Protection and Reconstruction of Schooling in Conflict Zones
Reflections from the Field

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Abstract

The paper outlines the remedial measures, protective and reconstructive steps to protect schooling in conflict zones that are based on the information collected through the questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion with the respondents (n=105) in Jammu and Kashmir. The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been hit by unrest for nearly three decades, and this situation of unrest prevailing in the region has impacted the education sector miserably. The present study is based on a descriptive survey method, intended to understand the broad trends of experiences, and factors influencing the experiences of various stakeholders. The paper is mostly based on the respondents' perceptions of the actions that must be performed to maintain the operation of schools as well as to improve the education system, which appears to be mistreated by conditions and problems in the way of protecting education. The type of protective measures discussed here are physical protection, community involvement, psychological protection and the role of government and NGOs that attempts to lessen the effect of armed conflict on schooling. Ensuring access to education need to be the priority and primary concern of the authorities as well as different stakeholders in education of the conflict hit zones.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of conflict and education has aroused interest in research studies, policy makers and practitioners. Education and conflict are mostly involved in two facets theoretically, i.e., effects of conflict situations on educational processes and, the ways through which education can mitigate conflict (Smith, 2005). Education can be a tool for reproduction of culture (Bourdeau, 1984), and it may also be a dynamic form of active political participation that opposes social inequalities existing in the societies.

In the case of Nepal, Moist took advantage of this aspect to channelise youngsters in support of their cause, with schools providing safe access to youngsters who might be employed for military purposes. Schools have also become a target for armed groups who abused students and teachers frequently (Phareli, 2019). Children are traumatised in conflict zones as they are very tender hearted, they develop a fear of abduction and physical torture. Vulnerable children are enroled in the state sponsored government schools in South Asia and they face difficulties not only in getting access but also in terms of becoming victims of poor quality of teaching and unacceptable levels of learning (Rai, 2018). Conflict creates further problems for the already vulnerable and make it difficult for them to access schools, and in case access is available they remain in the atmosphere of uncertainty. The geographical condition of Jammu and Kashmir impedes the development of basic infrastructure, which is exacerbated by armed conflict, which has taken a high toll on life and public property while also throwing normal life out of gear. The conflict in Kashmir has become increasingly violent in the valley since 1989. The conflict had far-reaching consequences. Apart from economic devastation, it caused social disorganisation, educational difficulties, psychological distress, and developmental issues (Hassan A., 2012). Putting emphasis on children's education and stating that both before and after an armed conflict, education may promote children's well-being, Winthrop and Krick (2008) noted that education can influence children's well-being by fostering a sense of normalcy through consistent attendance at school, opportunities for social interaction with peers, and a supportive atmosphere. The effects of the conflict on education are a major concern for global educational advancements. On the other hand, there is growing recognition that education can help reduce conflict. To be a citizen and to engage in professional activities, one must have access to education. It plays a crucial part in protecting children from abuse. During times of conflict or unrest, having access to safe schools can give students not only an education, but also physical and psychological protection. It might provide youngsters a sense of normalcy to be able to go to school

and see friends and trusted teachers on a regular basis. Schools can also be used to give aid, such as feeding and vaccination programmes, which help to reduce the humanitarian effects of conflict (Sheppard, 2019). In any circumstances, education is a fundamental entitlement for all children irrespective of differences. Children are denied this right at the times of emergency situations frequently and as a result, they are denied the opportunity to develop and gain the skills, information, and competencies which are necessary to overcome the challenging situations faced by them (Aguilar and Retamal, 2009). For every child, education is an important part of growing up. Safe and secure environment for children to learn and play is critical to their survival and well-being, and education is one of the hopes for a better future. But the children in the conflict zones do not get a chance to go to school and they miss out the opportunities to enjoy the benefits that education brings in.

Why Education is a Priority in Conflict Zones

There are several reasons to prioritise education during an armed conflict. Presently, education is recognised as a human right that must be fulfilled even in dangerous and impoverished situations (Save the Children, 2006). Therefore, any child residing in a conflict zone has the legal right to education and is required to have access to it. Even under the most

challenging conditions, education should always be maintained as a right and should not be disregarded when there is animosity. This is not an ideological statement; rather, it suggests that if it is possible to maintain education in the midst of conflict, it might offer a crucial mechanism for the registration of young children and their protection from abuse. The education system is critical in both teaching people about their rights and establishing respect for the rights of others. Numerous resolutions emphasise the importance of education as both a right and a method of achieving other rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, has become one of the most helpful tools for assessing and advocating for the needs of children in general, particularly those of children and young people in conflict-affected countries (Todres, 1998). Many researchers and academicians have recognised that education is critical to progress. Firstly, education is considered to be an important tool for human development, empowerment, and poverty eradication, and it gives youngsters hope for a brighter future. Second, it can play an important role in re-establishing a normal routine and peer networks for children whose lives have been disturbed, promoting psychological and social well-being, and cognitive development. Third, children rarely have a second chance at education; when the opportunity

to educate is lost due to conflict, it is not just a loss of individuals, but also a loss of social cultural capital and the society's ability to recover from the conflict. (Burlacu, 2012; Boyden J., 2002). Given the importance of education in a child's future and well-being, we should make every effort to protect and sustain education amid armed conflict. The global community has also pledged to meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural disasters, and instabilities, and to conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace, and tolerance, as well as to help prevent violence and conflict, in order to achieve the goal of *education for all*. Protecting the school environment must be a top priority because it promotes children's well-being and establishes broader protection (Dupuy, 2008). Education is considered a positive force in social life, and key to increasing the quality of life and it is an important instrument to overcome violence and improve respect for human rights. Thus, all the children must be ensured right to quality education and safe learning environment. Schooling can shape children's well-being by restoring normalcy to regular school attendance, social opportunities with peers and nurturing environment with access to counsellors are likely to have positive influence on children. Schools and classrooms can provide the space in which people of different origin can be brought together and taught how to live and work together peacefully (Dupuy, 2008; Justino, 2016).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study dealt with the broad objectives that revolved around the key terms like armed conflict, school education and NGOs which are stated as: (1) To study the problems encountered by the educational stakeholders during conflict situations in Kashmir. (2) To understand the stakeholders perspectives regarding protection of school education during conflict situations. (3) To study the role of NGOs in protecting and managing school education in Kashmir. The research questions which were dealt with by this study in order to get the relevant information from the stakeholders were; what impact does armed conflict have on school education?; what are the challenges faced by the educational stakeholders due to armed conflict?; and what are the stakeholders perspectives on protection of schooling in conflict situations and how do NGOs play their role of mediating education amidst conflict?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH

The study was based on a descriptive survey method intended to understand the broad trends of experiences, factors influencing the

experiences of various respondents in the research area. The study is descriptive in nature which revolves around the collection of data and its analysis based on the experiences in the 'field' (Creswell, 1999). The study was based on information collected through the research tools such as questionnaires, interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in the research area from the actual experience of various stakeholders. Before going to the field secondary data was collected and review of related literature was done which helped to outline major issues regarding study that were used in developing tools for the study later on. A total of 70 questionnaires (50 students and 20 teachers) containing both open-ended and closed-ended items were distributed to the target groups in order to assess the impact of armed conflict on school education and to better understand the protective measures in place to keep education going during times of conflict. Similarly, interview schedules were developed for teachers and parents, which revealed the diversity of view points on the study's concerns and aided in the collection of information from the respondents. Over the course of more than a month, 10 interviews with parents and 15 with school teachers were done. The majority of the interviews were conducted in local language i.e. *Kashmiri,* and they were afterwards transcribed and translated into English. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with students to get deeper understanding of the concerned issues. The study was carried out in Anantnag, a district in the south kashmir region in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents. For conducting fieldwork, Government Higher Secondary Schools (GHSS) located in both rural and urban areas were considered.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Protection of School Education

Stakeholders should try to maintain and sustain education during armed conflict, as it is one of the most crucial determinants for children's future and well-being. In order to achieve the goal of *education for all,* the international community pledged at the World Education Forum Dakar (UNESCO, 2000) to meet the needs of educational standards affected by crisis, natural calamities, and instabilities, and to conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace, and tolerance, as well as help to prevent violence and conflict. So far as the school education is concerned which is very crucial for deciding future aspirations of children, how this important stage of education is being affected in conflict areas of Jammu and Kashmir is the main concern for different stakeholders. To

protect schooling from armed conflict, opinions of different stakeholders are given below.
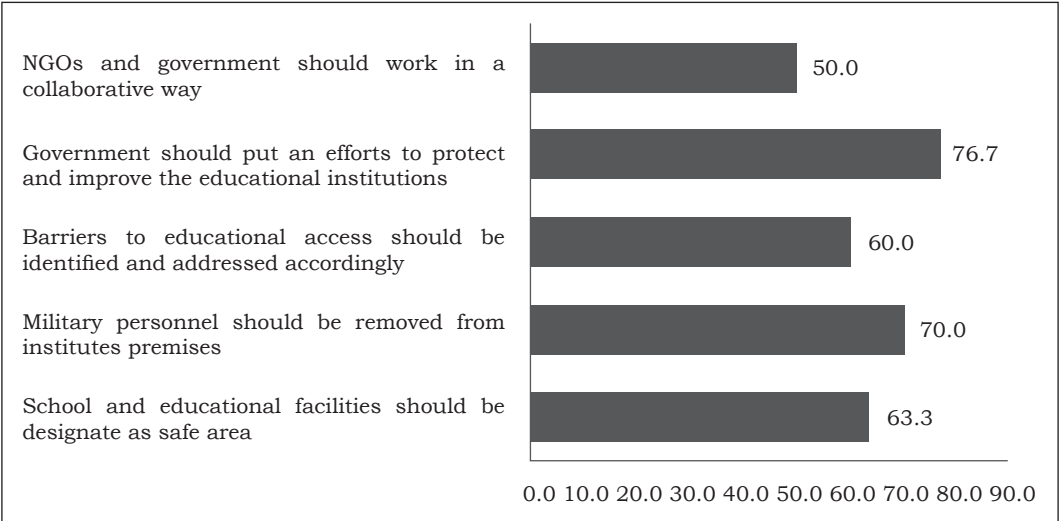

Fig. 1.1: Teachers' Perception towards Protecting Education
Source: Fieldwork, 2019

As a result of humanitarian events such as wars, natural disasters, and health crises, millions of children throughout the world skip school. Education may save a children's life, and not going to school in an emergency or during a conflict situations can put them at danger of child labour, early marriage, exploitation, and anti-social behaviour. It is evident from figure 1.1 that respondents have the convergence of opinion that government should put an efforts to protect and improve the educational institutions (76.7 %) in the valley and military personnel should not be given permission to enter school premises and the one who have occupied school surroundings should be removed. In the same manner, 60 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that obstacles should be identified and addressed accordingly, and 63.30 per cent of respondents are of the opinion that schools and educational institutions must be established as safe areas. In this regard one of the teacher respondent said that,

> *"Whatever the circumstances are, the military forces should not be allowed to enter the school premises"* (2019)

Besides a number of respondents felt the need that NGOs and government should work in a collaborative way to protect schooling in Kashmir. Frequently, the influence of conflict on schooling is disregarded. In such circumstances, education can be a lasting instrument for creating post-conflict peace and restoring

normalcy to the region. It is also a technique of imparting hope and positivity in youth who are surrounded by violence and providing them with opportunities. Creating discontinuities is one of the most difficult aspects of education in a conflict situation. These factors affect both the academic and psycho-social development of students. Particularly talking about the contribution of NGOs in education sector, most of the NGOs are working with the government to build the schools that were destroyed or arson during the uprisings in Kashmir from time to time. These NGOs have identified the destroyed building and are making efforts to rebuild the structure for the public good.

Some of the respondents are of the view that,

"Communities should come forward to make some contributions to protect the education especially when there is chaos all around". FGD, 2019.

There are many cases of attacks on school being observed by the community member teachers and students as well. So in this situation the survival of education is very difficult unless every stakeholder contributes for its sustenance.
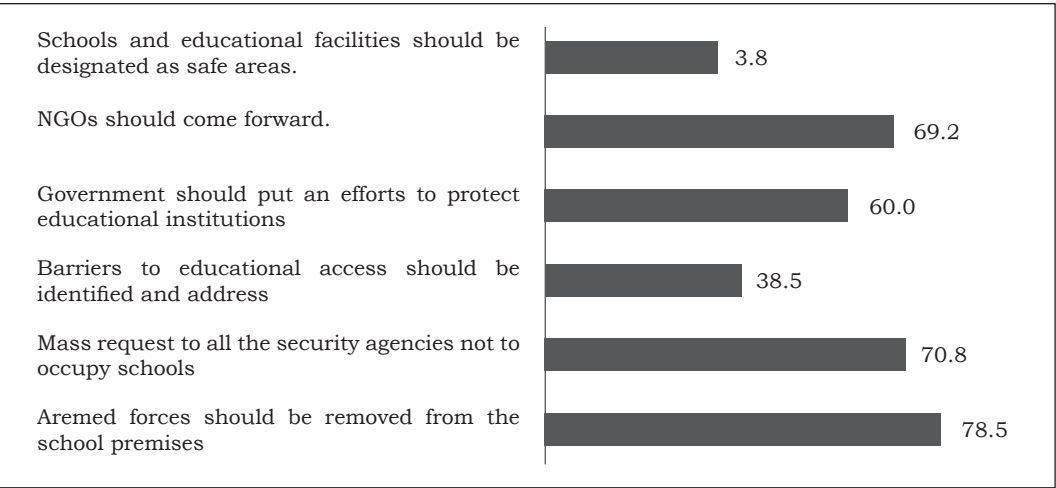

Schools and educational facilities should be designated as safe areas.	3.8
NGOs should come forward.	69.2
Government should put an efforts to protect educational institutions	60.0
Barriers to educational access should be identified and address	38.5
Mass request to all the security agencies not to occupy schools	70.8
Aremed forces should be removed from the school premises	78.5

Fig. 1.2: Students' Perceptions towards Protecting Education
Source: Fieldwork, 2019

According to Figure 1.2, 78.50 per cent of respondents believe that there is a strong need to remove armed forces from school premises and that armed forces should not be granted permission to enter the premises of any educational institutes in order to protect and preserve education in the valley, because all respondents consider it to be the most serious problem in their communities. Furthermore, a sizable proportion of

respondents (70.8 per cent) believe that all armed forces should be asked not to occupy educational facilities. During the focus group discussion, practically every member agreed that a major appeal to all security forces should be organised because there is no other way to halt these school attacks. One of the narrative emerged from the FGD in this regard is below,

> *Halaat kharaab hony kay douraan hum nay bahut sey cases dekhty hain jab schools ko nuksaan pounchaya gya... humary mohally mein bhi eik school ko nuksaan pounchaya gaya. Yehi wajah hai ki parents bhi humy school jany ki ijazat nhe dety jab government ya separatists ki taraf say kabhi paabandiyaan lagti hain.,* (FGD, 2019)

> "We have seen many cases where schools are being destroyed or arson during conflict situation … one of the schools' infrastructure in this locality was also damaged during the uprising of 2016 that too in the day time and this becomes the core reason that even our parents stopped us from going to school during any type of restrictions imposed by either government organizations or separatist groups …"

Based on the above figure, 69.20 per cent of respondents believe that NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) should take an active part in safeguarding and maintaining education in the state during conflict situations. State parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an important role in this process by ensuring that education is a vital component of humanitarian assistance. Surprisingly, 60 per cent of respondents believe that the government should make aggressive efforts to defend education. Furthermore, due to the occupation of school buildings by armed forces, these schools were later clubbed to other adjacent schools, adding to the children's suffering in terms of school access, since they now have to walk further to reach the school. Furthermore, all of these respondents believe that educational hurdles should be identified and addressed in order to improve access to education in the valley. To protect education in the valley's conflict-affected areas, every stakeholder in the state should make it a priority to ensure the safety of educational institutions. During the interview one of the respondents (parent) stated:

> *"Meri umar 43 saal hai, main nay bahut say waqaat ka mushahida kiya hai jahan fouji aaehkaar schoolon mein daakhil hoty hain, inki hadood ki deewarron ko nuksaan pounchaty hain…2011 mein eaik kareebi school mein bhi fouji aaehlkaaroon ney kabza kar liya tha… Hukoomat ko chahy ki security forces ko school kay ander daakhil hony*

ki ijazat nahin dee jaaye chahy woh gaaoon ka school ho ya shehar ka, kyonki bacchy bahut naram dil hoty hain woh jaldi se mayoos ho jaaty hain jiski wajah se woh buray kaamoon ki taraf gaamzan hoty hain." (Fieldwork, 2019)

I am 43, I have witnessed a number of incidents where security forces enter the schools, destroying their boundary walls…one of the nearby school is also occupied by security forces in 2011 probably…government should not allow security forces to enter the school premises in villages or in cities, as children are already soft-hearted they easily get frustrated and start to begin antisocial behaviour…

The people in the local areas should jointly come forward to address this issue with mass appeal. Children and teachers must be prepared and ready to lessen the impact of something risky occurring on school grounds by having the necessary knowledge and abilities. The Global Coalition to Safeguard Education from Attack (GCPEA) has also developed rules for schools to follow in order to protect themselves. 'Parties to armed conflict also utilise schools and universities as bunkers and camps, for arms storage, as detention centres, and for other military uses', according to the GCPEA, putting students and staff's safety at risk and causing institutions to close for varied amounts of time. Long-term, such assaults on education and military usage of schools reduce student attendance and enrolment, obstruct learning, lower educational quality, and limit the number of persons certified to teach.

Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Education

It was observed while interacting with the teachers and students that they are not aware of the activities of the NGOs especially in the field of education. They stated that there is no contribution from their side to protect and promote education during conflict situations. (*No attempts are being made in this study to interact with NGOs. These are the perceptions of students and teachers only*). Towards the contribution of NGOs in protecting school education in the valley, it was observed that students and teachers have mixed views. Some of the respondents are of the view that NGOs have identified the problems of school education in conflict situations and are hosting indoor gathering but they have not contributed much other than appreciating the toppers with prizes. One of the teachers stated that,

"*Talking about the efficiency of NGOs especially in our district, there are many organizations who have hanged big signboards outside their offices, but no developmental work has been taken up so far*". (Fieldwork, 2019)

Even in the NGO sector, there is a lack of accountability and transparency. On the other side some of the respondents are of the view that NGOs usually do not come forward in such difficult situations as they also have safety concerns, 'nobody wanted to get abused or hurt in such situations be it NGO workers, Government worker or any civilian'. Sometimes with the help of community members classes are being arranged in localities to keep the students in touch with their studies.

CHALLENGES IN IMPROVING EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KASHMIR

Article 21-A of the constitutiom of India deals with the basic right to education. "All children from 6–14 years will receive free and compulsory education in such a way as the state may by law designate." Everyone now acknowledges the constitutional necessity of education in India. However, in areas with ongoing conflicts, particularly in Kashmir, what occurs with this right is known to all. Whether the problems in Kashmir's education are caused by natural calamities or man-made ones, the children always suffer. In this regard, the researcher has attempted to assess the experiences of teachers, parents, and students and has gathered data on the difficulties that many stakeholders have faced in the pursuit of progress.
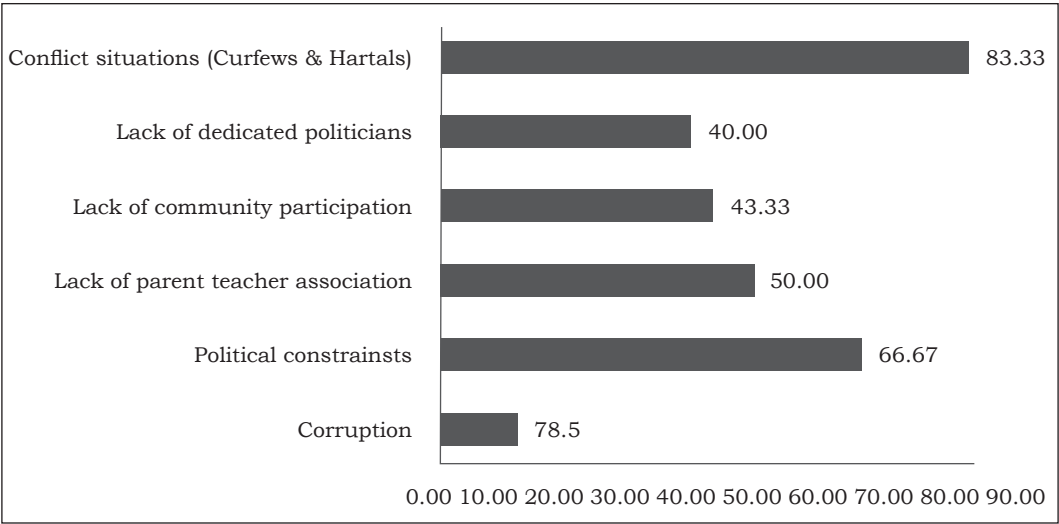

Fig. 1.3: Major Challenges in Development of Education
Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Education in communities impacted by violence has many difficulties. The above figure makes it clear that one of the main issues with protecting education in Kashmir's conflict-torn region is the conflict

scenario, which includes curfews, *hartals*, shutdowns, incidences of stone-pelting, internet suspension, and similar factors as a fundamental reason influencing education. Conflict circumstances were cited by 83.33 per cent of the teachers surveyed as a difficulty in protecting and improving education. In addition to this 66.67 per cent of respondents are of the opinion that there are countless political constraints which came into the way of development of education in the valley. This problem completely hampers the progress of student's education and the entire education system gets affected by these uninvited challenges. Besides, there is also a dearth of dedicated politicians which becomes a challenge for developing the education system in the disturbed state. Some teachers felt that challenges are also coming from the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) because the level of participation in these meetings is very pathetic. 50 per cent of teachers are of the view that the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) is also a challenge to overcome. 43.33 per cent of the teachers are of the opinion that lack of Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) is also a challenge in improving education in Kashmir. Community involvement is essential because when schools, parents, and the community collaborate, remarkable things may happen in the lives of children and young adults. Schools alone cannot be held accountable for raising a

well-educated and civic-minded generation of children. In addition to this, most of the parents are of the opinion that armed conflict in the valley and corruption are the two main challenges which come into the way of improving education. One of the respondents said,

> "*Kisi bhi siyasatdan ki yeh koshish nahin rahi ki kaise taaleemi aadary ko sudhara ja sakhay, haalanki woh halaat say ba-khoobi waqif hain ...*" (Fieldwork, 2019)

There is no determination among the concerned politician to improve education system though they are quite aware of the grave issues.

This conflict needs to end, and most importantly, corruption needs to be eradicated, in order to promote education. Every stakeholder in education, including teachers, educational administrators, students, and community members, should play their part and approach things with great care and enthusiasm. Examples of such things include transparency in the educational system, creating a safe environment for learning, well-organized teachers' schedules and lesson plans, and recruiting trained teachers.

REMEDIAL MEASURES TO IMPROVE SCHOOLING IN KASHMIR

Education should be considered as a development agent and should be restored as soon as possible during emergencies. For rebuilding

and reconstructing education one of the core tools is a good analysis of situations of education which would be helpful in reformation and transformation (Pigozzi, 1999). From the very beginning, planning should be a part of every education programme and some important measures should be taken into consideration, such as, non-formal approaches, child-centered education, besides parents, communities and local resources should also be involved. In the study, responses were obtained about the reconstruction measures that need to be taken up to manage and improve educational sector in the union Terrtory of Jammu and Kashmir. Measures such as free coaching classes, conducting extra classes, mass promotions, scrapping vacations, etc., are some of the solutions as opined by respondents.
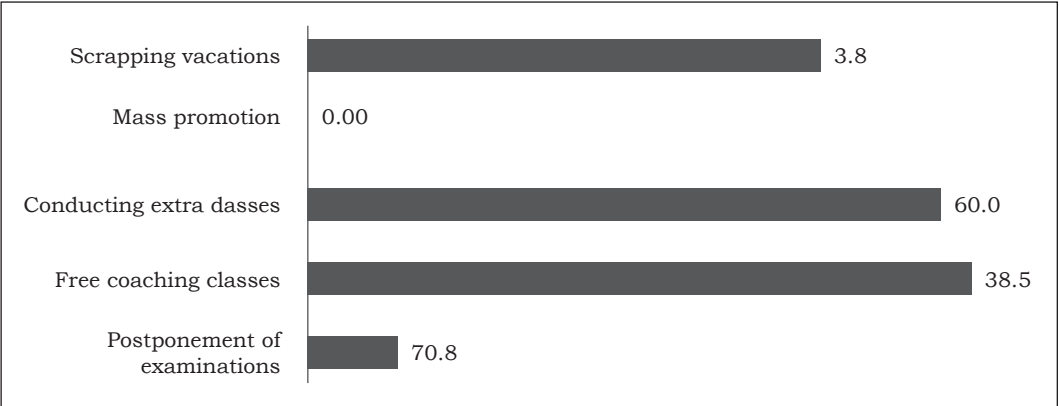

Fig. 1.4: Remedial Measures to Improve Quality in Education
Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Following the study's findings, 73.33 per cent of respondents said that authorities in educational institutions should set up free coaching sessions. The teachers held the opinion that free coaching sessons can improve students' performance at this stage of education and that students who are academically weak should receive extra attention. In this approach, the full curriculum can be taught to children even during school closures, curfews, or other types of *hartals* that interfere with the regular operation of the educational system. However, during curfews, schools are frequently closed, and students miss their classes, which becomes the most significant factor in increasing pressure on teachers to complete the given syllabus within the time frame. As a result, 70 per cent of teacher responders believe that they would hold extra lessons on normal working days to compensate for the loss, and that students would benefit from learning the complete syllabus. Postponement of secondary

school examinations is impossible because this is the critical stage for setting the pace for future aspirations and fulfilling the goals of life and education, so a very low percentage, i.e., only 10 per cent of teachers, are in favour of postponement of examinations because delay in examinations affects students' continuous preparation in their academics. Scrapping the vacations in the conflict-affected areas is another remedial measure felt by teachers. To avoid academic loss in the event of a shutdown, *hartal* (strike), unanticipated occurrence, or forced closure of the school, the next holiday should be regarded as a working day. Separate remedial sessions should be offered at the beginning of the academic year in the mornings or evenings for slow learners with large learning gaps. The above figure clearly depicts that there is not even a single respondent who is in favour of the mass promotion of students because of conflict situations.

Parents, as stakeholders in education, are well aware of the fact that suitable corrective actions are essential to address their children's educational issues. Many parents believe that free coaching lessons provided by the school administration, particularly for children in Class X and XII, are necessary to boost their learning and reduce stress before sitting for their board exams. There are already a lot of thoughts racing through their heads about their future goals,

so adequate instruction would be quite beneficial to them. These free coaching sessions will help to bring underperforming and weak students into the mainstream. According to one of the parent respondents,

"...Hum itnay padhy likhy nahin hain ki bachu ki padhai ko leky kuch ikdaam utha sakhen, hum humesha kehty rehty hain ki khud say beath kay padhai kiya kro lekin unko Maths, Science aur Engish padhny mein mushkilaat ka samna karna padhta hai" (Fieldwork, 2019)

We cannot take any steps being not so literate, we always scold our kids, sit and study by you, but they feel hardships in mathematics, science and English language subjects.

As a result, some respondents (parents) believe that public holidays should be eliminated to compensate for academic loss. When schools first open, teachers are rushed to complete the curriculum, which negatively affects students' exam performance. Private tuition was another suggestion made by some responders, but it has its limitations as well, as children cannot attend tuition centres when there is conflict or instability in the neighbourhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Education should be given priority and should not get disturbed by hurdles. Whenever possible, authorities must

maintain safe and secure access to education during the unrest in the valley, by engaging with school, communities and all other relevant stakeholders in developing risk-reduction strategies and comprehensive safety and security. During periods of conflict, security personnel's camps and bunkers should not be established near educational institutions.

2. In order to turn educational institutions into safe learning environments, students should be made fearless and the consequences of conflict which have left a huge mental and psychological scar on their personalities should be resolved. Authorities must work to provide a safe learning environment so that the parents will get convinced to send their children, especially girls, to schools during the unrest, and it is only possible if educational institutions are designated as safe zones.

3. To ensure that teachers can complete their work and finish the syllabus on time, the educational department should adopt such teacher policies that encourage greater consistency among teachers. Teachers should be more punctual when conditions in the valley are normal and schools are operating normally. Furthermore, in order to increase student-centered learning, authorities must organise

pre-service and in-service training programmes for teachers.

4. The implementation of pertinent curriculum in the schools during times of conflict requires special consideration. Priority must be given to timely curriculum updates, including the addition of new areas or pertinent topics as the situation demands.

5. As the findings of the study suggests, support for the re-establishment and continuity of education must be a priority strategy for NGOs in conflict and post conflict situations as well. As a core stakeholder NGOs should also monitor, report and respond to disruptions to education during conflict. They should come forward and take responsibilities for protecting and enhancing educational development in the valley. NGOs can also support programmes that respond to the psychological needs of the children by providing the counselling sessions on the regular basis.

Conclusion and Implications

In today's world development can be brought up in society by education only. In the conflict-affected areas like that of Kashmir, education plays a pertinent role in protecting future generation. The first and most important step is to protect education and educational infrastructures; regardless of the circumstances, education should not be hampered in any way. Education

can be a way to mediate the conflict and education services should be included into humanitarian aid as asserted by a number of studies (Aguilar and Retamal, 1998; Machel, 2001; Save the children, 2010). To improve the quality of education an effective mechanism should be put in place to check education related malpractices rampant in society. Certain things such as transparency in the education system, create a safe environment for learning, well organised teachers schedule and plan lessons, recruitment of trained teachers are some of the pertinent things that every stakeholder should take with great care. Access to education as a right should be maintained at all times, especially in the most difficult situations, and should not be disregarded during times of conflict. When educational opportunities are lost as a result of conflict, it is not only a loss of individuals, but also a loss of socio-cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2018) and a society's ability to recover from the conflict. Efforts should be taken to maintain the educational system during armed conflict since inequalities in educational access can lead to other inequities, such as, income, employment, nutrition, and health, as well as political status, which can worsen the situation in society. Furthermore, in order to recoup the shambled state of education, confidence must be rebuilt by creating a peaceful environment. However, ensuring that all students are incorporated into educational communities should not come at the expense of educational quality.

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