Study of the Impact of Socio-Political Conflicts on Libyan Children and their Education System

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ABSTRACT

Wars and conflicts affect everyone; especially the children the most. Civil wars have been not only costly and they have crippled social infrastructures including education and other basic and necessary social services (Waal and Vines 1992; Malecela 1999). The war in 2011 and subsequent conflicts in Libya have affected almost every Libyan. The most affected have been the children. This study attempted to investigate how the war affected Libyan students particularly in the city of Sebha with special reference to their environment, education system, their learning habits, their thinking ability as well English language learning ability. To this end, the relevant research data was collected from the teachers (06), students (19), parents (06) and guardians (05) from Sebha using observation and interview as data collection techniques. The analysis of the data revealed that the Libyan conflict had direct impacts on education. There were school closures due to targeted attacks, collateral damage, military use of school buildings, and use by displaced populations. Death and injury to teachers and students were also noted which affected the education process. On the part of parents, fear of sending children to school, recruitment of teachers and students by armed forces and thus reduced public capacity to deliver education were notable findings of the study.

1. Introduction

Education process should always takes place in peaceful and quiet environment for successful learning. Therefore, any interruption or lacking in these factors will lead to sufferance by learners, especially young children who will directly be effected. Civil wars and conflicts have been mostly disruptive in the educational process in most of the Middle Eastern countries as frequent wars and conflicts have crippled social infrastructures including education and other basic and necessary social services. This has been quite true about Libya as the war in 2011 and subsequent conflicts in Libya have affected almost every Libyan. The most affected have been the children particularly during 2011-2015. With this background, this study attempted to investigate how the war affected Libyan students particularly in the city of Sebha with special reference to their environment, education system, their learning habits, their thinking ability as well English language learning ability. Since the main concern in this study is investigating the impact of sociopolitical conflicts on young children and their learning performance, it is necessary to deeply view previous literature on the topic. This is done in the following section.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Role of environment in learning

English is the language that the world uses most extensively nowadays. More and more Libyan know the importance of English learning. By Learning English well, we can understand outside world. Environment is considered a complex set of physical, geographical, biological, social, cultural and political conditions that surrounds an individual and determines his performance. The school environment is the result of the interaction of teachers-students' relationship, teachers' academic and professional qualification, teachers' teaching. School environment is the sum of all physical, emotional, social, mental, organizational and instructional factors that contribute to the total teaching learning process with in school having maximum influence on the quality and quantity of students' as well as teacher's actions and has also facilitating effects on the achievement

of students. According to Patterson (1992), the school environment cannot be ignored. Students learn English at school. That is not just from the teachers, in the classroom and on the campus; students can also learn English from these environments. These are the good occasion or places from students to learn English in school.

Further writers have argued that teachers' views and perceptions are crucial (Deemer, 2004); (Schneider, 2003; Clark, 2002). Cooper (1985) asked primary school teachers about their school buildings and argues that 'whether physical surroundings are themselves proficient of disabling education, teachers' belief in their capacity to do so could prove self-fulfilling. For it could act to lower their morale and motivation, so eroding their obligation to teaching". (PP: 267-8). Coopers (2000) considers staff morale to be of key importance while Berry (2002) observed that there were enhancements in attitude among all users after a school was physically enhanced. Such improvements can be seen as resulting from the physical changes to the environment which then donate to the overall learning setting qualified by everybody.

According to Lyons (2001), there are conservational situations such as indoor air quality, audibility, and illumination in many school facilities that badly affect student learning. A clean, quiet, safe, contented, and healthy knowledge environment was noted by Schneider (2002) to be a component for successful teaching and learning. Filardo (2008) stated that building lacks impair the excellence of teaching and learning and also donate to health and protection problems of staff and students.

2.2 Effects of Conflicts on Children's Education

It is certainly the case that wars can have hugely damaging impacts on entire educational systems. Indeed, major reports have described the overall impact of war on educational systems as highly damaging, even devastating, disastrous, and causing the destruction of educational opportunities on an epic scale. But this is not the case for most countries, most of the time. Indeed, Paul Collier's memorable phrase, war is 'development in reverse' is not an accurate description of the impact of war on educational outcomes as has been elaborated in the data from a major 2011 study of 25 countries by UNESCO.

UNESCO's 2011 report, *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*, provides the most compelling recent iteration of the mainstream narrative. Drawing on a wide range of research resources, it provides a comprehensive overview of the many different ways in which conflict adversely affects children's schooling. Its research leads it to conclude that 'the scourge of warfare is destroying opportunities for education on an epic scale.

There are generally noted nine ways that war affects children's education. These include-

First, and most obviously, war kills children, and injures others so seriously they cannot attend school. **Second,** teachers may be killed, injured, or subject to forced displacement in wartime environments. More than two-thirds of Rwanda's primary and secondary school teachers reportedly fled or were killed as a result of the genocide. In Cambodia's genocide, teachers, along with other intellectuals, were specifically targeted by the Khmer Rouge regime. In less extreme circumstances, teachers are still at risk of conscription by government or rebel forces, or of losing their jobs because of war-driven cuts in educational spending. **Third,** children in war are often displaced to refugee or internally displaced person (IDP) camps. IDP camps, which tend to have a high concentration of children, typically have far fewer educational resources than refugee camps. Moreover, many children, particularly those who have lost homes, parents, and siblings, may be deeply traumatized by their experiences. The scope of the problem is evident in the sheer numbers of displaced children-an estimated 13.5 million around the world are internally displaced plus several million refugee children.

Fourth, armed conflict affects education indirectly, for example, through conflict-related sexual violence. Sexual violence against children can have, a devastating impact on education: it impairs victims' learning potential, creates a climate of fear that keeps girls at home and leads to family breakdown that deprives children of a nurturing environment. **Fifth,** war can destroy or seriously damage schools and other educational institutions. In Iraq the Ministry of Education reported that there were 31,598 attacks on educational institutions between March 2003 and October 2008. In Afghanistan the number of attacks on schools increased from 242 to 670 between 2007 and 2008. In Thailand attacks on schools almost quadrupled between 2006 and 2007, rising from 43 to
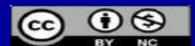
164. In Timor Leste 95 percent of schools had to be repaired or rebuilt after the violence that followed the independence referendum in 2000. In Iraq the figure was 85 %; in Kosovo, 65%; in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 50%, and in Mozambique, 45 %. School buildings that are not destroyed or badly damaged may be commandeered by government or rebel forces and used as headquarters, as barracks, for storage, or to house IDPs who have lost their homes.

Sixth, parents affected by war-exacerbated poverty, and finding it difficult to pay school fees, may choose to take their children out of school and put them to work at home. **Seventh**, child soldiers, who lose far more years of education than other children in war affected countries, have special educational needs. These needs are rarely met. **Eighth,** in wartime, military budgets typically increase; educational budgets get cut. As a consequence, teachers go unpaid (causing many to quit), funding for teaching materials and routine maintenance of schools dries up, and system-wide management and development of educational systems degrades and sometimes grinds completely to a halt. **Finally,** warfare destroys human capital throughout the educational system. This is arguably an even greater challenge than damaged and destroyed buildings. In what follows, we focus on three indicators used to measure the impact of warfare on education-school enrolment, attendance, and pupils' educational attainment (i.e. average years of education). If the mainstream narrative is correct, we would expect the impact of conflict would be reflected in declines in all three indicators.

Much of the reportage of the impact of outbreaks on education emphasizes on the direct human and material charge, such as the number of people murdered or injured and the number of buildings demolished or injured. But there has been very little reporting of the longer-term effects on education systems in affected areas, such as the negative impact on teacher effectiveness, retention and recruitment, and on pupil attendance, concentration and attainment. There has been little or no reporting on the cumulative impact of attacks on fragility and development, for instance the effects of rebels achieving the psychological victory of destroying the most visible symbol of government control in a village-the school prevention of the government's delivery of basic services in the form of education.

Conflict disturbs education in many means. Most terribly, it results in the death or movement of teachers, work and students. For example, more than two-thirds of teachers in primary and secondary schools were killed or displaced as a result of the Rwandan genocide (Buckland 2005, xi). Cambodia and Somalia represent extreme cases. In the late 1970s the Cambodian educational system was left in ruins with virtually no trained or knowledgeable teaching professional (Buckland 2005, 17). Schools and places of learning are often obvious targets during periods of armed conflict.

In *Education Under Attack*, UNESCO reports that "education has been criticized in at least 31 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America over the past three years" (2010 P. 15). One of the most distressed countries is Afghanistan, which observed a dramatic increase in attacks on schools, from 242 in 2007 to 670 in 2008(UNESCO 2010, P. 43). Many of the countries where education is under attack included Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Zimbabw. Targeted attacks on education during conflict created real costs to the sector. Schools have to be repaired or rebuilt, furniture and teaching materials restocked and lost personnel replaced. When schools are closed there may also be the cost of paying teachers who are not teaching.

In DRC, Nigeria and Pakistan, the capital costs alone from targeted attacks in the period 2009–2012 was estimated to total $57m. Adding to this the cost of replacing teachers and paying wages whilst schools were closed, the estimate total direct cost to the sector from targeted attacks in 2009–2012 in these three countries is about $133m.

In terms of the wider impact of conflict on children's access to education, these attacks represent only the tip of the iceberg. *The Education under Attack* series focuses primarily on targeted attacks on education. It does not aim to cover 'collateral damage', for example, when school buildings are damaged or education personnel are killed as an unintended result of military combat. It reports on military use of schools, as this can result in schools becoming military targets. But it does not report on cases where schools are just one of a large number of buildings destroyed by bombardment or aerial bombing or when a village is razed to the ground, or where

students and teachers are included among civilian casualties and refugees. In high-intensity conflicts, the destruction to schools and overall physical damage done to education systems are far greater than that caused by targeted attacks on education. For example, following the 1998–1999 war in Timor-Leste, 95% of schools required repair or reconstruction. In Iraq, 85% of schools were damaged or destroyed by the fighting during 2003 and 2004 (Buckland, 2005). Similarly, teachers included among civilian casualties and displaced groups often greatly outnumber the victims of targeted attacks on education perse. In Rwanda, more than two-thirds of teachers in primary and secondary schools were killed or displaced as a result of the genocide (Buckland, 2005).

In contexts like Syria, conflict has led to the interruption or end of education for hundreds of   thousands of children. However, in other conflict-affected countries, millions of children have never had the opportunity to attend school in the first place. The barriers to these children attending school include chronic underinvestment, inequitable investment and ineffective investment in education.

These barriers often predate the conflict. Conflict can delay progress in overcoming these barriers, keeping children out of school in systems that would otherwise have developed further (Gates etal. 2010). Conflict can stifle national development, impacting negatively on income and human resources at both household (Justino, 2011) and national levels (World Bank, 2011; Gupta et al. 2002; Lai and Thyne, 2007; Collier, 2007), leaving families and governments with fewer resources.

Untangling the interrelationship between conflict, state fragility, low economic development and low school enrolment is complex. But the scale of the indirect impact of conflict on education, as a result of reduced or stagnated education development, is likely to be of an order of magnitude greater than the numbers who have had their education interrupted or halted due to the more direct, immediate impacts experienced at the local level.

There is evidence that schools, students and teachers are increasingly being targeted during conflict (see Buckland, 2005; GCPEA, 2012 and 2014; and Van Wessel and Van Hirtum, 2013). However, this trend might simply be a result of increased reporting. Some insurgency groups are ideologically opposed to secular education (e.g. Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan); others attack schools as they are a highly visible extension of the government they are fighting (e.g. in Sierra Leone, rebel forces targeted schools for destruction, see O'Malley, 2011 and Turrent, 2012); other schools are destroyed simply because they provide tactical bases for insurgency and government armed forces. Where opposition is religious or ideological, teachers and students may also be deliberately targeted, leading to death, injury or kidnapping.

The 1996 Machel's study highlighted that admission to quality education is serious to the welfare of children and young people in disaster situations and should be a key constituent of the humanitarian reply. The study painted children's need for continuity in schooling. It strained that the right to quality education does not gap under conditions of crisis or displacement, within the country or in immigrant contexts.

The disastrous effects of conflict on education systems are not specific to any one region. Examples of education's failures and challenges in the wake of war extend across the world. Prior to NATO's war in Kosovo in 1999, the Serbian-dominated government introduced an assimilation policy that eliminated Albanian as the language of school instruction and introduced their own curriculum and textbooks. In response, Kosovar Albanian parents sent their children to illegal, non-accredited parallel schools run by Albanians. As a result, "there can be no doubt that the schism in education in Kosovo was a major contributor to the upsurge of violence that reached its horrifying zenith in 1999" (UNICEF 2000a: 19). In Colombia, "financial roadblocks and bureaucratic maneuvers" implemented by the government has kept hundreds of thousands of internally displaced children out of school (Myers and Sommers 1999: 11). And in different parts of Sudan, as well as in nearby countries hosting Sudanese refugees, Sudanese students follow different school curricula and languages of instruction (Sesnan 1999: 1). In all of these examples, the recruitment of children – girls as well as boys – into armies, militias and support units keep many children out of formal schooling and involved in the perpetuation of war.

In war-affected areas, many children who should be in school are hard to find, hard to get into school, and hard to make sure they remain there until completing, at the very least, their primary education. Of
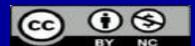
these three, the first challenge is often the most difficult – children are too often fighting, fleeing, or hiding during conflicts. They are not hard to get into school, relatively speaking, if they're already in a refugee or IDP camp. Nonetheless, the proportion of children in war-affected areas receiving education is usually very low: during much of Sierra Leone's recent civil war, for example, tens of thousands of children in camps attended primary schools, but hundreds of thousands more were either difficult to locate or completely unable to regularly attend school.

Thus, it is essential to explore the impact the conflict in Libya had on the Libyan education system in general and on the Libyan children in particular.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants & Method

The study is based on qualitative case study research, which gives the researchers an opportunity to explore one entity deeply and allow for generalizations on the wider population to which that entity belongs (Creswell 1994; Cohen and Manion1994). The participants of the study included 06 teachers (05 female + 01 male) from the Mosa Bin Naser School in Algordabia Najlaa area of the Sebha city in Libya. The study also included 19 student participants (10 male + 09 female) from the same school. It also included 06 parents and 05 guardians (05 male + 06 females).

The choice of students from primary schools was intentional as they are apparently the most affected by any drastic change in the educational process (Tierney and Dilley 2002). Parents and guardians in Sebha district formed a category for the study since it was believed that they were aware of the impact of the war and the conflicts on their school going children and basic education in general. The primary school teachers were included in the study as a reliable source of data since teachers were also affected directly or indirectly by the conflict.

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

Two data collection instruments were used to collect the data required for this research.

3.2.1 Observation & Interview: Data collection through interviews opened room for observations. As Gubruim and Holstein (2002, P. 8) put it, 'interviewing gives us access to the observation of others'. Observation, which involved looking at the world and making measurements of what is seen (Babbie 1986), was used to collect data.

It was particularly used to observe physically the impact of war on primary education in the study zone.

Structured interviews were used to allow consistent data collection and analysis. As Breakwell (1995) puts it, "structured interview yields information, which is easily quantified; and the data are usually already framed for analysis". The interviews were administered to education officers, the children, and teachers, parents/guardians, in areas affected by conflict and civil wars or influx of refugees, in the research zone.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

After stating the objectives, this research began to sample the subjects and identify the methods and instrument of data collection. The first step,   the researchers interviewed teachers and parents.   Each interview lasted for 3 to 5 minutes. The second part, the observation began with going to schools and enter English language classes. The relationship between teachers and students was observed along with their behaviour. The surroundings, students' sketchbooks were also observed to understand the impact the conflict had on their thinking and learning ability. Some of the images of the same are attached in the appendix.

4. Data Analysis, Findings & Discussion

4.1 Analysis and findings of observation

During the observation phase, inside the class, teacher asked the students to discuss the impact of war on them and their education. They started their discussion while I observed. They talked about how the bombs and bullets have often killed or wounded children. They said that they were worried and often had disturbing thoughts and nightmares, sleeping problems, anger, stomachaches and headaches due to fears of bombing. They also said that while they were in school and when they heard any of bullets shots, they would start crying and felt scared. They also talked about how schools have been damaged due to that they cannot come to study. They also reported that their final exams were cancelled due to the war which discouraged them and had negative impact on their life.

It was also reported that very often that some young students, from different tribes, used to carry weapons and knives with them. These students sometimes created violence in school during their arguments about who were with or against the revolution of 17th of February. Their sketchbooks were also filled with ghastly images of wars and its impacts.

Thus, it was found that young Libyan children were negatively affected and influenced by war which has changed not only their thinking but also their attitudes and approach towards education.

4.2 Analysis and Finding of Interview:

After observing and asking somme questions to the students about the impact of war on them and their education, it was noted that they were badly affected by the war. Security related fears were heard as kidnapping of children was becoming menace. According to Boothby et al. (1992) children living in conditions of political violence and war have been described as "growing up too soon" losing their childhood, "and taking political responsibilities before achieving ample maturation. This development leads to negative psychological consequences. Mental health professionals show increasing concern about developmental risks for children who fall victims to political violence and war.

The teachers interviews revealed that during the war, there were armed groups who stole the school equipments, furniture and materials which facilitated the learning process. As a result, there were no chairs to sit on nor boards to write on, especially at Manshia Street in Sebha which faced a lot of conflicts between opposing tribes. Even some school buildings were burnt like the school of Almanara, Ali Bin Abi Taleb and Abobaker Alsadeeq.

Teachers also reported that Students were usually worried or anxious about attacks on their school, or nearby which made them hard to concentrate in class. Feelings of nightmares, grief, memory problems, impaired concentration, aggressiveness, loss of interest, inactivity, apathy and numbness, mistrust, psychosomatic complaints, regressiveness such as bedwetting were also reported to the teachers by some of their students.

They also reported that some students had completely changed. There were bitterness among them due to the fighting between their tribes. Most affected were male students as they often talked about taking revenge, how to be solider in order to carry guns etc.

It was thus found that most of the teachers were worried that the war had affected their students' achievements and their behaviors.

The analysis of the interview data of the parents and guardians revealed during war time and armed conflicts there was so much burning toxic smoke out of different weapons and bombings which caused severe diseases such as malaria, cancer and diarrhea, which sometimes led to death. Most of the children lost parents or loved ones which has affected their complete behaviour. Children were becoming more aggressive, using impolite language, talked about fighting and revenge. Their focus on study was hampered and they could hardly concentrate on study. Many parents reported that their children would often scream in the sleep and were afraid due to bad dreams. They also were worried when their kids went schools as they were not sure when the fighting would break out between different arm groups and their kids may get caught up in between. They were also worried about their kids getting kidnapped from school premises and feared for their life and safety until they came home safely every day.

It was thus found that most of the parents were worried about the kids as the conflict has affected them very badly. The most significant caring resource to enable a child to handle with war is a strong association with a capable, gentle, confident adult, most often a parent. A study by Elizur and Kaffman (1982; 1983) followed 25 children 2-10 years of age for three and half years after the death of their fathers in war. They found that the severity of the bereavement response was influenced by the excellence of the relationship with the father prior to his death, the ability of the mother to share her sorrow with the child and the availability of extended family. There is developing literature that proposes that the psychological impact of parental death is mainly mediated by the obtainability of extended family support systems and the child's relationship with the remaining parent (Breier et al.1988). These factors are hard to measure during time of war.

To sum up, the following impacts were noted due to war in Libya on children and their education.

a) Direct impact on education
b) School closure due to targeted attacks, collateral damage, military use of school buildings, and use by displaced populations
c) Death and injury to teachers and students
d) Fear among parents and guardians of sending children to school, and teachers' fear of attending due to targeted attacks.
e) Threats of attacks or general insecurity reducing freedom of movement
f) Recruitment of teachers and students by armed forces (state and non-state)
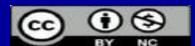
g) Indirect impacts on education
h) Forced population displacement leading to interrupted education
i) Public health impacts of conflict which reduced access and learning
j) Increased demand for household labour
k) Reduction in returns to education
l) Reduced educational expenditure (public and private) due to overall reduction in resources and shifting priorities
m) Reduced public capacity to deliver education.

5. Sum Up

The purpose of this was to investigate the impact of war and conflict in Libya on children and their education especially on the environment, education system, their families and governments in war zones. After the analysis of the data and on the basis of the findings obtained, it is evident that the 2011 war and subsequent conflicts have severely affected the lives of Libyan children in general. Their education, their thinking, their behaviour, their life patterns have been critically affected which poses serious question about their future development into a confident successful happy person.

It should be noted that, more than any other circumstance, war makes the case for providing appropriate education for children whose lives have been affected by war. Appropriate formal and no-formal education can provide important alternatives to child soldiering and other procedures of abuse (sexual and otherwise), social and cultural estrangement, violence, and self-destruction. War also disclosures the delicacies of gender in teaching and socialization, and the susceptibility of boys as well as girls, making responses to gender needs critically important if not vital. Lack of investment in and original, participatory work on education for children and youth in danger makes returning to peace and constancy difficult if not justly impossible. It is thus disappointing and unfortunate that support for education in advance of during, and immediately after emergencies remains so under supported in the Libyan context. Education during wartime emergencies and post-war transitions remains a small field, even though the potential benefits of supporting education for children and youth during emergencies are compelling and the negative impacts of not doing so create a multitude of opportunities for destructive and violent tendencies to thrive.

Therefore it is suggested that international performers familiar to working with national education offices such as the World Bank, regional development banks, donor governments, and UN agencies should not delay for crises to end. They should work with offices to contend with education in crisis circumstances on readiness concerns through training, contingency planning, and assembling reserves of critical materials, establish an active, helpful, answerable presence during disasters, and begin planning for post-war circumstances before they reach. Similar support should also be extended to relevant local NGOs, which can be carried out, in part, through active, collaborative, capacity-building arrangements with international NGOs with emergency education experience.

School curricula, materials, equipment, supplies, and buildings may not be available, but if teachers are present and able to respond, educating children can continue. Just as war upends lives and makes them unstable and vulnerable, so does war change the context of education and the needs of students. In order to learn, students require psychosocial interventions as a component of their educational experience to access their potential for resilience under extreme stress. Without this, their processes of learning and retention will be clotted by trauma. In order to successfully prepare for a peaceful, stable future, communities impacted by war can benefit from the values and approaches present in viable and appropriate peace education, human rights, conflict resolution or other related education modules.

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APPENDCIES

Image: 1 Damaged School building in Sebha due to war

Image: 3 Military toy prepared by Libyan school children affected by war

Image: 2 Paper toy prepared by Libyan school children affected by war