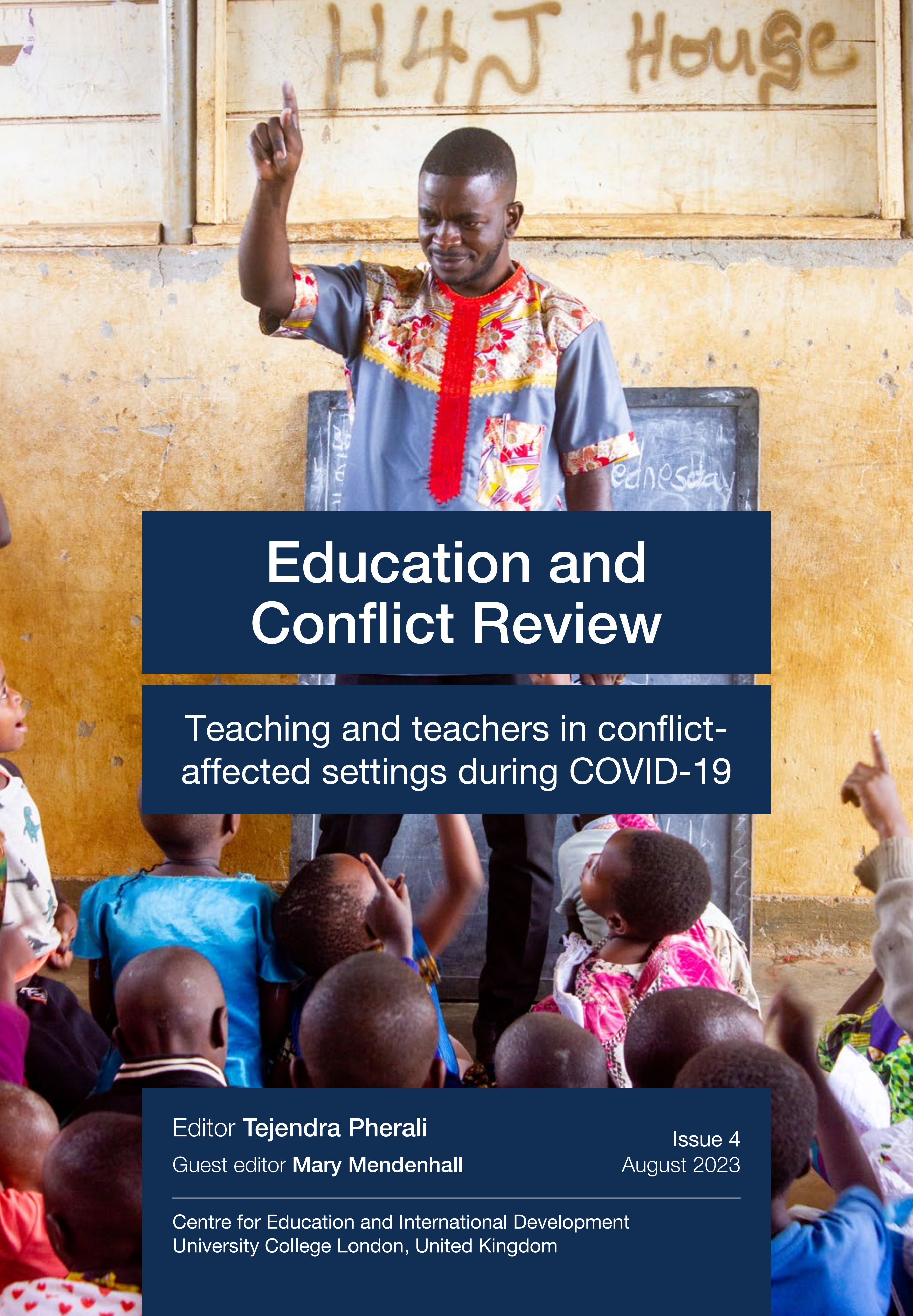

Education and Conflict Review

Teaching and teachers in conflict-affected settings during COVID-19

Editor **Tejendra Pherali**
Guest editor **Mary Mendenhall**

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Cover image: Joel Vieutome Kakalage, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a refugee teacher in Uganda. Credit: Makmende media/IIEP-UNESCO
Image above: Leticia Ainembabazi is a refugee teacher in Nakivale, Uganda. Credit: Makmende media/IIEP-UNESCO
Image pages 18 and 72: UNHCR (Mohamud)
Image pages 29, 107 and back cover: All photos have been shared with permission of the Karen Education and Culture Department, 2023

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About Education and Conflict Review

Education and Conflict Review is an open-source journal published by the Centre for Education and International Development, University College London. It focuses on debates about broad issues relating to education, conflict and international development and aims to provide succinct analyses of social, political, economic and security dimensions in conflict-affected and humanitarian situations. It provides a forum for knowledge exchange to build synergies between academics, practitioners and graduate students who are researching and working in these environments.

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Message from the Editors

Professor Tejendra Pherali

Dr Mary Mendenhall

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 was probably the most disruptive global crisis that humanity has ever experienced. The disproportionate vulnerability of the elderly populations and rapid transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus through human contacts meant that mass education in physical spaces had to be stopped to decelerate the spread of the disease to families through children and young people. The nation-wide closures of schools and other educational institutions affected an estimated 1.6 billion learners (94% of the enrolled student population) and 63 million teachers in more than 190 countries around the globe (United Nations, 2020). Millions of learners in disadvantaged and crisis contexts were also deprived of school meals, access to healthcare, and opportunities to socialise with their friends. This situation exposed the entire education sector to an 'unprecedented global emergency' (Save the Children, 2020), particularly in contexts of poor or no internet connectivity where online teaching and learning were challenging. Education delivery was further hampered by teachers' lack of familiarity with alternative pedagogical approaches, such as the use of educational technologies in fostering meaningful teaching and learning. Education in emergency responses during the pandemic largely concentrated on ensuring learning continuity through the use of low- and high-tech educational technologies, including the dissemination of educational resources to learners at home. The lack of necessary skills among teachers and educational professionals as the frontline workers to adapt new pedagogical approaches as well as their stress, anxieties, and vulnerability during the times of lockdowns were often underserved (UNESCO, 2020).

Whilst 'teachers globally were forced to adapt to new ways of working, adjusting pedagogies for the realities of remote learning' through synchronous and asynchronous delivery on online platforms, and broadcasting recorded lessons on television and radio, they were faced with 'disorienting immediacy' of the emergency and largely, the unpreparedness of education systems to cope with the complete replacement of face-to-face teaching and learning (INEE, 2022: 6). There was sweeping national-level guidance on online teaching without sufficiently recognising the system-side capacity and resource deficits as well as the challenging social, political, and security environments teachers were working in. In particular, teachers' experiences of the pandemic, their professional needs and pedagogical adaptation in conflict-affected contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic was neglected.

The educational settings in conflict and protracted crisis have long suffered from a shortage of a qualified, trained, and motivated teaching workforce (Mendenhall, Gomez & Varni, 2019); where teachers are available, they often lack in relevant qualifications or professional capacities to teach learners who have been uprooted, traumatised, and treated with hostility in host communities. Teachers in protracted crises are poorly paid; forced to work with limited educational resources; and their employment is usually unstable due to ongoing conflict and restrictions on their right to work. . Additionally, they continuously face violence, hostilities, and lack of access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Nevertheless, teachers in crisis contexts are the frontline heroes (Education Cannot Wait, 2020) and can play a crucial role not only in maintaining education during an emergency but also facilitating the return of most vulnerable learners who would otherwise drop out from school permanently. Most importantly, experiences of educational delivery in settings that have long endured disruptions, physical restrictions due to ongoing insecurity, failures, or denial of state educational provisions to displaced learners, and frequent and repeated displacements of learning communities can provide useful knowledge and insights into how to cope with sudden, acute, and large-scale emergencies globally. Hence, it is crucial to examine the experiences of teachers and processes of teaching and learning in conflict-affected and protracted crises during the debilitating public health emergency.

The most vulnerable learning communities such as internally displaced people, refugees and those who live in contexts of ongoing war have suffered the most during COVID-19 and the impact is likely to be long-lasting due to the decline of humanitarian aid, deteriorating economic conditions of families due to lockdowns, and closures of schools and learning centres. Even though the most frightening phase of the COVID-19 pandemic may be over, the failures in humanitarian response, under-preparedness of national and global institutions to tackle the health emergency, and disproportionately adverse effects of the crisis on the most vulnerable educational communities must inform education in emergencies policies to better prepare for future pandemics.

This special issue of the ECR brings together a broad range of empirical research that focuses on teachers and teaching in conflict settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include innovations in research methods and ethics in educational research in conflict settings; the use of educational technology and teacher professional development; increased role of parents and family members as ‘teachers’; local approaches to educational delivery during the pandemic; collaborations and partnerships; resource mobilisation; equity and inclusion; (false) promises of online learning to many at the margins; and innovations in pedagogies and teacher professionalism and well-being.

Josić and Sugrue focus on teacher well-being with a particular focus on gendered experiences during school closures in low-income countries. Drawing upon the secondary analysis of survey data, they argue that teacher well-being during health crises is affected by gender norms in society and therefore it is important to reflect on the assumptions and values embedded in education programmes while designing and implementing COVID-19 measures in the school environments.

Rinehart and Tyrosvoutis present an interesting analysis of ethnic and indigenous parallel teacher education systems in Myanmar that have developed resilience and creative ways of navigating disruptions. When the pandemic paralysed much of the teacher education provision in the centralised government system, the ethnic and indigenous communities harnessed their ability to adapt responses to emergent needs of COVID-19 restrictions within their parallel educational systems. Despite minimal resources, these educational provisions have a long-standing experience of tackling multiple crises and are therefore designed for disruption. The authors argue that the expertise of parallel teacher education systems in Myanmar offer useful insights into the ways in which teacher education systems work in crisis contexts.

Khoso’s paper draws on 17 qualitative interviews with male teachers in the Shikarpur district of Sindh-Pakistan to discuss how teachers in the district were affected by tribal conflicts and restrictive COVID-19-related measures. He reports that tribal feuds had been more threatening and obstructionist to educational access than the COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the government. Whilst the teachers were struggling to recuperate the year-long learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers had been the victim of conflicts

and learners had long suffered from the ongoing violations of the right to education.

Hure and Taylor illustrate the critical role of refugee teachers in providing education continuity and support to children in the Kakuma refugee camp in Northern Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper reveals that refugee teachers in the camp showed 'remarkable commitment and creativity' in maintaining education in the camp when the host community teachers had to return home during the lockdown. Yet, these teachers, as the paper highlights, had to function with limited educational resources and internet connectivity. The authors argue that refugee teachers, who have gained crucial pedagogical knowledge and experiences during the pandemic, must be recognised as professionals and incorporated in the mainstream education system with the provision of fair service conditions and opportunities for capacity development. This policy shift could be instrumental in mitigating the learning crisis during an emergency.

Vayaliparampil's paper describes the social, cultural and security challenges faced by female university students from conflict-affected countries who had to return home during university closures. The paper argues that alternative educational provisions during COVID-19 must pay attention to the potential risk of physical violence at home and in communities that female students are likely to face. Hence, the author stresses that safety and wellbeing of their students are basic ethical and moral responsibilities of universities and decisions relating to emergency response at the times of crisis must adhere to the fundamental principles of human rights and rights to education.

Christian, Singh, and Sayed examine the impact of the health pandemic on teachers' experiences in contexts of ongoing conflict and school violence in a community in South Africa. They highlight the importance of teacher voice, support, and autonomy to the education policy-making process and the negative implications if teachers are not meaningfully included.

Billy, Thibault, and Bengtsson address the implementation of an inclusive refugee policy that includes refugee teachers – the Djibouti Declaration – in Uganda and some of the delays and disruptions wrought by COVID-19 on its rollout. They pinpoint promising movements in the right direction, but also key areas that need to be improved as the government and the range of education actors working in Uganda strive for more holistic and coordinated teacher management of national and refugee teachers alike.

Sánchez-Bautista, Reyes Gómez, Mojica Gómez, and Moreno Villamil portray teachers' experiences engaging in a reflexive research initiative during and after the pandemic in an underserved refugee and immigrant community in the capital of Colombia. They show what can be gained as teachers employ inclusive, intercultural, and decolonial approaches to their pedagogical and curricular practices, efforts that can disrupt the silencing of immigrant, indigenous, and refugee knowledges and assimilationist tendencies.

Garland, Louis, Alhalabi, and Kennedy share an innovative higher education initiative for Syrian refugee learners in Lebanon. Drawing on the facilitators' and students' experiences participating in a Co-designed Massive Open Collaboration (CoMOOC) on community-based research, they demonstrate how hybrid and participatory approaches can ensure relevant and meaningful learning opportunities and research skills development amidst health pandemics as well as protracted crises.

Gichuhi examines the impact of COVID-19 on pastoralist areas in Kenya that have been enduring persistent violence connected with inter-ethnic conflict. She demonstrates the further marginalisation experienced by these groups during the pandemic due to lack of technology and telecommunications infrastructure as well as the shared and differential challenges that local and non-local teachers experience in terms of their personal security and options for pursuing teaching elsewhere.

Drawing on a peer researcher-based methodology, Charitonos, Khalil, Ross, Bonfini-Hotlosz, Webster, and Aristorenas capture the experiences of instructors working with refugee learners in non-formal tertiary settings in Jordan. The authors present four vignettes to introduce the findings and to point to the amplified disadvantage experienced by teachers in refugee settings during the pandemic due to pre-existing disparities and emerging digital inequalities.

Hence, the papers in this special issue broadly highlight the lack of preparedness of the education systems, both the formal and non-formal provisions, in dealing with disruptions caused by health pandemics. The lack of emergency education policies, preparedness, and planning in national systems as well as within international organisations supporting education in low- and middle-income countries led to confusions, disorientation, and sluggishness of emergency response in the educational sector. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of the face-to-face mass education provisions globally at the times of highly infectious diseases. An important lesson learned is that the education systems must be equipped with remote learning and teachers well prepared with relevant pedagogical skills that can provide high-quality learning experience via remote learning methods. Education technologies (EdTech) have hence become not supplementary tools of learning but indispensable educational approaches. Nevertheless, it is crucial to research how EdTech provisions ensure equity, inclusion, and diversity of learning as they increasingly become fundamental tools of educational experience. These efforts to expand the evidence base on EdTech must also recognise the central importance of the role of the teacher in the classroom and engage them in finding effective solutions. Thirdly, refugee teachers and educators who live within the communities are the most resilient and committed frontline educational agents whose experience and innovative ways of emergency education can be harnessed to mitigate learning loss, provide education safely, and inform education policies. Educational practices in contexts of conflict and protracted crises can provide invaluable lessons to education systems in generally stable environments to prepare for educational delivery in future emergencies. Finally, educational response in emergencies must put teacher agency, their continuing professional development, and well-being at the forefront of planning, programme design, and delivery.

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Contents

01 **Teachers' gendered experiences of the global health crisis: The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher well-being during school closures** 9
Jasmina Josić, Education Development Center, Inc., USA
Mary F. Sugrue, Education Development Center, Inc., USA

02 **Designed for disruption: Lessons learned from teacher education in Myanmar and its borderlands** 19
Gray Rinehart, Independent Consultant, Myanmar
Greg Tyrosvoutis, TeacherFOCUS, Thailand; The University of Toronto, Canada

03 **Challenges for the government school teachers during COVID-19 and tribal conflicts/ feuds in Shikarpur district, Sindh, Pakistan** 30
Abdullah Khoso, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Pakistan

04 **The critical role of refugee teachers in the COVID-19 education response: Supporting their continued professional contributions and leadership in displacement and durable solutions** 37
Mohamud Hure, UNHCR Education Section, Denmark
Jennie Taylor, UNHCR Bureau for East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes (EHAGL), Kenya

05 **Educating students in the gender-conflict-COVID-19 intersection** 45
Mary Vayaliparampil, American University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

06 **Education policy-making in South Africa during COVID-19** 55
Desire' Christian, Centre for International Teacher Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Yusuf Sayed, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

07 **Ensuring effective teacher management in refugee settings in the COVID-19 era: A Ugandan case study of policy and practice** 63
Candyce Billy, IIEP-UNESCO, France
Claire Thibault, IIEP-UNESCO, France
Stephanie Bengtsson, Benedex, Austria

08 **Teaching experiences in contexts of conflict and cultural diversity during the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of a public school in Bogotá** 73
Consuelo Sánchez-Bautista, University of Minnesota, U.S.
Liliana Reyes Gómez, UPTC, Colombia
Liceth Carolina Mojica Gómez, Universidad Santo Tomás, Colombia
Sonia Moreno Villamil, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

09 **Hybrid higher education innovation for Syrian refugee learners: Reflections on an embedded community-based research CoMOOC** 81
Natalie Garland, University College London, UK
Bayan Louis, MultiAid Programs NGO (MAPs), Lebanon
Fadi Alhalabi, MultiAid Programs NGO (MAPs), Lebanon
Eileen Kennedy, University College London, UK

10 **Teaching in conflict-affected settings during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya** 89
Loise Gichuhi, University of Nairobi, Kenya

11 **'We have dealt with this situation randomly': A peer ethnographic approach with teachers in refugee settings in the age of COVID-19** 97
Koula Charitonos, Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University, UK
Betul Khalil, STEM Faculty, The Open University, UK
Tara W. Ross, Keiser University and Centreity Learning Systems, USA
Cindy Bonfini-Hotlosz, Centreity Learning Systems, USA
Ben Webster, Mosaik Education, UK / Jordan
Miki Aristorenas, Mosaik Education, UK / Jordan

Teachers' gendered experiences of the global health crisis:
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher well-being during school closures

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Abstract

With the COVID-19 pandemic once again highlighting the crucial role teachers play in maintaining learning continuity, building a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences and well-being during the health crisis can inform ongoing crisis response and education development strategies. This paper focuses on teachers' gendered experiences during school closures in four low-resource, post-conflict countries and suggests how their experiences might inform the current discourse on teacher well-being. Drawing from the secondary analysis of survey data from a multi-project panel study, the paper discusses teachers' gendered experiences within the socio-ecological framework of teacher well-being in low-resource, crisis- and conflict-affected contexts, as outlined by the Education Equity Research Initiative. Recognising teacher well-being as a multi-dimensional and context-specific phenomenon, the paper discusses how teacher well-being is affected by gender norms in society and suggests programmatic responses to support teachers' well-being during school closures.

Key Words

teacher well-being, gendered experiences, school closures, conceptual framework

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Teaching during the educational responses to the global health crises

The global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing social, economic, and political conditions and further destabilised countries already battling previous political or health crises. In 2020, nearly every government in the world closed down schools in an attempt to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Approximately 1.6 billion learners (94 percent of students) and 63 million teachers in more than 190 countries were affected (United Nations, 2020). From the onset of the pandemic, education systems and education development programmes were expected to adapt nimbly by providing alternative solutions amid rapidly changing contexts in an unfamiliar and unpredictable environment. Schools switched to distance learning modalities, and teachers were immediately tasked to adopt these modalities, often without sufficient guidance, training, or resources (United Nations, 2020).

The provision of alternative education solutions for learners affected by the pandemic varied from region to region. In low- and middle-income countries, pre-existing disparities in resources and quality were exacerbated by the limited resources and support provided to make the transition to remote or distance learning, leaving teachers under- or un-prepared to engage with learners and caregivers (World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021). As schools across the globe adopted alternative or distance education approaches, concerns were raised about teachers, particularly female teachers, facing intensified demands on their time as they engaged in distance teaching, supporting learning at home, and other care responsibilities. These factors would add 'extra layers of stress, lack of time and

additional work' (Unterhalter, 2020, para. 5).

During health crises, the underlying gender inequalities in societies are exacerbated, due to the generalised responses of governments and organisations that do not consider the lived realities of men and women (Fuhrman *et al*., 2020; Missika and Vicherat, 2020). Current health policy research recognises that understanding the 'gendered dimensions' of health crises plays an important role in designing programmatic responses, as biological and social normative factors shape the ability of both women and men to survive and recover from a pandemic's effects (Oertelt-Prigione, 2020; The Lancet, 2020). The 2013-2016 West African Ebola outbreak and the Zika virus in South and Central America provided insights into how differently the effects of disease outbreaks were manifested, based on social gender norms (Simba and Ngcobo, 2020; Davies and Bennett, 2016). These studies showed that girls and women were disproportionately affected, particularly with women primarily responsible for caring for the sick and the young. The gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic manifested not only in the mortality rates of women and men (Sex, Gender and COVID-19 Project, 2020) but also in the mental well-being, physical health, and safety of women and girls, as well as economic resilience of women and educational opportunities for girls (Briggs *et al*., 2020; de Paz *et al*., 2020). Additionally, situations of social instability exacerbated pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls, and violence against girls and women frequently intensifies in times of crisis (The Global Women's Institute, 2021; The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). With households under financial strain in many regions, stay-at-home orders, school closings, and deteriorating access to basic hygiene products and health services, women and girls often faced disproportionate economic, health, and social risks. Child care, elder care, and household responsibilities typically fall on women, and these responsibilities and related stresses compounded the pandemic's effects on women.

Looking at the intersections of gendered social norms and structural responses to the crisis caused by the pandemic, this paper examines gendered experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the attitudes and behaviours of teachers. It focuses specifically on teachers' experiences during the school closures in four low-resource, post-conflict countries—Honduras, Liberia, Mali, and Zambia—and how those experiences can inform future responses to support teacher well-being during emergencies.

Teacher well-being

Teachers share significant responsibility for preparing young people to lead successful and productive lives. It is well-documented that teachers play a vital role in promoting and supporting learners' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Studies show that teachers are the single most important in-school factor contributing to student success, satisfaction, and achievement—for all children, regardless of their circumstances, location, or social status (Hattie, 2009). Providing a quality education largely depends on having a qualified, well-resourced, and motivated teaching workforce. Hence, strengthening the education systems that prioritise investment in teacher quality and professionalism is critical for the future of education.

In recent decades, teachers' psychological, physical, and emotional well-being has received increasing attention, as it is known to have a bearing on their aspirations, development, and retention in the profession. As stated above, it is also critical to students' well-being and achievement (Richardson, Watt and Devos, 2013). Work-related stress and poor teacher well-being are often cited as contributing to poor teacher performance, burnout, staffing shortages, and attrition, and being an impediment to education reforms (Hasher and Weber, 2021).

While there is no universal definition of teacher well-being, there is general consensus that well-being is multi-dimensional, nuanced, and context-specific and that it refers to physical, emotional, social, and cognitive health. For instance, Uchida, Ogihara, and Fukushima (2015, p. 823) caution that cross-cultural studies point at 'sizable cultural differences in how people define well-being and how people pursue it'. Teaching as a profession also varies across different countries (Stromquist, 2018), as do teachers' working conditions. At the individual level, feeling stressed, burdened, pressured, or over-worked can negatively affect teacher well-being.

Teachers in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts often work without professional development

support, certification, or reasonable compensation. However, limited attention has been paid to teacher well-being in these settings. They may also face personal hardships that could threaten their well-being (Mendenhall, Gomez and Varni, 2018; Burns and Lawrie, 2015). Among these challenges are concerns for their own and their family's safety, stress due to economic uncertainty, or being over-worked due to increased workloads.

For this paper, we rely on the well-being positioning and definition by McCallum and Price (2015, p.17), who propose that

> well-being is diverse and fluid, respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected.

This view of well-being, along with the Education Equity Research Initiative's (EERI) Teacher Well-Being conceptual framework in low-resource, crisis- and conflict-affected contexts, was adopted to inform and guide the analysis in this paper. The EERI Teacher Well-Being conceptual framework uses a socio-ecological framework to offer a logical structure of individual and contextual factors. It provides a clear picture of how constructs of teacher well-being, self-efficacy, job stress and burnout, job satisfaction, and social-emotional competencies may be affected (Falk *et al*., 2019). The framework also identifies the inter-related environments, interactions, and relationships that contribute to teacher well-being. It recognises that individuals have responsibility for their own well-being and, at the same time, acknowledges that teachers operate and interact in numerous micro-systems, including the school environment, home, and community. The framework also outlines how the constructs of well-being interact at the individual, school, community, national, regional, and global levels. Gender, teaching experience, coping mechanisms, and content knowledge are identified as factors that might contribute positively or negatively to teacher well-being at the individual level, depending on the context in which the teacher lives and works. Together with the definition of teacher well-being, the framework guided and informed the discussion of our findings, as well as the recommendations aimed at providing more comprehensive support for teachers and their well-being at the individual, school, community, and national levels.

Methodology

In May 2020, Education Development Center initiated a research study across its ongoing projects in several countries. The study, the Effects of COVID-19 on Project Beneficiaries, was an effort to provide insights and useful information to help shape Education Development Center's programmatic responses, and to contribute to a broader understanding of its project beneficiaries' resilience. The research was shaped around the USAID 2019 Policy Framework on Education and Resilience, which focuses on understanding communities' capacities to withstand the shock of the adversities created by the global health crises of COVID-19 pandemic, which Shah (2019, p. 23) describes as 'short-term, acute deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on people's current state of well-being, level of assets, livelihoods, and safety or their ability to withstand future'.

This paper draws from the sub-set of data collected from teachers as part of a larger study focusing on four projects implemented in low-resource, post-conflict countries: Honduras, Liberia, Mali, and Zambia. The aim is to understand the gendered dimensions of the health crises as experienced by teachers within these contexts, and to examine whether the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the attitudes and behaviours of teachers in the development projects differed by gender.[1] The results informed new insights into teacher well-being that are vital to programmatic responses, particularly during global health crises.

This paper relies on the secondary analysis of data collected from May through August 2020 using

1 The survey used the variable 'sex' aligned with the USAID sex disaggregation, with two response options: male and female; the survey did not ask about gender identity. In the absence of additional data about gender, the study uses the variable 'sex' as a proxy for teachers' gender identity and experiences as female or male teachers. The paper does not reference the experiences of gender non-conforming teachers.

a survey instrument administered via phone[2]. The survey was designed to capture the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of development project beneficiaries in relation to their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic 'shocks', specifically, any deviations in environmental, economic, conflict, or violence trends (Shah, 2019). The survey data was collected over three intervals; an interval represents the contact with the participant and includes the same set of core questions[3]. The study used a randomly stratified sample from the projects' population. The secondary analysis conducted for this paper focused on the sample of teachers (n=2,045) reached by four projects. Across the four projects, 56.7 percent of participating teachers were female. The proportion of female and male participants in each country varied, fairly reflecting the gender breakdown of the teaching workforce in those countries. While this study examines the experiences of teachers in four countries, it does not take the comparativist approach. Rather, the data are aggregated to provide a richer analysis across different time points during the early stages of the pandemic and to contribute to an understanding of the 'gendered dimensions' of a health crisis in education (The Lancet, 2020).

Data analysis for this study focused on six constructs created to capture beneficiaries' actions around personal protection and prevention, access to basic needs and services, concerns about health, livelihoods, concerns about and experiences of violence, and perceptions about family resilience[4]. Multiple survey items were added to create a composite score for each construct. To examine the effects of COVID-19 on the attitudes and behaviours of teachers by gender, multiple analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted for each construct; the variables of sex (as a proxy for gender) and the interval were included as independent factors. The results of the secondary survey analysis were examined within the context of the expanding literature and frameworks about teacher well-being, particularly in low-resource and crisis-affected contexts. Notably, the survey inquired about the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of project participants that were relevant to their understanding of well-being. However, it did not inquire about specific challenges, demands, or tasks of the teaching profession.

Findings:

Teachers' gendered experiences of the pandemic effects and educational practices

The ANOVA examined whether the effects of the pandemic on teachers' attitudes and behaviours were different by gender over the three intervals of data collection. The results of these analyses include the following[5]:

- There was statistically significant interaction between the effects of gender and interval on the actions around personal protection and prevention. Female teachers reported making significantly greater protection and prevention efforts than their male counterparts. While female teachers' efforts were consistent over time, male teachers' protection and prevention efforts decreased over time.
- Female teachers had significantly less access to basic needs and services—particularly health services—and significantly lower livelihood standards. While access to basic needs and services and livelihood standards significantly improved for all teachers over time, the differences between male and female teachers remained.
- Female teachers reported significantly lower levels of family resilience to the shocks of the health crisis than male teachers. While the family resilience levels of male teachers increased over time, the family resilience of female teachers stagnated.

Additional analysis of teachers' responses to whether people in their community faced increased exposure to violence in the home indicated a statistically significant difference in the proportion of female and male teachers[6]. A greater proportion of

2 The study was able to reach only beneficiaries who had phones.

3 Interval duration varied across locations between 3-6 weeks, depending on the significant national policies affecting the logistical procedures of the programme staff members who coordinated data collection.

4 Informed by the 2019 USAID Policy Framework on Education and Resilience.

5 See results tables in the Annex.

6 Chi-Square analysis.

female teachers (36.6 percent) than male teachers (28.3 percent) reported increased violence in the homes in their community.

The survey also inquired whether teachers' children had access to educational activities during school closures. Overall, 76.8 percent of teachers (n=1,572) had children in school. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference, based on teachers' gender, in their children's access to education[7]. A greater proportion of female teachers' children (79.6 percent) had some sort of replacement education, compared to those of male teachers (75.0 percent).

The results suggest that balancing the roles and responsibilities of teaching and care-giving was central to many female teachers' experiences, due to social norms and gendered expectations at home or in the community. The findings also highlight the contrasting gendered experiences of the participants: female teachers reported having a greater domestic workload, less access to basic needs and services, lower levels of livelihood and family resilience, and a heightened risk of domestic violence.

Participating project staff members reported that physical distancing and school closures impeded teachers' ability to maintain professional relationships with their colleagues, particularly in light of teachers' limited means and resources to do student outreach or to network with colleagues. After the schools reopened, teachers reported greater levels of concern about job security, their families' financial stability, and their health than during the initial months of the pandemic, when schools were closed.

Discussion

The study findings have parallels with evidence from past public health responses to health crises. While intended to protect citizens, public health responses have historically reinforced restrictive societal norms and advantaged one gender over the other, due to the different ways men and women experience them (The Lancet, 2020). The reinforcement of the traditional societal norms of women as caregivers and unpaid workers corresponds with the female teachers in this study, who reported having a greater domestic workload, less access to basic needs and services, lower levels of livelihood and family resilience, and concerns about personal and family safety when schools reopened. Previous studies indicate that women are more likely than men to perceive COVID-19 as a very serious health problem and to comply with restrictive health measures, and the restrictions on movement during the pandemic possibly impeded female teachers' ability to access health care services. These findings support the argument that public health policies, practices, and communication should be viewed through a gender lens to encourage gender equity in roles and responsibilities when responding to public health measures.

Our findings are similarly consistent with the current literature on teacher well-being. Teachers in general, and particularly those who work in low-resource, crisis- and conflict-affected contexts, face many challenges that negatively affect their well-being. A recent study in the U.S. indicates that teachers 'showed a significantly higher prevalence of negative mental health outcomes during the pandemic when compared to healthcare and office workers', and that female teachers were 'significantly more likely to report anxiety symptoms, depression symptoms and feeling of isolation than male teachers' (Kush, *et al*., 2022, pp. 3-4). This study also notes that various guidelines provided for supportive school reopenings have 'often fail[ed] to consider the magnitude and scope of possible negative effects on mental health outcomes among teachers' and have lacked guidelines or interventions to address these effects on teachers' (p. 4).

Learning is an inherently social process embedded in a social context, wherein students and teachers work together to build knowledge (Wood, 1998). Several studies highlight that knowledge, communication, and student-teacher relationships are foundational to effective teaching and learning and can contribute to teachers' well-being (Hattie, 2009; Falk *et al*., 2019). In the contexts where our projects were implemented, we found that physical distancing and school closures impeded teachers' ability to maintain professional relationships with colleagues, do student outreach, or to network with colleagues. While social and emotional support for learners in crisis settings is increasingly prioritised in educational programmes, the social and emotional

7 Chi-Square analysis.

well-being of teachers needs more attention in order to address the individual and contextual factors that affect them in their work. Numerous studies and reports call for greater understanding of the factors and predictors of teacher well-being, including the role of social relations (Hascher and Weber, 2021). Moving forward, both pre-service and in-service teacher professional development programmes should provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to adapt and deliver instruction via multiple modalities, including distance or hybrid learning. Additionally, peer support programmes and remote training should foster connectedness with colleagues and help teachers transition to remote teaching.

The learnings from educational responses in different emergency settings (e.g., natural disasters, human-caused crises, and health pandemics, including COVID-19) can inform education policy and programming so it is better prepared and relevantly resourced to respond to change and support longer-term educational reforms. The roles women and girls play in providing formal and informal care is often under-estimated or invisible, and this gender blindness can result in public health measures that are less effective for women and detrimental to their overall well-being. A contextual analysis of educational environments and a gender-inclusive approach can inform response pathways. It also may mitigate the inequitable risks posed by health crises and support teacher well-being. The EERI Teacher Well-Being framework can support policy-makers and practitioners in developing policies and identifying intervention points for enhancing teacher well-being and creating more resilient education systems (Falk, Frisoli and Varna, 2021). In addition to reforming educational programme design, planning also needs to consider multi-sectoral approaches to crisis response. Relevant, effective, equitable, and proportionate measures for responding to a health crisis require efforts not only in the education sector but in health, social, and economic systems. Social protection systems need to be in place to support all members of society. Policy-makers and implementers should adopt a gender-responsive approach to health messaging and communications, which may provide greater equity in gender roles during health crises and improve the well-being of all.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this paper signify the need for education policy-makers and practitioners to consider both individual and contextual factors from the start, and to design gender-responsive programming that prioritises and supports teacher well-being. We argue for the importance of reflecting on the assumptions and values embedded in education (and other) programmes and policies to promote better understanding of how measures, tools, and interventions introduced in the school environment during health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, impact supportive learning environments. It is also important to understand how they interact with the less flexible gendered relations of power in society that may affect teachers' mental health and well-being. It is through this process that we can increase our understanding of how practice and policy could be reshaped to provide more equitable experiences for all education programme participants, including teachers. As highlighted in the EERI framework, teacher well-being is the responsibility of the entire education system. We encourage policy-makers and programme implementers to reflect on the learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic experience, and to consider how educational programmes can be shaped to consider working conditions and teacher well-being as key factors in improving student learning outcomes. We urge them to engage in dialogue with teachers about their experiences and challenges, and to include their voices in discussions around teacher well-being policies and programmes. We also want to emphasise the need to identify opportunities for additional research to examine the intersections of gender, social hierarchy, and community relations within educational programmes or policy decisions, with a particular focus on the crisis- or conflict-affected contexts where teachers are often at the forefront of facilitating both learning and psycho-social stability among learners and their families.

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Appendix A:

ANOVA Results

Table 1: Two-Way ANOVA. Effects of Sex and Time Interval on Personal Prevention and Protection Construct

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
(Intercept)	65068.77	1	65068.77	135021.39	0.000
Sex	49.44	1	49.44	102.60	0.000
Time Interval	5.98	2	2.99	6.20	0.002
Interaction	4.62	2	2.31	4.79	0.008
Error	942.62	1956	0.48		
Total	69697.25	1962			

Table 2: Two-Way ANOVA. Effects of Sex and Time Interval on Access to Personal Needs and Services Construct

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
(Intercept)	18112.50	1	18112.50	25891.62	0.000
Sex	17.40	1	17.40	24.87	0.000
Time Interval	5.45	2	2.73	3.90	0.021
Interaction	0.49	2	0.24	0.35	0.707
Error	887.03	1268	0.70		
Total	21189.00	1274			

Table 3: Two-Way ANOVA. Effects of Sex and Time Interval on Access to Concerns about Health Construct

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
(Intercept)	14792.45	1	14792.45	68611.22	0.000
Sex	0.16	1	0.16	0.74	0.391
Time Interval	6.42	2	3.21	14.89	0.000
Interaction	0.48	2	0.24	1.12	0.327
Error	434.00	2013	0.22		
Total	16156.50	2019			

Table 4: Two-Way ANOVA. Effects of Sex and Time Interval on Livelihood Construct

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
(Intercept)	5630.27	1	5630.27	16552.40	0.000
Sex	1.46	1	1.46	4.29	0.039
Time Interval	15.82	2	7.91	23.25	0.000
Interaction	1.63	2	0.81	2.39	0.092
Error	644.58	1895	0.34		
Total	6468.25	1901			

Table 5: Two-Way ANOVA. Effects of Sex and Time Interval on Resilience Construct

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
(Intercept)	18394.46	1	18394.46	9459.13	0.000
Sex	46.27	1	46.27	23.79	0.000
Time Interval	52.07	2	26.04	13.39	0.000
Interaction	6.17	2	3.08	1.59	0.205
Error	3860.08	1985	1.94		
Total	22734.75	1991			

Designed for disruption:
Lessons learned from teacher education in Myanmar and its borderlands

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Abstract

Due to protracted armed conflict, recurrent political crises, widespread structural disruption, and multi-dimensional oppression, teacher education in Myanmar and its borderlands operates within parallel state and nonstate systems. This article draws from a qualitative study that used complexity theory to examine how parallel ethnic and indigenous teacher education systems navigated disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic largely paralysed the provision of teacher education in Myanmar's central government system. In contrast, the actors interviewed for this study who work in parallel systems pivoted and re-developed their programming to meet the need on the ground. The use of de-centralised approaches and flexible programming, and their ability to adapt the response to emerging needs and to operate with minimal resources, may signal that these parallel teacher education systems are designed for disruption. How such systems have continued to function amid complex emergencies may offer insights for researchers investigating the ways in which teacher education systems work in other crisis contexts.

Key Words

Myanmar, teacher education, complexity theory, education in emergencies

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Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has shown that, without much notice, any presumably stable teacher education programme can find itself in a state of emergency. As the ratio of children learning in conflict zones has increased to a staggering one in five, ever more teachers undoubtedly will work on the frontlines of education in emergencies (EiE) (Fylkesnes *et al*., 2019). As the number of protracted emergencies increases, teachers and the systems that support them will need an expanded toolbox of integrated skills, knowledge, and responses to enable them to navigate disruption (UNESCO, 2021). [1]This will affect how teachers are recruited, trained, and supported, and will have significant implications for the fields of teacher education and EiE (Lingard, Wyatt-Smith, and Heck, 2021).

The literature on teacher education in emergency contexts highlights the contents of teacher education programmes: disaster risk reduction, conflict prevention, mental health and psychosocial support, education for peace, and teaching multiple-perspective history. All of this supports what Burde *et al*. (2017) call the 'protective potential of education' during crisis (c.f. INEE, 2010; Burde, Lahmann, and Thompson, 2019). The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies situates teacher training as a core educational strategy during emergency response. Per their guidelines, teacher education in emergencies should be 'periodic, relevant, and structured training according to needs and circumstances' (INEE, 2010, p. 83). However,

1 This paper uses 'disruption' to describe the root causes of education in emergencies: widespread insecurity; governance challenges; ongoing social, economic, physical and environmental hazards; and direct or indirect impacts of conflict (INEE, 2010).

Burde *et al*. (2015) note that there has been minimal inquiry into the extent to which teacher education in emergencies is tailored to teachers' needs and qualifications. They suggest that there is a need for deeper understanding of the ways teachers perceive their roles in crisis contexts. Ring and Reeves (2015), recognising that a solid evidence base can inform new policy and practice and support the retention of teachers, identify critical gaps in the grey and academic literature around how teacher education in emergences operates.

As conflict and displacement continue to increase globally (UNHCR, 2022), systems-level recommendations for teacher education in emergencies will prove invaluable. Comparative lenses are needed to better understand, learn from, and advance teacher education systems across the globe. The ability to capture and compare the multi-dimensional and nuanced aspects of teacher education, especially teacher education in emergencies, requires comprehensive, multi-level approaches and frameworks designed specifically for the task (Sahlberg and Cobbold, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that there are lessons to be learned from emergency settings which may be applicable to all teacher education systems (UNESCO, 2021). The Myanmar context offers multiple long-standing examples of teacher education systems which have operated despite persistent disruptions, and may help to address gaps in the EiE literature. This article draws from the strategies and practices of parallel teacher education providers in Myanmar and its borderlands, highlighting their adeptness at managing disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] It situates the pandemic within a broader landscape of protracted conflict and disruption in Myanmar, and examines how complexity theory may help describe how teacher education systems are organised and how they operate.

Teacher education in Myanmar

Over the past 70 years, the baseline state of education in Myanmar has been associated with protracted armed conflict, ethno-religious persecution, widespread displacement, and political unrest (South and Lall, 2016; Lopes Cardozo and Maber, 2019). The Myanmar context—for this study, the territory of Myanmar and its borderlands where displaced and/or migratory populations from Myanmar reside—contains a mosaic of teacher education providers linked to different education systems (Figure 1). These systems are of varying scale, scope, and demographics, but all include, to different degrees, pre-service and in-service training for teachers at the primary and secondary levels. The development of teacher education in this context reflects the distinct and pluralistic histories of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual 'nation' marked by civil war since it won independence from Britain in 1948 (Lall and South, 2013). The two most prominent accounts include, on the one hand, the state-led education system governed by the centralised Ministry of Education,[3] which over the last decade has been enhanced by global policy isomorphism and education lending through partnerships with international actors (Lall, 2020). On the other hand is the range of parallel education systems within Myanmar and across its borderlands; namely, monastic, ethnic and indigenous, and refugee education, which have been born of and shaped by many decades of disruption. While operating against backdrops that meet much of the criteria to be considered EiE, most of these systems have existed for decades, which differentiates them from traditional emergency models. Within these parallel systems, teachers are trained and supported through a myriad of programmes, including:

- Teachers' colleges;
- Mobile teacher trainers who travel to support teachers;
- Zone teacher training, which brings together teachers from a geographic region;
- Summer vocational training;
- Classroom observations;

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2 'Parallel' here refers to systems that exist alongside the formal state-run system and which often provide educational services to populations that might otherwise be overlooked or marginalised by the formal system.

3 The article uses the terms 'government' and 'state-led' to refer to education administered by the democratically elected, civilian governments serving from January 31, 2011 to January 31, 2021, under the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

- Pre-service training for new teachers;
- In-service training;
- Individual coaching; and
- Intensive subject-based workshops (Johnson, 2016; RISE, 2021).

Despite their different origins and histories, these teacher education systems have been collectively instrumental in supporting Myanmar's commitment to the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration. These systems complement the state-led system by filling in coverage gaps and providing educational services to many children who would otherwise be out of school. Together these parallel systems serve many hundreds of thousands of students, most of whom come from ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious minority backgrounds; internally and externally displaced populations; and stateless groups. Although some has been written on the basic education provided by ethnic and indigenous non-state actors in Myanmar (c.f. South and Lall, 2016; Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016; Lall, 2020), there is scant exploration of how the teacher education systems run by these actors have operated and what characteristics have enabled them to continue in contexts of protracted emergency, marked by a lack of material resources. This study contributes to this literature by recognising that research into teacher education can promote better understanding of educational processes and offer suggestions for potentially applicable practices in diverse contexts.

Table 1. Education systems in the Myanmar context

System	Description	No. of Systems Within	No. of in-Service Teachers	No. of Students Served	Teacher Education Delivery
Government	Schools under administration of the Ministry of Education	One	322,514, most of whom have formal qualifications	8,853,480 (MOE, 2016)	• Education Degree Colleges • Joint programmes with international development actors
Monastic	Schools under shared administration of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious and Culture Affairs, but often operating independently under the discretion of an abbot at the school level	Multiple	11,044, some of whom have formal qualifications	297,039 (MOE, 2016)	• Programmes arranged by prominent monasteries • Joint programmes with international development actors • Programmes led by local NGOs or civil society actors
Ethnic and Indigenous	Schools under administration of non-state resistance organisations and/or civil society actors, or under shared administration with the Ministry of Education	Multiple	20,000+, many of whom have non-formal qualifications	300,000+ (Lall, 2020)	• Joint programmes with international development actors • Programmes led by local NGOs or civil society actors

System	Description	No. of Systems Within	No. of in-Service Teachers	No. of Students Served	Teacher Education Delivery
Refugee	Schools under administration of civil society actors based in the Thailand refugee camps or the Cox's Bazar Education Sector coordinating body in Bangladesh	Three	1,000+ in Thailand and 4,000+ in Bangladesh, many of whom have non-formal qualifications (KRCEE, 2021; Education Sector, 2022)	20,000+ in Thailand and 300,000+ in Bangladesh (KRCEE, 2021; Education Sector, 20221)	• Joint programmes with international development actors • Programmes led by local NGOs or civil society actors

Analytical framework:

Examining teacher education as a complex adaptive system

Attempts to describe teacher education systems and make actionable recommendations for their improvement have been criticised as being too narrow and too difficult to compare with and apply to other contexts (Cochran-Smith *et al*., 2014). In response, a growing body of literature that applies complexity theory to teacher education has emerged. It draws from organisational studies of the application of complex adaptive systems. Complexity science allows previously regarded 'messy realities' to be examined more deeply and compared (Ramalingam *et al*., 2008). Complexity theory is concerned with systems that have a large number of constituent elements that relate to and interact with each other in dynamic ways. The system is therefore characterised by ongoing (re-) organisation of its elements, which often leads to new and unexpected systemic behaviours and properties. Complexity theory, which has been applied to the social sciences and education studies, offers nuanced discourse on how systems change, evolve, adapt, and learn (Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2008; Walby, 2007; Wheatley, 2006). This study applies complexity as an analytical framework to identify whether teacher education systems possess such elements as adaptive agents, self-organisation, non-linearity, organisational learning, inter-dependent components, and feedback processes (Ramalingam *et al*., 2008). These traits have been considered an advantage in adapting systems to dynamic and turbulent contexts through feedback loops and bottom-up processes (Cilliers, 1998; Morrison, 2008), which may be especially relevant for teacher education providers operating against a backdrop of disruption.

Research design

This research set out to identify the extent to which teacher education systems in Myanmar were able to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and deliver relevant teacher education services. It specifically sought to answer two key research questions:

1. In what ways were teacher education systems able to continue during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. To what extent did parallel teacher education systems exhibit the traits of complex adaptive systems?

Sixteen purposeful key informant interviews were conducted online in June and July 2021 with 24 senior management personnel who, at the time, represented 15 organisational actors across state and non-state systems (Figure 2).

Table 2. Research participants

System	No. of Interviews	Actors Represented
Government	4	Three international development partners
Monastic	3	Two teacher education centres and one national development partner
Ethnic and Indigenous	4	Two ethnic education departments, one national development partner, and one international development partner
Refugee	4	Two refugee education departments and two international development partners
Migrant	1	One international development partner

The qualitative findings were analysed using the comparative analysis technique (Mathison, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). The aim was to generate theory from data collected during the study to address the current general lack of theories and concepts to describe and explain teacher education systems in the Myanmar context. The comparative analysis involved three sets of coding, based on the framework presented by Robson and McCartan (2016). Open coding was first used to create initial categories of information regarding the navigation of actors within teacher education systems during the COVID-19 disruption. This focused primarily on coding behaviours, conditions, and values more broadly. Axial coding was then employed to assemble the insights from open coding in new ways, such as identifying with greater specificity the causal conditions, strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences of navigating COVID-19 disruption as traits relating to complex adaptive systems. Finally, a substantive-level theory relevant to the topic of interest was generated. Our research was limited to a single interview with each of the selected teacher education providers and development partners. The research therefore does not focus on the perspectives of teachers or the most senior decision-makers within the teacher education systems.

Findings

The most prevalent features of complex adaptive systems were found in ethnic and indigenous teacher education systems, thus the findings focus mainly on these systems. Interviewees from ethnic and indigenous teacher education systems articulated three complex adaptive traits: sensitivity to the external environment; organisational adaptation and learning; and decentralised management structures. The sections that follow elaborate and provide evidence on these features.

Table 3. Components of ethnic and indigenous teacher education systems that exhibit traits of complex adaptive systems

Aspect of Complex Adaptive Systems	Traits Exhibited
Sensitivity to the external environment	• Many providers operate in areas that are self-governed by non-state actors • Flexible funding from international donors • Experience of working in low-/no-resource environments
Organisational adaptation and learning	• Adapt programming to meet in-service teachers' needs/demands relating to subject and pedagogical knowledge, as well as practicality of the education provision • Incorporate feedback cycles from teachers/schools to mid-tier managers and to the central management team within teacher education providers • Value adapting to meet teachers' emergent needs more than general notions of teacher education quality • Leverage local human resources and delegate responsibilities to local-level actors • Change modalities of teacher education delivery from on-site to virtual during times of high risk
Decentralised management structures	• Local context awareness, inquiry, and responsiveness • Compassion toward teachers working in challenging circumstances • Decentralised decision-making • Flexible partnerships with international development actors • Horizontal relationships between local teacher education decision-makers and recipients • Flexible accountability relationships with central management

Sensitivity to the external environment

At the time of the interviews, teacher education systems operating in territories under the governance of the Myanmar state were required to follow the Ministry of Education's COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector (May 2020-October 2021). This severely limited what international development partners acting within the government system sought to accomplish. Most notably, all pre-service teacher education was halted and unable to pivot to online modalities, unlike what was seen in many other countries (Ellis, Steadman, and Mao, 2020). Although permissible under the Response and Recovery Plan, the MOE did not take steps towards initiating online pre-service teacher education. Consequently, teacher educators could not work with their student teachers and instead were engaged in ongoing professional development through online modalities. In-service training did occur through a combination of face-to-face and online modalities, although its duration was significantly reduced. In 2020, attempts to reopen government schools across Myanmar failed, due to an increase in local COVID-19 cases, and learning continuity was limited at all education levels. Htut, Lall, and Howson (2022) suggest that the Response and Recovery Plan was not sufficiently comprehensive, was too centralised, and lacked coordination, which paralysed higher education, including pre-service teacher education at Myanmar's education colleges.

Actors in the ethnic and indigenous teacher education systems paused their activities for at least a month, before moving much of their face-to-face training to online modalities, albeit in low-resource contexts. Some actors in non-state territories were able at times to continue face-to-face engagement with teachers, as these territories were not under the mandate of the Ministry of Education. In fact, one ethnic and indigenous actor moved its pre-service training programme from Myanmar government territory to non-state territory so it could continue using its face-to-face modalities. New teacher education content was designed to align with

emerging needs, such as health, hygiene, and mental health and psychosocial support. While remaining sensitive to the conditions and context, teacher education providers were able to offer new forms of provision, including remote training for teachers.

Learning and adaptation

Ethnic and indigenous teacher education providers described their ability and willingness to respond to emerging needs by rapidly altering both the content and duration of training, which at times extended beyond traditional pedagogical content to include topics such as first aid, COVID response, socio-emotional well-being, and disaster risk reduction and preparedness. Providers were found to operate in a non-linear fashion, to create and employ new responses for their specific contexts, and then to scale the responses they found effective. Given agency to adapt, these providers exhibited the trait of co-evolution, wherein different members learned from each other. As one interviewee reported:

> We're not doctors…so teachers can make mistakes and can experiment. (Monastic teacher education provider)

The new tools and modalities were flexibly deployed and adapted to the circumstances providers faced. This elasticity was reported to motivate staff members, who knew that, when faced with sudden shocks, they were ready to act. Ethnic and indigenous teacher education was described as being in an ongoing state of emergency, as evidenced by examples of systems incorporating new foci, programmes, and curricula that continued to evolve in response to the environment. As one actor in an ethnic and indigenous teacher education system expressed:

> We want our teacher education programme to be elastic and adaptable. The adaptability, willingness, and motivation of the staff [is essential] to work under this critical transition… We are trying to sustain educational activities so that the whole system doesn't collapse. (Ethnic and indigenous teacher education provider)

Most of the interviewees shared that their organisations consulted with school- and community-level stakeholders before adapting their programmes. They described the process as iterative, with multiple feedback loops occurring as more communities became aware of the COVID-19 situation. Schools and communities would often make decisions to suit their own situations on how to move forward, as illustrated by this quote:

> We meet with our partners to determine how to move forward...[Our response] will vary based on individual communities. Some don't feel comfortable sending their children to school. It has become very political whether you send your children to school. (Ethnic and indigenous teacher education provider)

Adapting educational programmes to emergency situations was considered necessary but difficult. Many interviewees described the growth and scaling that had occurred within their organisations in previous years and the unfortunate regression caused by the recent disruption. As one participant lamented:

> In the future, I don't think we will be able to conduct coaching support for teachers and monitors. Our plan is to connect [them] with the local trainers. It is difficult to contact them by phone...We want to prepare some handouts and send them. No online options are possible. Everything is paper based. Oh my God! Even our videos were only sent to communities where they could play them using solar panels. We are going back to the way it was before. I worry that with paper-based [training] the teachers will not be motivated. There is not that person-to-person connection. We are trying to do the best we can. We are inspired and grateful for the teachers. We thank our teachers for their commitment, effort, and service for our children. (Ethnic and indigenous teacher education provider)

Management and decentralisation

Actors in ethnic and indigenous systems reported their commitment to developing programming based on requests from teachers and school administrators. These systems thus can be characterised as having non-linear interactions by a range of stakeholders. Some aspects of teacher education were regarded as intimate and having a profound impact, such as the close relationships between communities and their teachers. Local and international development partners pointed out the importance of decentralised decision-making

and context appropriacy when working with local resource- and needs-based approaches. This was echoed by other participants, as in the following quote:

> The greatest success is that we are trying to decentralise. We share a lot with our district and township [management] so that they can be more responsive to this emergent situation. The situation is different in different areas—they can decide to close the schools…Some of our schools have been damaged by the airstrikes but we haven't lost any children or teachers. This is because of the power structure for our staff to make appropriate decisions. The safety of the students and teachers is the most important. (Ethnic and indigenous teacher education provider)

This quote highlights how planning for education delivery may be explicitly underpinned by the need to keep teachers and students safe. This is significant, as many educational programmes prioritise teaching and learning processes. By including safety as a significant factor, ethnic and indigenous teacher education systems may be better placed to provide education in emergency situations. These responses highlight the importance of local ownership for decisions regarding parallel teacher education, as evidenced by collaborative relationships in which multiple perspectives informed policy and programme development.

Analysis: 'Designed for disruption'

Over the past seven decades, teacher education providers in parallel education systems in Myanmar have had to navigate widespread political unrest, protracted armed conflict and displacement, and periodic natural disasters in order to provide critical support and training to their teachers. The contemporary context of COVID-19 brought new challenges, but these providers were equipped to handle it using the knowledge, tools, and resilience learned through decades of education provided during unstable times. Many of the teacher education systems our interviewees described may therefore be considered designed for disruption. During the COVID-19 response, these systems exhibited many traits of complex adaptive systems, such as organisational adaptation and learning, decentralised management structures, and the ability to recontextualise within a dynamic external environment. These parallel systems were likely developed to withstand the hardships associated with protracted emergencies, which made them relatively better positioned to navigate the pandemic. The agility of these systems enabled them to pivot their programming and respond, despite operating in no-/low-resource environments. It also allowed for more distributed decision-making at the local level and enabled heightened flexibility, adaptability, and localisation in keeping with the emergent need in the dynamic contexts in which they operated. This contrasts with the centralised Myanmar government system, which was largely unable to help teacher educators provide support to their teachers during the first year of the pandemic.

Discussion and conclusion

We believe that using complexity theory to further investigate parallel teacher education systems in the Myanmar context will provide additional insights into how these systems can be effectively supported amidst the current crisis resulting from the 2021 coup d'état. These systems are not defined by 'quality assurance' and 'accountability' in the traditional sense, but by their ability to endure and adapt during disruption and thus to continue serving some of the hardest-to-reach children from Myanmar. The resilience of these systems and their durable practices need to be recognised in their own right. These concepts may continue to be better understood through participatory inquiry, such as participatory action research (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019) and comparative case studies (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2022). The perspectives and participation of teachers and local decision-makers has the potential to underscore valuable lessons from emergency contexts, from which all teacher education systems can benefit.

In recent years, the educational needs of children in the Myanmar context have become more urgent and complex. Teachers on the frontlines must navigate the destabilisation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and, most recently, the 2021 coup d'état. Education for children from Myanmar requires a transformation, but for many teachers this is not the first time they have been called to innovate. The expertise of parallel teacher education systems in the face of protracted disruption deserves greater

recognition by both academic institutions and international donors.

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A Karen school in the aftermath of conflict

A temporary Karen school constructed in a remote area away from conflict

Without a safe school availble, Karen children sit their annual exam on the forest floor

A Karen school targeted by airstrike

Challenges for the government school teachers during COVID-19 and tribal conflicts/feuds in Shikarpur district, Sindh, Pakistan

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Abstract

COVID-19-related restrictive measures and the re-opening of educational institutions have created challenges for teachers in areas of Pakistan that are ridden by tribal conflict. Drawing from 17 qualitative interviews with 17 male teachers from the conflict-affected Shikarpur district during the COVID-19-related school closures, this paper reports on challenges teachers faced in maintaining teaching and learning. The narratives reveal that tribal feuds had a more severe impact on children's education than the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, or by the government's preventive policies. These policies included school closures, which caused a year-long loss of learning. Most of the teachers and students were struggling to recoup their losses through supplementary instructional time, but in areas that suffered from tribal conflicts, generations of villagers had long been deprived of the right to education.

Key Words

COVID-19 pandemic, challenges, school teachers, tribal feuds

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019, every sector, including education, has been disturbed (Khoso and Noor, 2021). School closures globally impacted the education of about 1.6 billion learners (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). Children were deprived of normal schooling (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021) in all parts of the world, and governments put stringent measures, such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), in place at educational institutions to prevent the spread of the virus (Daniel, 2020). A growing body of research has emerged that assesses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021; Sintema, 2020). These assessments focus broadly on government policies related to social distancing, wearing masks, and restricted physical movement. The restrictions on physical mobility and social distancing disrupted conventional educational practices.

The re-opening of educational institutions when restrictions were relaxed has created new challenges and new SOPs relating to social distancing, wearing masks, hand-washing, and sanitisation (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). Researchers have examined the public's awareness of the disease and required post-COVID-19 preventive measures (Nicholas *et al*., 2020), including procedures in the education sector (Zhao and Watterston, 2021; Kim, Yang and Lim, 2021). However, information on educational practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in contexts affected by tribal conflicts are scarce, especially in terms of the intersecting impact of the two crises—COVID-19 and the tribal conflicts—on teachers' practices. This is particularly significant because teachers' and students' educational experiences during conflicts are linked to overall political governance in the region (Burde *et al*., 2017).

Education is generally believed to be a source of peace and reconciliation (King, 2013), and teachers play an important role in mitigating the impact of emergencies and maintaining the provision of education. Many regions in the world are currently experiencing conflicts (Pherali, 2019) and, like Pakistan, they are simultaneously facing health crises, most recently COVID-19. This makes understanding the ways teachers cope with emergencies particularly important.

The Shikarpur district, which is located in the north of Pakistan's Sindh province, provides an opportunity to understand the relationship between education, COVID-19, and tribal conflicts, using a political economy lens. Education programmes, budgeting, and the appointment and transfer of teachers in the district are influenced by the political and economic interests (Hasan, 2020a, 2020b) of various actors. There also are broader social and political issues that impact the Shikarpur district's education system and teachers' practices (Novelli *et al*., 2014).

Sindh province, which has 29 districts, is the second most populated province in Pakistan. The population in 2017 was 47,886,051 (Khoso and Khaskheli, 2022). In 22 of the 29 districts in Sindh, 1,566 tribal clashes were reported between 2010 and 2014, including 217 in the Shikarpur district. In these conflicts, 2,301 people were killed, including 160 women and 45 children, and 3,697 were injured (Idress, 2018). Hundreds of clashes among tribal groups have been reported in Shikarpur since 2014, but reliable current data is unavailable. These conflicts have damaged not only the local economy but also children's education and the important role teachers play. It is not yet known how COVID-19-related government measures have impacted teachers' practices.

This article investigates the challenges teachers encountered in the Shikarpur district due to tribal conflicts and COVID-19-related measures, and the ways they ensured the continuity of children's education. To gain an understanding of teachers' coping strategies and their perspectives about the difficulties faced by children and communities amid the pandemic and tribal conflicts, the researchers conducted interviews with teachers in Shikarpur district.

In 2017, Shikarpur district had a population of 1,233,760, including 598,130 females and 709,388 children and youth from ages 0 to 19. Of the total population, 75 percent lived in rural parts of the district (City Population, n.d.), including the Kacha area (the forested area on both sides of the Indus River), which lies at the centre of the tribal feuds. Shikarpur district has 1,374 public schools, including 190 only for girls; 4,205 teachers, including 899 females; and 151,821 enrolled students, including 53,649 girls. Only 546 of the schools have electricity, 808 a washroom, 760 drinking water, and 783 a protective wall (Sindh Education and Literacy Department, 2020). A 2014 survey revealed that around 21 percent of the district's children ages 6 to 16 were out of school (ASER Pakistan, 2014).

The Shikarpur district has always been a centre of tribal disputes that have impacted every sector of the economy, including education. The region also is notorious for being a haven for dacoits (bands of armed robbers), especially in the Kacha area (Hasan, 2020a). However, Ghotki, Kashmore, and Jacobabad are also caught up in intense tribal conflicts and affected by the dacoits' activities. Forests, bushes, and rough terrain provide protective cover that enables the dacoits to carry out their operations and seek refuge (Hasan, 2020b).

Government measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools

In February 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Sindh province. Sindh was the first province in Pakistan to impose a lockdown, which started on 23 March 2020 (Waseem, 2021), including in Shikarpur district. The lockdown meant shutting down an estimated 43,000 government-run schools, from primary to higher secondary, to prevent the spread of the virus. In August 2020, Sindh Education and Literacy Department (SELD) announced that schools would re-open by mid-September 2020. The SELD prepared safe school re-opening materials to distribute among schools across the province. The material included COVID-19 guidelines, brochures, pamphlets, and training resources for education officials and teachers (UNICEF, 2020). However, it was found that schools were not following SOPs, nor did they have the required protective materials, such as sanitisers, masks, and washbasins (Research and Training

Wing, Government of Sindh, 2021). This meant the teachers in Shikarpur district were facing serious challenges.

Methods

This study draws from data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 government school male teachers in rural Shikarpur. Interviews also were conducted with two NGO representatives. Due to the tribal nature of Pakistani society, female teachers were not allowed to participate. Some interviews were conducted by telephone because the teachers were not in their schools at the time of the researcher's visit. The researcher had a list of interview questions related to the impact of COVID-19 and tribal conflicts on education and teachers' lives, and their coping practices. The interviewees were asked further questions based on their responses. The interviews were audio-recorded, with participants' consent to use the data anonymously or under pseudonyms for publications. All respondents were selected through snowball and referral sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1989). The data was transcribed from Sindhi into English and then organised under the three main themes: the impact of tribal feuds on education and teachers' practices; the impact of COVID-19 on education and teachers' practices; and teachers' coping practices to mitigate challenges created by tribal feuds and COVID-19 measures. While analysing the data, the above themes were further divided into sub-themes.

Risks and threats to teachers during tribal feuds

Most teachers vividly described the safety issues in their school surroundings. Teacher AllahDad said that, during clashes between tribes and clans, the villagers set fire to schools in the village and stole the furniture. Teachers then stopped coming to school. Most teachers were interviewed after the feud had stopped and differences were reconciled, but teachers from outside of the village feared for their lives and hesitated to return. AllahDad explained:

> The Mahar and Jatoi feud started in 1989 and resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives on both sides. Well, it ended in 2009. But after that, we [locals and teachers] have lived with extreme fear. (Teacher 1)

NGO representatives complained about the hundreds of ghost teachers and schools (nonfunctioning schools that continue to exist only on paper or even if school buildings exist, which are used for other purposes not for educational purpose) in the district, which is a serious issue throughout Sindh province. Schools are on the official record (on papers) and teachers are drawing salaries, but none of them are physically present (Khoso and Khaskheli, 2022). Jamshed described the situation:

> Teachers living in the same villages [where they teach] often do not teach because they fear for their lives, and they also receive threats from people due to their different tribal identities. (NGO Worker 1)

Most teachers reported that they had been traumatised by the tribal clashes and were unable to teach in rural areas, due to the lack of security. Punhal, a teacher in a local school, lamented that his fellow teacher was robbed twice and shot once by robbers. He survived the attack but was paralysed and homebound.

Punhal explained that a tribal feud had recently erupted in a nearby village between two groups of the Shaikh tribe. Six brothers were killed, and the school was closed down. He added that one or two people were kidnapped every second week, and many people in the district had been robbed and killed. These incidents had an adverse impact on teachers' well-being and on their ability to engage in educational activities. Nadir, also a teacher, confirmed the effects of the frequent tribal feuds in the districts.

Impact of feuds on children

One reason for the clashes between tribal groups was reportedly the claim of land. Shahid Shah shared that two groups of the Kharkani tribe had been fighting over a piece of land, which caused one death and many injuries. The conflicting groups often exchanged fire, and teachers and students took shelter in the nearby masjid (place of prayer). Children of both victims and perpetrators often refrained from attending school because they feared further attack or retaliation. For example, the 22 children of the perpetrator tribe had not attended school for around four years. Shah also noted that

> the children of the group which had killed the

> man of the other group had to bear the brunt of the murder, because most of their adult male members were hiding from the police in the Kacha area or had been arrested. Therefore, the routine agriculture, livestock, and other dealings were the responsibility of their children. (Teacher 2)

It was reported that some of the families had no male members, only children and women, and children as young as 12 years old were carrying guns to ensure their and their families' safety.

The Brohi and Kakepota feud, which began in 2013, caused the deaths of more than 30 people. The feud ended in 2021, but the issues have not yet been settled. Most of the men were in hiding to avoid arrest, leaving their children with the responsibility for agricultural work and cattle-rearing, which prevented them from attending school. An NGO worker explained:

> Once a school teacher who was taking care of a local school was killed by an enemy tribe. After his death, the school turned into a donkey yard. Students stopped coming to school for the next ten years, and although another teacher was appointed, the new teacher had no interest in education. Also, children of other tribes left the village. They were hiding along with their adult family members and raising livestock for their livelihood. (NGO worker 2)

Pakistan already has a high ratio of out-of-school children, and most are engaged in child labour (Khoso and Khaskheli, 2022). Tribal conflicts have been the prime cause of out-of-school children, child labour, militancy, and social crimes, but this has not been given much attention in the research. These factors have deprived children of their childhood and basic rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). These tribal children often join their adults in the Kacha area when they become older, and thus they inherit the legacy of the tribal feuds carried on by the older members of their families.

Fear of COVID-19 or tribal feuds?

In addition to their conventional roles of improving literacy and enhancing the quality of education, teachers could play a positive part in mediating resolution of tribal conflicts, and in supporting and guiding villagers to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (Khlaif *et al*., 2021). However, most teachers reported that neither they nor the villagers had any fear of the virus, although all were scared of being killed in the tribal clashes. They were always extra vigilant due to those fears, as Abdul Qayoom explained:

> This pandemic did not matter to us [teachers] and the villagers in the times of feud. We were never worried about the virus. (Teacher 3)

The tribal feuds were nerve-shattering and had caused many deaths, whereas the virus had done nothing to any villager or teacher. Most teachers disliked the government's COVID-19 measures, which had negatively impacted the already dysfunctional education system in rural areas. Most considered the closure of the schools a futile exercise and felt that the pandemic's impact on education could have been minimised if the government had not closed them. This measure was apparently taken to protect children from the virus, but the government meanwhile had failed to protect the children and their education from ongoing violence in the village. For Shah, the impact of the ongoing fighting and the pandemic could have been reduced if the government had taken the right security measures. Arbelo Shar explained:

> During COVID-19, my school was closed for one year, and…it is still closed because the one-room school building was in a dangerous area where Khoso and Shar tribes were fighting. (Teacher 4)

Akbar Indhar explained that the government announced the re-opening of schools, even though the virus was still prevalent. But the schools had been closed and education had stopped even before the COVID-19 pandemic, due to tribal feuds. NGO workers reported that COVID-19 had no impact on teachers' lives and performance; in fact, teachers already had the habit of not teaching in the schools, so they found the pandemic an opportunity to enjoy free holidays.

Interestingly, this study found that teachers did not express their frustration with the feeble education and social systems that deprived children of their right to education, nor did they complain about the government's inability to bring the tribal feuds to an end. The detrimental impact of violence on schools and communities across Sindh province is well known to the government authorities, but no

meaningful attempts have been made to address these problems. Under these conditions, the government's COVID-19 measures did nothing but further weaken the education system in tribal areas. Teachers were not overly concerned about COVID-19 but they were scared of the tribal feuds, which had hampered both their ability to provide education and the local economy (Hasan, 2020a, 2020b).

Challenges created by COVID-19 measures

The teachers' narratives highlight the intersecting challenges of the tribal conflicts and COVID-19. Due to COVID-19, all schools in Sindh Province were closed for six months starting in March 2020. Even though some teachers were present in the school on alternative days after the government announced the re-opening of schools, no teaching or learning occurred. And yet, the government announced that all students would be automatically promoted to the next grades. Altaf noted that

> teachers had nothing to do with the government's policy to promote students to the next grades and submit the reports and results to the relevant authorities. But unfortunately, students did not learn anything in their previous grades. (Teacher 4)

Despite the liberal progression policy in the aftermath of COVID-19, many parents did not send their children back to school, which resulted in a significant number of school dropouts. Some teachers noted that they tried to cover the missed syllabus once the students returned to school, but the students struggled to catch up on learning because of the year-long school closure. The majority of teachers reported that the villagers had little interest in education, even though they had no fear of the virus. School closures due to the pandemic seemed to have facilitated parents' indifference to their children's education. Arbelo explained:

> For most villagers, the closure of the school for any reason [including the virus] did not make a difference, including the loss of an educational year. (Teacher 4)

Some teachers noted that, once schools re-opened, teachers followed SOPs that were received from the district education department. The government did provide the schools with masks, but the villagers were not too concerned about the spread of COVID-19.

Challenges of educating children who were promoted without learning

During the school closures, no provisions were made for online education in rural areas. This led to a significant amount of learning loss, but teachers were not competent enough or they lacked the resources to recover the learning losses. Therefore, for two years, children were promoted without completing the prescribed syllabus. When students were promoted to higher grades, they struggled with the syllabus. Soomro described the situation:

> We even promoted grade one students to grade two; they did not know how to read and write. Without learning and examination, they were promoted to the next grades. So, in grade two they were learning things related to grade one. (Teacher 6)

Teachers reported that students had difficulty coping with the higher level syllabus and that they had to offer them extra teaching and support. They also had to be stricter and more demanding, as most children had lost interest in education after the year-long school closures. One teacher justified this, saying that they had no other option but to be strict and put pressure on students to learn more quickly. They sometimes inflicted corporal punishment, which caused students mental stress, and sometimes caused them to drop out of school.

Like teachers in the Philippines (Talidong *et al*., 2020), the respondents in Shikarpur did not say that they were anxious or under stress because of COVID-19 or the protective measures taken by the government. No teacher openly confessed to using corporal punishment after the schools re-opened, but around 85 percent of children up to age 14 were reported to have experienced corporal punishment in Sindh (Daily Parliament Times, 2022). This research demonstrates that, without appropriate measures to remedy learning losses, teachers could not handle the problem of liberal progression.

Conclusion

Tribal feuds are one outcome of the government's political policies that enable clans and tribes to dominate and control areas of Sindh province. They also prevent the government from operating schools and providing other educational facilities in rural areas. Rather than using education as a tool for peace (Pherali, 2019), it appears that internal (tribal groups) and external (tribal heads, assembly members) political forces are complicit in the failure to provide education in the district. Due to the lack of security, ongoing tribal conflicts, and unthoughtful education policies imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, communities in the district have been deprived of meaningful access to education, and the children have suffered from the loss of learning. It also appears that school closures during COVID-19 were yet another barrier to teachers' professional practice, as the government offered no alternative provision of education in rural areas. Moreover, teachers sometimes misused the policies of school closure, re-opening of schools on alternative days, and social distancing to avoid their professional responsibilities.

Overall, the study reveals that tribal feuds were more threatening and detrimental to education than the risk of contracting COVID-19. The mandatory school closures did adversely impact educational activities, but teaching and learning had long been marred by the uncontrolled tribal feuds. Fuelled by the complex dynamics of the political economy (Novelli *et al*., 2014; Hasan 2020a; Hasan, 2020b), the feuds have taken more lives and created more severe challenges for teachers than the COVID-19 virus. As envisaged by Pherali (2019), the state must protect the education system from external violence and violence within the education system (i.e., corporal punishment). However, the government in this region has failed to fulfil this positive role, and it also is missing from the teachers' narratives.

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The critical role of refugee teachers in the COVID-19 education response:
Supporting their continued professional contributions and leadership in displacement and durable solutions

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Abstract

This paper considers the essential role refugee teachers played in the COVID-19 education response by providing education continuity and support for children during extended school closures. It focuses specifically on the situation in the Kakuma refugee camp in Northern Kenya. Despite facing severe constraints such as limited resources and connectivity, in addition to their own limited professional qualifications and a lack of recognition, the refugee teachers in Kakuma have shown remarkable commitment and creativity in responding to the crisis. The paper offers relevant policy and practice recommendations to strengthen support for refugee teachers and to meet their professional needs in the post-COVID context, including their professional qualifications and recognition.

Key Words

Refugee teachers, education continuity, recognition of teachers, COVID-19

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education on an unprecedented scale. This has exacerbated pre-existing education disparities for the most marginalised (Sayed *et al*., 2021), deepened inequalities in education access and attainment for refugees (UNHCR, 2021a), and presented a considerable threat to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which addresses education. In refugee settings, the refugee teachers bore the greatest burden in ensuring that learning continued during the school closures. Their presence in refugee communities during the pandemic made it easier for them to play a crucial role as the first responders to the education crisis. Despite immense personal, professional, and practical challenges and risks, these refugee teachers rallied to provide educational opportunities in their communities by developing and implementing their own innovative solutions (ADEA, AU/CIEFFA and APHRC, 2022). During a time of immense anxiety and fear worldwide, the role refugee teachers played in providing a sense of normalcy, life-saving messages, and psychological safety cannot be over-emphasised.

This paper considers the essential role teachers played in the response to the COVID-19 emergency, with a focus on the situation in Kakuma refugee camp in Northern Kenya. It discusses the critical role of refugee teachers in the education response, highlighting their commitment and creativity despite significant resource constraints, such as limited internet connectivity and electricity, and access to digital devices.

The study specifically investigates the following research questions:

1. What contributions did refugee teachers make to the COVID-19 response in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp?
2. How can these contributions be leveraged to advance the inclusion agenda for displaced populations in national education systems?

Drawing from a qualitative inquiry and reflecting critically on the researchers' professional experiences, the paper offers relevant policy and practice recommendations to strengthen support for refugee teachers and to meet their professional needs in the post-COVID context, including their professional qualifications and recognition. We argue that teacher development programmes need to integrate unique skill sets that will help teachers deal with the educational challenges posed by school closures and, most importantly, will empower and recognise them as professionals who are able to respond to a crisis with contextually relevant pedagogical approaches.

Literature review

Research across stable and crisis-affected settings alike demonstrates the central role teachers play in the lives of their students (Schwille, Dembélé and Schubert, 2007). In crisis-affected contexts, teachers take on several roles and responsibilities to address their students' needs in complex educational environments (Mendenhall, Gomez and Varni, 2019). For example, teachers often act as quasi-social workers, providing psychosocial support and life skills to their students, many of whom have experienced adversity, hardship, and trauma (Kirk and Winthrop, 2013). In many cases, teachers come from the same communities as their students and are able to draw on their shared experiences to utilise culturally relevant teaching and counselling approaches (Kirk and Winthrop, 2013). Despite their central role, however, teachers receive insufficient support to carry out their work effectively (Mendenhall, Gomez and Varni, 2019). Refugee teachers feel this dearth of support most acutely, as they frequently grapple with exclusionary teacher management policies that restrict their access to teacher professional development, fair compensation, and benefits (Mendenhall, Gomez and Varni, 2019). In recognition of these challenges, countries hosting large refugee populations, such as those in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, have made bold commitments to improve the quality of education for refugees and host communities. The Djibouti Declaration specifically provides a comprehensive framework for improving refugee teachers' recognition, compensation, and professional development (IGAD, 2017).

Many of these challenges were compounded by COVID-19. The pandemic severely disrupted in-person teaching. In most contexts, teaching and learning were suspended entirely for several months, depriving millions of students of continuity in their formal education. Teachers were expected to shift rapidly to remote teaching, to leverage existing and new technologies, and to adapt their practices and strategies to provide continuity of learning (UNESCO, 2021). Despite these new demands, teachers rarely received professional development or psychosocial support to help them navigate this new educational landscape. Research conducted by UN agencies and the World Bank found that only half of the countries surveyed provided their teachers with training in online education and distance learning, and only one-third offered teachers psychosocial support (UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2020). These numbers drop dramatically for teachers working in sub-Saharan Africa, which hosts nearly one-third of the world's refugee population; only 15 percent of these countries provided specialised training during the pandemic and only 4 percent provided psychosocial support (UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; UNHCR, 2021b).

Research from Africa and Latin America demonstrated that, despite government response plans, teachers working in complex conditions and environments lacked the support they needed to deliver and adapt solutions to support both student learning and their communities (Mundy *et al*., 2020). This research also found that, amidst this lack of support, teachers engaged in a range of activities to ensure learning continuity across both low-tech and high-tech learning environments. For example, teachers in low-tech contexts reported using social media and messaging applications to communicate with students and deliver lessons, while those in high-tech contexts reported using online platforms (Mundy *et al*., 2020). Many teachers also reported organising community learning circles to reach their

students, including adapting and translating learning materials to ensure that they were relevant and engaging (Mundy *et al*., 2020).

Background and context

Education for refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei

Kakuma refugee camp and the nearby Kalobeyei integrated settlement, both located in Kenya's northwestern Turkana County, are host to more than 200,000 refugees from across East Africa. South Sudanese and Somalis make up the majority of the refugee population, but the camp also hosts refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. At 74 percent, women and children constitute the majority of the population. School-age children (ages 4-17) make up half the refugee population (54 percent; UNHCR, 2020a). As of March 2020, more than 90,000 refugee children and youth were enrolled in the 19 pre-schools, 27 primary schools, and 7 secondary schools in Kakuma refugee camp and the Kalobeyei settlement.

The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, and a host of partners provide protection and assistance to refugees, including basic education. Camp-based refugees are served by a parallel and segregated school system. While all schools deliver the Kenyan national curriculum and refugee students sit for national assessments and examinations, education coordination, planning, and implementation are carried out separately by actors outside the state system. School governance and curriculum delivery are inconsistently aligned with government policies and regulations, which potentially compromises the quality and accountability of education services (Bellino *et al*., 2018).

Refugee teachers account for 84 percent of the teaching workforce in Kakuma refugee camp and the Kalobeyei settlement, the remainder being Kenyan nationals. The teachers in the camp have diverse backgrounds, in line with the demographic distribution of the refugee population. They are usually young, most completed their secondary education in Kenya, and only 27 percent of the refugee teachers in Kakuma have recognised teaching qualifications (UNHCR, 2021c). Teacher management (recruitment, remuneration, and training) is carried out by non-state actors and is not systematically aligned with national protocols. A low level of compensation, limited opportunities for teacher professional development, and large classes have a negative impact on teachers' professional motivation and contribute to high teacher attrition rates.

Teachers in Kakuma and Kalobeyei work in a complex, challenging educational environment. The schools are over-crowded and have limited infrastructure, which creates teacher-student ratios as high as 200 to 1. Exceptionally large classes make it challenging to monitor individual students' understanding and progress, and may cause some learners to fall behind or drop out. Teachers also struggle with multi-lingual, multi-age classrooms and acute protection concerns that have significant gendered dimensions. For example, more than 40 percent of enrolled learners are over age. While primary accelerated education programs are in place in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, they are not sufficient to meet the educational needs of such a large number of students. With so many nationalities represented among the refugee population—South Sudanese, Somali, Sudanese, Ethiopian, Burundian, Rwandese, Ugandan, and those from the Democratic Republic of Congo—the learners have different educational experiences and linguistic competencies. Girls continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged, with fewer girls than boys attending school at the upper primary and secondary levels.

The impact of COVID-19 on education for refugees

On March 16, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Kenya closed all educational institutions, public and private, for an indefinite period. The government also put strict limitations on people's movements to slow transmission of the virus. To support the continuation of learning during the period, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed a three-pronged approach that adhered to the international and national guidance for social distancing, quarantine, and self-isolation. The three 'prongs' were the provision of digital learning, primarily by expanding access to and strengthening the Kenya Education Cloud; the provision of educational radio and television programmes at the primary and secondary

levels; and support for students' access to textbooks and other teaching and learning materials.

While schools for refugees and other camp-based students were included in the Kenya Basic Education COVID-19 Response Plan (MoE Kenya, 2020a), UNHCR and the education working groups were responsible for ensuring that refugees were not left behind. The Kakuma education working groups, jointly led by UNHCR and the MoE at the sub-county level, developed a response plan that prioritised actions in accordance with the unique situation of the Kakuma camp and Kalobeyei settlement.

In camp settings, the inability to connect to radio lessons due to the unavailability of the national broadcast signal, along with inequitable access to internet connectivity, digital devices, and electricity, created bottlenecks for refugees attempting to access national learning interventions during the school closures. Prior to the pandemic, investments in digital learning in the camp and settlement communities were primarily in the form of centralised services in schools or community centres. These facilities were often oversubscribed, making it difficult to maintain social distancing.

Methodology

The study draws from primary and secondary data collected over a 24-month period. The focus was on the role of refugee teachers in the COVID-19 education response. The study provided an opportunity to understand teachers' contributions to the inclusion of displaced populations in the national education system. The authors of the study, who are practitioners, contributed directly to the COVID-19 response in the camp. They collected, analysed, and collated data and information for this paper from their COVID-19 education response work. Mindful of their positionality as practitioners and researchers, the authors took steps to ensure that the respondents were able to express their own views and experiences freely. Having extensive understanding of and familiarity with the local education context, establishing trust with participants, and reflecting on their own potential biases facilitated the authors' interviews and enabled them to collect authentic data.

The primary data was collected in 2020 and 2021 through three focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers, school administrators, and school management committees, and through semi-structured interviews with three education implementing partners in the camp and two local MoE representatives. The FGDs and interviews were conducted with the informed consent of all participants, and the confidentiality of participants was assured. The secondary data was collected from published literature, UNHCR education management information systems, and other published statistical information sources, such as rapid assessments and surveys, partner assessments reports, project progress reports, and reviews of documented best practices during the period of school closures and the immediate 12 months after schools re-opened. The primary and secondary data were thematically analysed to identify teacher practices during the COVID-19 response and challenges they faced. Conclusions were drawn about ways teachers could have been more effectively supported during the emergency educational response.

For data triangulation and validation, the FGDs and interviews were combined with an analysis of UNHCR and the education partners' regular implementation reports, assessments, and statistical data sets, such as education management information systems for schools.

Findings

Analysis of the primary and secondary data revealed that refugee teachers directly supported various response activities during the school closures. Unlike their national counterparts, the refugee teaching workforce remained in the camp during the school closures. They were supported with incentive payment from UNHCR and the education partners. Recognising their critical importance, remuneration was paid to all teachers, Kenyans and refugees alike. This proved key to teacher retention and to their participation in learning continuity interventions and in providing psychosocial support. It also supported teachers and their families during a period of immense stress and uncertainty. Nevertheless, the data analysis showed that teachers faced significant challenges, including movement restrictions and other COVID-19 mitigation measures, limited professional development opportunities, and a rising cost of living. Despite these challenges, refugee

teachers worked tirelessly to facilitate learning continuity and to provide psychosocial support to their learners.

Strategies to support learning continuity during COVID-19

Through a partnership with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, UNHCR and the education partners were able to broadcast the national radio education programme to children in the camps and host community via local and community radio stations (UNHCR, 2020b). The five-hour daily broadcast remained the primary strategy to reach learners during the school closures. However, analysis of the data showed that refugee teachers took the initiative to develop supplementary lessons that reached more than 50,000 primary and secondary school learners in the refugee camp and host community. While movement restrictions in and outside the camp limited their access to UN and NGO staff members, refugee teachers were able to mobilise children in their neighbourhoods and monitor their participation in radio broadcasts. It was found that the radio lessons played a crucial role in filling the educational vacuum created by the school closures. One participant mentioned that

> the radio lessons have helped me improve my listening skills and taking short notes at the same time. Learning through radio is so interesting. I listen from different teacher from different schools, and I learn both from the teacher on the radio and the teacher in my homestead. (Female student in Kakuma refugee camp)

Refugee teachers adapted lesson content provided by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development into video and braille formats. They also developed short lesson notes based on the radio broadcasts, which were shared among learners through a WhatsApp communication tree. Teachers also followed up on the relevance and use of these lessons by making visits to students' homes.

Teachers also utilised the WhatsApp communication tree, along with offline and online digital content, to share life-saving information and important updates on the pandemic. Teachers also benefitted from virtual teacher training and mentorship. They capitalised on their presence in the communities by establishing learning circles among children residing in the same area. Each teacher supported between 5 and 10 learners within their neighbourhoods by providing critical learning and social and emotional support. They also assisted with the distribution of radios, textbooks, revision materials, personal protective equipment, and dignity kits to support learning at home and in the community learning circles. To support these actions, teachers were provided with data bundles and airtime, and they received training on remote learning methodologies, psychological first aid, and COVID-19 response and mitigation, which was delivered by a multi-agency team.

Female refugee teachers provided mentorship to vulnerable girls

In addition to academic disruption, the pandemic had a profound social and emotional effect on learners across Kenya and worldwide. There were growing mental health concerns, reports of increased violence against children, an increase in teenage pregnancy, and rising levels of chronic absenteeism and dropouts (McKinsey & Company, 2022). In Kakuma refugee camp, 62 teenage pregnancies were reported in June 2020 alone, compared with eight in the same month the previous year (IRC, 2020). A total of 651 secondary school students became pregnant during school closures. The data revealed that female refugee teachers provided crucial support and mentorship to adolescent girls, during both the school closures and upon re-opening. The international community provided support by training 30 female teachers in peer mentorship and basic psychosocial support. Each of the 30 then trained five additional teachers, which created a network of support in the blocs where the girls lived. This contributed directly to many vulnerable young girls' return to school upon re-opening. It is understood that shifting deeply ingrained cultural norms and community structures can be a difficult task and it may take a long time to show progress. It is crucial for partners to engage with both males and females to foster more inclusive and equitable learning environments. It also is important to facilitate dialogue on how certain community members can use their power and privilege to shift cultural norms and structures that are having a negative impact, such as girls' participation in education.

The role of teachers of refugees for national school re-opening

Kenya adopted a phased re-opening of schools, beginning with national examination classes in October 2020 and a resumption of all classes in January 2021. To make up for lost learning time, the academic calendar was condensed by increasing contact time through reduction of student breaks and removal of optional subjects from school time tables and reducing the number of holidays. In this context, teachers were obliged to adopt strategies to support learning loss, and to put in place the necessary capacities (skills, knowledge and attitudes) to implement the new curriculum (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019). At the same time, teachers had to navigate new requirements for social distancing, mask-wearing, and hygiene, and help learners adhere to them. Teachers, in collaboration with parents and partners in health and water sanitation and hygiene, also had to ensure that school-based health and safety measures were in place and then monitor learner compliance, which helped to lower the level of transmission in the schools.

Limited professional development and teacher remuneration

The pandemic also illuminated the urgent need to invest in teacher management in refugee settings. As the Kenyan teachers returned home during the school closures and the international community faced movement restrictions, the refugee workforce—two-thirds of whom were unqualified and were paid an incentive rather than a salary—led the learning continuity efforts. With little prior preparation and limited skill in mediating remote learning and in information, communication, and technology, refugee teachers were still the champions of the response.

Despite their critical role and the level of personal risk they faced, refugee teachers were paid an average monthly incentive of US$70. This is approximately one-fifth the average pay for a Kenyan national teacher working in the same school with a comparable level of responsibility. While humanitarian support was provided in the form of food rations, shelter, and non-food items during the extended lockdowns and reduction of informal livelihood opportunities, refugee teachers, learners, and their families reported increased economic and social stress (Pape *et al*., 2021). Teacher salaries were supplemented during the school closures with additional internet data bundles and financial incentives for preparing radio lessons. However, this support ended when schools re-opened.

Discussion and conclusion

Implications for policy and practice

In recognition of their invaluable contribution (pre- and post-pandemic) to ensuring learning continuity during the school closures, refugee teachers must be recognised as professionals. To capitalise on the crucial pedagogical knowledge and experiences they have gained during the pandemic, their role should be mainstreamed. They should be given fair conditions of service and opportunities for capacity development that are in line with the Kenyan education reforms and that reflect the challenging educational circumstances of the refugee setting. The recommendations proposed below inform the realms of policy and practice. They aim to build human capital for refugee teachers and improve the quality of education wherever they may be teaching. The recommendations also build on the recent global shift toward the inclusion of refugee learners in national systems, which is underpinned by the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, 2017 Djibouti Declaration, 2018 Nairobi Declaration, and the Global Compact on Refugees. The refugee teacher workforce is a key pillar of the inclusion agenda, and harnessing their contributions to teaching and learning is an effective way to mitigate the learning crisis during an emergency. The Djibouti Declaration, which specifically recognises the important role refugee teachers play in providing education to refugee children, calls for their inclusion in national education systems, and for providing the support and resources they need to succeed.

It is also important to ensure appropriate conditions of service for refugee teachers that reflect their qualifications, experience, and responsibilities. A swift recognition of prior learning process for qualified refugee teachers must be implemented. Approximately one-third of refugee teachers hold accredited teaching credentials, at least 25 percent of them acquired in their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2021a). In January 2020, Kenya launched national

guidelines for the recognition of teachers' prior learning (MoE Kenya, 2020b) that make specific reference to refugees. The guidelines are anchored in progressive regional agreements, including the East Africa Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and the Djibouti Declaration.

Teacher motivation and well-being are essential to maintaining a committed and experienced workforce, and in improving teaching quality and, consequently, learning outcomes. With the overall goal of aligning pay and conditions of service across host community and refugee teachers (IGAD, 2017), immediate steps must be taken within the existing legal and policy framework to develop schemes of service for refugee teachers that factor in their qualifications, experience, and responsibilities, on a par with national teachers. The lack of sufficient and consistent financing has limited the recruitment of refugee teachers, and those who are deployed are usually on short-term, unpredictable contracts, which can lead to unnecessary stress and high turnover. In Kenya, the legal and policy framework limits the recruitment and remuneration of refugee teachers, which is not comparable to their Kenyan counterparts. Given their similar roles and the significant value refugee teachers bring to the profession, the unfair practice of unequal teacher compensation must be addressed. Predictable and consistent financing must be brokered to ensure that all teachers of refugees are provided with fair terms and decent work conditions (UNHCR, 2018). Furthermore, strategies to increase the number of female teachers must be adopted, including strengthening their participation in secondary education.

Invest in accredited teaching qualifications for refugees and support continual teacher professional development

Investing in refugee teachers' accredited teaching qualifications and supporting their continuous professional development is critical to the education of refugee children. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the resourcefulness and commitment of refugee teachers in maintaining teaching and learning. It also has highlighted the heightened need for teachers to develop new capacities, including how to operate safe schools, support learners' transition back to school, and recover lost learning (Carvalho *et al*., 2020; UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2020). Teacher professional development, including national development programmes, combined with regular coaching, peer mentorship, and ongoing support is imperative to improve both teacher practice and student learning. Stakeholders therefore must work together to facilitate refugee teachers' access to teacher training, preparation, and continual professional development, in line with national standards.

These recommendations must be implemented within a broader approach to build the conditions, partnerships, collaboration, and approaches that will strengthen education services for refugees, improve learning outcomes from early childhood through tertiary education, and facilitate economic inclusion.

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Educating students in the gender-conflict-COVID-19 intersection

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a single case study that examined the impact of COVID-19 on the education of female university students from conflict-affected contexts. The study examined a university's experience in addressing the educational needs of students during the 2020 national lockdowns. The paper draws from semi-structured interviews conducted with students from both conflict-affected and stable contexts, faculty members, and university administrators (n=20). The study found that university closures compelled students from conflict-affected countries to return home, where they suffered from not only poorer access to learning resources but also from the risk of violence. The study concludes that, in addition to the disruption of classroom instruction faced by all students, female students from conflict-affected contexts are likely to be further disadvantaged due to their insecure home environments. The paper hence highlights the need for the education in emergencies community to develop strategies to address the security risks girls are likely to face at home during school closures.

Key Words

girls' education, COVID-19 impact, contexts of conflict, remote learning

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic forced higher education institutions around the world to stop face-to-face instruction and operate online. University staff members and students were unexpectedly and immediately forced to adapt to new methods of instruction that included online teaching. This brought with it a multitude of challenges. Attending class from home added levels of complexity for students from conflict-affected contexts. This situation was further compounded for female students, due to the opposition to girls' education in some societies (Burch, 2004; Lingard, Henry and Taylor, 1987; Purewal and Hashmi, 2012; UN Women, 2019).

This paper is based on a study that examined the COVID-19-related experiences of female students from conflict-affected contexts at a higher education institution in a stable, low-income country in Asia. The institution was one of the country's 165 universities that discontinued face-to-face instruction during COVID-19. The institution, which is located in a major city, is an international university for women. The student population includes women from 23 countries.

The student population is a mix of domestic and international students, most of whom are on full scholarships. The international student body includes women from conflict-affected contexts, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Myanmar. Prior to COVID-19, approximately one-third of the students were from conflict-affected contexts. Students who are residents of the city live with their families, while international students and domestic students who are non-residents live on campus. A full scholarship for domestic and international students covers tuition, food, accommodation, and travel expenses. The university staff comprises both men and women. During COVID-19, the university transitioned to

online instruction, which lasted from March 2020 to January 2022. Nearly all of the approximately 600 students living on campus returned home after the first national lockdown was announced. Approximately twenty Rohingya students were allowed to stay on campus.

Literature review

Given that the disruption of education due to COVID-19 is a recent phenomenon, the literature on the impact the pandemic had on the education of girls pursuing higher education in conflict-affected contexts is relatively limited. While there is an increasing number of studies about the impact of COVID-19 on school education (Brehm, Unterhalter and Oketch, 2021; Daniel, 2020; Hammerstein *et al*., 2021; Kuhfeld *et al*., 2020; Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021; Schleicher, 2020), insufficient attention is generally paid to education at the university level in low-income contexts. The effects of the pandemic on the education of girls from conflict-affected contexts is also under-explored, and it therefore is vital to study the transition to online instruction during COVID-19 for girls from conflict-affected contexts.

COVID-19 impact

Researchers have examined the impact of COVID-19 on education, as well as on the economy, public health, and mental health. Schleicher (2020) examined indicators from the Education at a Glance publication of the Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which provided insights into the impact of COVID-19 as of June 2020 on the public financing of education in OECD countries, international student mobility, the loss of instructional time delivered in a school setting, measures taken to continue student learning during the school closures, teachers' readiness to support digital learning, when and how to re-open schools, class size, and vocational education. Guglielmi *et al*. (2021) provide a guidebook that highlights five key considerations for promoting girls' learning in emergency contexts, including COVID-19: context, teaching and learning, inclusion, modalities, and data and evaluation.

COVID-19 and disruption of higher education

Some studies have analysed the extent of the disruption of education caused by COVID-19 at universities and colleges.[1] Marinoni *et al*. (2020) investigated the impact COVID-19 had on higher education institutions and the strategies the institutions employed to sustain teaching and learning, as well as research and community engagement. The survey findings revealed the impact of COVID-19 on communications, enrollment, partnerships, teaching and learning, international student mobility, assessment, research, and community engagement. The study found that a substantial number of institutions had to be completely shut down.

Education, conflict, and gender during COVID-19

Some researchers have studied the intersection of COVID-19, education, and conflict. Dey *et al*. (n.d.) analysed Twitter conversations and employed topic modelling to identify the important gender equity issues in an international education setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that girls dropped out of school at a higher rate and faced the risk of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation, and violence as a consequence of the pandemic. Meagher *et al*. (2020) similarly asserted that women's access to health care in conflict-affected contexts can be enhanced by leadership models based on utilising women's voices to address the pandemic, and by nurturing and mobilising women's leadership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the likelihood of girls being out of school more than boys (Nesamoney *et al*., 2021). Poverty and malnutrition due to COVID-19 appear to have affected girls more severely than boys, and girls are targeted more often than boys by militants who are opposed to their education. Girls also experience more sexual exploitation than boys in conflict-affected contexts.

Additional research clearly is needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of how COVID-19 impacted the education of girls living in conflict-affected contexts. Given the complex challenges women face in accessing education and the fact that

1 See Agasisti and Soncin (2021) in Italy; Jena (2020) in India; Jacob *et al*. (2020) in Nigeria; and Abidah *et al*. (2020) in Indonesia.

investing in girls' education transforms communities (UNICEF, 2020), it is vital to understand the intersectional impact COVID-19 had on girls.

Research Questions

The study examines the following research questions:

1. How did female university students from conflict-affected contexts navigate educational challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did the challenges faced by female university students from conflict-affected contexts compare to the challenges faced by female university students from stable contexts?

These research questions are examined by considering (a) classroom instruction and instructional resources, (b) physical and mental health issues, and (c) physical safety and living arrangements.

Methods and data sources

The study was conducted at a university for women located in Asia; the students come from 19 Asian countries. The university is committed to providing quality education to women from disadvantaged communities. For the purpose of this study, 'students from conflict-affected contexts' is defined as students whose immediate families reside in regions experiencing armed conflict. During COVID-19, almost all residential students were repatriated to their countries of origin, and teaching and learning was delivered to them online. In a few cases, the students were repatriated involuntarily. The students returned to their families in regions of armed conflict during the two years of COVID-19. 'Students from stable contexts' is defined as students whose immediate families resided in regions not currently experiencing violent conflict.

The presence of students from both stable and conflict-affected contexts allowed for a comparison of student experiences during the pandemic. The staff at the university included senior management staff and faculty who were expatriates from North America and Europe, and Asia.

The data was collected online by conducting semi-structured interviews through audio or video calls. Each interview was recorded using a smartphone or the Zoom platform. The interviews with participants from Afghanistan were completed before the withdrawal of coalition forces at the end of August 2021. Permission was obtained from relevant authorities at the university to conduct interviews with staff members and students. The sample consisted of five female students from conflict-affected contexts, five female students from stable contexts, five faculty members, and five members of the senior management team at the university. The study used convenience sampling to select the university, while a mix of purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in the selection of interviewees.

Data analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is the students. Students' experiences were examined from the perspective of the students, faculty, and management staff.

Phase 1 involved employing thematic analysis to examine the data. This included becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, and searching, reviewing, defining, and labelling the themes. A graphical representation of the themes generated from phase 1 is presented in Figure 1.

In phase 2, the data analysis proceeded from noting patterns and themes to within-case comparisons between students from conflict-affected contexts and those from stable contexts. This was done by identifying the similarities and differences between the themes that emerged out of the experiences described by the students, faculty, and management, as represented in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Initial thematic map

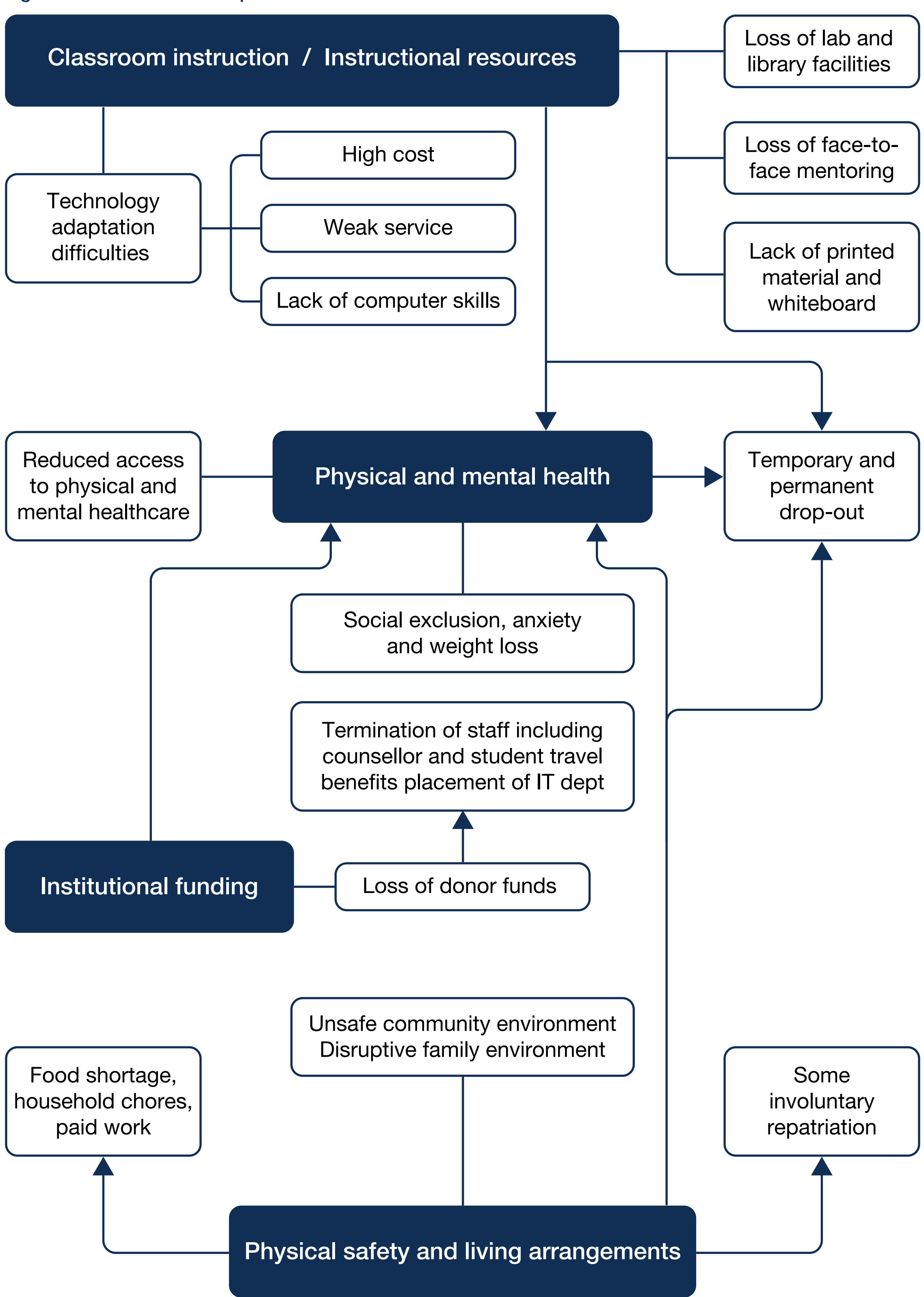
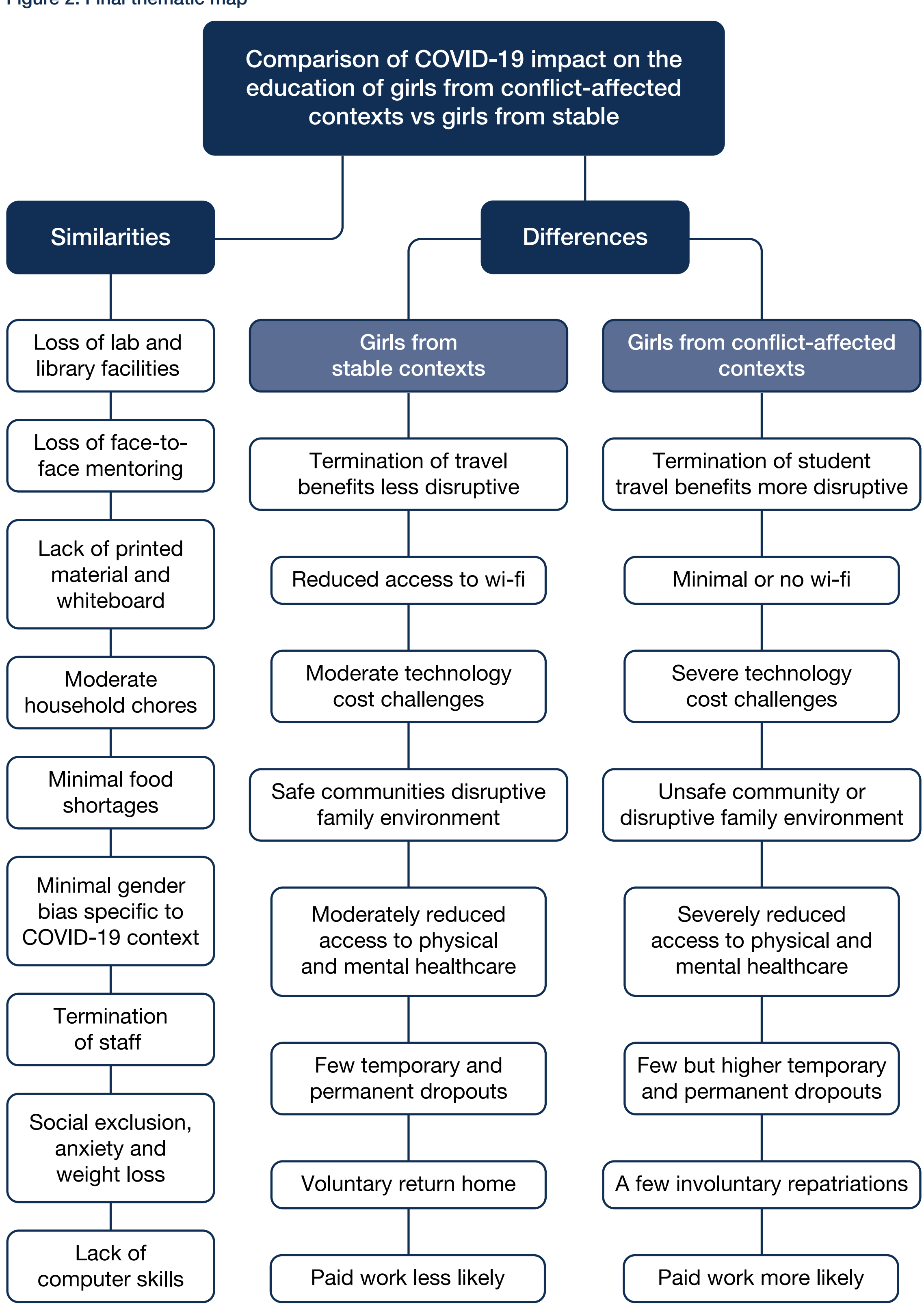


Figure 2: Final thematic map



Findings and Discussion

After the announcement of the first national lockdown, the university made the decision to transition from face-to-face instruction to online instruction. The initial few weeks were marked by the several challenges discussed below, some of which were addressed successfully while others remained unresolved. By December, almost all expatriate staff members had left for their countries of origin. Local staff members visited the campus to access office files, maintain the campus property, and address the needs of the students who remained in residence on campus when possible.

Classroom instruction and instructional resources

The most immediate impact of the COVID-19-induced national lockdown was the disruption of classroom instruction. The university transitioned to online instructions using the Zoom platform in mid-March. Some faculty used the live-session format to conduct classes, while others utilised a hybrid version of both live and recorded lecture formats. As a result, faculty members taught classes from their homes, which were primarily university accommodations. The local students attended classes from home, and residential students attended classes from their university accommodations. Wi-fi services for the students and staff members residing on campus were provided by the university. Students and staff members who were residing off campus were expected to have their own internet connections. The biggest critical challenge with online instruction was two-fold: many students and staff members were not familiar with the use of Zoom, and a number of students living off campus could not afford laptops and internet services. Those who had computers often experienced poor internet connectivity, which made it difficult to participate in online lectures, group activities, and assessments. In an effort to minimise connectivity problems, the Zoom video facility was usually turned off. The teaching faculty reported that being unable to read the students' body language made them often unsure whether the students were attentive. The lack of visuals may also have caused students to lose their motivation to engage in online classes. A student from Afghanistan described the disruption of classroom instruction:

> For my studies, I am happy to be on campus because there are more facilities for my education for study. Like here in Afghanistan, we have a hard situation of electricity and now the North part of Afghanistan is fully in war…We import electricity from other countries…Here the Taliban rent many lines of electricity and we had no electricity for more than one or two weeks. In this situation, here the data package doesn't work for our google classroom, our email…and it's extremely hard to study online in Afghanistan in such a situation. So, for my studies, I love to go back to my campus. (Participant S3AAd, 2020)

In terms of instructional resources, the financial strain brought about by COVID-19 greatly reduced the number of resources available to students and faculty. Students lost access to the library and could no longer check out books, use the library computers and internet facilities, download and print instructional materials, or use the library as a quiet space for focused study. Faculty members were also unable to make use of the library facilities and could not print handouts, prepare other instructional resources, or use the whiteboard to explain concepts. They also couldn't access their offices, as noted in the quote below, which they had previously used to advise students face-to-face. One of the faculty members explained:

> There was no office [or] being able to meet my students face-to-face in that office, you know, having appointments, counselling them…physical classroom with a whiteboard…Being a very visual person, that visualisation helped me… [but] there was no classroom. I was on Zoom like everyone else. I couldn't use a whiteboard, I tried to do that…I didn't know where I could get one because I was nervous about going outside…I didn't know where to get a whiteboard, so I tried to use notebook paper, that didn't work very well…I used WhatsApp a lot. I am not proud of it but I did the best that I could…We had a lot of power outages and that really affected the online instruction. (Participant F2M2, 2020)

Students and faculty members could no longer use the science laboratories, even though labs are a critical component of science instruction. Students taking courses in physics, chemistry, and biology missed out on opportunities to learn and comprehensively understand the practical

aspects of theory. Students were sometimes unable to complete assignments because they lacked a thorough understanding of the concepts. All these challenges increased faculty members' and students' frustration with everyday tasks, the academic programme, and life in general.

At the end of June 2020, students from conflict-affected contexts who resided on campus were facing the same problems as students from stable contexts. Problems with online instruction were aggravated once the students returned to their home countries in regions of conflict. Students complained of frequent power outages and low bandwidth for internet connections. The university's offer of free data plans was retracted in some cases, and the students affected could not afford wi-fi services. This resulted in a few students being forced to temporarily drop out of their academic programmes.

Physical and mental health

Situated on the university campus is a health centre with a qualified doctor, nurses, and a psychologist. Staff members and students living on campus were eligible for health care at the health centre. Physical health-care services continued to be available to students while they resided on campus, but with minor changes. The health centre provided treatment for minor ailments, but if more serious care was required, the students were transferred to a nearby hospital.

A few students who tested positive for COVID-19 were provided the necessary health care. Those who needed mental health care, however, were forced to transition immediately to online services. Because the mental health counsellor was outside the country when the national lockdown was announced, counselling was only available using Zoom. This reduced the students' ability to access mental health care. As with online instruction, mental health care became dependent on the quality of wi-fi services at both the counsellor's location and on campus. The ability to read body language, such as gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc., is critical to a psychologist's capacity to evaluate a student's mental health and emotional status. It also helps students feel comfortable during counselling. Owing to budget cuts caused by the pandemic, the counsellor's employment contract with the university was not renewed. The students' mental health seemed to have been a relatively low priority and was not given sufficient attention.

Students thus were left without mental health services starting in July 2021, at a time when they confronted significant challenges to their emotional well-being. The mental distress students experienced is demonstrated in the anguish expressed by one student:

> It was a very tough time for me, especially because I don't know why, for me, I had anxiety. I was depressed. I was crying a lot with myself, I don't know what was the reason, it was just I guess I was depressed. So, yeah, it was very tough and unfortunate. During that time, I lost about 10kg in just three months and for that I was not able to eat anything. I was not eating because I was just thinking to myself, why should I eat because I am going to die here, so I'll not see my family members, so why should I eat [if] I expect to die as soon as possible. Yeah, I can say that I was a bit depressed, but then when I came here about two or three months [ago], I got better because, like you know, in Afghanistan no one is thinking about COVID-19 anymore. They are just saying that it is a common flu. (Participant S8AH, 2020)

The shift to online instruction hindered the daily social interaction with faculty and peer groups. Besides frustration in dealing with online instruction, students were worried about their families' well-being. Families of students experienced loss of income, contracted COVID-19 or other serious ailments, and dealt with the death of family members. The trauma of losing loved ones to COVID-19 and adjusting to a more frugal lifestyle was not addressed. This strained the students' emotional well-being and mental health, as they could not be physically present to comfort and help their families. Furthermore, the extracurricular activities such as student clubs, music and dance activities, field trips, and guest talks that provided a distraction and an outlet for emotional angst were no longer available.

The impact of COVID-19 on the physical and mental health of students from conflict-affected contexts changed once the students returned home. The advent of COVID-19 required prompt access to quality specialised health care, but few students from conflict-affected contexts had access to quality

COVID-19 or mental health care.

Physical safety and living arrangements

After the national lockdown was announced, students from conflict-affected contexts were initially allowed to live in the same facilities but with some minor changes. Since cleaning and cafeteria services were terminated as part of cost-cutting measures, students had to assume some cleaning responsibilities for their own living spaces. However, the university decided to repatriate international students to their home countries, as almost all senior management staff members who were expatriates were expected to leave. The students living on campus and the services they needed became a liability for the university, as the expenditure for residential students became a significant proportion of the total university budget. Given the loss of funding due to COVID-19, the students' return to their families was also expected to allow for better fiscal management. By the end of June, almost all international students had been repatriated. Only graduating students travelling home for the final time were provided with air tickets. First- and second-year students paid for their own tickets or got a loan from the university.

The repatriation of students posed a few obstacles for the university. Some students from Afghanistan did not want to return to their families, due to the ongoing conflict and the cultural opposition to girls' education or the lack of wi-fi services back home. These students were forced to return home despite their protests.

For students from conflict-affected contexts, some aspects of their physical safety and living arrangements changed substantially once they returned to their families. Students who were members of a patriarchal family said their presence was a reminder of the defiance of tradition by educating girls.

Some students experienced domestic violence, which was exacerbated by the impact COVID-19 had on the family members' emotional well-being. A few students who attended online classes had visible bruises from physical abuse at the hands of male family members, which they got for being active on social media. This is reflected in the experience narrated by a faculty member:

> The challenges are multi-fold and multi-level for the Afghan girls because when they are at Uni, all they have to do is focus on their studies, their meals are provided or they talk on WhatsApp back home, they can go to the gym. When they go home, they have more jobs than they have as a student. They are a daughter, sister, or cousin, so they are doing domestic duties when they are at home. I have had three cases [who experienced] significant domestic violence by family members back home. (Participant F1A, 2020)

This faculty member noted that some of his students had been depressed because of the controlling environment and sometimes domestic violence they endured at home, which had adversely affected their studies. Some students found employment to make up for the loss of family income, which also resulted in a loss of study time. They also had minimal facilities to engage with learning. Online classes were interrupted by noise from family members and neighbours or requests to perform a chore. Household responsibilities included helping the family with child care, caring for the sick, cooking, and cleaning. Given the context of armed conflict, some students' movements were restricted to the four walls of their property. A few students from Myanmar were allowed to stay on campus on humanitarian grounds, as their families resided in refugee camps where alcohol-fuelled violence was rampant. The students from Afghanistan were not allowed to stay on campus, as they were expected to go back to families living in less dangerous environments (prior to the Taliban takeover). The university management perceived the interpersonal violence in the refugee camps as more threatening than violence by the Taliban.

Conclusions and implications

The experience of dealing with COVID-19-related challenges drawn from this case study offers some important lessons. Firstly, in pedagogical terms, the students and faculty adapted a hybrid provision of pre-recorded lectures and live instruction to address problems with weak internet connectivity. This enabled students to download recordings at the pace of their internet service while preserving the opportunity to participate in synchronous teaching and learning.

Secondly, the university did not have a well-developed emergency plan to deal with an unexpected crisis. After the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the university realised the importance of having an emergency plan to mitigate the effects of future emergencies related to climate crisis, pandemic, or violent conflict. Such plans should involve strategies for how to balance the roles of expatriate and local staff members in administering the university in case the emergency repatriation was recognised; how to ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making during an emergency response; and how to ensure that female students are safe when they return to their conflict-affected home countries.

Thirdly, the disrupted access to learning resources and classroom instruction affected students' academic achievement and retention. Faculty members and students agreed that online instruction limited their ability to fully engage in teaching and learning, which ultimately affected the quality of their education. Most importantly, it was not prudent to send students from conflict-affected contexts back to their homes, given the security risks they were likely to face. Therefore, any decisions about repatriation should have been based on the best interest of the students, including giving them the choice to stay on campus or return home.

In conclusion, those providing alternative education during COVID-19 had to pay attention to the different social circumstances (e.g., ongoing violent conflicts and security risks) in which students were living. Even though all students are likely to be affected educationally by a university closure, students who return home, especially female students from conflict settings, are likely to face physical violence, both in the home and in their communities. Governments and international aid agencies must therefore take into account the types of risks students face while appropriate measures are taken to protect populations from the threat of a pandemic. Universities have an ethical and moral responsibility to protect the safety and well-being of their students, and decisions relating to the emergency response in times of crisis must adhere to the fundamental principles of human rights and the right to education.

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Education policy-making in South Africa during COVID-19

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Abstract

Scholarship on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on education has focused primarily on learners (Vaughn, Sayed and Cooper, 2021; Spaull *et al*., 2020) and the widening of existing educational inequalities (Schleicher, 2020). Few studies have considered the effects COVID-19 has had on teachers, which makes this study's contribution relevant and essential (Sayed *et al*., 2021). The literature on teaching during times of crisis has demonstrated that teachers can act as a buffer and mitigate many of the adverse effects that result from conflict and crises-ridden contexts (INEE, 2020). However, teachers need to feel more valued, as this will contribute to their positive sense of well-being and their ability to persist. This paper illuminates the experiences of teachers who work in challenging contexts in the Western Cape province of South Africa[3]. It contributes to the knowledge on teachers' experiences of crisis and instability in the Global South. The paper suggests that teachers, as front-line workers in crisis situations, should be granted autonomy and agency in their education choices and delivery methods.

Key Words

teachers, well-being, voices, autonomy

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3 Challenging contexts', for the purposes of this article, refer to impoverished areas that suffer from social and structural problems as a result of inequality, including gangsterism.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education systems globe-wide. Traditional school calendars were disrupted by hard lockdowns or intermittent and rotational learner attendance (OECD, 2020). Whilst 'academic learning loss' from disruption to the school calendar has received a fair degree of scholarly and policy attention, less attention has been paid to teachers, their working conditions, and their well-being. This paper addresses this gap by considering how teachers in Manenberg, a neighbourhood in the Western Cape of South Africa, coped with the education policy response to the pandemic and the impact it had on their existing anxiety and vulnerability, and therefore on their well-being, between March 2020 and February 2022. It specifically examines teachers' experiences in the context of ongoing violence, and the effects of the pandemic relative to teacher voice, teacher support, and teacher autonomy.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the management and mitigation of the effects of the pandemic in South Africa, with a particular focus on teachers' working conditions and well-being. This is followed by a review of the literature to define teacher well-being, explore the effects of conflict and violence on teachers in South Africa, and present the theoretical focus. The paper then goes on to map the methodology and findings, as discussed in relation to three themes: (1) teachers' experiences of voicelessness during the pandemic; (2) teachers' lack of professional support and resourcing; and (3) the curtailing of teacher autonomy. These themes highlight the effects of the education policy response to COVID-19 in contexts of conflict and violence, that adversely impacted schools and communities in marginalised and impoverished settings.

Initial COVID-19 policies and the effect on teachers in South Africa

In South Africa, a national state of disaster was declared on 15 March 2020, as per the Disaster Management Act (57 of 2002). This allowed the government to institute protocols such as closing schools and forbidding travel that would spread the virus. The education policy response to the pandemic ranged from the complete closure of schools to rotational and staggered school days (Government Gazette 43578). Teachers were expected to implement COVID-19 protocols whilst managing their teaching load. These arrangements continued throughout 2021, until the Government Gazette 45877 announced on 6 February 2022 that schools would return to normal full-day schooling. Two striking effects of the regulations on teachers' work are noteworthy.

First, teachers were expected to disseminate information about the virus and preventative measures to the school community (DBE, 2020a) whilst managing teaching and learning. They were responsible for ensuring social distancing in class and during breaks, monitoring bathroom usage, and disinfecting classrooms (Maree, 2022). Teachers also were expected to allay community fears about the pandemic, despite concern for their own and their families' safety, which increased their personal anxiety and deflated their sense of well-being (DBE, 2020b).

Second, teachers were expected to compensate for the loss of learning and curriculum coverage, ensure that missed content was covered and assessments conducted, and that learners were assigned homework when not in school (Schreuder, 2020). Research by Sayed *et al*. (2021) into the role of teachers in the development of the education policy response to COVID-19 suggests that policies were enacted with minimal to no consultation with teachers, effectively silencing those who would inevitably be responsible for implementing the policies.

As is often the case during crises and times of social disruption, the policy regulations for COVID-19 put multiple unrealistic and conflicting demands on teachers. They were expected to be front-line, street-level bureaucrats who oversaw state emergency functions whilst fulfilling the professional role for which they had prepared—teaching and learning.

Literature review

Crises, disruptions, and conflicts negatively impact teaching and learning. Whilst research on the impact of schools in conflict zones and areas plagued by violence is typically oriented toward learners' experiences, school violence also has an adverse effect on teachers (Yang *et al*., 2021). Several

studies have noted that violent school contexts aggravate teachers' anxiety, fear, and sense of inadequacy about their ability to provide quality teaching and learning. Teachers often suffer effects similar to prolonged post-traumatic stress disorder (Davids and Waghid, 2016). When teachers in these contexts are not adequately supported, valued, or respected, these effects can expedite burnout (Sayed and Singh, 2020). Therefore, teachers and their well-being in conflict contexts are the subjects of this paper.

Defining well-being

The concepts of teacher well-being in conflict settings are multiple and varied (Falk *et al*., 2019; OECD, 2020). The World Health Organization defines health, which includes well-being, as 'the full physical, mental and social well-being not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO, 2022, p. 1). Benevene, de Stasio, and Fiorilli (2020, p. 1) similarly contend that well-being is a complex notion with intellectual, physical, and emotional aspects which incorporate dispositional, personal, organisational, and environmental factors. In the context of teachers, well-being refers to a 'positive emotional state that combines personal needs and expectations of both learners and their teachers' (Entrée, 2017, p. 1). According to Schleicher (2018), well-being refers to how teachers feel and function in their jobs. In conflict-ridden and other challenging contexts, teachers are essential to creating safe teaching and learning environments for others, which amplifies their stress and anxiety. This highlights the need to be attentive to teacher well-being (Mendenhall, Gomez and Varni, 2018). Teacher well-being in general, but particularly in challenging contexts, affects student learning and the building of equitable, inclusive, resilient, and quality education systems (INEE, 2021).

Framing teachers' well-being

The definition of well-being, as captured in McCallum *et al*.'s (2017, p. 6) comprehensive framework, includes external and structural aspects such as 'economic resources, political circumstances, and health and literacy', as well as individual 'happiness, emotion, engagement, purpose, life satisfaction, social relationships, competence and accomplishment'.

This paper explores teacher well-being in relation to the external and individual aspects of violence and conflict contexts, and how they are affected by education policy responses to COVID-19. Particular attention is paid to teacher autonomy, involvement, and collaboration in education policy-making.

Teacher voice and empowerment

The pandemic exacerbated the inefficiencies and misalignment of resources within South Africa's education system (Maree, 2022). Teachers were expected to work remotely from home with minimal support and direction, despite not having done so before and regardless of whether they or the learners had the facilities to do so (Schleicher, 2020; Neufeld and Malin, 2020). The empirical literature suggests that teachers were struggling to adapt to these expectations, with little guidance on how to best manage the effects the pandemic was having on education (OECD, 2020; Sayed *et al*., 2021). In this respect, many scholars note that teachers' voices have been marginalised in the literature and in policy-making, despite their being uniquely placed to offer input into policies, reforms, and school contexts, particularly during times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Gozali *et al*., 2017; McCallum *et al*., 2017; Maree, 2022). The literature suggests that, where teachers are given a voice in forming policies and procedures, they have an 'increased sense of ownership and responsibility of the outcomes' (Gozali *et al*., 2017, p. 34). The increased sense of ownership of and responsibility for the outcomes will reduce teacher stress and increase their motivation to teach (Neufeld and Malin, 2020).

Teacher stress, anxiety, and motivation

Teachers' mental health during times of crises is critical to the provision of quality education (Collie, 2021; McCallum *et al*., 2017). The COVID-19 restrictions and limited available resources, compounded by anxiety about contracting the illness, left teachers feeling worse psychologically than before the pandemic (Landa, Zhou and Marongwe, 2021). As teachers' anxiety and vulnerability increased, their well-being declined. In areas like Manenberg, where most adults are unable to assist children academically (Maree, 2022), teacher stress levels escalated and further reduced their sense of well-being (Collie, 2021). Teachers' stress was likely exacerbated by the power

dynamics of the education authorities and their top-down micro-management practices (Eiroa-Orosa, 2020). In sum, teachers' lack of involvement in crisis policy-making adversely impacted their professional work, morale, and motivation (Neufeld and Malin, 2020).

Methodology

This paper focuses on the experiences of teachers in Manenberg, a location created during the spatial planning of apartheid, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers participating in this study worked at one of three primary schools: Jupiter Primary School (JPS), Saturn Primary School (SPS), and Neptune Primary School (NPS)[4].

JPS is geographically situated where four rival gang territories coincide. The children associated with these gangs attend JPS, which gives rise to tensions within the school. SPS is a relatively small school situated on a main road, where the local youth gather to indulge in substance abuse activities. NPS is situated in a slightly more affluent area, but the learners commute from less affluent areas that are inundated by gang activities.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate after the onset of COVID-19. They indicated their consent through an interest questionnaire disseminated via email. The sample included two principals, three management team members, and nineteen teachers.

Data were collected using open-ended, semi-structured interviews in English, the language of teaching and learning, to enable participants to relay their experiences. The information was gathered in person and via Skype or email, including follow-up questions. It was transcribed and along with the field notes, then coded, analysed, and identified themes named. It then was reviewed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for analysing qualitative data, which include familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. Similarities, anomalies, or contradictions were carefully reviewed by the researcher (one of the co-authors), who is regarded as both an insider and outsider by virtue of their position as an education specialist working in the district in which these schools are situated.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, with which all three co-authors were affiliated at the time of the study. Written informed consent was gained from the participants, who had the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions.

We acknowledge the study's limitations. Considering the ongoing and evolving effects of COVID-19, we know that it represents a snapshot in time. Further limitations stem from the reluctance of the participating teachers to meet face-to-face and to have follow-up sessions due to their personal and professional demands, and from the potential bias that could emerge due to the researcher's association with the school beyond this study. However, the findings we present are substantiated by the existing body of literature, which allows for insightful conclusions.

Findings

The findings in relation to teacher well-being during the COVID-19 crisis identified the following three themes: teachers' experiences of voicelessness during the pandemic, a lack of professional support and resourcing, and curtailment of teacher autonomy.

Teachers' experiences of voicelessness during the pandemic

Teachers' sense of not being heard and of having their voices rendered invisible in policy discourse while they were expected to follow explicit directives emerged powerfully from the data, as indicated in this quote:

> Ideas get shared, but it doesn't always get brought into [being] and sometimes that also causes a kind of demotivation. (Samantha, grade 7 educator, JPS)

This suggests that teachers felt excluded, that their voices were ignored in a context in which they are experts and capable of providing workable solutions. The feeling of invisibility was evident to teachers in discussions regarding when to resume schooling, and in the ineffective communication with schools

4 The school names are pseudonyms.

in the midst of the pandemic about the return of learners and the academic programme.

This feeling of invisibility creates a trust deficit between teachers and senior officials, as explained by this school official:

> I would love the authorities [Minister of Basic Education and Superintendent General of Education in the Western Cape] in this period [COVID-19] to actually...let teachers come to school and develop what the new normal will be [i.e., school opening times and which learners should attend school]. (Donovan, deputy principal, NPS)[5]

Teachers understand the context and academic deficits of the learners in their schools and the communities they serve. Thus, they are best placed to develop COVID-19 protocols and to deliver quality teaching. The lack of insightful policy-making that resulted from the scant input from education specialists, including teachers, aggravated the challenges officials faced when closing schools, such as providing meals and the increased food insecurity amongst the children in the country during that time.

Lack of support and resourcing

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa highlighted the inequalities that still exist in the country, despite the move to democracy in 1994 (Sayed and Singh, 2020). This was noted by a respondent:

> COVID has actually brought up a lot of the deficiencies in our society, in our schools. [The] marginalised communities [were left wanting as there was] no data. There was no home-schooling that could happen. (Donovan, deputy principal, NPS)

The Manenberg area is an impoverished community where most residents lack access to online resources. Many parents are unable to assist their children academically, as they have minimal schooling themselves:

> Because we have a backlog here in our curriculum, and especially with our learners, it was difficult to give them a take home pack because the parents can't help them. (Donovan, deputy principal, NPS)

Ensuring that everyone adhered to COVID-19 protocols proved an additional challenge for teachers, as learners needed frequent reminders of these protocols:

> The new set of rules, that is going to be challenging because...social distancing was impossible in this environment because they hadn't applied it at home. They are coming into a classroom setting, and you have to remind them not to hug their friend, but they are used to doing it at home. (Samantha, grade 7 educator, JPS)

Lack of access to the necessary technological resources due to a lack of funding and infrastructure proved particularly stressful for teachers:

> I know it's a difficult concept to provide every school what is required. It's extremely difficult because the finance is not there…Half of the teachers cannot do a Zoom; we don't have computers. (Donovan, deputy principal, NPS)

Some teachers used their personal resources to engage the learners who did have access to technology, but they were burdened by the extra preparation time, which was onerous and time-consuming:

> I was constantly in the mode of teaching because I've been actively on my WhatsApp with my learners and parents throughout the lockdown. I was busy. (Samantha, grade 7 educator, JPS)

Teachers noted that the education policy response to COVID-19 was difficult and almost impossible to implement without adequate support or resources. Engaging with teachers about suitable teaching and learning strategies that would be effective in the pandemic context would have minimised much of the stress, anxiety, and frustration experienced by the teachers at these schools.

Curtailing teacher autonomy

When teachers are given the autonomy to manage teaching and learning in their classes in the way they deem best, it promotes job satisfaction and improves teacher retention (Worth and van den Brande, 2020). During times of crisis and disruption, such as COVID-19, teachers are less inclined to leave the profession if they are given the space to manage how they teach and how best to realise

5 All participant names are pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

education policies in their specific contexts. Limiting teacher autonomy and instructing them to just 'follow the rules' disregards their professional skills, which creates feelings of confusion and anxiety, as one teacher noted:

> I feel like the plan was never obvious to us. That made me very cross! Okay we're going to do it this way…Oh, no, here's another circular, we must do it this way…I felt overwhelmed. I felt disrespected by the education departments. (Samantha, grade 7 educator, JPS)

A lack of teacher autonomy reduces their role to one of automated state workers, when they are in fact trained professionals fulfilling one of society's most crucial functions.

The findings presented above on the three themes suggest that the education policy response to COVID-19 at these schools left teachers anxious, stressed, and frustrated, which negatively impacted their well-being. Teachers noted that the emergency policy mandates during the crisis heightened their anxieties to the point of needing medication and therapy and caused immense stress. One teacher explains:

> That's also the main reason why I returned to therapy. I was feeling anxious because my first inkling was to phone my doctor and ask for a prescription, and then I thought…No, no, no… why phone the GP when you can actually phone your therapist, and that's what led me to returning to my therapist because I wasn't blind to the fact that this was a traumatic experience. I was feeling anxious. (Faith, grade 5 educator, JPS)

Simply including teachers in the process of emergency policy-making, giving them a platform to advise, and allowing them to use their experience to implement policies in a manner they knew to be effective would have minimised the catastrophic effect the pandemic had on teachers' well-being.

Conclusion

This article examined teachers' reflections on their well-being, and their views about teacher participation in education policy-making during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic engender fear and vulnerability in teachers, particularly in violent and conflict-affected contexts. Despite uncertainty about their personal well-being, teachers were expected to attend to learners' needs (Neufeld and Malin, 2020). The difficulties teachers experienced during the pandemic were especially pronounced for teachers in Manenberg, a marginalised community, where they struggled to provide quality learning in an impoverished and vulnerable situation affected by social ills and inequality. The difficulties teachers in such contexts experienced were compounded by scant resources, the absence of meaningful professional development, and access to support for their own well-being (INEE, 2020; Sayed *et al*., 2021).

In the South African context, strategies to cope with learning during the COVID-19 pandemic were determined without teacher consultation (Sayed *et al*., 2021), which diminished teacher autonomy and agency. This contrasts with countries like Finland, Japan, and the Netherlands, where schools and teachers were given the autonomy to make alternative arrangements for education (Schleicher, 2020). South Africa's top-down education policy approach to the COVID-19 pandemic undermined the conditions under which teachers laboured and adversely impacted their well-being. Not being given a voice in policy-making or the agency to adjust their teaching, coupled with restricted access to learners and their collegial community, had a detrimental impact on teachers' professional and personal well-being and their efforts to mitigate the effects the crisis had on education (Wong and Moorhouse, 2020).

This paper underscores the importance of teachers' voices in the management of a crisis while also considering the fault lines of inequality in education. The value in policy-makers and school leaders listening to teacher voices when instituting regulations and assessing the particular context of a school is clear. Therefore, it is essential that policy-makers and education leaders give teachers autonomy over their work and allow them to operate in a collaborative environment in which their input is valued and respected. Teachers will then be able to adapt their teaching and the curriculum to the crisis context while taking into account the contextual needs of the community they serve.

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Ensuring effective teacher management in refugee settings in the COVID-19 era: A Ugandan case study of policy and practice

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Abstract

Uganda has been considered a model for progressive and inclusive refugee policies. In 2017, the country adopted the Djibouti Declaration. The Plan of Action accompanying the declaration recognises the role of teachers in achieving inclusive and quality education. It proposes key actions to support the inclusion of refugee teachers in national education systems. Together, the Djibouti Declaration and the Action Plan represent a promising holistic model of teacher management. Drawing on findings from a larger research study, this article explores the progress made in implementing the Plan of Action, factoring in the impact of COVID-19, and discusses the conditions under which a holistic approach to teacher management can lead to improved motivation, well-being, teaching quality and retention of teachers.

Key Words

Refugee teachers, Uganda, teacher management, policy

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Introduction

Home to the largest refugee population in Africa, Uganda has been considered a model for progressive and inclusive refugee policies, which are firmly anchored in international and regional agreements. However, the country faces a burgeoning refugee crisis, compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, which has had a dire impact on education. In displacement situations, the role of teachers is particularly significant, as they are a source of continuity in students' disrupted lives (Kirk and Winthrop, 2007). However, there is a severe shortage of qualified teachers, meaning that nearly half the refugee children in Uganda remained out of school in 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). Efforts to increase the number of teachers and teaching quality have tended to view teachers simply as service providers, but teachers are members of affected communities, rights holders, and potential agents of positive societal change (Rubagiza *et al*., 2016).

The Djibouti Declaration Plan of Action builds on this idea by promoting equal rights for refugee teachers and ensuring that their working conditions are aligned with those of national teachers. This plan aligns with the Incheon Declaration, the framework for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), for 'ensur[ing] inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all'. More specifically, the Incheon Declaration calls on the international community to 'ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported' (UNESCO *et al*., 2015, p. 8) The Djibouti Declaration

Plan of Action and the Incheon Declaration call for a holistic approach to teacher management that considers multiple dimensions of teacher management to ensure quality education, while also recognising refugee teachers' rights.

Drawing from the results of a study on teacher management in refugee settings in Uganda, this article examines the progress made to date by Ugandan authorities in implementing the Djibouti Declaration Action Plan[1]. Factoring in the impact of COVID-19, it demonstrates that a holistic approach to teacher management is a key policy lever for building and maintaining inclusive, quality education systems that enhance refugee self-reliance and resilience, and promote safe and sustainable integration, resettlement, or return, as per global agreements. The case study adopted a collaborative and iterative multi-phased approach. The research methodology included a review of international, regional, and national policies. While there is no universally agreed-upon definition of 'policy', for the purposes of this article, policy refers to laws, regulations, guidelines, procedures, and administrative actions as set out by governments and other institutions and organisations. A teacher survey constituted part of the study which sought to gain a better understanding of who the teachers are who are deployed in refugee settings. It was answered by 979 teachers, of which 828 were nationals and 151 were refugees. We also conducted 49 semi-structured interviews with central-level stakeholders, including government representatives and development partners and key representatives from the districts, as well as 80 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key actors at the school level in four settlements. Given the timing of our research, we had the opportunity to build in questions about the impact of COVID-19.

Teacher management in the literature

A global shortage of qualified teachers in refugee settings

While teachers and teaching practices in refugee settings have received increasing attention in research agendas, most data is limited to numbers, qualifications, and compensation (Richardson *et al*., 2018). In their review of the literature, Ring and West (2015a) argue that it is difficult to attract and recruit high-quality teachers in refugee settings. Mononye and Penson *et al*. (2012) identify the lack of cross-border recognition of teaching qualifications as one obstacle to recruitment and retention. Indeed, refugee teaching credentials are often not recognised by the host country, which excludes refugee teachers from the pool of candidates (Ring and West, 2015a). Ring and West (2015b) therefore assert that the governments and agencies in charge of refugees should advocate for regional strategies and policies, and for standardised mechanisms to recognise qualifications.

In terms of professional development, the literature has stressed the need for teachers to be adequately prepared to meet the complex needs of refugee learners (Dryden-Peterson and Adelman, 2016; Kirk and Winthrop, 2007; Ring and West, 2015b). However, it also has highlighted the difficulties in addressing those needs and the possible adverse consequences, such as problematic classroom management practices and high levels of de-motivation and disempowerment among teachers (Dryden-Peterson and Adelman, 2016; Kirk and Winthrop, 2007; Ring and West, 2015b). Finally, when available, professional development is often episodic, and the remoteness of refugee camps makes it challenging to provide regular opportunities for continuous professional development (Burns and Lawrie, 2015; Ring and West, 2015a).

1 Although it is difficult to establish a causal relationship, there was consistent mention in our interviews of policy-makers' concerted efforts to follow up on the Djibouti Declaration, as evidenced by an understanding of what it entails, and to implement these policies.

Recognising the rights of teachers in refugee settings

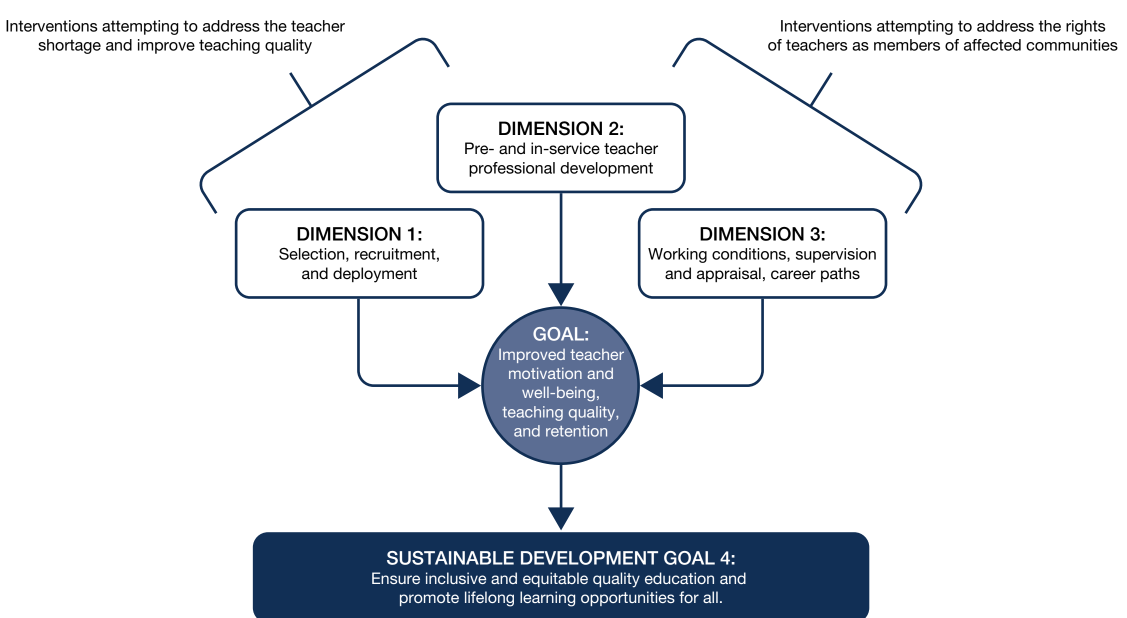
In the recent literature, the focus has shifted to seeing teachers as members of affected communities and, more importantly, as rights holders. Penson *et al*. (2012) assert that the state has to realise refugees' rights and, thus, highlight the need for greater preparation and for the establishment of national and international frameworks for supporting refugee teachers. In particular, guaranteeing refugees' right to work can reduce their vulnerability, strengthen their resilience, and protect their dignity (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016).

Research has also shown that education systems with functioning administrative and remuneration mechanisms are supportive of teacher recruitment, retention, satisfaction, and morale (Dolan *et al*., 2012). However, establishing an effective remuneration system remains challenging in fragile countries (Dolan *et al*., 2012).

A new model for understanding teacher management in refugee settings

As highlighted by the literature, interventions that target teachers not merely as service providers but as members of affected communities and rights holders are more likely to have positive implications for their well-being, motivation, teaching quality, and retention. This will subsequently lead to more inclusive, quality education systems. Based on this idea, and on a review of international guidelines and standards on the teaching profession, we have developed a conceptual model for understanding teacher management as a policy lever in meeting SDG 4. This model, which is presented in Figure 1, differentiates between the means (labelled 'dimensions') and ends of teacher management (labelled 'goal'). It also demonstrates the importance of undertaking interventions that address teacher shortages, improve teaching quality, improve working conditions, and provide meaningful career paths. Consequently, strengthening teacher management processes in the three dimensions—namely, in the selection, recruitment, and deployment of teachers; in pre- and in-service teacher professional development; and in terms of working conditions, supervision and appraisal, and career paths—leads to improved motivation, well-being, teaching quality, and retention, which in turn helps to ensure quality, inclusive education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for understanding teacher management as a policy lever for achieving SDG4. Adapted from Teacher management in refugee settings: Uganda by IIEP-UNESCO and Education Development Trust, forthcoming.



Findings

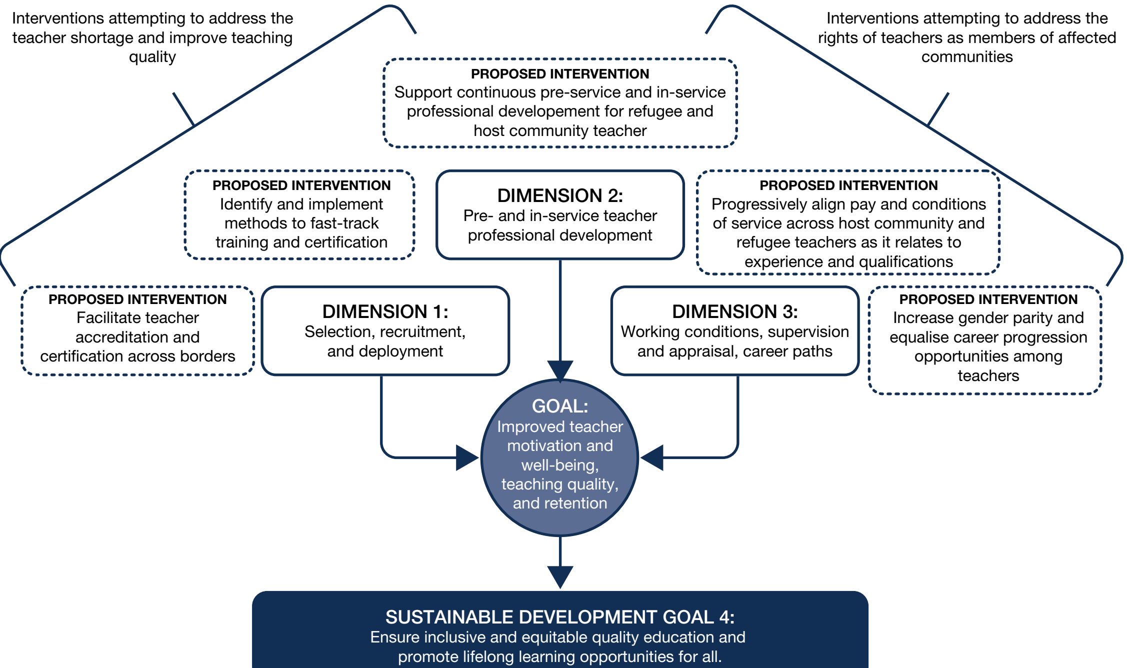
A promising policy framework for a holistic approach to teacher management

In 2016, at a leader summit held to formulate a more equitable and predictable response to the global refugee crisis, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and agreed to the core elements of a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), including supporting integration and building self-reliance in refugee-hosting communities (United Nations, 2016; UNHCR, 2018). According to an interview with a senior representative from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), Uganda's commitment to the inclusion of refugees in national education systems predates the CRRF. The country has long been recognised as having one of the most progressive policy environments for refugees in the world, with refugees being granted the right to work and to access public services, including education, and the ability to obtain key official documentation, including identity cards and education certificates (Refugee Act, 2006; REF, 2019).

A UNHCR representative from Uganda noted that, with the CRRF vision in mind, efforts to include and integrate refugees in education has accelerated since 2016, and that all policies in the sector are now 'anchored' in the global and regional CRRF agenda. This commitment to implementing the CRRF in the education sector is also evident in the region as a whole. In 2017, Uganda played a leading role in developing the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, a non-binding legal instrument promoting quality, inclusive education for refugees, returnees, and host communities in the eight East African countries that make up the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). As with the CRRF, the Djibouti Declaration has acted as a mechanism for codifying Uganda's commitment to refugee inclusion, which is evidenced by the mainstreaming of refugee education into national education sector plans through the development, implementation, and review of a national costed education response plan (ERP) to guide the refugee response as an annex to the country's national education sector strategic plan. Uganda's progress in the implementation of the ERP was recently reviewed at a consultation meeting between IGAD and the Government of Uganda (IGAD, 2022).

The Djibouti Declaration Plan of Action explicitly mentions teacher management, calling for 'strengthening regional frameworks to promote the inclusion of refugee teachers' and setting out five proposed actions for governments to achieve this end. We argue that, when taken together, these actions represent a promising regional policy development because they not only address qualified teacher shortages and the quality of service provision, they also pay attention to teachers' rights as members of affected communities. This is illustrated in Figure 2, which maps the five proposed actions to the different dimensions of our conceptual framework.

Figure 2: Alignment between the conceptual framework and the Djibouti Declaration Action Plan. Adapted from Teacher management in refugee settings: Uganda, by IIEP-UNESCO and Education Development Trust, forthcoming.



As previously noted, Uganda's progressive refugee policy landscape includes the right to work. From a legal and policy perspective, refugees have the right to work as teachers, provided they have the relevant qualifications. This means that the new National Teacher Policy (NTP) applies to all teachers working in refugee settings, whether they are Ugandan nationals or refugees (MoES, 2019). Uganda's NTP is research-based and aims to streamline the training, management, and development of teachers in order to restore the status of the teaching profession in Uganda and professionalise teaching through three key mechanisms: (1) a teacher management information system; (2) a national institute for teacher education; and (3) a teacher council. The outbreak of COVID-19 occurred only a few months after the launch of the NTP, which means that several critical initiatives outlined in the policy were stalled, and that it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the policy, given the challenges posed by school closures and dwindling resources for education.

The MoES ended the world's most prolonged COVID-19 school closures in January 2022, after almost two years of disrupted education threatened progress toward implementing policies and programmes that targeted refugee teachers. And yet, several promising practices in Uganda point to the country's strong commitment to the multiple dimensions of the Djibouti Declaration Action Plan, which will be discussed below.

Interventions attempting to address the teacher shortage and improve teaching quality

There is evidence of progress in Uganda regarding the proposed action to support cross-border teacher accreditation and certification. Indeed, when appropriately qualified, refugees can work as teachers in all types of schools. Those without prior training or recognised teaching qualifications can be hired as classroom assistants, which is a common practice to ensure increased support for over-crowded and multi-lingual classes. However, our survey shows that, while there are a high number of refugee teachers in other countries in the region, only about 15 percent of teaching posts in Uganda are held by refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. Among

the 15 percent, approximately half obtained their qualifications in Uganda. The other half qualified in another country and were able to have their qualifications formally recognised through the Uganda Higher Education Qualifications Framework (UHEQF). However, most refugee teachers are unaware of the UHEQF, which partly explains the low percentage of refugees in the workforce. Refugee teachers from non-English-speaking countries face additional barriers, according to interviews with central-level UN and MoES representatives, who noted a mis-match between the anglophone system and the francophone system. Nonetheless, head-teachers and other partners aim to raise awareness and encourage their classroom assistants whose qualifications are as yet unrecognised to apply to the UHEQF.

Furthermore, to ensure that refugee classroom assistants have the opportunity to progress to teaching positions, development partners have been implementing fast-tracking training programmes for refugee classroom assistants who lack qualifications. For example, according to a UNHCR official, Windle International is working with the MoES and teacher training colleges to implement a teaching qualification programme for refugee classroom assistants. However, it should be noted that fast-tracking training initiatives have mainly been done on an ad-hoc basis with support from NGOs and development partners, as explained by an MoES representative, who noted the absence of a formal structure for refugee teacher training. Indeed, while our survey data revealed that 66 of 79 refugee classroom assistant respondents were currently participating in training through development partner initiatives, interviews with staff members from teacher training institutes revealed that relatively few refugees were accessing the training opportunities.

Refugees seeking pre-service teacher education can access teacher training institutes, provided they meet specific key requirements. In fact, according to the ERP steering committee chairperson, ‘Uganda is one of the few countries in the world where refugees are integrated into the national education system’. The chairperson said this extends to refugees who wish to become teachers: ‘Even as I speak there are refugee students studying education within the country’. However, as mentioned above, the absence of a formal structure to manage refugee teacher training continues to present a barrier to ensuring their equal access to training opportunities. Furthermore, one key aspect of the NTP is to raise the status of the teaching profession and improve the quality of teaching by requiring primary school teachers to hold a degree rather than a diploma. Many Ugandan teachers who participated in our study expressed concern about how they would find the time and money to upgrade their qualifications to meet these requirements, particularly as the establishment of national bodies aimed at supporting the upgrade process was delayed due to COVID-19. For refugees, pursuing a degree-level programme seems ever more out of reach, especially in the current climate of dwindling resources for education aid.

Uganda has been actively engaged in providing in-service professional development to teachers working in refugee settings, which was made possible through effective coordination mechanisms, such as the ERP. In this light, there is a clear attribution of roles and responsibilities as highlighted hereafter: district authorities, in partnership with education partners and schools, identify and report training needs to the central level, which then liaise with UNHCR which, in turn, provides funding to implementing partners who are in charge of delivering training activities. These robust mechanisms proved critical in the context of COVID-19 in helping teachers to ensure education continuity. For example, teachers were given training on how to deliver distance learning, as described by one head teacher interviewed for the study. When it comes to psycho-social support, however, while COVID-19 highlighted the critical need for psycho-social training to meet the needs of vulnerable children more effectively, our survey suggested that only a handful of teachers had access to psycho-social training. As with pre-service training opportunities for refugees, in-service psycho-social support training for all teachers in refugee-hosting areas is highly localised, ad-hoc, and facilitated by development partners.

Interventions attempting to address the rights of teachers to lifelong learning and decent working conditions

Ensuring that teachers have access to pre- and in-service professional development is essential to providing quality education and a prerequisite for

ensuring teachers' access to lifelong learning and career progression, thereby respecting their rights. The examples above and data from our survey indicate that, while there are no specific official barriers to participation in lifelong learning associated with refugee status, refugee teachers are prevented from participating for several reasons, including the high cost, lack of employer support, long distances between schools and training locations, and scheduling conflicts.

On a more positive note, promising efforts have been made to align the salaries and working conditions of refugee and national teachers. During our research, our survey indeed showed that Ugandan and refugee teachers received comparable salaries. This suggests that there is alignment between government and development partners' salaries, as we found that refugee teachers are more likely to be employed by the latter. Furthermore, according to our data, teachers continued to receive their salaries during COVID-19, which likely prevented massive teacher attrition. In fact, most teachers returned to work when schools re-opened, which aligns with the literature demonstrating that a functioning remuneration mechanism is closely linked with teacher retention and satisfaction. One interviewee also provided promising examples of teachers going door-to-door to support students' learning during the school closures. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, despite salary alignment and continuity, teachers employed on the development partner payroll face greater job insecurity, due to the precariousness of their contracts. Indeed, as mentioned by an interviewee from UNHCR, these teachers are hired on annually renewable contracts, subject to good performance and the availability of funds.

In terms of gender parity in the teaching workforce, the ERP highlights that men make up the majority of teachers, particularly in leadership roles (MoES Uganda, 2018). Although our research suggests that female participation in recruitment processes is strongly encouraged—for instance, through the implementation framework of the NTP, which assigns head teachers responsibility for checking gender imbalances in staffing—female participation in recruitment processes remains low. This imbalance can be explained in part by lower enrolment rates among girls in secondary education and, therefore, in higher education.

Finally, during interviews, central-level MoES representatives explained that they had served as teachers before taking up roles in school and district leadership, and then finally taking up their roles within the MoES, which indicates a promising career path for teachers. However, it was unclear if this career pathway is open to refugees. Furthermore, meaningful career progression is also a challenge for teachers on development partner payrolls, due to the one-year contract mechanisms. In fact, one interviewee indicated that career progression is not included in their terms of service. In addition, according to our survey, 38 percent of the 151 refugee teachers surveyed indicated that one of their reasons for not participating in training was that they had no incentive to do so, since training is not linked directly to career progression. While an incentive framework for teachers has been introduced as part of the NTP, it is unclear the extent to which refugee teachers will benefit in the absence of a formal structure for refugee training, which could help to overcome some of the pervasive challenges to participation in lifelong learning as identified above.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that the holistic policy framework in Uganda has enabled significant progress in the implementation of the Djibouti Declaration. These results reflect the key role the states play in realising the rights of refugees and the importance of having well-established and trusted development partners to complement this work. This relationship has proved particularly successful in the context of COVID-19. However, the research also highlighted some challenges in accreditation, access to pre- and in-service training, and job security and career path.

To tackle these challenges, system-level preconditions need to be met. Introducing a formal structure for managing refugee teachers, which is focused on their professional development and career paths, could help ensure that promising developments related to the NTP also benefit teachers working in refugee contexts. Additionally, building on the strengths of the existing ERP mechanism at the central and district levels, it is essential to ensure that school-level actors are actively involved in policy development processes and implementation. In this regard, Uganda's

reputable teachers union and teacher training institutions have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that communication is not just top down and that teachers' rights to lifelong learning and decent work are not forgotten in efforts to address teacher shortages and improve the quality of education in refugee settings.

These findings reveal that only a holistic approach to teacher management that considers the interdependent nature of teacher management's multiple dimensions can improve teacher motivation and well-being, teaching quality and retention, and contribute to ultimately achieving SDG4. Finally, in reflecting on the impact of COVID-19, we saw the importance of having development-oriented initiatives that support the integration of refugee teachers over the long run through improved working conditions and career paths, while ensuring the resilience of education systems.

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Teaching experiences in contexts of conflict and cultural diversity during the COVID-19 pandemic:
The case of a public school in Bogotá

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Abstract

This paper showcases the experience of teachers in an under-served school in Bogotá, Colombia, amidst the difficulties of delivering meaningful education to a diverse population of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the students were already affected by precariousness and forced displacement. The paper focuses on teachers' agency and their motivation to work toward social and educational change, while also attending to the educational needs of immigrant and indigenous students using a critical inclusive and inter-cultural education approach. The teachers' research-action-reflection process enabled them to examine educational practices through a de-colonial and inter-cultural lens and to implement an innovative pedagogical strategy to address educational inequalities.

Key Words

critical inclusive education, inter-cultural education, teachers' agency

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social and educational inequity, particularly for people already affected by uncertainty amidst situations of conflict, precariousness, and forced displacement. However, despite the adversity, this global emergency also disrupted the status quo and provided education stakeholders with an opportunity to 'rethink the purposes, practices, and paradigms of education itself' (Cohen and Willemsen, 2021, p. 356). Rethinking teaching and learning practices during the pandemic was precisely what happened in the case of Alameda (pseudonym), a public school located in an under-served neighbourhood in downtown Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, a country affected by decades of violence, inequity, and social and political conflict. Since teachers' pedagogical practices can promote or hinder students' social and educational inclusion, recognition, participation, and achievement (Mendenhall *et al*., 2020; Raffo and Gunter, 2008), the purpose of this paper is to highlight the agency of a group of Alameda teachers' and their journey through the design and implementation of a research-action-reflection (RAR) process that addressed two inter-related problems: the teaching

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and learning challenges posed during the pandemic, and the intensified social and educational exclusion and inequalities affecting the diverse community of immigrant and forcibly displaced students enrolled at the school[1]. Despite the time needed to generate systemic change, we argue that, paired with a critical inclusive and inter-cultural education framework, the RAR process provides empirical insights into how highly diverse educational communities in contexts of emergencies or protracted conflicts can work toward pedagogical and curricular change and build more participative and inclusive schools.

We first present a theoretical discussion of inclusive and inter-cultural education. After presenting the methodology, we situate this case study within the broad context of conflict, precariousness, and diversity that characterises Alameda students and families. Next, we provide a background for the motivations of a group of teachers—to whom we refer as the 'leadership team'—who designed and led the implementation of the RAR strategy. We also offer details of the implementation of the inter-cultural education project, a pedagogical strategy developed to respond to the educational needs of forcibly displaced students and families. Finally, through teachers' reflections on their experience, we discuss the benefits and challenges of initiatives such as the one implemented at Alameda.

Inclusive and intercultural education

In the field of education and conflict, the educational needs of young people affected by emergencies, violence, and protracted conflicts have usually been addressed by donors, policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers from humanitarian, development, security, and social justice frameworks (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Novelli, 2017; Lopes Cardozo and Shah, 2016). In contrast, we analyse the delivery of education for these populations at a school in Bogotá through the lens of a critical inclusive and inter-cultural education approach, which has not been widely discussed in the literature on education and conflict.

Although inclusion in mainstream schooling has lately been one of the most widely advocated global education strategies to increase enrollment and quality of education for forcibly displaced children, it differs from a critical definition of inclusive education. Inclusion is commonly encouraged as access to national education systems, rather than to informal, short-term education programmes (UNHCR, 2019; UNICEF, 2022). However, while educational inclusion can be understood from a functionalist perspective as students' access to schooling and their adaptation to its mainstream social and cultural life, a critical inclusive education approach advocates for schools' adaptation to students' needs and the transformation of structural barriers that hinder children's access to education and limit their recognition, participation, and achievement (Ainscow, 2020; Gale, Mills and Cross, 2017; Raffo and Gunter, 2008).

In Colombia, the National Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Secretariat of Education of Bogotá (SoE), the local education authority in the city, have promoted the inclusion of vulnerable populations, ethnic groups, and victims of conflict in schools (SED, 2018). Policy guidelines on inclusive education aim to acknowledge students' individual characteristics and the country's social and cultural diversity. Due to that diversity and the historical exclusion, racism, and discrimination against minoritised communities, inclusive education policy guidelines in Colombia explicitly incorporate an inter-cultural approach.

Inter-cultural education is a popular approach not only in Colombia but also in other Andean countries. The concept of inter-culturality originated in the 1990s in the context of indigenous movements and their struggle to transform their relationship with nation-states and shift public policies toward more culturally appropriate education (Walsh, 2002). Like the functionalist approach to inclusion, a functionalist inter-cultural education would advocate for the inclusion of populations in the established school system but without encouraging school transformation or challenging existing inequalities. A critical de-colonial perspective of inter-cultural education aims instead to recognise and legitimise the cultural diversity of people who have historically suffered subalternation and have been minoritised (Walsh, 2010). According to this perspective, inter-cultural education is also a pedagogical

1 In this article, we use the term 'forcibly displaced persons' or 'forcibly displaced students' to refer to Alameda populations of internally displaced people and Venezuelan refugees and vulnerable immigrants.

tool for dialogue among diverse members of a community that enables them to share their wisdom, knowledges, thoughts, and emotions as they strive for the emancipatory potential of education and seek to co-create a shared cultural and social world (Freire and Ronzoni, 2008). Ideally, it also encourages diverse forms of being, thinking, learning, and teaching (Walsh, 2010). However, this practice can prove challenging to implement, since relationships among diverse communities at a school tend to be problematic. Discrimination against minoritised groups usually occurs because of the lack of knowledge about who the students/others are; the lack of preparedness to handle different perspectives, ways of living, and interests; and resistance to social and pedagogical change (Walsh, 2010).

Methodology

To acknowledge teachers' agency and interrupt extractivist research practices, this article incorporates a standpoint epistemological approach, which highlights individuals' voices and experiences through collective interaction and dialogue with others (Connolly, 1996; Johnstone *et al*., 2023). Carolina Mojica Gómez, a primary school teacher, and Liliana Reyes Gómez and Sonia Moreno Villamil, two psychosocial and pedagogical counsellors at the school, are the three Alameda teachers (leadership team) who designed and implemented the RAR strategy between October 2020 and April 2022. In re-constructing this experience, in this article their voices appear throughout, and they are therefore considered participants and co-authors, jointly with Sánchez-Bautista, a doctoral candidate researching alternative education practices involving forcibly displaced students at Alameda.

We draw from a variety of qualitative data to answer the following questions:

1. How did Alameda teachers adapt their pedagogical practices to serve the educational needs of a diverse community of forcibly displaced students and families during the pandemic?
2. What motivated them to work toward social and pedagogical change through inter-cultural education during the pandemic?

We utilise the findings from a series of individual semi-structured interviews, group conversations, and individual follow-ups with the leadership team conducted by the first author in 2022, after in-person classes had resumed. We also use information collected by the teachers during the implementation of the RAR process, mainly structured phone interviews with parents and students from different cultural backgrounds in October 2020, and a focus group with seven Alameda teachers after the school reopened in January 2022. Using a thematic analysis of this information, we focus on teachers' experiences, interests, and beliefs around inclusive education and forcibly displaced students to discuss the implementation of teaching and learning strategies.

The context of conflict and cultural diversity

One of the most visible consequences of more than six decades of social and political conflict in Colombia has been the forced displacement of teachers, students, and their families from their conflict-affected communities (CdV, 2022). Due to protracted and emergent conflicts, millions of rural, Afro-descendant, and Indigenous populations from different corners of the country have been forcibly displaced. In addition to more than eight million internally displaced persons, almost two million Venezuelan refugees and immigrants have arrived in Colombia since 2015 (PCINU-R4V, 2021). Looking for safety and better living conditions, these populations have migrated primarily to cities, such as Bogotá, which has received thousands of children and school-age youth.

Many FDPs have arrived in under-served neighbourhoods (SDIS, 2019). These families typically live in over-crowded housing, but a few do not have a fixed place to live, since having housing depends on their ability to earn a daily income. Alameda Public School is located in one of these neighbourhoods in downtown Bogotá, which is inhabited by the school's diverse low-income community. Alameda has historically had a high enrollment rate among victims of conflict, but its population has become more diverse in recent years, due to the influx of immigrants and Indigenous internally displaced persons to the city (Sánchez, 2017). By 2020, the school had around 1,200 students enrolled in pre-school, elementary,

and secondary education, of which approximately 34 percent were Venezuelan immigrants. Most Colombian students are usually self-identified as mestizos from Bogotá and other rural and urban locations. Afro-descendants made up about 13 percent of the total population, and 6 percent of the families came from Indigenous communities of at least six different ethnicities, each with its own language (MEN, 2021).

Background of the RAR process

Following national guidelines released at the beginning of global school closures, Alameda teachers tried to deliver synchronous online classes (MEN, 2020). However, according to the teachers who checked attendance in every class, 70 percent of students, on average, did not show up (SED, 2020). Considering that public schools do not usually require families to purchase textbooks, and in the context of limited internet connectivity for low-income students enrolled in public schools, the SoE encouraged teachers to design digital/printed guides that would cover the most important topics of the regular curriculum. The intention was for students to learn with this home-study material, the assistance of their families, and the support of teachers through phone calls, WhatsApp messages, or online classes. Like workbooks, the guides designed by Alameda teachers included an explanation of a topic, activities, and questions. All the activities had to be completed by the students, and the guides were to be turned in every one or two months for teachers to grade.

Months after implementation of the digital/printed guides strategy began, Alameda School staff members analysed students' and families' responses to online and home-schooling learning. Mojica Gómez, one of the teachers who initiated the RAR process, pointed out that 'fewer than 30 percent of the families returned the guides, which posed the challenge of increasing students' participation and improving their learning experience at home'. As psycho-social and pedagogical counsellors at the school, Reyes Gómez and Moreno Villamil were aware that most forcibly displaced students with Indigenous and immigrant backgrounds did not have learning support from their parents and other adults in their households, who had low levels of education or were not proficient in Spanish. Due to these students' more precarious living conditions and limited access to digital technologies, the teachers were convinced that it was necessary to address the learning difficulties that the forcibly displaced were facing because they were among those most affected by the pandemic.

These three teachers, who are also graduate students in the field of education and have a theoretical and practical interest in inter-cultural education, decided that the pandemic and the arrival of a new principal interested in supporting forcibly displaced students provided them with an opportunity to focus on these students' needs. They decided to design and implement a pedagogical process based on the RAR methodology to improve students' participation and critically explore if the underlying reasons for students' disengagement were also motivated by the lack of adequate teaching strategies and attention to families' realities in such challenging circumstances.

Implementation of an alternative strategy: A pedagogical response based on the research-action-reflection methodology

Drawing from participatory action research inquiry (PAR), the leadership team designed the RAR process. In education, PAR can be conceptualised as a collaborative process and a reflective practice in which teachers-researchers critically inquire about social, cultural, and pedagogical issues to transform and improve their educational practices (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992). In Latin America, PAR is a widely known epistemological and methodological approach in education inspired by the works of Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, who observed that knowledge can be produced not only by scholars but by community members who are able to reflect on their lives and the social problems affecting them, and can solve such issues through collective action (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991). In Bogotá, the SoE has encouraged PAR at schools, as well as the development of initiatives that promote critical pedagogy, more equitable power relationships among the school social actors, and citizenship and peace education (SED, 2014).

In the teachers' adapted RAR experience, the practice of reflection is highlighted by the leadership

team, since every action taken in the process provided them with constant feedback about the problems and solutions to be implemented and triggered new questions and actions. The RAR process was structured into three phases: (1) analysis of students' and families' disengagement, (2) participatory design and the implementation of a pedagogical action-response to improve educational practices, and (3) teachers' reflection on their teaching experiences with the implementation of the inter-cultural project during the pandemic. In the following sections, we expand on each one of these phases.

Analysis of students' and families' disengagement

In October 2020, the leadership team conducted 15 phone interviews with parents and students from different cultural backgrounds to gather information about their experience of learning at home with the digital/printed material. In the interviews, some parents reported that they did not have sufficient education to explain some topics to their children and suggested that topics and activities should be closer to their backgrounds to make the home-schooling experience easier. Also, although one of the mothers found it easy to support her child because she was a teacher, she commented that she 'did not see' her family's reality in the guides, that topics and activities related to other cultures and knowledges were missing, and that teachers should consider cultural differences and somehow include them in the material to make it more relevant for students and parents. She explained, for instance, that the classification of living beings and non-living things used by her child's second-grade teacher is different in her culture: 'The teacher explained to my daughter that stones are an example of non-living things, but in our culture, stones are living beings, as everything on our Mother Earth is…, so teachers should learn about our worldview too'. Finally, some refugee parents and students affirmed that they would like to learn more about Colombia, its geography, food, and the history of the armed conflict, and that Colombians should learn about Venezuelans because 'it could contribute to having better relationships when the children return to school'.

The intercultural education initiative, a participatory pedagogical action-response

Drawing from families' and students' answers, in January 2021, the leadership team started an inter-cultural education project as a strategy to begin transforming pedagogical practices of exclusion that affect Indigenous and immigrant students. The leadership team designed two community activities to learn and share inter-cultural knowledge. The first was mingas[2]. For these online gatherings, the leadership team invited all Alameda teachers, students, parents, elders, community and spiritual authorities from ethnic communities, and dinamizadores culturales working with the SoE[3]. The participants discussed social issues, such as the inequities affecting the community and the country in the context of an unpopular tax reform planned by the national government amidst the pandemic. They also shared knowledges about topics such as students' places of origin, gastronomy, music, traditional games, and hair-dressing. Out of 90 teachers working at the school, approximately 20 percent attended the mingas. Students with access to internet connectivity—expanded at the time by the SoE through the distribution of tablets to students—also attended the mingas.

These conversations were the basis for the second activity, called clases tejidas (woven classes). While learning about students' topics of interest and communities' ancestral wisdom in the mingas, a group of seven primary and secondary teachers joined the leadership team. Their job was to work with other Alameda teachers to design the school's digital/printed material to facilitate the incorporation of topics and activities developed during the mingas into the guides. This strategy allowed teachers to integrate areas of knowledge and further develop project-based learning already implemented at the school. For example, one of the clases tejidas was developed around corn, a topic addressed

2 Traditionally, a minga is a community effort in which people voluntarily work together to address a community need or issue.

3 The SoE's inclusion office has a group of professionals from Afro, Indigenous, and Room (gypsy) communities. Known as dinamizadores culturales, they support the schools where students from these ethnic backgrounds are enrolled. Among other activities, they help with interpretation in the classrooms when Indigenous students do not speak Spanish and provide teachers with pedagogical tools to include ethnic communities' knowledges in the school curriculum.

from different perspectives in the digital/printed guides according to each one of the subjects: the history of corn and contemporary uses, climate and moon phases to grow crops, production statistics in Latin America, the meaning and use of corn by Indigenous, black, and Venezuelan families, and so on. When a mix of online and in-person classes began to be implemented in July 2021 as part of the plan for school re-openings in the city, some teachers, students, and families came together to cook Colombian and Venezuelan arepas and other corn-based dishes.

Teachers' reflection on the intercultural education project

After in-person classes had resumed in January 2022 and the school was 'back to normal,' the implementation of mingas and clases tejidas was suspended. The leadership team observed that, although some teachers wanted to keep implementing these pedagogical activities, other colleagues rejected them because they were in a hurry to catch up with the curriculum and the topics they could not cover effectively during the pandemic. For the leadership team, strengthening the inter-cultural education project was a priority, since discrimination and exclusion of FDPs were happening at the school before the pandemic. This disruptive event allowed teachers to realise that these students 'were not only socially excluded but also excluded from the curriculum', since it did not incorporate ways of knowing different from those of the hegemonic populations. For this reason, the inter-cultural project was conceived of as an attempt to 'recognize these students as part of the community…, create a symbolic space to de-colonize the curriculum, and transform structural inequities affecting forcibly displaced students'.

Teachers' narratives of their motivations, experiences, and lessons learned have also provided insights into the benefits and challenges of working toward social and pedagogical change through inter-cultural education in the future. Empirical knowledge about mainstream culture influenced teachers' attitudes toward and pedagogical practices with forcibly displaced students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their interest in transforming those attitudes and practices. As one teacher pointed out, recognising and valuing diversity has not been a common practice. In her opinion, her teaching practice was informed by her experience when she arrived in the city many years ago. She had to adapt rapidly to the social and cultural dynamics of the urban context where differences were often made invisible, erased, or derided. As 'people mocked' her 'rural' accent, this teacher used to think that everybody, including her students, 'should learn how to behave in the city to avoid being devoured by it'. Another teacher added that talking about diversity was important because 'the society has changed with the massive arrival of Indigenous people and Venezuelans in the city' but 'at the school, we have not addressed it explicitly or designed any other collective strategy for these students'. Still another teacher pointed out that, before his participation in the inter-cultural project, he 'was not sure about how to interact with Indigenous students' but he has 'a better idea now'. In this sense, various teachers valued the experience as they learned about inter-culturality and Indigenous and immigrant students' lives, and say they now feel 'closer to them'. Even though 'culture' could be essentialised in education processes drawing from inter-culturality (Sánchez-Bautista, 2013), the implementation of strategies such as mingas and clases tejidas provided teachers with additional pedagogical tools and helped to reduce social and cultural gaps by laying out a 'common ground' for teachers and the diverse community of forcibly displaced students to learn from each other. However, without teachers' participation and engagement, the implementation of inter-cultural education as a practice to promote social and educational change in the school will not be sustainable in the future.

Conclusion

As seen in the case of the Alameda School, the movement of people fleeing from conflict, violence, and precarious lives usually creates diversity in the schools, since students bring their different backgrounds to their new locales. However, this diversity is not necessarily noticed or managed purposefully. As Malkki (1995) pointed out in one of her seminal works, labels such as 'refugee' or 'forcibly displaced' tend to group these populations into categories that minimise or ignore diverse life experiences and cultural backgrounds. Ignoring differences and diversity makes it difficult for

schools to respond to students' learning needs and transform structural inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion. In the case of the Alameda teachers, the pandemic revealed the cultural, social, and educational exclusion affecting forcibly displaced students at the school, and made more evident the need to recognize, accept, and embrace students from diverse identities and backgrounds who were being neglected before the COVID-19 emergency. It also took some of the teachers on a journey wherein recognising and legitimising students' diverse cultures, identities, knowledges, and ways of knowing was pivotal to providing meaningful education during an emergency that made survival the top priority for families and students living in a context of precarity and economic and housing insecurity.

Alameda teachers' experience shows that, in contexts in which cultural diversity is not explicitly recognised, valued, or integrated into school life, educational settings may implement a functionalist approach to inclusion that potentially fosters students' assimilation. Their assimilation is facilitated through a curriculum that overlooks the voices, multi-faceted knowledges, interests, and needs of the students and their families and drives students from minoritised ethnic communities and immigrants to adapt to the mainstream culture of the receiving society/school. The task of curbing the reproduction of structures of exclusion and inequalities affecting forcibly displaced students at schools is usually left to teachers, who do not always have the necessary knowledge or tools. In these contexts, the participatory and community character of the RAR methodology has the potential to inform pedagogical and curricular change from a de-colonial practice of inclusion and inter-culturality. In the case of Alameda, the implementation of the RAR strategy led a group of teachers to develop innovative teaching and learning practices and non-hegemonic ways of conceiving education, curriculum, and social and cultural relationships within the school community.

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Hybrid higher education innovation for Syrian refugee learners:

Reflections on an embedded community-based research CoMOOC

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Abstract

This paper explores an innovative approach to teaching refugee learners in higher education during Lebanon's economic and political collapse. A connected hybrid learning model was piloted with Syrian higher education learners in Bekaa and Arsal, Lebanon, during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the core of the hybrid programme was a co-designed massive open collaboration, or CoMOOC, on community-based research. The authors describe community-based research as a fundamental teaching topic for remote refugee learners, due to the added value it provides by strengthening refugee community engagement through collective problem-solving. Advantages to using an online format, beyond reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission, are discussed, including a range of implications for future higher education models in unstable and remote contexts. The authors conclude by considering the value of non-traditional forms of teaching which can strengthen refugees' sense of belonging and agency.

Key Words

online learning, community-based research, pandemic, refugees, Lebanon

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Introduction

Lebanon is enduring a protracted and multi-faceted crisis. Multiple political, economic, and social challenges are causing nation-wide vulnerability and distress (LCRP, 2022). In a country of approximately seven million, people's daily lives and their well-being are directly affected by the country's degradation and instability. The origins of this crisis are complex, and they trace back to a long history of conflict that has weakened Lebanon's physical, social, and political infrastructures (Ghanem, 2018). In 2019, a mass uprising called for an end to political corruption, but hope for change was soon shattered by the port explosion on August 4, worsened power cuts and unprecedented hyper-inflation. Lebanon's economic crisis has created a vicious domino effect of fuel, water, bread, and medicine shortages. According to a recent report, 40 percent of the population is considering emigrating, with a mass exodus of educated youth already under way (Saleh, 2022).

This paper, situated in the context of Lebanon's complex socio-political milieu, focuses particular attention on the displaced Syrian refugee community living in its neighbour country. Refugees account for nearly one-quarter of Lebanon's population (LCRP, 2022). The authors of this paper, two of whom are part of the Syrian community, reflect on their experiences navigating Lebanon's lucrative humanitarian and research industries, which are inequitably influenced by the interests of the Global North. The authors identify the need to strengthen local research capacities as a fundamental component of supporting the displaced Syrian community over the long-term. Research is considered an essential tool for reducing harmful power dynamics, and for galvanising local activism and community engagement.

This case study details a pilot hybrid programme for Syrian students offered during the pandemic, whose aim was to understand what higher education enrichment can offer displaced learners. The authors specifically reflect on the motivations, experiences, and barriers involved in developing a hybrid co-designed massive open online collaboration (CoMOOC) learning model for community-based research (CBR) in Lebanon. Attention is drawn to the CoMOOC design process, which differs greatly from the normative MOOC framework. The paper evaluates the pilot programme from the designers' and participants' perspectives, with the aim of offering a model that can be replicated in other contexts of mass displacement. The authors reconceptualise the purpose, significance, and models of quality teaching in crisis settings, emphasising the intellectual needs, interests, and learning journeys of refugees.

The Lebanese context

Lebanon hosts an estimated 1.5 million Syrians. In 2015, the Lebanese government prevented the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) from registering Syrians seeking asylum in the country. Since that time, residency permits are required for all Syrians, replacing UN refugee status documents. To remain legal in the country, Syrians must find a willing Lebanese sponsor—some of whom charge fees up to 1,000 USD—in addition to paying 200 USD per year (HRW, 2017). There is also a cumbersome bureaucratic process, which often entails discrimination. It is thus unsurprising that approximately 60 percent of Syrians in Lebanon lack legal residency (LCRP, 2017).

As such, the Syrian community is familiar with restrictions on mobility. Well before the COVID-19 lockdown, checkpoints across the country prevented Syrians without residency permits from leaving their neighbourhoods, out of fear of arrest. Bekaa Valley, the region of Lebanon which hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the country and globally, and Arsal are two geographies in Lebanon with strict government surveillance. Guarded by enforced checkpoints that require paperwork and ID cards for anyone leaving or entering, Arsal resembles an open-air prison. These restrictions on mobility and the lack of state-authorised documents also limit students' ability to travel for educational purposes, and did so even before restrictions were in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In this paper, the authors focus on Syrian higher education students in Bekaa and Arsal, where three of the authors are based. They focus in particular on an educational innovation at Multi-Aid Programs (MAPs), a Syrian refugee-led community organisation operating in both Bekaa and Arsal. In 2018, MAPs partnered with Southern New Hampshire University's (SNHU) Global Education Movement, which provided Syrian refugee adults from these regions with

access to an accredited online, competency-based connected learning degree programme. MAPs is one of the only humanitarian organisations in Lebanon offering long-term accredited higher education opportunities.

With an expanding higher education programme of 100 students, MAPs has the infrastructure to integrate new educational innovations. Thus, MAPs and the RELIEF Centre—a partnership between University College London, American University of Beirut, and the Centre for Lebanese Studies—co-created a contextualised higher education project with MAPs and other local organisations. This paper elucidates how a hybrid localised programme was designed around the CoMOOC to address the intellectual needs and interests of refugee higher education students at MAPS. The next section discusses the challenges of educational access and engagement for refugees and details the limitations of conventional MOOCs.

Refugee higher education access and engagement

Improving refugee learners' access to education is fundamental to humanitarian missions. Higher education access has increased from 1 percent in 2019 to 5 percent of refugees today worldwide (UNHCR, 2022). However, this rate remains far below the 40 percent of non-refugees accessing higher education. A range of barriers limits refugee enrolment. This includes interrupted schooling, issues with academic credentials and legal papers, mobility restrictions, financial constraints, and the lack of language proficiency (GEMRT, 2018). These challenges, pervasive in the Lebanese context, have intensified with the country's financial crisis and the unprecedented rise in university tuition fees.

Digital tools and online platforms are increasingly proposed as a solution to student enrolment and education access in contexts of mass displacement. In fact, a comprehensive 'connected learning' initiative developed by UNHCR is built on the idea that flexible learning using technology is more accessible than traditional tertiary programmes for refugee learners (UNHCR, 2014). Massive open online courses (MOOCs), which provide free, open-access university-level online education, have also been proposed as a solution, particularly for under-served populations in the Global South (e.g., Oyo and Kalema, 2014).

While increasing refugees' education access remains paramount, minimal humanitarian action or research addresses the growing barriers around student engagement and enrichment in the context of both digital platforms and universities. Although the flexibility of connected learning initiatives enhances education access, the effectiveness of these programmes varies. A range of student, faculty, and institutional challenges have been documented, including the lack of student motivation, negative interactions with facilitators and peers, a poor sense of belonging to the institution, and students' commitment to the programme (Ghali and Ghosn, 2016). A 2019 study further reveals that most refugee students enrolled in Lebanese universities are not well integrated into the academic community and that they struggle to engage, due to differences in socio-economic backgrounds, lack of support and guidance, and discrimination from peers and professors (El-Ghali and Alameddine, 2019). Challenges around educational engagement have since been exacerbated by Lebanon's road and school closures caused by political unrest, COVID-19, and university strikes. The strikes are due to salary cuts that have caused a dramatic reduction in class time. The recent exorbitant rise in fuel prices presents a tangible barrier to face-to-face education, while online learning is made more challenging because of power cuts and weak internet connections (Hammoud and Shuayb, 2021).

Despite optimism around democratising education, research has shown that learners who enrol in MOOCs are usually well-prepared for education (Dillahunt, Wang and Teasley, 2014). Early MOOCs, which catered to already highly qualified and privileged professionals in well-resourced environments, provide minimal support to enhance student engagement (Hollands and Tirthali, 2014; Rohs and Ganz, 2015). In contexts where MOOCs have been successful with refugee populations, it is often because additional in-person support is available, which leads to stronger student engagement (Colucci *et al*., 2017; Halkic and Arnold, 2019).

The pedagogy underpinning the CoMOOC and hybrid model that we present in this paper is the conversational framework (Laurillard, 2012) which

proposes that online learning should support six learning types: acquisition, discussion, investigation, practice, production, and collaboration. Many current digital education initiatives, including MOOCs, focus only on acquisition, which is the most passive form of learning (i.e., watching, reading, or listening). Enriching learning experiences should instead be designed to support learners in investigating and practising new concepts, to engage in cycles of communication between teachers and peers, and to produce individual and collaborative output. The global demand for higher education is expected to more than double to 500 million students by 2030, which means that pathways for scaling access to and engagement with quality and affordable education are urgently needed (Atherton, Dumangane and Whitty, 2016).

CoMOOCs

Considering the limitations of MOOCs, as detailed above, the RELIEF Centre pioneered the development of CoMOOCs. The aim was to foster the development of online communities around knowledge exchange in contexts of mass displacement, where education opportunities are limited and disrupted. This co-design process and the CoMOOC learning design, which embeds the six learning types of the Conversational Framework (Laurillard, 2012), focuses on creating social learning opportunities for participants to exchange their experiences, and builds community knowledge collectively.

There are five stages in the RELIEF Centre CoMOOC theory of change (Kennedy and Laurillard, 2019):

- **Engage:** engage professionals from the community to design curriculum
- **Develop:** co-create the CoMOOC content
- **Extend:** run the CoMOOC to extend community knowledge on a global scale
- **Embed:** local partners blend the CoMOOC within their existing learning programmes
- **Sustain:** further iterations of the CoMOOC are supported by community mentors, and partners continue to update content

For the 'engage' stage, stakeholders were invited to share their needs and curriculum suggestions for a CoMOOC on CBR. The NGOs working with refugees in Lebanon were already engaged in participatory CBR and were able to identify refugees who could share their research experiences with the CoMOOC production team. For the 'develop' stage, videos interviews were recorded in English and Arabic with community based researchers in Lebanon discussing their research (e.g. in education and urban planning) including researchers from among the refugee community. These videos were combined with interactive and collaborative activities within the learning design of the CoMOOC. As a result, the CoMOOC reflected the culture of the refugees in Lebanon. The video case studies featured voices from the community to inspire learners and teach practical and participatory methodologies. The 'extend' stage opened the CoMOOC to enrolment. The 'embed' stage is the focus of this paper, which explores how and why MAPs 'embedded' this CoMOOC into their higher education provision as a pathway to the final stage, 'sustain'.

Why CBR education?

The interest in CBR education at MAPs stems from its organisational makeup, since it is comprised of members from the community it is serving. MAPs strives to restore dignity through quality programmes that support self-reliance and social transformation. A key objective is to initiate solutions from within the displaced society. This grassroots approach is often challenged by international humanitarian organisations that impose their interests and values onto local communities without listening to or understanding local needs. A well-established body of literature critiques these power dynamics, under-scoring exploitative tendencies that exacerbate tensions between aid organisations and the people they are meant to 'support' and 'empower' (Hancock, 1989; Harrel-Bond, 1986; Marren,1997).

Meanwhile, critiques of Western-led research initiatives are identical, specifically in the Lebanese context, where well-intentioned 'participatory' research can still alienate, exploit, and frustrate communities, and the local researchers who were promised improved livelihoods (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019; Jallad *et al*., 2022). CBR strives to eliminate these power dynamics by equitably engaging local communities in research to address lived challenges through locally driven solutions (Minkler, 2005). This action-oriented approach

begins with a research topic that has meaning for the community. Scholars are increasingly promoting more engaged and longitudinal ways of working with communities to promote positive change (Jallad *et al*., 2022). Despite growing progress and awareness around community-based frameworks, there are still significant gaps between methodological theory and practice. In fact, although MAPs frequently collaborates on research projects with academic institutions, outside researchers often approach the organisation with their predetermined research questions and methodological framework. Under a 'research partner' title, MAPs assumes responsibility for participant outreach and research logistics, which leaves minimal opportunity for community members to develop their own research projects that have value and meaning for their lives.

The authors of this paper, who are also the designers and facilitators of the hybrid CoMOOC pilot programme, have extensive lived experiences navigating Lebanon's humanitarian and research industries, which are primarily led by Global North institutions. In response to the colonial legacies commonly embedded in humanitarian and research initiatives (see Jallad *et al*., 2022), the authors aim to strengthen local research capacities as a mechanism for reducing harmful power dynamics and amplifying narratives crafted on refugees' terms. The hybrid CoMOOC presents a pathway for local NGOs to engage with CBR education as a way to enhance their programs and teach employable skills, with the added value of empowering the local community through the engaged process.

In week one, the CoMOOC provided examples of how community members have used participatory approaches to identify local needs and establish solutions. The voices of community stakeholders are emphasised, and the importance of local perspectives to initiate the process of developing research questions are under-scored. Case studies, featured in short videos, are complemented with insights from experienced researchers. Week two focused on methodologies, including interviews, observations, mental maps, and participatory techniques (e.g., photo-voice). The combination of practical videos with community-based researchers and readings helps learners develop conceptual knowledge. Week three focused on developing a research proposal and creating impact for CBR findings. A peer review assignment gave learners feedback on a draft research proposal. The hybrid programme structure is discussed in the next section.

The hybrid CoMOOC learning model

The hybrid CoMOOC learning model aimed to (1) introduce the concept of CBR to interested MAPs students; (2) foster an inclusive space for critical and analytical discourse; and (3) inspire students to develop their own CBR projects to address collective challenges. Here, 'hybrid' refers to synchronous Zoom video conferencing to support learners as they progress through an asynchronous CoMOOC. During the first three weeks, learners' progress was supported by two one-hour live Zoom sessions each week. MAPs intends to apply student-led research to inform and improve future programming for the organisation and the community at large.

The live Zoom sessions were led by one of the authors who has been working with MAPs since 2019, with the support of two Arabic-speaking Harvard University undergraduate volunteer facilitators. The sessions reinforced the material covered in the CoMOOC using interactive platforms (i.e., Kahoot and Mentimeter), break-out rooms, and PowerPoint presentations. Ice-breaker activities helped create a friendly learning atmosphere in which students actively participated and interacted with each other on camera. The contributions of the U.S.-based peer facilitators benefited the programme, as they incorporated lessons of their own remote learning at Harvard.

After the CoMOOC, five additional weeks of live Zoom sessions were held to introduce new topics, such as quantitative and qualitative research, ethics, story-telling, and advocacy. Each week the Harvard facilitators held virtual 'office hours' during which students could seek additional support. All assignments were submitted and graded through Google Classroom, and the Zoom recordings were available in weekly emails. To receive attendance credit for missed live sessions, students summarised the lessons they learned and their reflections on the recordings. Attendance was incentivised, as completing the course went towards MAPs' required study hours for the SNHU degree. Students in the cohort also sought opportunities to obtain accredited certificates, as they were keen to build their academic resumes. The programme concluded

with written research proposals and live student presentations.

Evaluation methodology

The hybrid CoMOOC model was evaluated to capture both designers' and participants' experiences. A key objective of embedding the CoMOOC into MAPs' higher education platform was to understand students' knowledge, perceptions, and future interest in doing research. A quantitative and qualitative online pre- and post-programme survey was conducted, and a focus group discussion (FGD) was held via Zoom to discuss the programme and the learning outcomes. The survey asked about students' self-determined knowledge levels, their research interests, and their motivations for enrolment, and it collected feedback on the programme. A selection of relevant pre- and post-survey results were thematically analysed to identify key themes in students' responses.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' feedback of the learning model, the FGD included six graduates. NVivo was used to analyse the discussion transcript and identify key themes in students' perspectives (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The authors further summarised key findings pertaining to the advantages and limitations of the hybrid model, students' interests, and future learning needs.

Key findings

Student interests and perspectives

Students' motivations for enrolling in the programme varied among the cohort of 25 (16 female, 9 male). Interest in engaging in the community was the most common motivation (15), followed by interest in gaining knowledge about research (12), developing personal skills (7), and preparing for a future in academia (1). The increase in student self-determined knowledge levels of CBR (6 to 8.6 on a 1-10 scale) indicates overall effectiveness of the hybrid programme.

Changes in perspectives and interests around research were clearly articulated in the FGD. The relationship between research and social change was a new concept to several students; one participant noted how they thought the purpose of research was to 'write papers'. Another common misconception was that only outsiders leading projects were considered 'researchers'. The idea of a community researcher was novel to all participants.

After the programme, the students were able to conceptualise a community-based approach and understand the significance of their positionality. Students identified topics for their research proposals that included documenting influential people from the community, the effects of unemployment on refugee communities, access to birth control, integrating disabled children in the schools, and refugees' opinions of UN agencies. The diversity of research interests reflects the creativity and subjective nature of CBR. It also further underscores the need to create learning spaces where refugee learners can investigate topics and learn concepts that have meaning to their lives, and to provide opportunities to do so. This demonstrated that CBR was not limited to academic study but could also serve as a framework for gaining agency by helping to amplify refugee perspectives and experiences.

Hybrid advantages

Student evaluations and facilitators' reflections demonstrate a range of the benefits offered by a hybrid learning model that go beyond COVID-19 risk reduction. Firstly, the pandemic inspired connected learning practices that MAPs never implemented before the COVID-19 lockdowns; this was the first project that connected the MAPs' Arsal and Bekaa students. The West Bekaa (14) and Arsal (11) learners expressed excitement about meeting and learning from each other.

The hybrid CoMOOC format was 'extremely helpful' to most students. The FGD participants said that live sessions and office hours helped clarify relevant concepts introduced in the programme. These students referred to the CoMOOC as a helpful 'supplement' to the live workshops and lectures, particularly during the final research proposal assignment, which the students struggled to develop. Students also expressed their enjoyment of class discussions and debates, which are limited in the traditional MOOC format.

The hybrid model further addressed the lack of teachers and filled gaps in academic support, which are key educational challenges in refugee contexts

(Burns and Lawrie, 2015). Zoom sessions with guest lectures by a University College London researcher, MAPs' executive director, and an American documentary film-maker visibly excited students, since live interactions with expert stakeholders rarely exist in standard connected learning programmes in humanitarian contexts. The integration of facilitators further encouraged students to engage, as this peer-to-peer model stimulated open and egalitarian discussions between students.

Facilitators' experiences and reflections

The contextualised hybrid programme supported a move beyond traditional teacher-led educational environments, which strengthened learners' life skills by enabling them to apply their lived experiences to the classroom, and their new knowledge to their daily lives (Ito *et al*., 2013; Lemke, 2004). However, it is challenging to carve out digital spaces where students are energised to learn and feel comfortable sharing. The programme facilitators had to become 'reflexive practitioners' (Schön, 1983) and engage in conscious, critical analysis of their experiences. Each workshop was adapted weekly based on careful observations and active listening to student feedback. For example, the idea of holding office hours was integrated, assignments were altered, and workshop topics were developed in response to students' needs. Developing trusting and active communication with each student, including approaching learners who were either falling behind or quiet during discussions, became essential to fostering an inclusive environment.

Trans-languaging—the pedagogical use of multiple languages within the hybrid sessions (Conteh, 2018)—was essential during the live sessions. Facilitators and peers frequently translated between English and Arabic, which opened up opportunities for interaction and learning, particularly for learners with weaker English who found the pace of the workshops too fast. Facilitators were conflicted on best practice, as the majority of students were keen to learn in English (the language of their SNHU program). Giving more consideration to the purposeful construction of the hybrid programme as a trans-languaging space, including CoMOOC digital videos and activities, may help put more learners at ease and make the most of the considerable language repertoires of refugee learners.

Conclusion

This paper draws attention to the unmet needs of refugee learners and the ways an innovative education model that is a hybrid in both content and structure can support students by offering guidance, inspiration, and knowledge-sharing as they navigate their academic journeys during a protracted crisis. Experiences from the CBR programme reveal the additional advantages of an online format that moves beyond COVID-19 risk reduction to present a range of implications for future education models in unstable contexts. CBR education is also proposed as an experiential and pragmatic learning tool that can strengthen the refugee community's sense of belonging and agency, while also promoting contextualised and dignified humanitarian programming.

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Teaching in conflict-affected settings during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersections and impact of violent conflict and the COVID-19 health pandemic on teachers and teaching in Kenya. The qualitative case study utilises interview data from 15 practising teachers and 8 teacher-trainees to assess their perceptions and experiences of teaching in crisis- and pandemic-affected settings, and the impact on teaching and learning. Teaching in settings of violent conflict is stressful, and COVID-19 further compounded the challenges teachers and learners were already experiencing. The findings show that many practising teachers would either prefer to transfer from conflict-affected regions to more 'stable settings', where like other teachers they would face the singular challenge caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, or to leave the teaching profession entirely. Teacher-trainees felt that they had more time and better options to choose and secure teaching opportunities in their preferred geographic locations.

Key Words

violent conflict, pastoralist communities, teacher retention, teacher well-being

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Introduction

Some communities experience multiple and overlapping disasters that continue to aggravate an already complicated situation. The unprecedented COVID-19 global pandemic hit countries differently and further exacerbated an education crisis, especially in regions facing myriad disasters (Banati *et al*., 2020; Nesamoney *et al*., 2021). The negative impact on education has continued, but much of it has gone unreported. Children's and teachers' fundamental right to education and safe spaces has been harmed by rampant abuses and targeted assaults (UNESCO, 2011). According to UNICEF (2017), approximately 27 million children in fragile contexts were out of school pre-pandemic. Some countries have experienced protracted violent conflict, leading to generational disruptions of both the supply of and demand for education (UNESCO, 2011) that have far-reaching implications for reducing poverty. Violent conflicts displace families and force them to flee to safer locations. In the face of such stressful scenarios, students become de-motivated, some girls are married off, some are ashamed to return to school after a certain age, and others are subjected to early pregnancy and child labour (Abdullahi, 2019; Gatskova, 2017; Shakya, 2011; UNESCO, 2018).

Out of 54 known violent conflicts world-wide, 25 are in Africa (Strand *et al*., 2020), where economic disparities, particularly horizontal inequalities, are common because of systemic inequities that correspond with religious, ethnic, or geographic fragmentation (Cederman *et al*., 2011; Kimani *et al*., 2021; Langer *et al*., 2013; Stewart, 2000). Furthermore, during a conflict, schools may be suspended for months, causing suffering for teachers, students, and families. In Kenya, most of the violent conflict has been reported among the pastoralist communities that have practised

cattle rustling for decades. These conflicts have grown increasingly violent and are laced with more dangerous weapons (Institute for Security Studies, 2020; Gumba *et al*., 2019). Profiteering, small weapons proliferation, and competition over resources are driving conflicts amongst numerous pastoralist groups in Kenya (Triche, 2014). These are profound, deeply embedded problems without obvious solutions. It is unclear why cattle rustling-related violent conflict, including fatal attacks, has affected schools, teachers, and learners in many Kenyan sub-counties since 2018 (Gumba *et al*., 2019; Ominde, 2022; Osamba, 2000; Triche, 2014), which has forced many schools to close for months.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened settings in Kenya that were already experiencing armed conflict, which resulted in multiple vulnerabilities for the teachers, learners, and communities living in settings of violent conflict caused by cattle-rustling (Ide, 2021). To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kenyan government introduced measures such as nation-wide curfews, national and international travel bans, a ban on public gatherings, and the closure of places of worship and educational institutions. Some of these measures, like curfews, opened a window for armed groups to attack at night, when few people would notice or respond to the victims' cries for help (REINVENT, 2019).

Although the government closed schools for nine months in March 2020, there were some short-term education provision solutions, such as distributing revision papers to students, especially for students preparing for the national school-leaving examinations; teachers communicating through parents' smartphones to share learning materials via WhatsApp platforms; and parents finding the time for their children to participate in radio and television programmes that were available. Amidst these arrangements, this article seeks to illustrate teachers' and teacher-trainees' experiences on how teaching was affected amidst the dual challenges of violent conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violent ethnic conflict among pastoralist communities

In numerous Kenyan counties, socio-economic imbalances have traditionally generated conflict, which is described as a rivalry between two or more parties over scarce resources, power, and prestige (Laue, 1993; Mukoya, 2015; Wambua, 2017). Toft (2004) posits that conflicts within the geography of ethnic violence are complex phenomena that emerge from either socio-political, economic, or environmental disintegration. Conflict is about non-negotiable demands, such as recognition, participation, and dignity, which may have been implanted in Kenya during the struggle for independence that was championed by ethnic unions among different tribal groups that ultimately separated Kenya into tribal regions (Mwagiru, 2006; Nyukuri, 1997). The disagreements among these different groups have devolved into violent ethnic clashes, particularly in areas of the Rift Valley, Laikipia, North-eastern, and the Western regions, threatening peace and stability amongst pastoralist tribes such as the Marakwets, Tugen, Pokots, Turkana, and Keiyo (Schilling *et al*., 2012; Van den, 2011).

Ethnic conflict and impact on education

Cattle rustling and banditry have long been drivers of violent communal disputes, which have also affected schooling in ways that have resulted in the closure of schools and the deaths of teachers and students (Ominde, 2022; Osamba, 2000; Triche, 2014). Although empirical studies on the impact of COVID-19, conflict, and insecurity on education are limited (Megersa, 2020), it is known that the COVID-19 pandemic devastated the education sector in a variety of ways. The compounded impact of COVID-19 and long-term conflicts created uneven access to quality education which, if not addressed, creates a vicious cycle of conflict that leads to sentiments of discontent, unfairness, and complaints (Crespo, 2018). The intolerable circumstances created by the pandemic, ongoing conflict, and displacement affect teachers, and many are eager to change their location or leave the profession entirely.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative case study designed to examine teachers and teaching in conflict-affected settings during COVID-19. The case study helped the researcher understand the context and the reality faced by teachers in Kenya who work in regions affected by violent conflict. Kenya has approximately 13 pastoralist districts and a population of approximately 9 million

(K.N.B.S., 2019). However, not all the districts are experiencing cattle rustling-related violent conflict. The constructed-week-sampling method (Riffe, 2009) was used to analyse weekly newspaper content between February and November 2020 on government pronouncements and directives, the imposition and extensions of curfews, the number of banditry attacks, and school closures since March 2020. The researcher was able to identify seven (n=7) Kenyan counties for this study.

A mix of non-random selection approaches (Etikan *et al.*, 2017) were used to choose two groups—practising teachers in violent conflict regions and undergraduate teacher-trainees from violent conflict zones. This was followed by an exponential discriminative snowball sampling strategy (Anieting, 2017) to select individuals from the two groups. This method was chosen because the focus of the research deals with sensitive topics, and participants may be hesitant to reveal information to unknown researchers for fear of ramifications. The researcher conducted most of the interviews in May 2021 by phone, except for three in-person interviews with teacher-trainees who were in Nairobi. This approach mitigated the researcher's and the research participants' concerns about health and security by collecting data from a distance or outside of conflict-affected regions (Irvin, 2011). The researcher, however, recognizes the sampling bias, because when using the snowballing method, people tend to refer to people they know who share similar characteristics. Nonetheless, given the small scale of this study, this method was appropriate. Table 1 shows the targeted regions and the interview participants.

Table 1: Targeted Regions and the Interview Participants by County and Education Level

Regions Targeted	Study Participants		
	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	
	Teachers	Teachers	Teacher-trainees
West Pokot	1	2	1
Turkana	1	1	1
Garissa	1	1	1
Mandera	1	1	1
Samburu	1	1	1
Wajir	1	1	1
Baringo	1	1	2
Total	7	8	8

The study participants included 15 practising teachers with an average of 5 years of teaching experience, as well as 8 teacher-trainees from the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, and Mt. Kenya University. Only four study participants were female: three teachers and one teacher-trainee. Although the gender dimension was not considered for this case study, the results were not significantly different for male and female participants. However, it is noted that, despite having given consent and the researcher having ensured confidentiality in the reporting process, two of the original ten teacher-trainees withdrew from the study. One of trainee's reasons for withdrawing was difficulty in reconciling his thoughts, having seen some of his teachers killed in violent attacks. The other participant, who resided in a village that is regularly targeted for violent attacks, expressed concern that they might not know enough about the motives fuelling the violence and the potential stigmatisation of other communities that might result from their participation. Phone interviews lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes on average, while face-to-face interviews typically took 1 hour and 15 minutes. Both in-person and phone interviews yielded similar data, although the phone interviews were ultimately more efficient and cost-effective. The study aimed to interview primary school teacher-trainees, but unfortunately, none replied to the interview request.

Findings and discussion

The findings of the study generally noted that teaching in environments of violent conflict pre-COVID-19 was difficult, and that COVID-19 added to the existing challenges and difficulties teachers faced in such contexts. Generally, teachers working in these contexts faced a dual pandemic—of violent conflict and COVID-19. The findings below illustrate the specific challenges that arose and the teachers' decision-making processes when determining whether to remain in the same region, change professions, seek transfer to other regions, or retire from the civil service.

Lack of technology and telecommunications infrastructure

By virtue of the violent conflict, most regions lacked technology and telecommunications infrastructure. During school closures that lasted for nine months due to COVID-19, the teachers were expected to maintain constant contact with learners via their parents' phones. Because there was no prior mapping of the availability of digital infrastructure or households' capacity to offer the requisite devices and internet connection, it was difficult to create any meaningful engagement with the learners, as most parents did not own smartphones. Many teachers also utilised low-cost phones that were incompatible with Zoom, Google Classroom, or WhatsApp technology, thus limiting access to EdTech training or communication. Furthermore, the cost of internet access was left to the teachers, who faced their own financial challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to teachers, even though they had faced many challenges teaching in these regions, at no time did they think teaching and learning would be affected by a lack of technology and telecommunication, as no pre-service or in-service training emphasised use of technology in the classroom. Eight out of 15 teachers were pessimistic about the government's, teachers', parents', and students' ability to cope with COVID-19 in regions of violent conflict, where learning outcomes were already weak, or to overcome the technological and connectivity challenges that arose during school closures and curfews.

Despite high levels of anticipation for creativity and innovation from teachers during the pandemic (Barron, 2021), one interviewed teacher acknowledged his attempts to reach the students: 'I explored communicating to learners using parents' phones but only reached around 10 percent of the total of my class—i.e., eight learners whose parents had smartphones. This created major equity implications if 90 percent of my learners are left behind'.

Further, because Kenya's internet infrastructure and bandwidth are privately owned, access and connectivity at the required speed and quantity are unattainable (Gichuhi, 2021). This is corroborated by 12 out of 15 teachers who reported having internet connectivity at odd hours of the night. Ten out of 15 teachers travelled to higher ground in the highlands area, mainly in West Pokot and Turkana, to find a strong connection with solid bandwidth. The teachers expressed concern about the realities of teaching and learning under such circumstances. As one male teacher from Samburu stated,

> Although many conflict-affected regions experience curfews now and then, many teachers and community members have self-enforced curfews of not walking at night due to insecurity, and therefore, with a 9 pm to 4 am COVID-19 pandemic curfew, walking or gathering as a group for any COVID-19 response discussion was impossible. This made it even more difficult for teacher-teacher and teacher-learner interactions, particularly without any smartphones to facilitate communication, or even [the ability to] visit our learners at home.

Curfews and school closures both exacerbated and mitigated insecurities

The curfews brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic created new vulnerabilities for some people in the community, but school closures also meant that students were less exposed to harm. Seven teachers reported that many parents were relieved that their children were on an 'extended vacation' and out of the way of the dangers caused by bandits, which often are experienced by children while at school or on their way to and from school. According to teachers, many parents were happy that they only had to deal with COVID-19 health concerns, as the children remained at home. Conversely, one male teacher noted that

> many bandits used the COVID-19 period as a window of opportunity to assault many communities, especially during curfew hours, when more people were at home under movement restrictions.

Gaps left by teacher attrition

Teacher attrition was already a challenge in these settings prior to COVID-19. The regions affected by violent conflict lack locally trained teachers who could be hired as a stop-gap measure to cushion the major gaps when non-local teachers depart (ICG, 2019; Mendenhall *et al*., 2018). One male teacher, who since the interview was transferred from Baringo County, empathised with students, especially when teachers leave in large numbers or become victims of bandits. Nevertheless, he stated that he

> was teaching an examination class but had sought a transfer one year prior [to the] COVID-19 pandemic. With the delay of a transfer and continued insecurity, I had to leave,…I didn't care if TSC transferred me or not; I was content to be at home.

Another participant noted that,

> in violent conflict regions, the conditions cannot maintain trained teachers who have other profession options, especially those of us whose home regions are non-violent.

Another teacher-trainee also noted that,

> in my secondary school, non-local teachers were continually kept on notice, and they would take leave even for two weeks until they were assured about their security. This affected our smooth learning and curriculum implementation, and syllabus coverage was always many weeks behind.

The study reveals that teachers' departures, prompted by ongoing insecurities and/or the pandemic, had a negative impact on the quality of learning and students' academic achievement. Along with three teachers who expressed willingness to remain in their assigned county, ten teachers were seeking transfers to safer locations. Two teachers had already been transferred by the time of data collection, six teachers were waiting for official communication about a transfer, and four teachers were not sure whether to transfer or retire, as their ages would allow them early retirement with benefits. Out of the four teachers willing to retire, three had chosen to leave teaching for farming or other pursuits by 2022. These movements made it even more challenging for these teachers to remain in contact with their learners during the COVID-19 school closures. During the period of data collection, five non-local teachers had already left their regions after the school closures.

Reflecting on their time as a student during the health pandemic, one teacher-trainee stated,

> When schools shut during the COVID-19 time...we couldn't connect with [our teachers] since [our] parents didn't have smartphones… Unfortunately, two of my teachers did not return after the re-opening of schools...and that had an impact on my university admissions rating[1].

Psycho-social impact on teachers' well-being

Non-Muslim teachers working in predominantly Muslim regions (9 out of 15) were emotionally depleted, and many harboured untold trauma that could be detected in their voices as they recalled their teaching experiences during times of violent conflict. For example, in Northern Kenya, the militant organisation Al-Shabaab regularly accuses non-local teachers of corrupting Muslims (who are the majority in the region) with foreign ideals through secular education (ICG, 2019). One teacher described the security concerns she faced while teaching and her desire to find other work because of the pandemic:

> I was the head-mistress of a school in the North-eastern region, and my students would warn me of any imminent attacks...They would assist me to hide in their dorms while wearing a hijab.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewees observed worsening schooling conditions where they worked, which was exacerbated by the community ignoring any government efforts to curb the pandemic. Wearing of masks was ignored by many, and this exposed many teachers to the risk of illness. When schools closed, the bulk of the teachers from

1 I had aimed to get an A in my final examination but got a B, which affected my course of choice at the university. I was to do computer science, but I am now pursuing a bachelor of education (arts).

other regions (non-local teachers) returned home. The teacher who was protected by her students recounted her experience:

> The first weeks of [the] COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya were hectic, as the community and many students didn't embrace government protocols of wearing masks and washing of hands. When the schools were finally closed, I got a golden opportunity to rejoin my family and some time to request a transfer [to another school].

Local vs. non-local teachers' struggles

Even though all eight teacher-trainees were born and educated in the sampled regions, seven of them were concerned about the security and quality of teaching and learning. One stated that 'little learning can be achieved in [an] environment of uncertainties'. According to the findings, the causes of the disputes are deep-rooted, and the seeds of conflict are planted early in life. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers were not ready for an additional crisis.

As one trainee observed,

> most attackers [Pokots] know their fellow [Pokots] among the learners…They were never assaulted, but I later discovered that Pokots wear cultural artefacts that distinguish them from us [Marakwets]...and Pokots had a method of sensing danger from afar...and would warn us of impending attacks.

In this case, a local teacher had to count on their students (from a different ethnic group) to provide information or/and security. Given the experiences that have befallen teachers and schools, many teacher-trainees noted that they would only choose to teach there as a last resort.

COVID-19 has also exposed the gaps in teaching and learning in regions of violent conflict and the challenges of retaining non-local teachers. With the COVID-19-related lockdowns, non-local teachers felt they were more vulnerable and many 'left immediately [once] schools were closed'.

Distinct needs of teachers working in conflict-affected settings

According to both practising teachers and teacher-trainees, curriculum designers and policy-makers are out of touch with the reality in many regions that have experienced ethnic and violent conflicts for many years, and training colleges do not adequately prepare teachers for the experiences they will face in the field. All respondents agreed that the theoretical techniques and training used are detached from the realities on the ground. A male teacher from Baringo, with more than ten years' teaching experience, remarked that

> many of our trainers have no experience teaching in conflict zones. They simply teach book narratives that are different from reality, [and] we learn about risk mitigation 'on the job'.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, both the teachers' and teacher-trainees' lack of preparedness to teach during a crisis or pandemic further complicated their ability to reach their students amidst the pervasive insecurity. The teachers' experiences painted a picture of double tragedies—violent conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic—that might affect the daily lives of teachers and learners, as well as the ability to achieve both national and international education goals (World Bank, 2020). Better and more relevant teacher professional development is clearly needed, but broader efforts to ensure the safety and security of teachers and learners in these settings is paramount.

Conclusion

This study focused on the teaching and learning perspectives and experiences of practising teachers and teacher-trainees in environments of violent conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that violent conflict and uncertainties brought about by the pandemic significantly disrupted teaching and learning, particularly for teachers working in contexts affected by ongoing violence who feared for their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic affected different regions differently, depending on their level of vulnerability, but its impact was clearly exacerbated in settings of violent conflict, due to existing risks to the lives of teachers and learners. Both teachers and teacher-trainees reported that the information provided by universities and teacher training institutes fell short of their expectations on how to deal with the crisis. To pursue global and national educational goals during complex emergencies, educational

communities should be equipped with effective measures on disaster preparedness and conflict mitigation. This would enable the teachers and teacher-trainees living and working in these settings to provide invaluable resources that would inform education policies, curriculum development, and teacher professional development activities. This is one important lesson learned from the experiences of educational institutions in conflict-affected areas of Kenya during COVID-19.

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‘We have dealt with this situation randomly’:
A peer ethnographic approach with teachers in refugee settings in the age of COVID-19

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by English language teachers working in non-formal tertiary education programs in Jordan’s refugee settings. It focuses specifically on their experiences as they transferred their teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws from a post-digital theoretical perspective in which the digital, physical, and social are all interconnected within complex educational ecologies. Working closely with five teachers as peer researchers between April and July 2021, the study utilises the peer ethnographic evaluation research methodology. This paper draws from interview data generated during the study and uses four vignettes to synthesise key findings. The vignettes illustrate the amplified disadvantage experienced by teachers in refugee settings during the pandemic due to pre-existing disparities and emerging digital inequalities. The paper directs attention to human-technology relationships and the ways in which digital technologies are embedded in socio-technical networks, and generate, and potentially worsen, various disadvantages.

Key Words

Tertiary education, Jordan, English language, digital education

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Introduction

The urgent move to remote teaching (Hodges *et al*., 2020) at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic had a deep and wide impact on every aspect of teaching and learning, which revealed inequities in access to education (Beaunoyer *et al*., 2020). Although distant and remote approaches to teaching and learning mediated by technology are not new, they 'have taken on renewed salience' (Williamson *et al*., 2020, p. 108) during the pandemic, becoming the primary mode of instruction[1]. As teachers world-wide shifted their courses online (An *et al*., 2021; Gourlay *et al*., 2021), they were forced to adapt to 'pandemic pedagogies' and implement new ways of working (Williamson *et al*., 2020)[2]. However, the prolonged lockdowns and social distancing measures presented significant challenges for many teachers who were not equipped or trained to participate effectively in this sudden digital transformation of education. This situation was exacerbated in education in emergencies and crisis-affected contexts.

In such contexts, teachers have diverse responsibilities and 'expanded roles' (Charitonos *et al*., 2022). Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, teachers were facing additional multiple and inter-connected systemic challenges, such as inadequate resources, tensions around curricula which may not be relevant to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, mixed-age and mixed-abilities classes, and students with traumatic life situations (INEE, 2022; Colucci *et al*., 2017). Teachers in refugee settings have few opportunities for continuing education (Pherali *et al*., 2020), due to their varied professional status and the challenging conditions under which they and their families live, including restrictions on or loss of their right to work. Teachers thus are often poorly trained and lack a solid professional grounding. During the pandemic, some teachers in these settings used digital technologies; others relied on phone-based activities, radio, and broadcast television lessons; and still others created no-tech packages for remote learning (INEE, 2022). There is a limited but growing body of research on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching in crisis-affected contexts, but it currently resides mostly outside scholarly peer-reviewed publications. Empirical evidence on the teachers' perspectives at the tertiary and non-formal education levels also remains limited. This study aims to address these gaps.

The study draws from the concept of post-digital, in which the digital, physical, and social are interconnected within complex educational ecologies (Jandrić *et al*., 2018). It is the attentiveness to human-technology relations that makes this lens suitable for this study. By this we refer not only to wider social and political systems but also the local and often mundane unfolding of social and technological processes and practices in everyday life (Knox, 2019). A post-digital perspective provides a much-needed lens to guide a more nuanced and critical view of our relationships with digital technologies and how they are entangled with existing social practices and wider economic and political systems. The commitment to a post-digital lens is illustrated by the study methodology, peer ethnographic evaluation research (PEER) (Price and Hawkins, 2002; Oguntoye *et al*., 2009), which foregrounds important principles about epistemological diversity in knowledge creation and different knowledge systems. This methodology enabled us to 'enter' teacher communities, organisations, activities, and contexts that are key to understanding changes to the provision of education in refugee settings during the pandemic, and issues that affect teacher communities in relation to technology and education. The paper draws from data generated from interviews conducted between peer researchers and their peers. It presents vignettes that synthesise key findings related to the teachers' experiences of being an educator in Jordan's refugee settings, including how they dealt with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper provides evidence from an empirical study that brings the voices of teachers into the place they deserve—among other academic work

1 We use 'digital learning' and 'learning technology' to encompass virtual, online, and blended approaches to pedagogy and curriculum design facilitated by digital technology. By 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges *et al*., 2020), we refer to the rapid global shift of institutions early in the pandemic, distinguishing these from the well-designed online and distance courses created by educational institutions.

2 We use 'teachers' to encompass educators of all levels (e.g, primary, secondary, or higher education), but also teachers in non-formal and community-based settings, such as NGOs.

that examines the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on teaching. This paper seeks to contribute to the expansion of the field of digital education in education in emergencies and crisis-affected contexts. It goes beyond established approaches that might be reinforcing wrongful treatment and unjust structures in meaning-making and knowledge-producing practices. It thus emphasises the need for educational researchers to address epistemic injustice (Kidd *et al*., 2017) by shifting to 'new forms of scholarship that make visible the agentic potential and critical role [forcibly displaced people] can have in the transformation of their own social futures' (Gutiérrez *et al*., 2016, p. 275).

This paper first provides a brief overview of the study methods and context. It then presents the data in the form of vignettes, and concludes by describing the key study findings.

Methodology

Working with a group of five language teachers as peer researchers between April and July 2021, this study drew from the PEER methodology (Price and Hawkins, 2002; Oguntoye *et al*., 2009). PEER is an innovative, rapid, participatory, and qualitative approach to programme research, evaluation, and design. It is based on training members of the target group (teachers as peer researchers) to carry out in-depth qualitative interviews with their peers. Those teachers' deep awareness of contextual nuances and their strong ability to generate evidence by starting from a place of shared identity, trust, and relationship within their communities makes this methodology particularly suitable.

The study was a collaboration between the Open University UK, Mosaik Education, and Centreity Learning Systems. Using purposive sampling, five teachers were recruited. They included two men and three women with 1.5 to 15 years of teaching experience. Four were refugees—three Syrian, one Sudanese—and one was Jordanian. They were either teaching in Mosaik Education's English language programmes in Jordan or had taken part in a training programme offered by Mosaik/Centreity in the previous year and had expressed an interest in the study following an initial orientation. A small financial compensation was offered to teachers for their participation. The study received a favourable response from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Open University UK (HREC/4008/Charitonos).

In practical terms, the five teachers were trained in qualitative research methods through six, two-hour participatory workshops organised online. The teachers, along with members of the project team, considered the study's objectives and identified the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for teaching and learning as a key topic to explore. The interview protocol used for the interviews with their peers was a joint output from the workshop series.

Following the workshops, the peer-researchers conducted in-depth interviews with two peers selected from their professional network, and they met twice. The aim was to gain insights into the interviewees' experiences of the transition to emergency remote teaching. The interviews were not recorded, but the peer researchers were encouraged to take notes. Interviews were confidential and the data anonymised.

After each interview, the peer researchers met with a designated co-researcher from the project team to debrief. Each peer researcher had four debriefing sessions (n=20, average duration one hour each). The debriefing sessions served as spaces in which to share, capture, and discuss the data gathered and to provide ongoing support in the data collection process. Upon completion of the project activities, the researchers on the project team conducted in-depth interviews (1.5 hours average duration) with the five peer researchers. The aim was to understand their experience as peer researchers, and to share their reflections on some preliminary key themes in the data. Data collection was carried out over a five-week period.

The peer researchers then conducted data analysis with the project team to further describe and identify the key issues emerging from the interviews, and to support the project team's interpretation of the findings. We synthesised the data for this paper, and present four vignettes of 15 individual cases that illustrate the varied and complex nature of the teachers' experiences, motivations, and feelings about the challenges they encountered. We recognise the limitations in the four vignettes as representing our selections as authors and being informed by our own positionalities and priorities. In having the agency to construct these vignettes, we recognise the impact of our level of privilege, as

researchers and practitioners in institutions based in high-income countries, and with our limited personal experience of displacement (e.g., only the first author has lived experience of forced displacement). Despite our commitment to work to achieve justice for the displaced, we are aware that our work might reproduce unequal power relations in knowledge creation practices.

Vignettes

Vignette 1: Bushra[3]

Bushra lives in an urban environment north of Amman. She is an experienced university teacher who in 2023 is celebrating her 30th year in the field. Her university is part of a project led by a London university to assist young refugees in developing study skills and accessing higher education. Bushra considers herself a facilitator rather than a teacher, and she appears to be compassionate and empathetic toward her students with refugee backgrounds. As she explains, 'I don't want them to feel inferior to me. I work with them to help them find themselves'. At the onset of COVID-19, her university organised a workshop on online teaching which offered some support, but she thought it was inadequate.

Bushra thinks online teaching saves time and effort and provides education to more people. Also aware of its challenges, such as poor internet connections, expensive data, and a lack of devices, she was worried when the pandemic broke out because some of her students were very poor and they struggled the most. She said that 'some of them did not have laptops and had to use their mobile phones. One student had to walk 40 minutes to his uncle's house to use the internet'.

Issues with the quality of web connectivity and technical difficulties were not easily addressed. Bushra described feeling powerless: 'Sometimes the internet would just stop and I could not do anything about it. Sometimes you will think you are doing great and then realise the time has gone because students are asking for technical help'. Bushra reflected that more training for teachers would have provided more opportunities to understand online teaching, what tools are available, and how to cope with technical difficulties. Bushra added that it is still not too late for this: 'We will use technology more, not less. Teachers really need help with technology right now'.

Vignette 2: Saliha

Saliha is a Jordanian teacher of English with one year of experience teaching refugees of mixed ages. She is currently teaching as part of a programme offered by an overseas institution. Saliha says her students' needs are important to her, and she tries 'to choose what the students need and sometimes lets them choose or suggest what they want'. Like her colleagues, Saliha says she was clueless when COVID-19 hit the world, and the guidance and instructions she received from within her own organisation were unclear. She describes these days as 'tough times', but adds that she joined other teachers from her network on WhatsApp and they worked together to overcome the barriers that the programme administration was not able to respond to on time, due to time differences.

It was Saliha's first time teaching online, which she describes by saying, 'As a teacher, this was so hard for me to cope, with Zoom application, the first time to teach using Zoom'. She says it was not easy for the students either:

> It was complicated and was hard for the students to use [Zoom] at the beginning. Some of the students did not have an email, to have an account or use an application. Some of them had the basic knowledge of how to use the phone [just to call]. It was hard for them to use different applications. They lost their passwords.

For those who had not yet figured out how to use Zoom, WhatsApp provided an opportunity to continue the classes. Saliha shared an example of when teachers used the application to send summaries of the classes to the students.

Saliha's interview illustrated the importance of solidarity and support among teachers during COVID-19. She felt that the teachers worked together as a team to overcome the daily challenges of teaching online, and the volunteer teachers helped other teachers make videos or use applications that

3 The names of interviewees were not known to the members of the project team other than the peer researchers. Pseudonyms are used for the individuals represented in the vignettes.

were new to them. Although the initial transition was uncomfortable, students reported finding the classes helpful. However, the students' ability to participate in online classes was disrupted by a lack of access to core digital infrastructure. Some of Saliha's students, like Bushra's, suffered from poor bandwidth or had no internet at all. Others lacked access to a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. To attend their classes in the periods that followed the strict national lockdowns in Jordan (e.g., March-April and August-September 2020), these students had to travel to cafés, to their friends' homes, or to centres with internet access.

Vignette 3: Hira

Hira, a Jordanian public school English teacher with five years of experience, provides support classes to Syrian refugees in the afternoons and evenings. She has been teaching students of various ages. Although aligned with the national curriculum, Hira has some flexibility in her teaching methods and is a fan of total physical response, which uses role plays, games, drawing, and active learning. Most of her students have experienced trauma, hence Hira describes her role as 'sensitive': 'I should not be a teacher. I should be a facilitator. [I need to] motivate them, talk to them more, to make them feel comfortable to do the exams'. A typical day for Hira before COVID-19 was already challenging. A lack of resources was one of the main barriers she faced, and she often brought the needed materials from her home or spent her own money to buy them. She did not have access to a personal computer or internet connection at school, so she had no choice but to use her mobile phone.

When she was asked about the transition to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hira said,. 'We have dealt with this situation randomly'. She continued to explain that teachers did not have any knowledge of how to use technology for teaching purposes. When asked to share one positive thing she had heard about the online environment working well for teachers she knew, Hira responded, 'Nothing at all'. The new ways of working imposed on teachers by the pandemic challenged Hira: 'I worked late, it was not organised, students responded on the time they preferred, even at 12 am, and they sent…images or photos by WhatsApp at [that] late time'. Before COVID-19, Hira had enjoyed direct communication with her students, but that was not possible during the health pandemic.

Hira felt left to her own resources when the transition happened. She used her own digital devices and paid for the internet. Her words suggest that she felt lucky, because some of her colleagues did not have their own laptops or any other electronic devices. Internet connectivity and quality were poor, and she also said that the education ministry's online learning platform did not work well. Hira thinks the whole experience could have been better if teachers had been offered training on how to use applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or the government platform, and on how to teach online.

Vignette 4: Omar

Omar, a Sudanese English teacher in Amman, has worked with refugees of different nationalities, backgrounds, and ages, including adults, since 2019. He surveys his students to understand their needs and interests. Omar describes his role as follows: 'I am not considering myself as a teacher, I am just helping my community'. To illustrate his view, he said that at the beginning of every semester he tells his students, 'I am your brother. Consider me as one of your family members. We are here learning together'. This helps Omar break through his students' fear of speaking English.

The transition to online education was rapid, and in Omar's words, 'everyone was new in this role'. Together with his colleagues, he initiated a pilot conversation class in the beginning. He had 15-16 students in each class, but this soon proved too difficult to manage. The number of students was then reduced so teachers could focus on individual needs. Omar observed that his students enjoyed the transition and the prospect of experiencing something new, and of acquiring new skills.

The new ways of working were different from established practices, and Omar found the background noises and engaging students online challenging. Some of his students did not have a good space for online meetings, as most of the family members shared one bedroom or a living room. Accustomed to observing his students carefully in class, they would now keep cameras off to save internet bandwidth or protect family privacy. Eventually they overcame some challenges or worked around them. However, Omar thinks teachers would benefit from teacher training on engaging students in online lessons.

Analysis and discussion

COVID-19 had profound implications for educators' lives, work, and knowledge practices, 'with screens, digital devices, and material work arrangements taking on particular importance' (Gourlay *et al*., 2021, p. 2). The same holds true for teachers in refugee settings, who were already in an environment with significant barriers and systemic disadvantages. However, these barriers were exacerbated by the additional disadvantages and digital inequalities brought on by the pandemic.

The four vignettes illustrate that the sudden move to emergency remote teaching required teachers to secure devices—predominately their personal ones—and establish a space, typically at home with their family, to continue in their professional roles. For teachers, this transition included a range of tasks, including teaching, administration, support, and general communication with students and colleagues, and with teachers beyond their own organisations. This required a strong dependency on digital devices and infrastructure, such as laptops, smartphones, stable electricity, and connectivity for audio or video calls. This all needed to be achieved from home, and for most of the teachers interviewed, this was a stressful period involving improvisation, 'trial and error', and adaptation of their existing pedagogic strategies (e.g., sending summaries on WhatsApp; see Vignette 2). It required them to manage expectations and realise that student participation would take a different form (Vignette 4). It also required managing engagement versus the 'intrusiveness' of technology (Vignette 4), such as students not using cameras to protect their privacy. Teachers also navigated personal challenges in terms of their emotions and additional workload, as evident in Hira's vignette (Vignette 3). Hira clearly felt uneasy with the lack of a clear delineation between home and work and with working prolonged hours. This included struggling with work time intruding on private time when students submitted assignments at any time of the day. Omar (Vignette 4) felt that the background noise in his students' home was disruptive. This notion of blurred boundaries and barriers was a recurrent theme in the data, similar to a finding by Gourlay *et al*. (2021).

The transition to online teaching meant that teachers constantly faced reminders not only of their own but their students' 'digital poverty' (Faith *et al*., 2022) (Vignettes 1, 2), which is characterised by a lack of access to the resources (e.g., data, devices) necessary to participate online. For teachers and their students in refugee settings, the vast resources of the internet were not within (easy) reach: 'This accessibility gap has never been as acutely felt as during the COVID-19 pandemic' (Taylor and Daniels, 2020). That said, as the vignettes illustrated, this was not simply an access issue, as having access to devices was not enough. As described in Vignettes 2 and 3, access to devices was only one challenge. Teachers also described 'lacking skills' and expressed a need for support, which often was lacking both before and during the pandemic (see Vignettes 2, 3).

Despite the challenges teachers faced, including being suddenly isolated from their everyday professional networks and communities, they also found themselves belonging to an informal network of educators who offered solidarity and care. This helped them manage the transition (Vignette 2). The vignettes show that teachers regularly provided students with emotional support, and a 'pedagogy of care' (Kennedy *et al*., 2022; Bali, 2015) was discernible in the teachers' descriptions of how they tried to meet their students' needs online and to support one another. For teachers in refugee settings, providing care is common, as illustrated by the descriptions of their roles and pedagogic strategies (e.g., allowing students to draw from their own personal experiences), and is traditionally seen as part of their 'expanded role' (Charitonos *et al*., 2022). Although such a caring relationship is essential, it alone is not enough to ensure competent teaching (Noddings, 2005). It was evident from teachers' descriptions that they felt they had not received adequate support from their organisations during the online pivot (see Vignette 3). In other words, their organisations did not provide them with care, and teachers thus felt they were alone in learning how to teach online. Furthermore, teachers found technology-mediated communication with students in online classes more challenging than in-person teaching, which sometimes created increased emotional labour and negatively impacted teachers' well-being during the pandemic.

Concluding remarks

This paper synthesises empirical evidence from a study with teachers in refugee settings in Jordan. It gives voice to teachers who struggled to adapt their practices during the pivot to emergency remote teaching and did so with minimal professional development and technological support. Through the presentation of vignettes, and using a theoretical lens informed by the concept of 'post-digital', the paper illustrates an amplified disadvantage experienced by teachers in refugee settings during the pandemic, where pre-existing systemic disparities and digital poverty set up a vicious cycle. The students and teachers in those settings missed out on educational, social, and professional opportunities and thus were further marginalised. Inequalities associated with the digital realm, such as limited access to technology and the cost of mobile data, are embedded in and interact with wider types of disadvantage that exist offline. Teachers and their students were on the 'worse end' of the 'digital divide', not only because of having limited or no access to devices or data but because they had 'less agency in the digital era' (Jandrić *et al*., 2019, p. 166), which prevented their meaningful participation and advancement in learning through digitally mediated learning opportunities. It became clear through our study that aspects of digital inequality are entangled with other long-standing forms of inequality that specific communities may face (Robinson *et al*., 2015). With this in mind, the post-digital lens used in the study served as a helpful reminder that we ought to consider human-technology relationships more carefully, and that the ways digital technologies are embedded in socio-technical networks generate and potentially worsen various kinds of disadvantages. For those of us who are educational researchers, this means that our scholarly work should be attentive to these critical relationships that shape opportunities and life trajectories in specific structural and historical circumstances.

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Karen children playing in an emergency trench near their school

A Karen school destroyed by shelling

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