Issues and Challenges of Education Provision in Countries Affected by Violent Conflict with Special Reference to Iraq

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Abstract. The end of the Cold War did not finish tension and conflict worldwide. According to the statistics, there were 57 different major armed conflicts in 45 different locations in the 12-year post-cold war period 1990-2001 (Wallensteen, P. 2002). Some of the frequent conflicts are intra-country and some are inter-country. Unfortunately, both kinds of aggression are likely to result in widespread devastating physical destruction, massive displacement of population as well as considerable fatalities and injuries to the population and may even lead to many states being in danger of collapse. All these will inevitably seriously destroy the normal process of educational provision. Just as Tawil argues that violence appears to be increasingly affecting society and education system in general (Tawil, S.1997:8). This paper is about the issues and challenges of education provision in violent conflict situations and educational reconstruction in post-conflicts. The paper highlights some of the main issues and debates in this arena, with special reference to Iraq. The wider implications for emergency education in violent conflict situations and educational reconstruction in post-conflicts are also explored.

Introduction

The outline of the paper is as follows: Section 1 is entitled, "Literature Review." This section will review the literature on the impact of war on education, in a broad view. Section 2,"Education provision in conflicts and sanctions and post-war education reconstruction in Iraq". In this section, there will be a critical analysis of the priorities of the emergent education programme in Iraq. This is done so as to be able to demonstrate the wider impact of the emergent educational programme on the educational reconstruction after the violent conflict. Section 3 is the concluding section. With the reference to the literature review and the case study, a summary of the overall arguments will be presented.

Literature Review

The Impact of War on Education

The impact of war influences all aspects of education and educational systems. The statistically observable physical manifestations of violence with regard to the education system (killing and/or abduction of students and teachers, destruction of infrastructure, enrolment of students and teachers) indicate the extent or scale of the problem (Tawil, S. 1997: 8).

Firstly, schools are often the deliberate target buildings to be destroyed during conflicts. In addition, schools building are often used for military purposes, general administration and shelter for refugees and displaced persons. A rapid educational assessment by the end of 2000 revealed that 150 schools which were serving 83,240 children in 8 sub regions have been damaged in Eritrea conflicts (Norwegian refugee Council 2001, cited in Ghebreselassie, T. K.). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 75% of schools were destroyed during the conflict (European Commission 2002).

Secondly, during the war, a large number of qualified teachers flee the country, are injured or killed, or mobilized to the front line, which results in dramatic declination in the number of teachers. For example, in the Rwandan conflicts, more than 60% of the teachers fled the country or
were killed (Roger, 1. 2002:2). In addition, far too many adolescent boys under 18 years old have been recruited as soldiers during the wartime. It is estimated that more than 300,000 children under the age of 18 are currently fighting in conflicts around the world today (Bensalah. K. et al 2001:18). The fact is that all those children, adolescents and teachers have also experienced deep psychological suffering during times of war, which can cause severe damage on teaching and learning.

Thirdly, through the physical destruction of school buildings and other infrastructure, conflicts have a direct and immediate economic impact. In addition, the potential resources of the country have been directed to the war and high military expenditure squeezes out effective investment in education. For example, in Angola in 1999, the military expenditure was 23.5% of GDP, while educational expenditure was only 2.3% of GDP.

Above all, the brutality of war has led to an extreme crisis of educational finance, the serious shortage of qualified teachers and materials, the deprived opportunity of millions of children and adolescents’ regular schooling as well as permanent psychological scars and trauma from the terrible experience. As a result, it is usually quite a long time to recovery and reconstruction of education from the destruction of war.

Emergency Education in Violent Conflict Situations and Educational Reconstruction

Afterwards

A couple of decades ago, the World Bank were almost totally directed by economic considerations, whereas now, the importance of education has become clearly recognized. Unfortunately, the number of conflicts worldwide is on the rise, and many of the countries that have been recently affected by war, are suffering collapse of the education system. As Tawil, S. (2000:1) argued that during the past decade armed conflict has proved to be one of the major obstacles for the realization of the Education for All (EFA) goals set out in Dakar Framework action. It is obvious that education in conflict and crisis situations has become the new greatest challenge to education and its planners and managers.

Most recently, the mid-decade meeting of the Education for All Forum (Amman 1996) stressed the importance of ensuring that education should be incorporated within the first emergency interventions; that is, that education should be included early on within the linear relief-rehabilitation-development continuum (Tawil.1997:7). The emergency programme, concerning the basic requirements needed to get education systems working again, respond to the most urgent needs, both for the infrastructural and material and for the human component’. (UNESCO, cited in Arnhold, N, et al. 1998:12). Even, Bensalah et al (2000:9 cited in R$ireland Silje) argues that any educational programme must be a development programme, and not merely a stopgap measure that will halt later. Lately several humanitarian agencies have highlighted that emergency education should be flexible, mobile and implemented fast. That means, it has to be developed on basic principles and be changeable enough to suit local needs and circumstances (Nyrud Lina, 2002:28). On the other hand, Chambers(1994b:1441 cited in RSireland Silje. 2002:17) identifies rapid response can be one of its greatest challenge. He emphasises that rapid has become a liability, but also "rapid often means wrong". As UNESCO argues that educational rehabilitation and reconstruction is a 'more or less protracted process' with short-, medium-and long-term aspects.

Case Study--Emergency Education and Educational Reconstruction in Iraq Affected by Violent Conflict

The reality of Iraq during the past 14 years, especially in the area of education, has been unique. In order to describe the outlines of the devastation of Iraq and its struggle for reconstruction, a structure for discussion of the situation and the circumstances is presented below.

History Background

In 1932, Iraq became independent and founded a kingdom after occupation by Britain during World War I. In the following decades, a Republic of Iraq was declared in 1958. The war with Iran due to disputed territory began in 1980, a lasting and costly eight-year war(1980-88). Although the Iran-Iraq war had cost the lives of over 100,000 Iraqis and caused massive damage, Iraq was still a high-middle-income country, particularly in the area of education regarded as one of the best in the
Middle East, according to the UN description. Then following the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the Gulf War of the 1990-1991 between Iraq and US-led forces broke out, exerting a serious negative impact on all aspects of the country of Iraq. In particular, UN sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1990 badly influenced education in Iraq, the good educational achievements of the past were increasingly undermined. In March 2003, the US-led forces invaded Iraq after 12 years of strict economic sanctions. During the 2003 U.S.-led occupation, the education system continued to deteriorate rapidly. In June 2004, the Coalition Provisional Authority transferred sovereignty to the Iraqi Interim Government (IG) and the election of its president, Ghazi al-Ujayl al-YAWR, was held in January 2005.

Impact of Wars and Sanctions on Education in Iraq

In Iraq, the successive wars, from the 1980-1998 Iran-Iraq war to the 1990-1991 Gulf War, from the 1990s’ silent war—economic sanction to the 2003 US-led forces invasion—Second Gulf War, have led to a tremendous collapse of the educational system.

Deterioration of School Buildings and Infrastructure. During the period of the 1960 to 1990, Iraq built tens of thousands of schools across the whole country. However, due to structural damage and deterioration after two wars and 13 years of economic sanctions, more than 83% of 18,478 primary and secondary schools in Iraq need urgent reconstruction (UNESCO 2003:38). This number has increased after the war on Iraq in 2003. UNICEF estimates that more than 200 schools were destroyed in the conflict and some 3000 schools were looted following the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The Enormous Cost to Children and Teachers in the Wartime. According to the statistics, during the past decades Iraq has trained over 31,000 Iraqi children for war and has militarized Iraqi society and culture, including both boys and girls, some as young as 10 (CDI, November, 2002). During the Iran-Iraq War and the 1991 Gulf War, many children participated in the lasting battles in Iraq. It is reported that in 1998, 3,000 child soldiers joined the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) forces, more than 10 percent of which were girls. Currently, approximately 1,000 children are in the official Iraqi government armed forces. In addition, the UN estimates that the war could lead to more than three quarters of refugee children and one million internally displaced children (Simons, G. 2003:33). This situation has also led to the shortage of qualified teachers in Iraq and the deprivation of children’s opportunities to access school. The quality of education was in serious decline.

Extreme Shortage of Finance on Education in Iraq. According to UNESCO, until 1989 Iraq had been allocating 6% of its budget to education ($2.5 billion), with an expenditure of $620 per student. This percentage is higher than the maximum rate in developing countries, which stands at 3.8%. Furthermore, during the Gulf War and the economic sanctions, government resources switched to military purposes and funding for education decreased dramatically, with little or no finance. Even with the implementation of the 'Oil-For-Food' Programme in 1997, the spending of education was only $47 per student in 2002 (Basic Education Coalition. February 2004:1). Teachers' salaries also fell dramatically, from pre-war levels corresponding to about $500 to $1000 per month, to current values from $5 to $40 per month (UNESCO, 2003:14). This situation inevitably led to teachers’ departure from the profession and placed severe constraints on activities such as teacher training. Simultaneously, the Ministry could hardly provide any textbooks and educational materials. Above all, the crisis of finance in education has resulted in the shortages of teachers, supplies and equipment, which directly caused the significant decline of the quality of education in Iraq, as well as limited access for children to schooling.

Meeting the Challenges of Education in Iraq

Iraq's long-lasting emergency has led to a variety of consequences for education. Many organizations have been involved in the efforts to emergency education assistance and educational reconstruction, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID), UNESCO, UNICEF and many private voluntary organizations (PVOs). There has been great progress, but much still remains to be done.

Provision of the Emergency Education—the 'Oil for Food' Programme. After the 1991 Gulf War until 1997, UNESCO provided assistance in the rehabilitation of schools and the provision of school furniture and educational materials. However, these emergency provisions were quite inadequate to meet the immense needs of education during the war in Iraq (Simon, G. 2003:33). The
UN Security did not launch the Oil-For-Food Programme until December 1996, to permit Iraq to sell oil in exchange for humanitarian supplies, including educational supplies. After 1997, UNESCO began to implement emergency education under the Oil-For-Food Programme, which contributed much to the emergency education during the crisis conditions in Iraq. The expenditure of education was about 3.6% of the revenues in the Center/South, and 7% of those in the North, principally aiming at increasing access to education, increasing students’ learning and achievements. In addition, UNESCO devoted more to the rebuilding of the damaged schools and also the provision of school desks, furniture and school supplies as well as the provision of books, reference and other materials. According to the statistics until 2003, when the programme ended, there were 157 primary and secondary school buildings renovated or constructed and 152,000 school desks distributed. Furthermore, $1,907,935 worth of books and reference materials was provided to schools.

All these measures have helped to increase access to school and enhance the quality of education. It is obvious, the Oil-For-Food Programme has played a vital role to the rehabilitation, but the level of provision for emergency education was still very low compared with the actual need. Education was still in an emergency situation.

Provision of Educational Development after the Wars. Immediately after the war in May 2006, USAID and other international agencies combined with the Ministry of Education, placed the priority of the educational reconstruction and development from May 2003 to March 2004. During this period, three main educational reconstruction programmes were implemented. They are the Rehabilitation and Construction of Schools Programme, Material Distribution Programme and Teachers Training Programme. In particular, the last programme, which was not done during the conflicts, has more significant implications for the educational development in the long run.

Firstly, it is statistic that there were 2,358 schools rebuilt throughout the country during the 2003-2004 school year. These were some of the 18,478 primary and secondary schools (83% of the country’s schools), which needed renovating. At the same time, Muzhir al-Dulaymi, spokesman for the League for the Defence of Iraqi People’s Rights, told Aljazeera that contracts for reconstructing schools in Iraq were not adequate to upgrade educational premises to the required standard.

Secondly, in order to support the Ministry of Education (MOE) to bring students back into schools, 2302,513 student kits and 140,235 teacher kits were distributed at the primary and secondary schools. According to the statistics from the new MOE in 2003, approximately 11,066 primary schools and 2,968 secondary schools are open normally; 4.3 million primary students and 1.5 million secondary students are enrolled. In addition, more than 8.7 million textbooks were printed and distributed, large amount of desks, chairs, cabinets and chalkboard were also provided(...). But, according to the statistics in 2004, there were still 31% of girls and 17.5% of boys failing to access primary school. In rural regions, 50% of girls are estimated to be out of school. Those who do go to school leave early: 40-50 children drop out between grades 1 and 6; 30-40% drop out between grades 7 and 9 (Coalition Basic Education, 2004).

Thirdly, in order to promote the quality of teaching, the teacher-training programme laid the foundation for a change in teaching philosophies, encouraging teachers to freely express themselves and participate in decision making on the training content. In addition, the training also had a practical component, which introduced new teaching strategies, promoting education based on mutual respect, encouraging new ideas such as a tolerant and democratic atmosphere both in the training sessions and in the classroom. But, to ensure the quality of education, the establishment of an educational assessment programme is indispensable in the long term development of education.

Conclusion from the Case Study. Currently Iraq's Education is in great need of assistance. With the help of UNISCO, USAID and other donor agencies, the new national and local authorities have made great efforts to put a high priority on reopening schools as soon as there are signs of hope and a return to normal life. Donor aid for the education system in Iraq included assistance not only for the short term provision of emergency education, which is quite important for the further construction of education afterwards, but also for the long-term reconstruction and development of education, which is essential for the future of the country.

Partnership between aid organizations and the new government in Iraq has made significant progress in addressing the short- and long-term education needs in Iraq. In addition, the Iraqi government should take full advantage of available educational resources, using them wisely, by building on the experience of its many partners as well as on its own experience, thus ensuring the long-term success of the process leading to true peace in Iraq.
Conclusion

This study has dealt with the complexity of the emergency education and the post-conflict reconstruction of the education system. In the light of the empirical and theoretical literature review and the development of a conceptual framework for this study, a critical review of the agencies was conducted, with special reference to Iraq.

This study has critically analyzed the work of UNESCO and USAID, in order to determine to what extent these agencies have accounted for the emergency education and reconstruction of education after conflicts and how assistance for emergency education and post-conflict educational reconstruction could be more appropriate in Iraq and even worldwide.

In the case of Iraq all levels of the education system declined and much was destroyed as a result of the long lasting emergency. If education is not prioritized during times of conflict, the victims are not only deprived of their right to safety and comfort, but also their right to education. That is to say, one cannot wait for peace before providing education. Education and developmental activities should be prioritized once the primary needs of food, shelter and physical health have been met. In addition, it has also been suggested that there is a need to move beyond agency assistance and to encourage internal solutions in Iraq as well as other countries under conflict.

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