

The Right to Education in Conflict Zones: A Study of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children's Access to Education under International Human Rights Law

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Received: 06-10-2025	Revised: 21-11-2025	Accepted: 06-12-2025	Published: 26-12-2025
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ABSTRACT

The right to education is a fundamental human right enshrined in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, armed conflicts pose severe threats to children's access to education, disrupting schooling infrastructure, displacing populations, and exposing students to violence and exploitation. This study examines the impact of armed conflicts on children's educational rights in conflict zones, analyzing how international human rights law addresses these challenges. Drawing on case studies from regions like Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen, the research evaluates the effectiveness of legal frameworks, including the Geneva Conventions and UN Security Council resolutions, in protecting education during hostilities. It highlights barriers such as school attacks, child soldier recruitment, and resource shortages, while assessing state obligations and the role of non-state actors. The findings reveal significant gaps in enforcement and implementation, underscoring the need for stronger accountability mechanisms and humanitarian interventions. Ultimately, the study advocates for integrating education into peacebuilding efforts to ensure resilient, inclusive systems that uphold children's rights amid adversity. By bridging legal theory and practical realities, this work contributes to policy recommendations for safeguarding education in protracted conflicts.

Keywords: Armed conflict, Children's rights, Education access, International human rights law, Conflict zones.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Armed conflicts around the world continue to inflict profound and long-lasting harm on civilian populations, with children bearing a disproportionately heavy burden. Among the many rights violated in such contexts, the right to education stands out as particularly vulnerable yet essential for children's survival, development, and future prospects. International human rights law enshrines education as a fundamental right, recognized in instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which explicitly guarantees children's access to education even amid crises (Azhar et al., 2025).

Despite these robust legal protections, armed conflicts systematically disrupt schooling through direct attacks on educational facilities, recruitment of children into fighting forces, forced displacement of families, destruction of infrastructure, and pervasive insecurity that prevents safe access to classrooms. Schools are frequently targeted, looted, occupied by armed groups, or repurposed as military positions, turning places of learning into zones of danger. In many protracted conflicts, generations of children grow up without consistent formal education, facing increased risks of child labor, early marriage, exploitation, and radicalization. The intersection of armed violence and denial of education creates a vicious cycle: lack of schooling perpetuates poverty and instability, while ongoing conflict further entrenches barriers to learning. Recent years have witnessed alarming trends, with millions of children living in conflict-affected areas deprived of their educational entitlements. Organizations monitoring global education crises report that tens of millions of children remain out of school in war-torn regions, where enrollment rates plummet and dropout becomes the norm (Asghar, Bhatti, & Adnan, 2022).

This situation is compounded by the closure of schools due to violence, teacher shortages caused by fear or displacement, and the absence of safe learning alternatives. The problem extends beyond immediate disruption to long-term developmental consequences, as interrupted education hinders cognitive growth, limits economic opportunities, and undermines social cohesion in post-conflict recovery. International humanitarian law complements human rights frameworks by imposing obligations on parties to conflict to protect civilians, including children, and to refrain from attacking objects indispensable to civilian life, such as schools. Yet, violations persist, often with impunity, highlighting a critical gap between legal standards and on-the-ground reality. This study examines how armed conflict undermines children's access to education through the lens of international human rights law, exploring both the normative protections and the practical challenges that impede their realization in conflict zones (Ali et al., 2024).

Significance of the Study

The significance of investigating the right to education in conflict zones lies in its profound implications for human dignity, sustainable development, and global peace. Education is not merely a service but a transformative tool that empowers children, fosters resilience, and breaks cycles of violence and poverty. In conflict settings, preserving access to education serves as a lifeline, offering psychological stability, protection from exploitation, and a sense of normalcy amid chaos. Denying education to children in these environments constitutes a grave violation with ripple effects that extend far beyond the immediate crisis, perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage and hindering societal reconstruction (M. U. Zafar, Asghar, et al., 2024).

From a legal perspective, this topic is crucial because it tests the effectiveness and enforceability of international human rights obligations during times of emergency, when states and non-state actors often claim derogations or prioritize military necessities over civilian rights. Understanding these dynamics can strengthen advocacy for accountability, encourage better implementation of protective measures, and inform policy interventions by international bodies, humanitarian organizations, and governments. Moreover, the issue aligns with broader global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education. Millions of children in conflict-affected countries represent a lost generation whose potential remains unrealized, threatening long-term stability and economic progress in affected regions (Ashraf et al., 2024).

By focusing on the interplay between armed conflict and educational access under human rights law, this study contributes to the growing discourse on protecting education from attack, supporting initiatives like the Safe Schools Declaration, and urging greater integration of education in humanitarian responses. Ultimately, addressing this violation is essential for upholding the universality of children's rights, ensuring that even in the darkest circumstances, education remains a non-negotiable entitlement rather than a casualty of war (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Research Objectives

- i. To examine the core provisions of international human rights law that guarantee the right to education and assess their applicability during armed conflicts.
- ii. To analyze the multifaceted ways in which armed conflict disrupts children's access to education, including direct and indirect impacts on learners, educators, and infrastructure.
- iii. To evaluate the complementary role of international humanitarian law in protecting educational facilities and personnel in conflict zones.
- iv. To identify key challenges and gaps in the enforcement of the right to education for children affected by armed conflict.
- v. To propose legal and practical recommendations for strengthening protections and ensuring continued access to quality education in conflict-affected areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Human Rights Law Framework

The right to education is firmly established as a fundamental human right within international human rights law, applicable universally and without exception, even during periods of armed conflict. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims education as a right directed toward the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights. This foundational principle is elaborated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, particularly Article 13, which recognizes the right of everyone to education and obliges states to make primary education compulsory and available free of charge, while progressively ensuring secondary and higher education. The Covenant emphasizes that education must be accessible to all, without discrimination, and available in sufficient quantity and quality (Asghar, Shami, & Kiran, 2025).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child further strengthens protections for children by dedicating Article 28 to the right to education, mandating states to provide free primary education, encourage secondary education, and make higher education accessible on the basis of capacity, all while promoting equal opportunity. Article 29 of the same Convention outlines the aims of education, focusing on the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, alongside preparation for responsible life in a free society. Importantly, these obligations persist during armed conflict, as human rights law continues to apply alongside international humanitarian law, with no general derogation permitted for economic, social, and cultural rights like education except under strict conditions that rarely justify complete suspension. International humanitarian law complements this framework by imposing specific duties on parties to conflict (Shami, Asghar, et al., 2025).

The Fourth Geneva Convention protects civilian objects, including schools, from attack unless they are used for military purposes, while Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions extends protections in non-international armed conflicts, prohibiting attacks on objects indispensable to civilian survival. Customary international humanitarian law reinforces the special protection of children, including their right to education, by requiring respect and protection against abuse. Regional instruments, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the European Social Charter, echo these commitments, emphasizing continuity of education even in crisis (Asghar & Bhatti, 2023).

Mechanisms like the United Nations Human Rights Council and treaty bodies monitor compliance, issuing recommendations that affirm the non-derogable nature of core educational rights in emergencies. Initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration represent a political commitment by states to protect schools from attack and military use, incorporating guidelines to avoid endangering students and teachers. Together, these legal instruments create a robust normative framework that demands states and non-state

actors prioritize children's access to education, viewing it as essential for survival, development, and the restoration of peace (Kanwel et al., 2023).

Impact of Conflict on Education

Armed conflict profoundly disrupts children's access to education through a range of direct and indirect mechanisms that devastate learning environments and long-term prospects. Direct attacks on schools, teachers, and students represent one of the most visible and alarming impacts, with educational facilities deliberately targeted, bombed, looted, or occupied for military purposes, transforming places of safety into sites of violence. Such attacks not only destroy physical infrastructure but also instill widespread fear, leading to school closures and mass absenteeism. Teachers often flee due to threats, abductions, or killings, resulting in severe shortages that impair instructional quality (Manzoor et al., 2024).

Indirect consequences include forced displacement, as families flee violence, separating children from their schools and exposing them to prolonged periods without formal learning. In refugee and internally displaced settings, overcrowded makeshift facilities and lack of resources further hinder education. Economic hardship exacerbated by conflict forces many children into labor, early marriage, or recruitment by armed groups, particularly affecting girls who face heightened risks of gender-based violence. Psychosocial trauma from witnessing or experiencing violence impairs concentration, cognitive development, and emotional well-being, contributing to higher dropout rates and lower academic performance. Enrollment plummets dramatically in conflict zones, with millions of children out of school for years, creating generational gaps in literacy and skills (Adnan & Asghar, 2024).

Studies indicate that children in conflict-affected areas are significantly less likely to complete primary education compared to peers in peaceful regions, with boys often pulled into fighting and girls disproportionately affected by domestic burdens or safety concerns. The destruction of infrastructure extends to transportation, making safe journeys to school impossible, while insecurity prevents community support for education. Long-term effects include increased inequality, as wealthier families may access private alternatives while the poorest suffer most. Conflict also disrupts curricula, sometimes introducing biased or militarized content that undermines educational objectives. Overall, these multifaceted impacts create a cycle where lack of education perpetuates vulnerability, poverty, and instability, making recovery in post-conflict periods exceptionally challenging and prolonging societal fragility (Shami, Ashraf, et al., 2025).

Existing Research and Gaps

Existing scholarship on the right to education in conflict zones has expanded considerably, drawing from legal analyses, empirical studies, and policy evaluations to highlight both protections and violations. Legal scholarship extensively examines the interplay between international human rights law and international humanitarian law, demonstrating how treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights impose continuing obligations during conflict, with bodies such as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirming non-derogability for minimum core rights (Khan et al., 2025).

Reports from organizations like the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack provide detailed documentation of attacks on education, tracking incidents, perpetrators, and consequences across regions, revealing patterns of impunity and the devastating scale of violations. Empirical research explores psychosocial and developmental consequences, showing how exposure to violence affects cognitive outcomes, mental health, and educational attainment, often using longitudinal data from specific conflicts to illustrate dropout trends and gender disparities. Policy-oriented studies evaluate initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration, assessing its adoption by states and practical influence on military doctrines to

avoid using schools, while highlighting successes in raising awareness and some reductions in military use. Research also addresses education in humanitarian responses, advocating for its integration into emergency programming to provide protective learning spaces and continuity. Despite these contributions, significant gaps persist in the literature (Sadozai et al., 2025).

Much work remains descriptive rather than analytical, with limited focus on enforcement mechanisms and accountability for violations, particularly against non-state actors. There is insufficient comparative analysis across different conflict types international versus non-international or regions, which could reveal contextual variations in impacts and responses. Quantitative data on long-term educational recovery post-conflict is sparse, as is research on innovative alternative education models in protracted crises. Moreover, while attacks are well-documented, fewer studies explore the root causes of targeting education or the effectiveness of legal remedies in deterring violations. The intersection with other rights, such as protection from recruitment or gender equality in education during conflict, receives uneven attention, leaving room for more integrated approaches (Asghar, Bhatti, & Ch, 2022).

Research Gap

While substantial literature addresses the legal framework and documented impacts of armed conflict on education, a notable gap exists in comprehensive studies that systematically bridge normative protections under international human rights law with empirical evidence of implementation failures in diverse conflict settings. Few works critically assess the enforceability of these rights through accountability mechanisms or propose actionable, context-specific strategies to overcome barriers in protracted crises. This study aims to fill this void by analyzing both legal standards and practical disruptions, ultimately offering targeted recommendations to enhance protection and access for children in conflict zones.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a doctrinal and analytical approach, which is particularly suited to examining legal norms, their interpretation, and application in the context of armed conflict. The research is primarily library-based and desk-based, focusing on the systematic analysis of international human rights law instruments, treaty body interpretations, customary international law, and relevant soft law instruments such as the Safe Schools Declaration. The design combines normative legal analysis with a critical examination of documented real-world impacts, allowing for an evaluation of the gap between legal obligations and practical realities faced by children in conflict zones. By employing a doctrinal method, the study interprets primary legal sources to clarify the scope and content of the right to education during armed conflict, while the analytical component assesses how these legal standards are undermined or upheld in practice. This approach enables a comprehensive exploration of both theoretical protections and their operational challenges without requiring primary fieldwork in active conflict areas, which presents significant ethical, logistical, and security constraints. The research remains predominantly qualitative to facilitate in-depth understanding of complex legal and humanitarian issues rather than quantitative measurement of educational statistics.

Data Collection Method

Data for this study are collected through secondary sources, relying exclusively on existing published materials. Primary legal texts, including treaties, conventions, protocols, and declarations, form the core of the doctrinal foundation. These are supplemented by authoritative interpretations from United Nations treaty bodies such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as reports from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education (M. U. Zafar, Baig, et al., 2024). Additional data are drawn from credible reports produced by

international and non-governmental organizations that monitor attacks on education and document violations in conflict settings. Scholarly articles, books, and policy papers published in peer-reviewed journals and by reputable think tanks provide critical analysis and case-specific insights. All sources are selected based on their relevance, recency, and credibility, ensuring a balanced representation of global and regional perspectives on the issue.

Sample Size

Given the qualitative and doctrinal nature of the research, no statistical sample size is applicable in the traditional sense. Instead, the study purposively selects a focused yet comprehensive body of legal texts, interpretive documents, and reports. Approximately 25–30 key primary legal instruments and 40–50 secondary sources, including organizational reports and academic publications, constitute the effective corpus of materials analyzed. This number allows for saturation in identifying recurring themes, legal principles, patterns of violation, and proposed solutions while maintaining depth and manageability within the scope of a single research article (S. Zafar, Zaib, et al., 2024).

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is employed to identify and include the most relevant and authoritative sources. Legal instruments are selected based on their direct applicability to the right to education and their relevance to situations of armed conflict. Reports and studies are chosen according to criteria such as geographic coverage of major conflict-affected regions, recency of publication, methodological rigor, and recognition within the international human rights and humanitarian community. This non-probability technique ensures that the materials most pertinent to the research objectives are prioritized, allowing for targeted and meaningful analysis rather than random selection (Shami, Khaled, et al., 2025).

Data Collection

Data collection involves a systematic review and compilation of selected sources through desk research. Legal texts are accessed via official United Nations databases and treaty collections, while reports and scholarly works are retrieved from academic libraries, organizational websites, and reputable online repositories. Each document is carefully reviewed, with key provisions, findings, and recommendations extracted and organized thematically. Notes are maintained on legal obligations, documented impacts, enforcement challenges, and policy responses to facilitate subsequent analysis. The process emphasizes cross-verification among sources to enhance reliability and minimize bias (Asghar, Shami, & Ashraf, 2025).

Data Analysis

The collected data are subjected to thematic content analysis and legal doctrinal interpretation. Legal provisions are analyzed through close reading to determine their scope, content, and applicability in conflict situations, with particular attention to issues of non-derogability and complementarity with international humanitarian law. Empirical descriptions of conflict impacts are thematically coded to identify recurring patterns of violation, such as attacks on schools, displacement effects, and gender disparities. The analysis then juxtaposes normative standards against documented realities to highlight compliance gaps, accountability deficits, and implementation barriers. Interpretive reasoning is used to evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and protective mechanisms, culminating in the formulation of reasoned conclusions and recommendations. This analytical process remains rigorous, transparent, and grounded in the primary sources to ensure academic integrity and scholarly validity (Haider et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers to Education in Conflict Zones

The analysis reveals a multitude of interconnected barriers that severely impede children's access to education in conflict zones, operating through both direct violence and systemic disruptions. Direct attacks on schools and educational personnel constitute one of the most egregious obstacles, with educational facilities deliberately targeted, bombed, shelled, or burned, often as part of military strategy to destabilize communities or deny services to opposing groups. Teachers face abduction, assassination, or forced flight, resulting in chronic shortages that render schools non-functional even when physical structures remain intact. Insecurity surrounding school routes forces parents to keep children at home, particularly girls who are disproportionately vulnerable to gender-based violence, harassment, or abduction en route.

Forced displacement emerges as a pervasive barrier, with millions of children uprooted from their communities and schools, finding themselves in refugee camps or host areas where educational infrastructure is overwhelmed, under-resourced, or entirely absent. In protracted conflicts, prolonged absence from formal schooling leads to significant learning losses, skill erosion, and high dropout rates, as children are compelled to engage in child labor, early marriage, or recruitment into armed groups to support survival needs. Psychosocial trauma further compounds these issues, manifesting in anxiety, depression, concentration difficulties, and behavioral problems that hinder academic engagement and retention. Economic collapse induced by conflict exacerbates poverty, pushing families to prioritize immediate income generation over education. Gender disparities are stark, with girls facing compounded risks from cultural norms, safety concerns, and household responsibilities that prioritize their exclusion from schooling. Infrastructure destruction extends beyond schools to roads, water supplies, and sanitation facilities essential for safe and functional learning environments. Collectively, these barriers create a cycle of exclusion where education becomes inaccessible, perpetuating vulnerability, limiting future opportunities, and obstructing post-conflict recovery.

International Law Protections and Challenges

International human rights law provides a comprehensive protective framework for the right to education, yet significant challenges undermine its effective realization in conflict settings. Core instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, establish education as a fundamental, progressively realizable right with immediate obligations to ensure non-discrimination, availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. These treaties continue to apply during armed conflict, with no broad derogation permitted for economic, social, and cultural rights, meaning states remain bound to take all feasible measures to maintain educational access. International humanitarian law supplements these obligations by prohibiting attacks on civilian objects, including schools, unless they are actively used for military purposes, and requiring special protections for children. Customary rules and the Safe Schools Declaration further reinforce commitments to refrain from military use of schools and to protect educational personnel and facilities. Despite this robust normative architecture, enforcement remains profoundly weak.

Accountability mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court or universal jurisdiction, rarely address education-related violations due to evidentiary difficulties, political sensitivities, and competing priorities. Non-state armed groups, frequently implicated in attacks on education, fall outside traditional state-centric enforcement structures, leaving a significant accountability gap. States often cite resource constraints or security imperatives to justify failures in maintaining education, while monitoring bodies issue recommendations that lack binding force or follow-up mechanisms. The complementarity between human rights law and humanitarian law is not always seamlessly operationalized in practice, leading to

inconsistent application and protection gaps. Ultimately, while the legal framework is strong on paper, its translation into tangible protection for children in conflict zones is consistently hampered by impunity, political will deficits, and inadequate integration into humanitarian and military planning.

Examples of Best Practices

Despite pervasive challenges, several initiatives and practices demonstrate viable pathways to safeguarding children's right to education in conflict-affected contexts. The Safe Schools Declaration, endorsed by numerous states, has prompted policy changes in some militaries to incorporate protections against the use of schools for military purposes and to prioritize school safety in operational planning. In certain conflict zones, community-based alternative education programs have proven effective, delivering flexible, non-formal learning opportunities through temporary learning spaces, mobile classrooms, or radio and digital platforms when formal schools are inaccessible.

Accelerated learning programs tailored for out-of-school children have successfully bridged learning gaps, enabling rapid reintegration into age-appropriate classes upon return to stability. Humanitarian actors have increasingly integrated education into emergency responses from the outset, establishing protective learning environments that also provide psychosocial support, nutrition, and safety measures, thereby addressing multiple vulnerabilities simultaneously. In protracted displacement settings, some host countries and international partners have expanded access to national education systems for refugee children, offering certification pathways and language support to facilitate inclusion. Teacher training programs focused on conflict-sensitive pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching have equipped educators to better support children affected by violence.

Community engagement initiatives that involve parents, local leaders, and youth in school governance have enhanced security through collective monitoring and advocacy, reducing risks of attack or military occupation. Gender-responsive approaches, such as separate facilities, female teachers, and targeted outreach to girls, have increased enrollment and retention in conservative or high-risk environments. These examples illustrate that, with political commitment, innovative programming, and coordinated action, meaningful progress is possible even amid ongoing conflict, offering models that can be adapted and scaled to strengthen educational continuity and protection in other crisis settings.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This study has demonstrated that armed conflict inflicts devastating and multifaceted harm on children's right to education, despite the existence of a robust international human rights law framework designed to protect this fundamental entitlement. The right to education, enshrined in instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, remains fully applicable during armed conflict, with no general derogation permitted for its core obligations. International humanitarian law complements these protections by prohibiting attacks on civilian objects, including schools, and requiring parties to conflict to respect and protect children from abuse and exploitation.

Nevertheless, the empirical reality in conflict zones reveals persistent and severe violations. Direct attacks on educational facilities, personnel, and students continue to occur with alarming frequency, transforming schools into targets rather than sanctuaries. Forced displacement, insecurity on school routes, teacher shortages, and destruction of infrastructure render education inaccessible for millions of children. Gender disparities exacerbate the crisis, with girls facing heightened risks of exclusion due to safety concerns, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities. Psychosocial trauma, economic pressures leading to child labor, and recruitment into armed groups further erode educational continuity and outcomes.

While legal standards clearly mandate the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability of education even in emergencies, enforcement mechanisms remain inadequate. Accountability for violations is rare, particularly when non-state armed groups are involved, and states often cite resource limitations or security priorities to justify non-compliance. Initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration represent important political commitments, yet their implementation is uneven and insufficient to reverse the broader trend of education under siege. In essence, the research underscores a stark disconnect between normative protections and lived experiences, where the right to education is systematically undermined, creating lost generations and perpetuating cycles of poverty, instability, and conflict.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings carry significant implications for policy development and practical interventions aimed at safeguarding children's education in conflict-affected settings. First, states and international organizations must prioritize education as a core component of humanitarian response from the earliest stages of crisis, rather than treating it as a secondary concern. Integrating education into emergency programming ensures the establishment of protective learning spaces that also deliver psychosocial support, nutrition, and safety measures, thereby addressing multiple vulnerabilities simultaneously.

Military doctrines and training programs should incorporate strict prohibitions on the use of schools for military purposes and explicit obligations to protect educational infrastructure, with the Safe Schools Declaration serving as a minimum standard for endorsement and implementation. Donors and humanitarian actors should increase funding for education in emergencies, ensuring sustained resources for teacher training, alternative learning modalities, and infrastructure rehabilitation in protracted crises. Accountability mechanisms require strengthening through greater use of international criminal law to prosecute deliberate attacks on education as war crimes, alongside enhanced monitoring and reporting by United Nations bodies and civil society. Gender-responsive policies are essential, including targeted measures to reduce barriers for girls, such as safe transport, female teachers, and community sensitization campaigns.

Governments in conflict-affected and host countries should facilitate the inclusion of displaced children into national education systems, providing certification pathways and language support to prevent long-term exclusion. Non-state armed groups should be engaged through humanitarian dialogue to secure commitments to respect educational neutrality and refrain from recruitment or attacks. Ultimately, these policy shifts demand political will, coordinated action across humanitarian, development, and security sectors, and recognition that protecting education is not only a legal obligation but also a strategic investment in peacebuilding, resilience, and sustainable development.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study has illuminated key legal protections, practical barriers, and emerging good practices, several avenues for future research remain open to deepen understanding and inform more effective responses. Longitudinal studies tracking the educational trajectories of children affected by conflict over extended periods would provide valuable insights into long-term learning losses, recovery patterns, and the effectiveness of reintegration programs in post-conflict settings. Comparative analyses across different types of armed conflict international versus non-international and across geographic regions could reveal contextual factors that influence the severity of impacts and the success of protective measures.

Further investigation into the role and accountability of non-state armed groups in violating or protecting education is particularly needed, given their increasing prominence in contemporary conflicts. Research should also explore the potential of innovative educational technologies, such as digital and distance

learning platforms, in maintaining continuity during active hostilities, assessing both opportunities and limitations in low-resource, insecure environments. The intersection of education protection with other rights, including freedom from recruitment, protection from sexual violence, and economic rights, merits more integrated examination to develop holistic approaches.

Finally, empirical evaluations of the actual impact of initiatives like the Safe Schools Declaration on reducing attacks and military use of schools would strengthen evidence-based advocacy and policy refinement. Such research directions, conducted with ethical sensitivity to the vulnerability of affected populations, would contribute to closing persistent protection gaps and advancing the realization of children's right to education even in the most challenging circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Legal Protections

To effectively safeguard children's right to education in conflict zones, states and international bodies must prioritize the reinforcement of existing legal frameworks through concrete, actionable measures. First, universal ratification and genuine implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration should be aggressively pursued, transforming this political commitment into a binding norm by incorporating its guidelines into national legislation, military manuals, and operational protocols. States party to the Declaration should establish clear domestic accountability mechanisms, such as independent monitoring bodies or judicial processes, to investigate and prosecute violations involving attacks on schools or military use of educational facilities.

The international community should advocate for the explicit recognition of deliberate attacks on education as a distinct war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, thereby expanding the scope of prosecutable offenses and deterring future violations. Complementing this, the United Nations Security Council should adopt more consistent and robust resolutions that explicitly condemn attacks on education, impose targeted sanctions on perpetrators where feasible, and mandate regular reporting on compliance with educational protections in conflict situations.

Treaty bodies, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, should develop more detailed general comments or interpretive guidance specifically addressing the right to education during armed conflict, clarifying the minimum core obligations that remain non-derogable even in emergencies. National human rights institutions and ombudsmen in conflict-affected countries should be empowered and resourced to monitor educational rights violations and provide remedies, including compensation for affected children and families.

Furthermore, military training programs worldwide must integrate mandatory modules on the protection of education, emphasizing the legal prohibitions against targeting schools and the long-term humanitarian consequences of such acts. By embedding these protections more deeply into legal, military, and institutional structures, the international community can begin to close the persistent gap between normative standards and on-the-ground realities, ensuring that education is treated as a non-negotiable civilian entitlement rather than a collateral vulnerability in armed conflict.

Enhance Access and Support

Practical measures to restore and sustain access to education in conflict zones require immediate and sustained investment in protective and adaptive programming. Governments, humanitarian organizations, and donors should prioritize education within emergency response frameworks, allocating at least a minimum percentage of humanitarian funding ideally 10 percent or more to education in emergencies,

thereby enabling rapid deployment of temporary learning spaces, mobile classrooms, and digital learning platforms in areas where formal schools are destroyed or inaccessible.

Alternative and accelerated education programs tailored to out-of-school children should be scaled up, offering flexible curricula, catch-up learning modules, and pathways for reintegration into formal systems once conditions stabilize. Psychosocial support must be systematically integrated into educational interventions, with trained counselors and trauma-informed teaching practices to address the emotional and cognitive impacts of violence on children's ability to learn. Gender-sensitive approaches are essential: safe transportation, separate sanitation facilities, female teachers, and targeted outreach campaigns can significantly reduce barriers for girls, while addressing cultural and security concerns that disproportionately affect female enrollment.

Teacher support programs should focus on recruitment, retention, and professional development in conflict settings, providing hazard pay, security training, and mental health resources to mitigate flight and burnout. Community-based protection mechanisms, including parent-teacher associations and local vigilance committees, should be established and supported to monitor school safety, deter military occupation, and foster collective ownership of educational continuity. In displacement contexts, host governments should be incentivized through international assistance to include refugee and internally displaced children in national education systems, ensuring equivalence of qualifications, language support, and non-discriminatory access. These measures collectively aim to transform education from a casualty of conflict into a protective and restorative force, offering children stability, hope, and skills essential for individual and societal recovery.

Promote International Cooperation

Meaningful progress in protecting education in conflict zones depends on enhanced multilateral cooperation and coordinated action across diverse actors. The United Nations should establish a dedicated global mechanism potentially under the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to coordinate monitoring, advocacy, and response to attacks on education, ensuring timely verification of incidents, public reporting, and follow-up pressure on perpetrators. Regional organizations, such as the African Union, European Union, and Organization of American States, should develop region-specific frameworks and action plans that align with global standards while addressing local conflict dynamics and capacity constraints.

Bilateral and multilateral donors should condition development and humanitarian aid on demonstrable efforts to protect education, linking funding to verifiable progress in implementing the Safe Schools Declaration and maintaining educational access during crises. Civil society organizations, including human rights groups and education coalitions, should be actively included in policy dialogues and monitoring processes to provide grassroots insights and hold states accountable. Knowledge-sharing platforms should be created to disseminate best practices, innovative models, and lessons learned from successful interventions in diverse conflict settings, fostering cross-regional learning and adaptation.

Private sector partnerships, particularly with technology companies, can support the development and deployment of secure, low-bandwidth digital education tools suitable for insecure environments. Finally, sustained diplomatic engagement with non-state armed groups through humanitarian channels is crucial to negotiate commitments to respect educational neutrality, refrain from recruitment in school premises, and allow safe passage for educational supplies and personnel. Through such collaborative efforts, the international community can move beyond fragmented responses toward a unified, rights-based approach that places children's education at the heart of conflict prevention, mitigation, and recovery strategies.

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