

Reshaping Education in the Aftermath of Conflict: Understanding the Dynamics of Internal Displacement and Secondary Education in District Swat, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of conflict and internal displacement on secondary education in Swat, Pakistan and how this conflict has provided an opportunity for the development of educational landscape. The participants of the study were all the schoolteachers who had teaching experience of more than twenty years at secondary schools in district Swat, Pakistan. Data was collected through semi structured interview from 20 participants. The collected information was categorized into various themes based on interview questions. This study concluded that this conflict and internal displacement had a significant adverse effect on the lives of secondary school students. However, it was also found that this conflict also proved an opportunity for school education. Schools have been rebuilt to international standards, equipped with all facilities. The new school buildings provide more space with additional classrooms. The study also found a significant increase in student enrolment. The study recommended that government department, non-governmental organizations, local communities, Parents, and teachers may be involved for the improved and sustainable education.

Keywords: *Conflict; Internal displacement; Secondary Education.*

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Introduction

Conflict is a complex phenomenon that covers various situations including crises, animosity, or hostility between two opposing parties or individuals engaged with each other in a long fight or struggle. According to Obegi (2008) conflict is a situation where two or more people are in a dispute that leads to personal collective tensions. They explained that conflict is a struggle that compels the opposing forces through compromise for balancing of power. The notion of conflict covers a large range of areas and meanings from personal opinions to armed conflict between various groups, to nations. (Durojay, 2010). Armed Conflicts have far-reaching consequence for society. It causes instability which significantly affects all aspects of human life including the social structure, economy, politics, human infrastructures, mental health, and education. Conflict leads to destruction and bring stigma and terror to mankind.

Conflict and peace like destruction and construction are alternate forces, they replace each other simultaneously. After the destruction of conflict, the need for rehabilitation and rebuilding has been considered as a blessing to human civilization (Zezeza, 2008). It pushes the affected societies to reevaluate their norms, values and systems that leads to conflict which brought destruction to their society. The most important outcome of conflict is the social mobilization in the form of internal displacement. Social mobilization fosters political mobilization which provides ample opportunities for the empowerment of marginalized sections of society (Bar-Tal, 2013). Conflicts also motivate the effected peoples to find creative and innovative solutions for the problems and calamities they are facing (Simons, 2017).

Conflict have affected many people around the world, the most prominent among them were women and school students. In conflict areas schools were the primary targets which leads to their destruction and closer (UNESCO, 2019). The fight in Swat, Pakistan compelled the people of the valley to vacate their homes and displaced to other parts of the country. This internal displacement has been considered the largest migration in the history of the nation. It has been reported that more than 5 million people, mostly children, have left their homes and migrated to different parts of the country (International Displacement Monitoring Center, 2014). Elementary and secondary education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Government of Pakistan (2012) reported that more than two hundred elementary and secondary schools have been partially or fully destroyed in the district (Government of Pakistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elementary and Secondary Education (2012).

The people attached to education and health sectors were the primary targets that included teachers, students, and other supporting staff. This

has been considered the worst time for students, teachers, and educational institutions (Ahmad, 2020).

The battle in Northwestern Pakistan had far-reaching consequences, impacting the nation's economy, politics, and society (Austin, 2013). While conflict often causes disruptions, it can also pave the way for new opportunities to establish improved and more conventional patterns of behavior that were previously unattainable during times of peace. This process of creative destruction can lead to remarkable outcomes and achievements in the post-war period. During times of crisis, people often perceive an opportunity to fulfill long-standing desires and create new roles for themselves. They recognize the potential to address longstanding inequities and injustices. This optimistic outlook toward disaster, not commonly seen in other moments of crisis, is highlighted by Quinlan (2018). In the field of education, crisis situations present an advantageous environment for implementing immediate and transformative changes that can contribute to peace and harmony within a relatively short period. Education during emergencies becomes a catalyst for transformation (Pigozzi, 1999).

Following the military operation in 2009, the conflict in Swat came to an end, and efforts were made to restore peace and facilitate the return of internally displaced people, including school-going children, to their homes. However, the region faced significant challenges as much of the infrastructure, particularly education and healthcare institutions, had been destroyed. In response, a rehabilitation process was initiated, with education taking priority. Teachers underwent training using new models and modules, while education received adequate financial support. Inclusive centers and schools were established, and efforts were made to develop and implement curriculum effectively. The reconstruction and rehabilitation process foster innovations in school buildings in terms of space and other facilities. Various research studies have been conducted on the armed conflict and its effects on the lives of internally displaced people of Swat, Pakistan. These studies mostly focused on socio-economic conditions (Bangash, 2012; & Chughtai, 2013), mental health (Khan, 2015; Ahmad, 2018; & Khalil, M. T. (2011), Human Rights Violations (Faheem, 2016) and destruction it bring to education at all levels (Khan, 2015; & Khattak, 2018). These studies highlighted different challenges faced by the people and school students during the crises.

The reinstatement of peace in Swat Valley creates an opportunity to analyse the effects of this conflict and internal displacement of education. The objective of this study was to explore that how the post-conflict scenario has been utilized as an opportunity for the re-shaping of secondary education in Swat, Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study used etic approach to interpret the phenomena and research problem. The participants of the study were all the

schoolteachers who had teaching experience of more than twenty years at secondary schools in district swat, Pakistan. Data was collected through semi structured interview from 20 participants. The participants were the representatives of both genders and from the damaged and non-damaged schools. An interview script was developed to guide the interview session. Each interview was transcribed and read out to the participants for confirmation. The data collected was analysed manually and categorized under various themes.

Results

Based on analyses of data the following themes were identified:

1. Effects of conflict
2. Infrastructure
3. Students' Enrolment
4. Capacity building
5. Psycho-social Support

1. Effects of conflict

The main findings of this were that conflict started in 2005 and affected the lives of everyone in the region. In the opinions of the respondent women education was the preliminary target of the militant. They confine the women to their homes. This has badly affected the lives of teachers and students specifically women. A female respondent said that *"in those days It was very difficult to come out from the homes, especially the women had to wear a veil. The militants were threatening the schools and destroying schools every day. So going to school was very difficult for students and teachers"*. The situation became horrific with the passage of time and a phase came when the entire population become internally displaced in 2009 and moved to adjacent districts with the beginning of military operation against the militant. Majority of the internally displaced were women and school going children living in poorly equipped camps with no facility for educating school going children. Most of the students were out of school during their displacement. So, this conflict has badly affected the lives of everyone, the large part of which consist of school going children.

2. Infrastructure

The destruction of schools by militants was a widespread issue, as reported by most participants. Some schools were destroyed, while others suffered partial damage. Upon the return of the population, restarting education in the destroyed schools posed a significant challenge for the government and local community. Consequently, education activities commenced in partially damaged schools as part of the rehabilitation process.

Substantial efforts were made to rebuild the schools, with the new constructions meeting international standards and equipped with modern facilities. The reconstructed buildings featured an increased number of classrooms, providing sufficient space for enrolled students. A participant mentioned the stark contrast between the old and newly rebuilt schools, highlighting the lack of boundary walls, limited and outdated furniture, and the transformation into well-furnished establishments with comprehensive facilities for students and teachers. Prior to the conflict, science and computer laboratories were scarce, but the new constructions addressed this by establishing these essential facilities. Additionally, playgrounds and physical education facilities were provided in all the newly rebuilt school buildings. The expansion in the number of classrooms and the provision of basic facilities have significantly improved the learning environment for students.

3. Students Enrolment

The respondents highlighted a significant increase in student enrollment during the post-conflict era. This rise in enrollment can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the realization of the importance of education became more widespread among the population. The availability of well-equipped school buildings and increased opportunities played a crucial role in attracting students to schools. Furthermore, the magnitude of the internal displacement, which was the largest in the country's history, drew the attention of the government, national, and international non-governmental organizations. These organizations provided support to the government and local communities in rebuilding the education system. The respondents noted that one of the notable changes observed in the post-conflict era was the shift in people's attitudes towards education. Even those who were previously opposed to education started sending their children to schools. Moreover, there was a significant increase in female student enrollment, which can be attributed to various campaigns that were launched to promote female education and the provision of scholarships specifically targeted towards female students.

4. Capacity building

In response to the devastating impact of the conflict, capacity-building and teacher training programs were initiated to address the lack of preparedness among educators. The participant reported that both government and non-governmental organizations recognize that need for comprehensive in-service training programs and various capacity building trainings were arranged to equip the teacher with such skills to use the current situation as an opportunity for future challenges. These rigorous trainings aimed to improve the professional competence of teachers, equipping them with the necessary tools and strategies to provide quality education in the post-conflict era. The impact of these

training programs has been positive, benefiting both teachers and students by enhancing the overall learning experience and outcomes.

5. Psycho-Social Support

During the conflict the students and the teachers witnessed horrible situations such as brutal killings and bombardment. This has severely affected the mental health of both students and teachers. The respondent reported that different mental health organizations provide psycho-social support to students and teachers. Efforts have been made to bring back those students and teachers who developed mental disorders to school and normalcy.

Discussions

This study explores the effects of war on secondary school education in Swat, Pakistan. The major finding of the study was that many schools have been destroyed by militant and many secondary school students, and their teachers have been displaced. School activities has stopped for almost three years. The war left behind thousands of dreadful stories. Peace was restored in the valley after three years through military operation in Swat. Research studies by Bertoni, (2019), Dabalen, (2014) and Walker-Keleher, (2006) on conflict situation supported the findings of this study that conflict has affected the lives of everyone. A study found that this conflict dramatically impacted every aspect of society including social values, institutions, and even social relationships. (Sanaullah, 2021). A study conducted in Iraq found that war has affected the education of both male and female students (Diwakar, 2015).

The focus of this study was to analyses the post conflict situation of secondary school education after the return of the people of swat to their hometown. The findings suggested that conflict brought positive changes in the infrastructure of secondary education. Schools have been rebuilt with more facilities which positively affected secondary school education. Necolai (2009) explained in his book “Opportunities for change: education innovation and reform during and after conflict”. that new opportunities emerged simultaneously during and after the conflict which provided new directions to reform education. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) also found that militancy and conflict produces fast changes in society that are not possible in peace and usual circumstances. Pigozzi (1999) findings highlighted that war and crises creates new opportunities to bring positive change in the education system. War provides an opportunity to evaluate the gaps and develop a more effective education system for time to come. It is very easy to introduce positive changes in the education system in time of emergency.

The rebuilding of schools presents an opportunity to construct facilities that are more conducive to learning. While the conflict caused

devastation, it also led to improvements in school infrastructure. Science and computer labs were established and equipped with necessary equipment, while new playgrounds were built to provide sporting facilities to students. Skelton's (2014) study supports these findings, indicating that school infrastructure positively influences attendance rates among young children. Additionally, Ekundayo (2010) highlights that the role of school facilities are very much important for effective learning of students. The presence of basic school infrastructure and other services like water, electricity, as well as didactic facilities like sports, laboratories, libraries, books, and computers, has positively affected the learning of students at elementary level (Murillo, 2011).

The study also reveals an increase in student enrollment in the post-conflict period. The enrollment has increased due to special measures by elementary education department a "back to school" campaign, and national and international NGOs provided various incentives, ranging from free uniforms to food distribution. Thomas' (2002) findings support these findings, indicating that school rehabilitation leads to increased enrollment and improved administration. Furthermore, the study finds that the enrollment ratio of female students has increased in the post-conflict era. The restoration of peace, improved access to education, and awareness campaigns have proven advantageous for female education in the valley.

Conclusions

This study concluded that this conflict has severely affected the lives of secondary school students. The conflict also proved to be an opportunity for change, the school infrastructure improved, the new schools have been rebuilt on international standards, equipped with all facilities. In new reconstructed building there were more classrooms providing enough space for enrolled students. Student enrollment has been increased significantly.

Recommendations

It is recommended that there is a need to design an education system that is sensitive to conflict which has the capacity to develop negative attitude towards conflict and positive attitude towards peace.

It is also recommended that such educational programs may be initiated that involve school students, parents, and teachers to further improve the quality of life in a post-conflict setting.

The study recommended that there is a need to strengthen collaboration between different government departments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities for peace and implementation of inclusive and accessible education in post-conflict situations.

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