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Books Saving Lives? Critiquing the Conceptualisation of Education as Humanitarian Aid

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the world has witnessed an increase in violent and protracted conflicts. Education in Emergencies (EiE) as a field has emerged since the 1990s in response to these rising conflicts and disasters together with the realisation that children living in these situations often spend years without access to schooling. As EiE has grown, it has successfully positioned education as a key aspect of humanitarian aid. This paper focuses upon literature on conflict emergencies, including refugee and displaced populations. Through a review of the historical perspectives and development of EiE, this critical paper unveils that despite the conceptualisation of EiE as aid, it is not apolitical. By analysing the literature by prominent scholars and practitioners in EiE, the paper allows us to bear witness to the success of the rise of EiE which has developed from the power dynamics of the humanitarian aid infrastructure, governed by Western agendas and financing. In addition, the short-term vision and packaged nature of education to create normalcy supported by a rights-based and protection rationale has prevented the international development and aid sector from addressing wider structural issues and inequalities. The technical notions of EiE are revealed to be often detached from realities of communities and fail to empower and create quality learning opportunities. The paper calls for the immediate need to provide quality education to children in conflict and displacement settings but urges EiE to address the tensions and power relations examined between technical solutions, political agendas and security interests that remain at the core of the field's evolution.

KEYWORDS

Education in Emergencies, Humanitarian Aid, Conflict, Inequality and Protection

In recent decades, the world has witnessed a sharp increase in violent and protracted conflicts. Consequently, around 70.8 million people have been displaced from their homes and 25.9 million are classified as refugees, escaping due to fear of violence and persecution (Russell et al., 2020). Education in Emergencies (EiE) as a field has emerged since the 1990s in response to rising conflicts and disasters together with the realisation that children living in these situations often spend years without access to education. EiE is described as the provision of “quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical vocational, higher and adult education” (International Network for Education in Emergencies¹ (INEE), 2010, p.2). With evidence showing that increased education leads to improved

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¹ The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is a network of 62 partner organisations from the state and non-state sector and across the Global North and South, and acts as a convening organisation on the issue of EiE. It operates in the areas of advocacy, knowledge mobilisation, community building, and resource development (INEE 2016).

wellbeing among school children in refugee contexts, education in conflict and displacement settings has gained traction due to the promotion of mutual understanding, peace, and violence prevention in these unstable and precarious environments (Burde et al., 2015). As EiE has grown in research and as a profession, it has positioned education as a key aspect of humanitarian aid and has expanded as detailed by the studies and scholars I discuss below (Kagawa, 2005; Burde et al., 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). This paper looks specifically at literature around conflict emergencies, including refugee and displaced populations.

In humanitarian emergencies, “an event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or group” (Humanitarian Coalition, n.d., p.1), a state’s capacity to cope with these challenges often weakens or is absent, thus, EiE actors, including international organisations and states, can enter to deliver EiE to affected communities (Nicholai, 2003). However, development scholars have begun to critique how education is commonly understood as the universal solution to remedy all development challenges and one that can mobilise social transformation to solve crises and other conflicts. Cardozo and Shah (2016, p.17) critique the magical optimism of the potential of education by cautioning that, in the best-case scenario, it may “do no harm, or at worst exacerbate or perpetuate existing inequalities, doing little to transform underlying structural inequalities within society and the education sector” (Cardozo & Shah, 2016, p. 517). With displacement reaching accelerating rates and a growing number of children living in dire conditions of instability and crisis, the EiE sector has an opportunity to carry out programming that addresses structural inequities. Oddy (2021) writes that the current aid architecture continues to be wrapped up in colonial legacies and that the sector is aware that systemic racial and intersectional inequalities affect educational marginalisation in societies. In line with Kelcey & Monaghan (2019), by reflecting on the past, we can understand how systems of power have established ways of seeing and knowing and therefore, improve future EiE provision and prevent reproducing or exacerbating systemic barriers faced by these communities.

Method

This paper aims to explore the literature to unveil how education continues to be conceptualised as humanitarian aid. To reach the paper’s aims, I conduct a review of different scholarly and pragmatic perspectives, including critical approaches within the literature. A historical background giving rise to the emergence of EiE is presented first to set up how education has and is being conceptualised in the aid sector. I chose a semi-systematic approach to collecting my sources as this method is well suited for topics that are conceptualised differently by various groups, disciplines, or scholars (Wong et al., 2013). Apart from summarising a topic, a semi-systematic review looks at how research within a particular field has developed over time and across research traditions (Snyder, 2019).

A semi-systematic review is appropriate for my critical literature review as it helps explore the contradictions and paradoxes in the conceptualisation of EiE, which will help make legible certain implications for learners and communities. I identified several key journals that published articles in the field of EiE, such as the *Education and Conflict Review*, *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, *Journal of Comparative Education*, *Journal of Peace Education* and *Comparative Education Review*. On the basis of these journals, I started to curate a basis of the EiE field through looking at the key concepts, debates, scholars, and critiques while also inputting a pre-existing set of key terms such as “EiE”, “Emergency Education”, “Educational Aid”, “Education in conflicts” and “Crisis AND Education” into search engines on various data bases such as Scopus, ERIC and ProQuest. Then I selected articles based on these search results to incorporate into my literature review.

The following subsection provides a brief overview of historical perspectives on education and humanitarian aid that have led to how EiE is understood today. This sets this paper up to discuss the implications and tensions in the conceptualisation of education as humanitarian aid in EiE.

Approaches to Educational Aid Leading to the Rise of EiE:

The following historical overview of education aid contextualises the build-up of EiE and allows one to observe how some principles of historical approaches prevail in current EiE.

“Neutral” Beginnings:

EiE emerged from a post-global conflict space. Tracing back to post-World War II, any form of education aid at this point was perceived as largely neutral (Burde et al., 2015) such as the small local efforts to provide schooling for displaced and evacuated children in Europe during the 1940s (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). During this time, the traditional focus of humanitarian aid here was on biological survival rather than addressing educational issues in uncertain situations.

International actors focused on education in post-war and low-income countries but here, education was considered an international development practice to build education systems as prescribed by the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine (Burde et al., 2015) whereas humanitarian aid focused on needs-based physical relief like water, food, and shelter which dismissed education in crises (Lerch & Buckner, 2018). This aligned with the idea that “it is easier to rebuild roads and bridges” than “re-construct institutions and strengthen the social fabric of society” after and during crises and conflicts (Bromley & Andina, 2010, p.577). Utilising Winthrop and Matsui’s (2013) conceptualisation of EiE stages to guide this paper, this period can be understood as the ‘proliferation’ phase of EiE, categorised by the diffusion of refugee education programs, and that traditional aid prioritised survival through neutral interventions that did not affect the ongoing conflict.

Rights-Based Approach:

The shift from the ‘proliferation’ stage to the emergence of EiE as understood today occurred after the Cold War (Cardozo & Novelli, 2018). During this period, there was a shift from the partisan distribution of aid during the Cold War to an increased joint donor effort to improve coordination of international development policy, such as the Education for All (EFA) movement, bringing together development and humanitarian agendas (Shah et al., 2020). This mobilised a principal rationale for education provision in conflicts: access to education is a right for all children regardless of their circumstances (INEE, 2020).

Despite the 1948 promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was not until the 1990 Jomtien Conference that the development and education discourse moved beyond a human capital rationale to a rights discourse (Bromley & Andina, 2010; Chabbott & Ramirez, 2000). This contributed to the focus on education as a human right, pivoting the attention of interventions away from peaceful state-building to the universal rights of children in crises (Lerch & Buckner, 2018). Moreover, the rights approach to EiE was supported by other frameworks such as the 1989 Child Rights Convention and universal primary enrolment goals. By recognising the importance of fulfilling individuals’ rights to education and not just their basic needs, humanitarian interventions began including education.

A rights-based approach led to the global professionalisation of EiE which embodied an increase in organisations, expert positions, and funding, along with publications and training courses devoted to

promoting EiE (Lerch, 2017; Russel et al., 2020). Only in the 1990s was EiE named in academia and policy (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013). The recognition aligns with the conceptualisation of the mid-1990s to 2000s as the ‘consolidation’ period which included the development of a specialised education field through international efforts to build shared understandings for humanitarian action (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013). The following section elaborates from this period onwards in order to delve into how EiE is understood as aid while discussing the implications of this approach.

Conceptualising Education as Aid

This section critically discusses the existing literature about arguments about how the conceptualisation of EiE as aid came to be understood as well as uncover some of the tensions and implications of this approach.

Institutionalising Education as a pillar of Aid

EiE is built on the conceptualisation of education as life saving humanitarian aid which is often described as relief assistance provided to conflict- or disaster-affected populations (Shohel, 2020; Sinclair, 2007). As mentioned, humanitarian aid efforts typically focus on relief for survival, however education has increasingly been regarded as a pillar of humanitarian assistance and identified by crisis-affected populations as a high priority (Versmesse et al., 2017; Poole, 2014). Along with the human rights discourse as mentioned above, this change in the conceptualisation of EiE as humanitarian aid can be attributed to the 1996 Machel Reports on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, stressing education’s life-saving potential. Another influential report was the 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report which stressed the “hidden crisis in education” in conflict zones and areas of displacement, an area in development and humanitarian sectors that were receiving inadequate global attention prior to the growth of EiE.

Solidifying education as a legitimate humanitarian concern, proponents of EiE in the literature have highlighted how education plays a significant role in addressing conflict’s psycho-social consequences as well as generating development, stability, and peace (Sommers, 2002; INEE, 2021). This is reflected in the literature which views education as largely neutral, if not positive, leading to various positive outcomes (Davies, 2004; Kagawa, 2005; Novelli & Cardozo, 2008; Paulson & Rappleye, 2007). Surrounded by these encouraging justifications, in 2000, EiE was institutionalised through the INEE, which united actors like UNESCO, UNHCR, the World Bank, global NGOs, and researchers (INEE, 2000). The INEE acts as a space for education professionals to share knowledge and best practices including the dissemination of minimum standards, guidelines, and tools to implement EiE (Russel et al., 2020). Since 2008, the Global Education Cluster led by UNICEF and Save the Children Alliance has coordinated educational responses in emergency settings as part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Different organisations have advanced their interests in conflict areas while accumulating funding (Cardozo & Novelli, 2018). By doing this, certain actors have demarcated EiE from development to incorporate education into humanitarian assistance (Burde et al., 2017).

This incites the question: how does this play out on the ground? Bromley and Andina (2010) evaluate the implications of the INEE minimum standards.² They argue that a disconnect between standards and practice is likely, questioning the effectiveness of these rather top-down criteria (Bromley & Andina, 2010). This is supported by a Ugandan case study, suggesting that local NGO staff could not specify how they used the INEE standards or indicators (Sullivan-Owomoyela, 2006). Barnett (2005)

² The INEE (2010) published minimum standards in a handbook aimed at EiE actors to enhance the quality of educational services which include guidelines on teaching, assessment, and monitoring, among others.

expresses that humanitarian tendencies to develop templates and guidelines makes actors less able to respond to local needs. These arguably technical solutions to education provision sought to legitimise the discourse, painting education as life saving aid (Novelli & Cardozo, 2018). To further this, despite the INEE's open and horizontal membership structure, critics reveal that participation of Global South actors is tokenistic with limited influence in decision-making compared to wealthier donors (Menashy, 2018; Novelli & Cardozo, 2018). This reduces the diversity of voices, sustaining unequal North-South power relations within the network (Novelli & Cardozo, 2018; Brun & Shuayb, 2020a). Under the façade of universal values and mutual interest, education is perceived as apolitical, but is actually realised through politicised relations and donor interests (Burde, 2007; Brun & Shuayb, 2020b). This reveals that EiE is indeed stratified and built on existing inequality and unjust distributions of power and influence. These perspectives echo Ferguson's (1990) prominent argument that persistent power imbalances between North and South are concealed under an ideological guise of apolitical and consensual relationships in development aid. There is emerging scholarly work that examines power asymmetries in education policy but only a limited number of studies have investigated these concepts in the contexts of education in crises (Pherali & Lewis, 2019; Talbot & Taylor, 2015). Deeper reflection on how soft power operates financially and discursively to influence EiE is needed in the field.

Despite these concerns, decolonial discourse is still in early stages in EiE, but there have been calls in recent years by scholars as demonstrated in the above paragraph. Drawing on arguments by post-colonial scholars in international development, aid is a manifestation of existing colonial relationships and power (Escobar, 1995; Mignolo, 2000). Moreover, education is a fundamental instrument as it asserts and maintains the domination of Western epistemological frameworks and normative views of colonial powers over local alternatives (Tikly, 2004). We can see this through how prominent understandings of EiE tend to stem from institutional perspectives as illustrated through knowledge production, particularly the growth of policy documents and publications emphasising education as a humanitarian concern (Vernmesse et al., 2017). Many of the studies published in the Journal on EiE and others have an institutional perspective and are mostly written by global north affiliated scholars, legitimising the humanitarian rationale (Vernmesse et al., 2017; Moriarty, 2020). Epstein (2010) notes that this obscures the realities of youth in conflicts. The representation of youth's views in the literature remains inadequate despite INEE promoting notions of community participation. Through her study on Afghan and Polish refugees in Canada who grew up in conflict, Dicum (2008) asserts that learners are key stakeholders in understanding learning processes of children in conflicts as they are experts of their own experiences. Meanwhile, Save the Children's study on barriers to Accelerated Education Programming reveal the importance of engaging children in future research as they are active agents who have expertise on their own lives, however, this inclusion does not happen often in practice within EiE (Oddy, 2019).

In recognising these critiques, Menashy and Shields (2017) argue that new partnerships in EiE aim to reconstitute the aid relationship in ways that eliminate power inequality and hegemony through more participation and non-hierarchical relationships. An example is the localisation agenda through which communities engage thoroughly in educational or humanitarian responses, recognising the power of local actors (Fiori et al., 2016). This was emphasised at a consultation on futures of EiE hosted by NORRAG and UNESCO (2021). EiE experts at this discussion also highlighted the need to integrate temporary humanitarian perspectives and longer-term development frameworks, including in education. However, it is ironic that community members seemed to be absent in this consultation, reproducing an echo chamber of top-down narratives. Furthermore, Menashy and Zakharia (2022)

mention that the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the usual global education practice of flying in Global North actors or ‘experts’ to crisis settings to oversee projects or work with local partners. The travel restrictions meant that local partners had to adapt and sustain their programs on the ground, accelerating more participatory practices and countering power imbalances. However, the extent to which these shifts eradicate critiques about power inequalities in international development and education aid remains a question.

Overall, the above describes the ‘collaboration’ phase of EiE beginning in the mid-2000s (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013). Since the integration of EiE in Western humanitarian action, there is now an interest to use the new standards for outward collaboration and discussion from other actors, especially security and sustainable development specialists but also a new direction towards more ‘participatory’ programming and research (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013). It is important to question whether EiE is heading towards reproducing unequal power relations through its leadership and partnerships. By establishing education as a humanitarian concern, EiE can utilise universal norms to empower those that have been marginalised to participate in education. Nevertheless, aid actors are powerful as they dictate the selection, provision, and removal of services to communities.

Unpacking “Emergency” and “Fragility” in EiE:

Education’s role has been increasingly recognised as contentious in conflict-affected areas and displaced communities (Davies, 2004). The influential policy paper, ‘Two Faces of Ethnic Conflict’ published by UNICEF, illustrates the positive (peacebuilding) and negative (peace-destroying) roles of education in conflicts (Bush & Satreli, 2000). There has been attention from developed nations like the United States due to the belief that ‘uneducated masses’ produce instability or ‘fragility’ in weak countries emerging from crisis and therefore, foreign aid actors can step in to stabilise these countries and contribute to global security (Burde et al., 2017). Consequently, fragile states became targets for Western intervention as they are no longer perceived as a danger only to themselves but also to the Western world (Burde et al., 2017). Education has been identified as one way to mitigate these dangers. Shields and Paulson (2019) indicate that development organisations such as the World Bank (2011) understand fragility as engendered by institutional deficits stemming from cycles of violence. The assumption here is that improving state services like education teaches youth to prevent conflict and increases state legitimacy (Burde et al., 2015).

In her book on partnerships in education aid, Menashy (2019) emphasises that focusing on how terminology produces problematic notions can further dismantle deficit-based constructs entrenched in colonial discourse. Despite the term ‘fragility’ being widely operationalised, it has been criticised for its stigma and its link to Western security interests (Winthrop & Mastui, 2013). For example, INEE changed the name of its working group on *education and fragility* to *education policy working group* (Burde et al., 2015). Critics note that humanitarian actions are often used as a cover to refrain from addressing root causes of crisis or as a cover to legitimise political interventions that support Western interests which have detrimental impacts on the communities they seek to protect (Macrae & Leader, 2001; Duffield, 2001; Pupavac, 2010). For example, Novelli (2010) discloses that USAID-led education aid for the Afghan education system was a means of their occupation, leading to increased attacks on schools.

In the same vein, ‘Emergency’ determines the urgency and appropriateness of education in the humanitarian field. However, the term indicates a temporary condition, overlooking protracted crises (Burde, 2014). Critics such as Versmesse et al. (2017) assert that ‘emergency imaginaries’ reiterate

prevailing power relations which lead to adverse portrayals of crisis-affected communities and a legitimisation of the status quo. The emergency imaginaries shape how we understand events not as they look to local communities but to the civilised, reproducing stereotypes of the Global South (Calhoun, 2004). Calhoun (2004) critiques that humanitarian aid is conceptualised outside the realities, interests, and needs of communities.

There is a clear deficit discourse in EiE in how it positions populations in emergencies and their representation in the literature as wound up in the emergency imaginary among notions of fragility and uneducatedness (Versmesse et al., 2017). This implies that if a characteristic of an emergency is a weak fragile state, it justifies actors providing educational aid. Versmesse et al. (2017) observe how in EiE discourse, peace is portrayed as a regime of truth, where peace and violence symbolise the dichotomy between truth and falsity. The discourse belittles conflict-affected communities' worldviews as education aid aims to eliminate violence and teach people to prevent emergencies (Versmesse et al., 2017). It suggests that conflict-affected communities can only possess wrong truths. Communities are represented in a demeaning way as needing relief for wrongful worldviews and experiences. Almedom and Summerfield (2004) criticise this assumption as it characterises conflict-affected people as diminished humanity. Despite these critical perspectives, I am not arguing that we should not address the immediate educational and humanitarian needs of displaced children and youth. Rather, I urge the EiE sector to acknowledge and address the deeper and underlying power dynamics that are inherent to EiE agendas.

Form of Protection: Assumption that Children are Safe in School

After examining the literature discussing the institutional humanitarian conceptualisation of EiE and the implications in the previous paragraphs, this section moves to examine EiE's inherent assumption that attending school is a form of protection by keeping children away from risks and saving their lives, aligning with humanitarian life saving principles (Smith & Vaux, 2003; Burde et al., 2017). Deane (2016) comments that providers like UNICEF and Save the Children have changed their focus on child protection rather than education as education provision is more difficult to monitor and evaluate in line with donor requirements. This approach argues that education can mitigate the effect of conflict on children in a number of ways. Kagawa (2005) explains that formal education establishes a sense of normalcy by providing structure and routine in insecure settings, allowing children to express themselves and engage with peers and their community. Sinclair (2001) indicates that the UNHCR posits that structured activities benefit the mental health of children and adults in their programs. According to Save the Children, with education, children can protect themselves better through learning skills and knowledge to cope with risks (Nicholai, 2003).

However, the protective argument by humanitarian organisations to swiftly enrol refugee children in school to create normalcy and familiar routines can become complex and political as crises become more protracted (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Education for normalcy is being promoted in EiE but how does that relate to the increased permanence of refugee communities? Brun and Shuayb (2020b) remind us that humanitarian principles of normalcy used by host states sustain their view that refugees are not supposed to stay and that the only appropriate assistance is temporary relief.

Overall, there is mixed empirical evidence in relation to these protective claims of education from a variety of contexts. For example, Dryden-Peterson (2011) argues in her study with refugee children in Uganda that education may improve physical security and increase optimism for future economic security. However, critics have identified limitations of this perspective. Not only can schools be sites

of violence due to such factors as the increased risk of sexual assault and harassment of girls at school during conflict, but schools themselves can also become active targets in conflict areas such as those documented in Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Somalia, thus contradicting the safe space rationale (Sommers, 2002; Pherali, 2019). This argument is not solely relevant to the level of the student but to other educational stakeholders like teachers. Burde et al. (2017) add that teachers are also traumatised which affects teaching. Supporting teachers could improve wellbeing and learning in students; a study in the Democratic Republic of Congo revealed that teacher development programs increased motivation of the least experienced educators (Wolf et al., 2015).

The argument for normalcy through schooling is also insufficient as critics argue more needs to be directed towards the psychological needs of children through drama, writing, and storytelling (Sommers, 2002). International organisations have developed child-friendly schools such as Play Learning Centres in Cox's Bazaar. Aguilar and Retamal (2009) view schools as potential protective environments but they put forward that normal classroom activities would be insufficient for children with concentration difficulties after exposure to conflicts. To remedy these debates, Winthrop & Kirk (2008) highlight through their study with refugee children in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan that listening to students' opinions on their learning can further support their well-being. This could be done through initiatives that focus on learning quality and those that provide them the space to speak about their education priorities (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). A rights-based approach is not limited to the right to education but also communities' right to contribute and participate in decision-making that impacts their and their children's learning.

Short-term Vision

In conjunction with the discussion on normalcy above, EiE tends to operate as a short-term replacement for schooling until normalcy can be restored (Versmesse et al., 2017; Sinclair, 2001). Much of the education provision tends to be quick and pragmatic due to the urgency of providing schooling to affected children such as a venue for a school, recruiting teachers and school supplies to teach students (Pherali, 2019; Ika & Hodgson, 2014). The desire for practical and quick solutions may overlook critical insights (Novelli & Cardozo, 2008). Humanitarian aid views refugees as victims denied access to physical needs therefore education decision-making is carried out by external actors for refugees rather than with them (Waters & Leblanc, 2005). Shuayb (2019) shares that comparative research on the education experiences and attainment of refugees in temporary versus long-term settlements is also lacking. Brun (2016) argues that by making refugees the *subject* of humanitarian aid, it limits their present prospects and undercuts their future through the focus on temporary solutions. Surviving in the present and planning for a future represent conflicting temporalities in a situation where the humanitarian system and people living in crisis envision futures differently (Brun, 2016).

Classifying refugees as subjects of aid leads to the objectification of a disempowered refugee where they are treated as a problem to be solved. Shuayb (2019) attributes this perspective to the reification of the refugee in EiE by the international community and its agenda. But they are individuals, and not anonymous masses as depicted in the discourse. Novelli and Cardozo (2008) claim that the dominant problem-solving approach to education in conflicts is due to willingness to accept and operate within the status-quo. The acceptance dismisses broader political or social relations, and so they urge the problematisation of the complex interests and players in EiE to unpack how and with what intentions policy and programs are being developed (Novelli & Cardozo, 2008). For instance, Shohel (2020) expresses that in Bangladesh, the government sees long-term education provision as weakening its negotiating position for repatriating Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. The government does not want

the Rohingya to settle long-term and will, therefore, not allow integration with the host population, but they have allowed UNICEF to pilot a project using the Myanmar curriculum. This example also brings in debates and concerns about who is ultimately responsible for providing education to affected communities especially when conflicts become more protracted and complicated, reiterating a tension with the humanitarian principles of external neutral actors.

In a context where displaced communities and refugees tackle injustices due to legal and socio-economic constraints in host countries, EiE should also focus on how to tackle power, curriculum, inequality, and injustices. While there is substantial research on inequality in education (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Giroux, 1985), these debates have not majorly included EiE. Brun and Shuayb (2020a) find that, instead, EiE is more concerned with technical aspects of education access rather than long term objective and potential outcomes. It is clear that education increases the well-being and aspirations of children living in crisis or displaced settings. However, EiE needs to further discuss and address the limited trajectories that education can provide as the legal status of refugee children is different from the status of citizen children, and in countries like Lebanon where they are unable to access formal education, the possibilities for refugee children are limited as they cannot access formal employment in the future (Burde et al., 2017).

Packaging Education

To support the agenda to incorporate education with traditional humanitarian assistance rather than development activities, organisations have focused on delivering education as a service that can be packaged like other forms of aid and in a one-size fits all manner (Ika & Hodgson, 2014). For example, UNICEF’s “School in a Box” or UNESCO’s “School in a Suitcase” include translated learning materials and guidelines to distribute to children and teachers to support learning as a rapid response during a crisis as needed (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009). In an evaluation of education assistance for crisis-affected children in Eritrea, Indongole (2004) observes a 7% increase in enrolment in Grade One, with a bigger increase for girls than for boys. This increase was credited to stationery supplied to project schools. Likewise, Eversmann (2000) discovers that education stakeholders agreed that education kits improved attendance and learning of students in war-torn Somalia.

Packaging education distances it from politics, aligning with traditional apolitical humanitarian principles. Humanitarian aid aims to provide relief and save lives but not to address wider structural issues or inequalities present in conflicts or in education systems (Barnett, 2005). Therefore, in terms of rapid roll-out, these kits have been successful. But does this support issues of protection or learning quality? There is evidence from non-crisis, low-income contexts, such as Kenya, that shows providing education kits and uniforms can be effective in improving access outcomes (Duflo et al., 2006; Evans et al., 2008). If there is indication that packaging education is effective in non-crisis contexts, does that automatically hold true for learning outcomes in an emergency context? This is bound up in the same emergency assumption reviewed above, and universalises and overlooks specific contexts, realities, and challenges faced by communities.

Access vs. Quality

Since international organisations began including EiE programmes as a component of humanitarian action, policy makers and the aid community have prioritised restoring access to education given the urgency of ensuring children have access to schooling in these settings (Burde et al., 2015). However, access to education does not necessarily translate into quality, inclusion, or empowerment of learners (Shuayb, 2019). For example, outcomes for primary students in Kakuma refugee camp in

Kenya were very low, which pointed to the need to improve learning among children instead of only concentrating on their access to schooling (Piper et al., 2020).

As displacement and conflict durations lengthen, an increasing number of studies have examined the significance of educational quality related challenges such as curriculum and language instruction issues for refugee students (Anderson et al., 2020). Waters and LeBlanc (2005) note issues of language becoming contentious for host countries, communities, and humanitarian actors as there is uncertainty of which languages and curricula refugees should be educated in. Researching refugees living in Kenya and Thailand, Le (2021) indicates that language of instruction policies reflect power dynamics as refugees are excluded from decision-making processes about their futures as languages of instruction are predominantly decided externally based on efficiency and cost-effectiveness over linguistic rights. The preliminary view of EiE was to impart the curriculum of the country of origin for eventual repatriation (Sinclair, 2002). However, with a burgeoning cognisance that most conflicts are protracted, there have been appeals for long-term solutions, resulting in some adoption of host country curriculums for integration (UNHCR, 2019). However, this affects learning outcomes as learners must follow a curriculum that is often neither in their native language nor pertinent to their culture and experiences (Brun & Shuayb, 2020a). For example, in South Sudan, first grade female refugee students from lower socio-economic backgrounds with low proficiency in English lacked basic language and numeracy skills to enter the first grade (Raza et al., 2019). It has been argued that education should instead be based on the curriculum of the area of origin as host country curricula disregard the needs and expectations of refugees (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). The use of Syrian curricula and instruction for Syrian refugee children in Turkey has helped transition them into new communities with limited interruption (Hos, 2016). These debates highlight the complexity behind quality of education issues surrounding curricula for students in these settings, but also validate the importance of more comprehensive policy and research regarding quality of learning in relation to language instruction and beyond.

Conclusion

Through a review of the historical perspectives and development of EiE, my paper discusses the main debates that have given rise to the position of how both education as well as communities in emergencies are understood and not to mention, the implications of education responses. I unveil that the success of the rise of EiE has developed from the power dynamics of the humanitarian aid infrastructure, governed by Western agendas and financing that are keen to protect their interests. Despite the conceptualisation of EiE as aid, it is not apolitical, no matter how much EiE tries to distance itself from it. The short-term vision and packaged nature of education to create normalcy supported by a protection rationale has prevented addressing wider structural issues like inequality in host country education systems. In addition, these technical notions of education aid are detached from the realities of communities and their inputs which fail to empower and create quality learning opportunities. The tensions and power relations between technical solutions, political agendas, and security interests examined in this paper remain at the core of the field's evolution.

EiE provides access to schooling to affected children in dire need of education. However, keeping in mind the critical perspectives discussed and envisioned in this paper, moving forward, the EiE field must simultaneously address the immediate humanitarian needs of affected populations but also reflect and re-address the existing hierarchical approaches and systems of EiE. This alternative perspective can increase the chances of implementing more inclusive, quality, protective, and equitable education opportunities to the millions of children who have lost out because of conflicts. Power

needs to be shifted in favour of affected communities through more authentic participatory approaches that engage communities in research and practice for improved quality and justice in education provision. Future research and evaluation on programs and policies that engage a more localised and participatory approach need to be carried out to ensure that EiE is not reproducing inequalities.

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