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OF SCIENCES AND LITERATURE

**An Investigation Into War-Related Special Education Needs in Displaced
Children with The Aim Of Exploring Effective and Inclusive Teaching
Strategies in Conflict Regions: The Case of Bamenda in Anglophone
Cameroon**

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ABSTRACT

It's a well-known fact that many children facing difficult circumstances such as war, poverty, and natural disasters struggle to access proper education. This is especially true for children who have been displaced by armed conflict. Even when they find themselves in areas of relative calm with ongoing education, they often struggle to fit in due to the war-related educational needs they have. However, it is the fundamental right of every child to have access to formal education, even in the context of war, as endorsed by the United Nations and ratified by member countries. This research aimed to investigate the war-related special educational needs of children who have been displaced by the ongoing armed conflict in the English regions of Cameroon. Three main questions were therefore addressed. The participants, including the head teacher and teachers of School A in Bamenda, were selected through purposive sampling. Qualitative data was collected through telephone interviews and analyzed using Creswell's thematic approach (Creswell, 2015). The main findings revealed that the ongoing armed conflict had a significant impact on displaced children, leading to a sense of insecurity and lack of interest in education. The children also faced various learning challenges such as inability to concentrate in class, low self-esteem, lack of trust and respect, language barriers, and lack of basic learning materials. It was noted that there was no formal strategy used in School A to address these challenges.

The discussion of the findings in the light of past research concluded that the war-related learning challenges manifested by children displaced by armed conflict fall into the category of special educational needs rooted not in physical or functional biological defects, but in psycho-emotional turmoil (Bradley & Danielson, 2002).

The inability to sustain basic concentration levels in class was identified to have the most significant impact on the learning ability of the children displaced by war. It was also noted that these children carry unresolved mental health issues, compromising their ability to engage in learning, which should ideally be dialogic and participatory according to the theoretical framework of this research – the mutual enquiry theory (Lakasing et al., 2020).

From the above conclusion, this research made the pronouncement that it is evident that the subject of inclusion cannot be avoided when discussing education of children displaced by armed conflict.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing global trend emphasizing the importance of creating a more inclusive society (Krischler et al., 2019). This trend is particularly evident in the field of education (Ainscow, 2020). Recognizing the challenges that children from disadvantaged backgrounds face in accessing proper formal education, there is an international emphasis on the idea that access to education is a fundamental right for every human being (Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948; Committee on the Rights of the Child of 2008). According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, every child, regardless of their background, social status, or economic standing, should have access to formal education, which is essential for self-improvement and fulfillment. This stance is also supported by the "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001 in the United States, which mandates provisions to ensure that every child has the opportunity to receive a quality education.

In efforts to develop an inclusive educational strategy, researchers, educational stakeholders, governments, and international organizations have made various attempts to assess children's needs (Lundqvist et al., 2018). The objective has been to determine the level of support required for children with different challenges to have fair access to the general curriculum and to participate as fully as possible in mainstream classrooms (Lundqvist et al., 2018). This exploration has led to the widely recognised concept of special educational needs (Daniel, 2024).

One of the factors that can lead to special education needs in children is the impact of war. Studies have shown that war significantly affects education, especially for students who are the main focus of the teaching process (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2011; Pherali & Sahar, 2018; Flensner et al., 2019). This finding is consistent with the situation in the troubled anglophone regions of Cameroon, which have been affected by an ongoing armed conflict since 2017 (Achu, 2019; Allegrozzi, 2020). Reports from media outlets, human rights organizations, and other national and international non-governmental organizations have highlighted the various ways in which the ongoing conflict in anglophone Cameroon has impacted and continues to impact students, teachers, and the education process (Beseng et al., 2023).

In spite of the ongoing war in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, the fundamental importance of education, as expressed in article 28 of the UN's 1989 policy on education, has been upheld. This is evident in the efforts made by various stakeholders in Cameroonian education to ensure that children's education continues despite the armed conflict (Ekonde, 2019). The endeavor to uphold education for children amidst conflict is supported by Boyden & June (1996), who argue that in conflict areas, education should be given the highest priority. This is further supported by Sommers (2009), who emphasizes that the provision of education has been utilised as a part of humanitarian response in times of war.

The primary focus of this research was the measures needed to provide additional support to children who have been displaced by armed conflict. Children forced to leave their homes due to violence and armed conflict often struggle to adapt to new school environments. These students face various challenges due to the impact of war and the new circumstances of their displacement (Bürgin et al., 2022).

It is therefore important to consider whether it is enough to simply enroll displaced children in new schools in their new communities, expecting them to participate in studies like the local children. There hasn't been much research on the specific needs of children displaced by war and how they can be supported to engage in the educational process fully.

This research aimed to explore the special education needs of children displaced by violent conflict, with the goal of informing educational policies and practices in such environments. Addressing this gap in the existing literature was the main objective of this research. To achieve this, the following research questions guided the investigation:

- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteacher of School A in Bamenda Cameroon, regarding the impact of the on-going armed conflict on displaced students?
- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteacher of School A about the learning challenges that are manifested by the children who have been displaced by armed conflict.

- What are the teaching strategies that have been employed to address the impact of the armed conflict on displaced children? If any, how are they benefitting the displaced children?

The research design that was considered relevant to for answering these research questions was the qualitative interview-based approach. This design is appropriate for this research because the data needed to answer the research questions is qualitative (Punch & Oancea, 2009). Qualitative data is based on the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of participants' experiences and their interpretations (Cohen et al., 2011).

This study is empirical as it involves collecting original data from participants (Kothari, 2004). The participants for this empirical research were selected using purposive or non-probability sampling (Kothari, 2004; Punch and Oancea, 2014). The participants included the head teacher and teachers of School A in Bamenda, Cameroon, which has accommodated a significant number of children displaced by the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon.

The participants were contacted via email and telephone calls, and these communications will be recorded. In accordance with ethical principles of empirical research, informed consent was obtained from the participants. Participant information forms were sent via email. The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality (Cohen et al., 2011). As part of the ethical requirements for this empirical research, multiple-level permission for accessing the teachers and headteacher was obtained (Creswell, 2012).

Permission was obtained from the headteacher of School A, whose teachers took part in the interviews, as well as from the teachers themselves who participated in the research.

The data provided by the participants in this research through telephone interviews was analyzed using Creswell's thematic approach (Creswell, 2015). This approach is useful as it helps to identify key themes from the in-depth participant data (Nowell et al., 2017; Creswell, 2012). It is particularly relevant because it effectively captures the overall essence of activities characteristic of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2009).

After analyzing and presenting research findings, there is a discussion section that leads to relevant conclusions, contributions, and suggestions aimed at influencing policy and practice related to the education of children who have been displaced by armed conflict. The work concludes with a summary of the entire study and recommendations for practice and policy. Suggestions for further research are also provided.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The fierce fighting and violence that often characterize armed conflicts compromise the delivery of basic services, especially education, in countries. This has been the case with the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, which started in 2017 (Achu, 2019). With conflicts spread across many nations, the undermining impact of armed conflict on education has been considered a global crisis. This argument is supported by international organizations such as the United Nations Organization (UNO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (Allegrozzi, 2020). Several researchers have also confirmed this phenomenon, including Tidwell (2004), Cervantes-Duarte & Fernández-Cano (2016), Jones & Naylor (2014), Sommers (2009), and Pherali & Sahar (2018).

This chapter will begin with a brief overview of the Cameroonian context. Further in the chapter, a discussion of what literature says regarding armed conflict and the practice of education will follow. Additionally, the reality of special education needs will be considered with the objective of making relevant links with the challenges posed by armed conflict on the practice of education, especially in classroom teaching. A theoretical framework within which a discussion on the challenges of learning by children displaced by war will be highlighted.

2.2. THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF CAMEROON

The state of Cameroon has two education systems, the English sub-system and the French sub-system, which operate from primary to tertiary levels (Shu, 1985). These systems originated from the colonial influence of Britain and France, who controlled Cameroon as their colonial territory between 1922-1961. The English and French sub-systems of education in Cameroon use different languages of instruction, curricula, study durations, and issue different certificates at each level from primary to tertiary (Cockburn *et al.*, 2017).

In Cameroon, it is primarily the government's responsibility to promote education in both the English and French sub-systems. However, non-governmental institutions and individuals also have the authority to establish and operate educational institutions to assist the government in delivering education effectively to Cameroonian citizens (Cockburn *et al.*, 2017; Law Number 98/004, 1998). As a result, there are private and religious schools in both education sub-systems across all levels, from primary to tertiary, as stipulated by Law Number 98/004, 1998.

The non-state schools in Cameroon are established to support the government in providing education to all citizens. The government provides annual state subsidies to the proprietors of private and confessional schools to assist with school administration. According to Cameroonian government policy, the proprietors are responsible for funding staff salaries and school

expenses through annual tuition fees collected from students (Law No 2004/022).

Teaching in Cameroon follows a learner-centered approach known as the PIC Model (Planning, Interaction, and Consolidation Model) which is competence-based. This approach focuses on teaching concepts with real-life implications rather than as abstract theories. Students engage with the concepts, share their perspectives, and perform tasks based on what they have learned. The PIC teaching strategy in Cameroon encourages participatory teaching and learning, aligning with modern teaching approaches (Sequeira, 2012; Kachisa, 2004).

The delivery of education to Cameroonian citizens has been relatively smooth over the years, despite some brief interruptions due to tension around the period of presidential elections. However, since 2017, there has been a protracted and intense disruption. This disruption mainly affected education in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, where the English Subsystem of Education, a heritage from Britain, is practised.

The disruption began in 2017 when a protest staged in 2016 by Cameroon Anglophone Lawyers and teachers escalated into an armed conflict (Achu, 2019). Non-state armed groups that were formed during this turmoil instigated the shutting down of schools (Allegrozzi, 2020). Students and teachers were gripped by fear, and many stayed at home. Some who attempted to continue teaching and learning were kidnapped and released after huge ransoms had been paid. Others who ignored the injunction of the non-state

fighters and continued with teaching or learning were brutally punished and left with fatal injuries, while some were summarily executed (Human Rights Watch Report, 2019).

The anti-school campaign launched by the non-state armed groups resulted in the destruction of school infrastructure, including the burning or demolition of essential educational facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and student residential blocks (Ibid.).

Despite the hostility, some non-state schools in urban areas continued to operate, especially confessional schools where heavy military presence undermined the activities of the non-state armed groups. However, many parents in urban areas were hesitant to send their children to school regularly. The functioning of schools that remained open in urban areas was therefore not smooth and effective, as teachers themselves were handicapped by threats from non-state fighters. Therefore, those who continued teaching did so intermittently and without the necessary enabling atmosphere for lesson preparation and delivery (Ekonde, 2019).

Furthermore, due to the massive displacement of families caused by the volatile situation, especially in the rural areas where non-state armed group activities were rife, there occurred a vast exodus of students, some of whom left rural areas to settle in the urban areas that were relatively calm. Other students accompanied their families, leaving the English-speaking regions to other safer regions of the country (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2020). From this backdrop, Sixtus (2019) regarded education in

Cameroon as a victim of war. This conclusion confirms the already mentioned position of researchers and international organizations regarding the impact of armed conflict on the delivery of education (Allegrozzi, 2020).

Having considered the state of affairs in Cameroon as concerns education and especially the huge toll the armed conflict has had on the practice of education in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, the next section will focus on what other researchers have concluded about the impact of armed conflict on education.

2.3. THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

There are two types of armed conflict identified by Szayna et al. (2017), each characterized by distinct patterns of violence. The first type, called interstate armed conflict, involves war between two legitimate states. In this type of conflict, the formally constituted soldiers of each state fight to defend their national interests. The second type, intrastate armed conflict, refers to civil wars, political violence, and acts of terrorism within a single state.

While interstate armed conflict has become less common despite ongoing border disputes, intrastate armed conflict has increased in some countries worldwide (Ibid.). One reason for the higher prevalence of intrastate armed conflict is the rise in civil wars, acts of terrorism, and other forms of armed violence within different states globally (Achu, 2019; Bosetti & Einsiedel, 2015). This perspective is supported by Dupuy & Rustad (2018), who argue that violence within states has significantly increased, with 2017

being noted as one of the most violent years since the Cold War era. In 2017, there were 49 civil wars across the globe. Notably, this was the year when the English-speaking regions of Cameroon experienced the emergence of intrastate war (Achu, 2019).

The impact of armed conflicts on education is significant, regardless of whether the conflicts are international or within a single country. According to the Global Monitoring Report (2011) by the organization Education for All (EFA), armed conflicts lead to three patterns of violence. Firstly, civilians are routinely targeted by the warring parties, especially when state forces fail to protect them. Secondly, poorly trained fighters use light arms to carry out violence combined with criminal activities. Thirdly, violence is manifested through terrorizing inhabitants, disrupting economic and social life, destroying public infrastructure, and displacing civilians.

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2011), these patterns of violence are more peculiar to intrastate armed conflict and they have a huge negative impact on education. This is consistent with the argument of Pherali & Sahar (2018), who hold that intrastate conflicts, especially civil wars, take a great toll on the education system of a country. The impact of intrastate conflict results in weakening of teaching work force, destruction of educational facilities, a significant drop in budget for and expenditure on education due to a sharp rise in the budget for and expenditure on the military. This devastating impact of the violence engendered by armed conflict especially intrastate armed conflict is confirmed by Tidwell, (2004) and Jacob (2015), who highlight

other destructive activities such as targeting of school children, some of whom are severely tortured. These researchers also make mention of the utter destruction of school infrastructure or transformation of educational campuses into military bases, centres of torture and prisons of war, all of which compromise the effective functioning of schools.

In congruence with the aforementioned research findings, Jones & Naylor (2014) argue that armed conflict plays a decisive role among the other factors that cause drop out of school by students and complete discontinuation of studies. To substantiate their argument, Jones & Naylor (2014) used the following diagram by which they illustrate ten channels via which education is affected by armed conflict. Through these ten channels, armed conflict brings about an overall compromise in the access to educational structures.

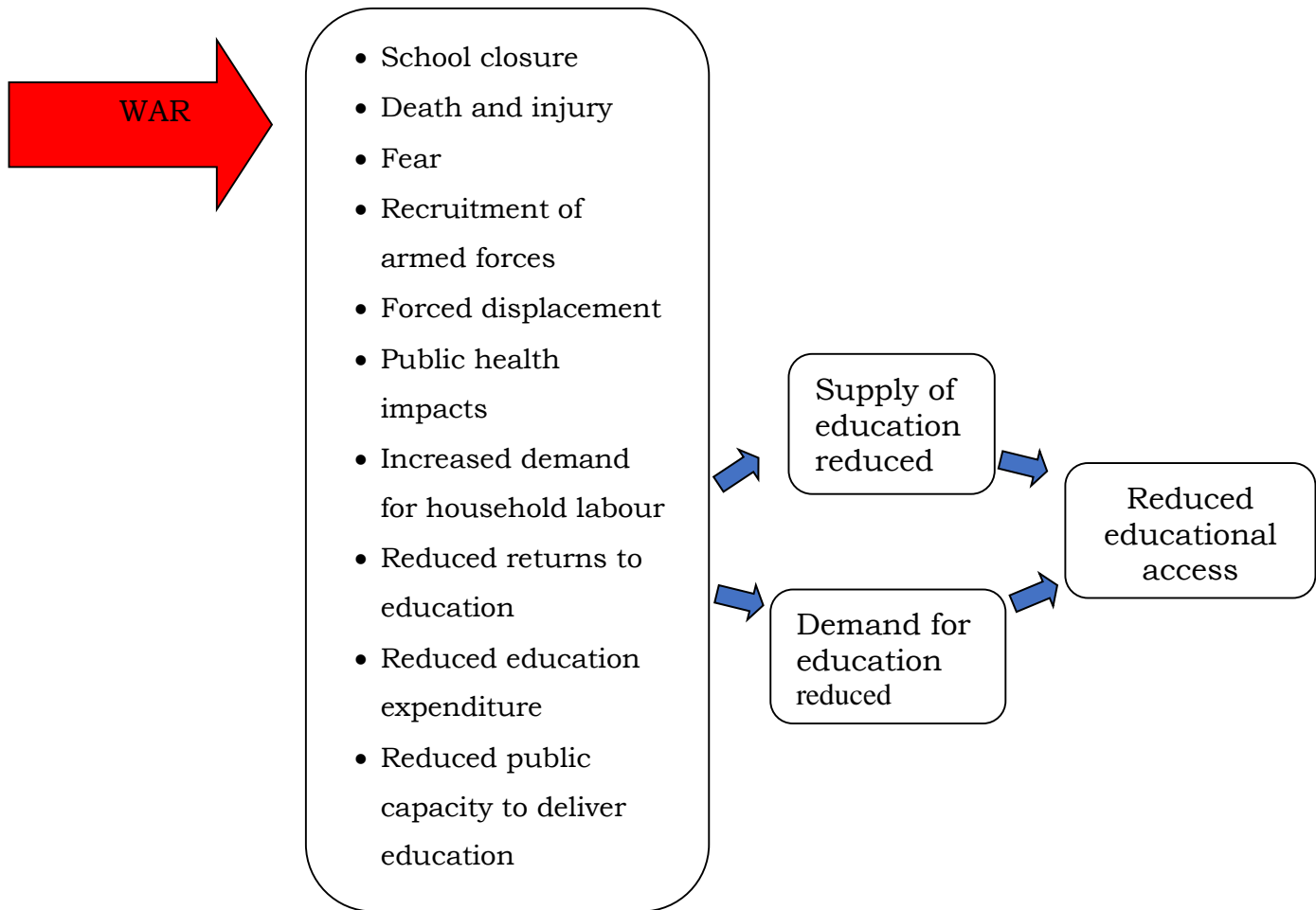


Figure 1. Ten Channels via which Education is affected by Armed Conflict
 Source: Jones, A. & Naylor, R. (2014) *The Quantitative Impact of Armed Conflict on Education: Counting the Human and Financial Costs*, United Kingdom: CfBT Education Trust.

Jones & Naylor (2014) discuss the direct and indirect impact of armed conflict on education. The first four channels represent the direct impact, which could be the result of deliberate attacks on educational institutions or collateral damage from war activities. The remaining channels are considered to be indirect consequences of the violence provoked by armed conflict. However, Jones & Naylor (2014) fail to precisely define the term "conflict,"

which has a broad meaning and should not be restricted to armed conflict alone. This critique is supported by Muzuwa (2009), who highlights that armed conflict is just one of many different forms of conflict, including food riots, border disputes, inter-communal strife, and political instability.

Despite the lack of precision in the use of the term "conflict" by Jones & Naylor (2014), it is widely acknowledged that armed conflict has a significant negative impact on education, affecting both its supply and demand. Cervantes-Duarte & Fernández-Cano (2016) argue that millions of children's education is severely affected by armed conflict, as it paralyzes the education system and infrastructure. They point out that families, children, educators, curriculum, teaching strategies, and educational infrastructure are all impacted. Additionally, Pherali & Sahar (2018) discuss how students and teachers are often targeted by warring parties in armed conflicts.

Notwithstanding these challenges, many countries and international organizations, such as the United Nations, remain committed to providing education in conflict-affected areas. The United Nations has emphasized the importance of education as a fundamental human right, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The Education for All (EFA) convention also aimed to eliminate discrimination in access to education for children living in difficult circumstances by 2015 (Cervantes-Duarte & Fernández-Cano, 2016). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008) further

emphasized that education should be promoted and maintained in all circumstances, including during times of crisis caused by armed conflict.

The discussion above emphasizes the need to provide education in all contexts, crediting Fielding & Moss (2011) for their reflection on how education should be perceived. According to Fielding & Moss (2011), education is about fostering and supporting the general well-being and development of children and young people, enabling them to interact effectively with their environment and live a good life. Noddings (2005) also stressed the connection between happiness and education, arguing that education should aim at promoting happiness. While this assertion does not acknowledge that happiness varies among different groups, it is acceptable as it emphasizes delight and fulfillment, which are fundamental aspects of happiness. Murray (2023) further outlines four purposes of education, referred to as the four Es of education: enhancement, equality, emancipation, and eudaimonia (implying flourishing).

It is evident that the provision of education must be emphasized regardless of the socio-political climate. Additionally, it is essential to consider the learning needs of children in situations of armed conflict. This is particularly important when considering the challenges that children displaced by war may face, requiring additional support to adapt to their new educational environment. This concern aligns with Benavot's (2016) view that armed conflict not only affects the delivery of education but also impacts the individuals involved in education, including students. Based on this, the next

section will discuss some of the challenges experienced by children displaced by armed conflict, which could hinder their full participation in the learning process.

2.3.1. The challenges faced by children displaced by armed conflict

Two important questions that need to be asked are: How does the violence caused by armed conflict and its direct and indirect consequences affect the ability of displaced students to effectively engage in their studies? What special education needs might displaced children have as a result of the impact of war on students, or what special education needs will displaced students exhibit due to armed conflict?

Unfortunately, no research has been conducted to establish the connection between armed conflict and special education needs, especially for children who have been forced to flee to other regions. This is one of the gaps in the literature that this research aims to address. However, it will be important to explore what existing literature says about the impact of war on children, particularly those who are displaced.

According to Abudayya et al. (2023) and Bürgin et al. (2022), one of the potential impacts of war is depression. This is supported by the views of Lakasing et al. (2020), who maintain that challenging life situations and neurotic breakdown under stress can lead to depression.

Depression, a mental health disorder, is a significant contributor to the global burden of disease. Its symptoms disrupt well-being and functioning,

leading to a decline in individuals' engagement in activities (Thapar et al., 2022; Gunnarsson et al., 2023; Christie et al., 2021). Lack of accurate understanding of depression symptoms can lead to stigma, both public and personal (Yokoya et al., 2018). Public stigma includes stereotypical beliefs, prejudice, and discriminatory behaviour, while personal stigma involves the internalisation of these experiences by those who are stigmatised (Wood et al., 2014). This lack of accurate knowledge may lead to children being misunderstood as stubborn and punished instead of receiving the necessary support for their mental health (Bürgin et al., 2022).

The next section will discuss the concept of inclusion in education regarding special educational needs in children displaced by armed conflict.

2.4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION VIS-À-VIS THE CHILDREN DISPLACED BY ARMED CONFLICT

2.4.1. A Brief look at the Concept of Inclusive Education (IE)

Various authors have presented different definitions of Inclusive Education (IE) (Tomlinson, 2017), indicating that IE is not a straightforward concept. According to Dance & Plunkett (2012), IE involves teaching all students in the least restrictive environment. This means bringing together all students in the same environment while ensuring there are no barriers to their success. Dance & Plunkett's perspective aims to avoid the practice of excluding students with unique learning challenges from the general education (GE) environment and isolating them in a specialized setup.

However, their position does not address the challenges that may arise from the diversity among students.

Another definition of Inclusive Education (IE) comes from Tahir et al. (2019), who regard IE as an approach where students with disabilities are physically included in the same GE classroom with other students. In this setup, both students with disabilities and those without are taught the same GE curriculum. Tahir et al. (2019) should be critiqued more severely than Dance & Plunkett (2012) because they specifically reference students with disabilities and fail to highlight the challenges that may arise from the physical inclusion of children with disabilities in the GE environment. Such social inclusion undoubtedly places a great strain on schools, which Allan (2008) refers to as a time bomb.

The term "Inclusive Education" (IE) refers to the physical inclusion of all children in a General Education (GE) environment. Hornby (2014) defines IE as the provision of a curriculum that is engaging and flexible, accommodating the diverse needs and strengths of children. This definition also emphasizes the importance of addressing diversity, highlighting the necessity of personalized support for each child to succeed.

Inclusive Education goes beyond mere integration, which involves teaching children with disabilities in separate spaces within mainstream schools. Instead, it entails the physical inclusion of all children, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, and circumstances, in a common GE environment, with appropriate specialized support.

Inclusive Education does not disregard the need for consistency in the curriculum, teaching strategy, and nature of learners. This aligns with the perspective of Lewis and Norwich (2005), who emphasize that IE aims to enhance the participation of all learners within the mainstream school environment, rather than focusing solely on the physical presence of disabled children.

Inclusion is based on the philosophy that all children, including those with special needs, have the right to access mainstream schools and study the GE curriculum as appropriate (Murawski & Lochner, 2010). The next section will consider how the concept of inclusion applies to school children who have been displaced by armed conflict and are studying in different areas.

2.5. RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF INCLUSION IN RELATION TO THE TEACHING OF CHILDREN DISPLACED BY WAR

Inclusive Education encourages the identification and addressing of the specific learning needs of school children to ensure that every child has a fair chance for appropriate integral growth (Rapp & Corral Granados, 2021). It is important to reflect on how the violence of war creates learning challenges for children who are displaced and studying in areas different from their usual residence. In essence, what are the learning needs of school children displaced by war? Before delving into this question, it is important to briefly highlight what scholars have said regarding special education needs.

2.5.1. An Understanding of Special Education Needs

The topic of Special Education Needs is extensive and can be approached from various angles. In this research, we will explore its potential connection to the impact of war on displaced students. Before delving into this, it's important to briefly discuss the general understanding of special education needs.

According to different authors, special education needs refer to the lack of basic natural skills for learning in the standard general curriculum offered in regular mainstream schools (Kauffman et al., 2018). Similarly, Lewis & Norwich (2005) state that SEN relates to impairments that affect natural faculties such as hearing, seeing, moving, speaking, writing, reading, attending, organizing, engaging, concentrating, comprehending, and remembering.

Lewis & Norwich (2005) emphasize the need to distinguish between a disability and the special education need it creates. This argument is important for enhancing understanding. In line with this, Kauffman et al. (2018) note that not every disability requires special education. They distinguish between disabilities and the impact they create, highlighting that while some disabilities causing learning challenges can be addressed with support in the general education setting, others require special education in a separate environment due to their more significant impact on a child's skills.

Disabilities that compromise learning, thus creating special educational needs, are viewed to have two bases: neurological and emotional. Disabilities

that are neurologically based have to do with processing problems that impact basic learning skills such as writing, reading, and math calculation (Bradley & Danielson, 2002). These neurologically based disabilities could also affect higher learning skills such as time planning, organisation, and abstract reasoning. The learning needs caused by neurologically based disabilities could be grouped into four categories based on the processing problem they involve: input (difficulty getting information into the brain), organisation (difficulty making sense out of information taken into the brain), memory (difficulty with storage and retrieving of data from the brain), and output (difficulty getting information back out of the brain) (Ibid.).

On the other hand, disabilities based on emotional challenges result mostly from experiences in society (Bradley & Danielson, 2002). These emotionally based disabilities are characterised by aspects that could affect the educational performance of children: difficulty establishing and sustaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers; strange behaviours and feelings in circumstances that are normal; a mood of depression and unhappiness; manifestation of excessive anxiety associated with school or personal problems; short attention span; temper tantrums, abnormal mood swings, and bizarre motor acts (Ibid.).

The foregoing section has distinguished two types of educational needs: those which are neurologically based and those which are emotionally based. Only special education needs that are based on emotional disabilities will be considered for the purpose of this research. This is because the focus is on

school children who, due to the violence of armed conflict and consequent displacement, may have some special learning needs that need to be addressed.

2.5.2. Any Need for Special Attention on School Children Displaced by War?

After discussing the impact of emotionally based disabilities on a child's learning, it is evident that the issue of inclusion is relevant in the context of school children displaced by war. Researchers have found that students affected by war, particularly those who have been displaced from their homes, exhibit behaviors that compromise their ability to learn.

According to King (2019), armed conflict causes significant displacement of students, leading to various challenges that greatly hinder normal learning. This finding is supported by the study of Duale et al. (2019), which focused on the education of displaced students in the northeast region of Kenya. The study concluded that armed conflict results in the massive movement of students to less volatile areas. This movement brings about challenges, including large class sizes, which hinder effective integration of all students and compromise the provision of necessary personalized support to students, especially those displaced by war.

Buriel et al. (2019) revealed that students displaced by war suffer from war-related trauma, which impairs their learning ability. The study indicated that exposure to war leads to significant distress due to bomb explosions, gunshots, molestation, direct threats, loss of loved ones, abduction, and

destruction of family property. Kostelny & Ondoro (2016) conducted research in Somaliland and Puntland on the impact of war on school children, identifying additional sources of trauma such as rape, continuous harsh treatment, and past instances of torture. These traumatic experiences lead to the displacement of school children and their families to less volatile areas, where the students continue to be traumatized as they join their peers in relatively peaceful regions. Consequently, displaced students come to school burdened with unresolved mental health issues, highlighting the need for additional support.

The conclusion above is consistent with the argument made by Abudayya et al. (2023), who argue that one likely impact of war is depression. Depression resulting from war, especially among school children, must be taken seriously. However, there are situations in which the reality of depression is misunderstood and ignored, leading to self or public stigmatization, as highlighted by Yokoya et al. (2018).

The need for inclusive support is confirmed by the studies of Burde et al. (2017) and Awng (2017), which maintain that the distressing circumstances that children go through in the context of war seriously undermine their ability to concentrate and study effectively.

2.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The primary focus of this research was to emphasize the importance of making the teaching process as inclusive as possible for children who have

special educational needs due to being displaced by war. This research was framed within the context of the mutual inquiry theory of teaching, and the rationale for choosing this framework will be explained in detail below.

2.6.1. Mutual inquiry theory of teaching

The perspectives held by educationists on the concept of teaching can be diverse and complex because educationists are influenced by different educational philosophies (Al-Khayat et al., 2017; Isola, 2019). This is why several theories have been developed to explain the concept of teaching, including the mutual inquiry theory, communication theory, Maeuitic theory, and the moulding theory (Kumar, 2012).

The mutual inquiry theory views teaching as a cooperative enterprise characterized by active participation of both teachers and learners. According to this theory, both teachers and learners work together to achieve instructional objectives (Kumar, 2012). This approach considers teaching as an interactive process, described by Mercer & Howe (2012) as dialogic.

The dialogic teaching approach advocated by the mutual inquiry theory gives teaching a participatory character, as referred to by Serekoane (2016) and Sherry (2019). This means that the process is not one-sided, with the teacher solely conducting activities and imparting knowledge. Instead, both the teacher and learners are fully engaged in thinking and learning activities. Consequently, Serekoane (2016) argues that dialogic teaching encourages students to reflect and present arguments in an engaging manner. Likewise,

Sherry (2019) asserts that dialogic teaching promotes whole-class discussion, enabling students to refine and develop their ideas.

Thus, the dialogic character of teaching advocated by the mutual inquiry theory aligns with the modern student-centered approach, as opposed to the communication theory, which advocates a more traditional teacher-centered approach (Sequeira, 2012).

The student-centered approach favored by the mutual inquiry theory supports participatory teaching (PT), which, according to McKeachie (2002), is crucial in the teaching process. As argued by McKeachie (2002), the teaching process can only be effective if the learners are also critically and actively involved.

2.6.2. Participatory Teaching

Participatory teaching is defined as a collective approach characterised by the performance of roles and tasks by students, which leads to the cultivation of skills needed to critically reflect, read and advance contributions that are constructive before a public audience (Montessori (2015)). This definition aligns with the view of Kachisa (2004), who holds that participatory teaching enables a conducive atmosphere for free-flowing discussion and academic debate. This boosts the students' cognitive skills and so enhance their ability to critically analyse and evaluate. This school of thought is consistent with the findings of a research carried out by Madar (2015). This research involved 75 students studying in faculty of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Computing at Amoud University in

Somalia. According to this research, two core academic outcomes are produced when participatory teaching is practised. These two outcomes include better academic performance and possession of academic skills. Consistent with this emphasis on active participation by learners, Márquez *et al.*, (2023) encourages the use of a multidimensional tool for grading class participation giving of weekly feedback on class participation of each student, known as the Work-In-Class Assessment Tool (WICAT). This tool assesses students' attendance, contribution to activities, active listening and performance in light tasks which are given frequently (Márquez *et al.*, 2023).

In this study, the Work-In-Class Assessment Tool (WICAT) designed by researchers is a multidimensional system that grades class participation by assessing students' attendance, active listening, contribution to class activities, and performance in frequent small tasks. The WICAT allows lecturers to clearly and objectively grade class participation while providing students weekly feedback on their in-class performance.

Despite the highlighted advantages of participatory teaching, some scholars have pointed out downsides of the approach. One of these scholars is Kachisa (2004), who maintains that the participatory teaching approach may not be useful for teachers dealing with large class sizes. This is because students' participation may become disproportionate and discussions can easily slide out of control. This challenge supports the idea that participatory teaching could be influenced by external factors. This is in line with the position of Flensner *et al.* (2019), who stated that participation and learning

are influenced by personal experiences and local context. This view is consistent with the constructivist conception of learning, which suggests that the interaction between teachers, learners, and the environment is crucial in the learning process. This is because all three – teachers, learners, and the environment – are factors that influence children's participation in the learning process and knowledge construction (Schunk, 2012).

Building on the preceding arguments, one can agree with Burkett (2014), who considers teaching to be a complex process made up of inter-relationships. These inter-relationships are affected by a multi-layered context. The following diagram has been designed to reflect the explanation advanced by Burkett (2014).

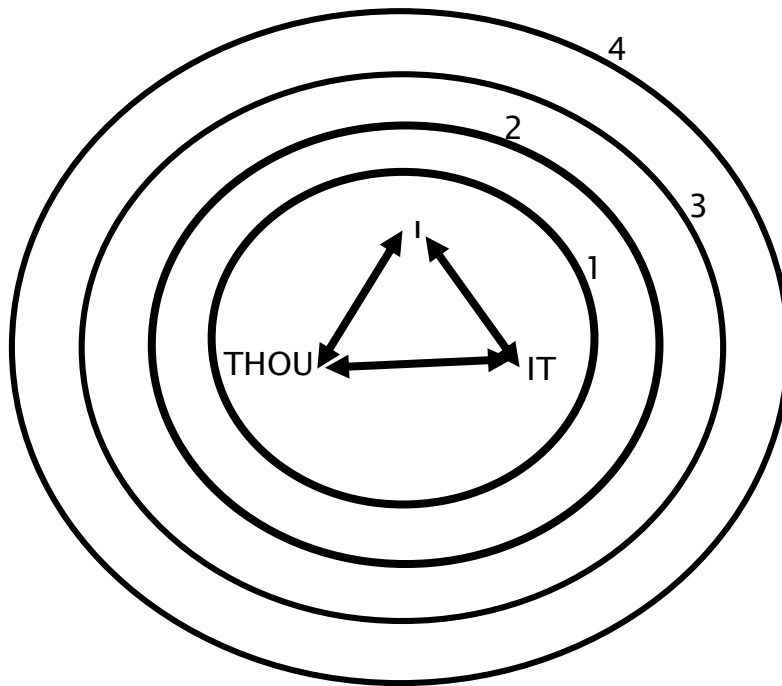


Figure 2. A Diagram of Teaching as Inter-relationships affected by Multi-layered Contexts (*Designed in consonance with the argument of Burkett, 2014*).

The teacher, learners, and subject matter are represented by “I”, “THOU”, and “IT” respectively. According to Burkett (2014), these three interrelate during the teaching process. This interactive relationship is influenced by the multi-layered context, represented by concentric orbits. The classroom context, the school context, the community context, and the state context are represented by orbits 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. Each layer is characterized by economic, political, and social factors that impact the teaching process, which is presented as taking place at the center (Ibid.).

From the arguments highlighted in this section, one can understand that participatory teaching, advocated by the mutual inquiry theory, is greatly influenced by the teaching context and the learners' experiences. This is

relevant to the investigation in this work since the focus is on how the teaching process can be made inclusive for children who have been displaced by war.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This research aimed to investigate the learning challenges manifested by children who are displaced by armed conflict and also to establish an inclusive teaching approach that could help the displaced children in the English Regions of Cameroon to participate effectively in the learning process.

The main research questions are as follows:

- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteacher of School A in Bamenda Cameroon, regarding the impact of the on-going armed conflict on displaced students?
- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteacher of School A about the learning challenges that are manifested by the children who have been displaced by armed conflict.
- What are the teaching strategies that have been employed to address the impact of the armed conflict on displaced children? If any, how are they benefitting the displaced children?

These research questions were developed with the understanding that they are central to this investigation and therefore need to be specific, clear, interconnected, empirical, and relevant to the topic (Gary, 2017). They have influenced the research philosophy and design that have been utilized in this study.

This chapter will therefore cover the research design and its philosophical basis, the tools used for data collection, the method for selecting participants, the data analysis method, as well as the ethical considerations and implications involved in this research project.

3.1. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN

Research design encompasses all the elements involved in the logical planning and effective execution of a research project, allowing the research problem to be addressed through the data collected (Thomas, 2017; Punch & Oancea, 2009; Yin, 2018). Consistency in the research process is crucial as it stems from the research questions that articulate the research problem (Gary, 2017).

Given this understanding of research design, this research will utilize a qualitative interview-based approach. This approach involves delving into a problem to generate in-depth findings (Creswell, 2015). The qualitative interview-based approach is inductive as it relies on detailed information shared by the participants, which is based on their experiences and interpretations (Creswell, 2012).

The qualitative interview-based approach is considered suitable for this research because the main research questions are qualitative. Participants are expected to provide qualitative data drawn from their own experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). This approach is also suitable for a study that involves a one-off collection of data (Setia, 2016; Punch & Oancea, 2009; Cohen et al., 2011).

The research design is based on philosophical assumptions that express a specific perspective about nature (Dalen, 1979). Since the main research questions require participants to provide their interpretations of their experiences, the research design will be based on the interpretivist framework. This framework focuses on individuals and the personal or subjective interpretations they give to their environment (Cohen et al., 2011).

The interpretivist paradigm advocates the understanding of the subjective dimension of human experience. Within this paradigm, there is an effort to comprehend phenomena from within by relying on the personal accounts of those with direct experience (O'Donoghue, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011).

This study is qualitative, meaning that the data required from the participants will be descriptive (Merriam, 2009; Taylor et al., 2016). This is consistent with the research philosophy - interpretive paradigm, which is associated with qualitative research (Punch, 2013).

After discussing the research design and the philosophical framework, the next section will focus on the method of data collection.

3.2. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The method of data collection refers to the protocol or instrument used to collect relevant data in a study (Creswell, 2009; Wiersma, 1969). The preferred method of data collection in this research was interviews. Research interviews involve a rapport between a researcher and participants aimed at

generating required data for a study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Brinkmann, 2013; Kvale, 1996; Boeije, 2010; Laslett & Rapoport, 2003; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Neuman, 2014; Hennink et al., 2011).

The specific interview format that was used is the standardized open-ended interview format. This format is semi-structured, with open-ended interview questions prepared before the actual interview sessions. During the sessions, probing questions will be asked to derive more helpful details from participants (Kvale, 1996).

Open-ended questions allow interviewees the freedom to provide in-depth information (Gall et al., 2003). Pilot interviews were conducted to ensure participants understood the interview questions and to estimate the duration of the interview sessions (Creswell, 2007; Drever, 1997).

The standardized open-ended interview format was considered suitable for this research as it can produce detailed information, also known as thick data (Turner, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Geoffrey et al., 2005). The necessary effort was made to avoid imposing biased views on the contributions of the interviewees (Creswell, 2012). One downside of standardized open-ended interview format is that the thick data produced could make transcription and analysis more challenging (Brinkmann, 2013). To address this, ongoing transcription and progressive analysis of the data was carried out (Merriam, 2009; Fontana & Frey, 1998).

The traditional face-to-face approach is commonly used for interviews in research (Taylor et al., 2016). However, as I was unable to travel to Cameroon, I conducted telephone interviews as an alternative and this is considered to be an acceptable substitute for face-to-face interviews (Cohen et al., 2011; Opdenakker, 2006; Novick, 2008). Telephone interviews supports more effective data collection due to several advantages, such as creating a more relaxed environment for participants, and leading to more detailed sharing compared to face-to-face interviews (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Additionally, telephone interviews help to reduce costs, provide anonymity, and make it easier to reach participants who may be located in inaccessible or unsafe areas (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Cohen et al., 2011).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned advantages, the challenges associated with telephone interviews were not ignored in this research. These challenges include the risk of participants losing interest due to distractions or discomfort from talking on the phone for a long time (Creswell, 1998). There is also the possibility of participants providing inaccurate information since they are aware that the interviewer is not physically present with them (Cohen et al., 2011). To address these challenges, necessary efforts were made to keep participants engaged by being lively and reminding them that they are free to answer only the questions they are comfortable with. Attentive listening and asking of probing questions were also employed to ensure fruitful interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

To ensure that the data presented in this research accurately reflects the contributions of the participants, the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants (Jamshed, 2014). Obtaining participants' consent is an ethical requirement and must be explicitly requested and granted (Cohen et al., 2011). Recording the telephone interviews did not only allow for more effective data capture but also enabled the interviewer to remain focused on presenting the research questions to the participants and ask more relevant probing questions (Bucher et al., 2003).

However, there are potential downsides to recording research interviews. Participants may feel tense due to uncertainty about how the recording will be handled (Bucher et al., 2003). To address this, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the presentation of research outcomes, ensuring their identities remain obscure in the final work (Esterberg, 2002). To enhance anonymity and confidentiality, the precise name of school of the teachers and head teacher was coded as "School A". Additionally, a friendly and cheerful atmosphere was created at the beginning of the interview to ease any tension in the conversation, which could help the flow of the interview process (Esterberg, 2002).

3.3. PARTICIPANT SAMPLING METHODS

Participant sampling involves selecting individuals from a larger group, known as the research population, to gather information for a research project. As this research is qualitative, meaning that the data collected is descriptive and based on participants' experiences, a nonprobability sampling

approach was used. This approach, recommended for qualitative research by Neuman (2014), involves purposefully selecting participants who can provide relevant data. This understanding is supported by Taherdoost (2016) and Cohen et al. (2011), who emphasize deliberate selection of participants for qualitative research.

Two types of non-probability sampling were used to obtain participants: convenience and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling will involve selecting participants who are accessible and open to collaborating on the research problem. Purposive sampling will be reflected in the deliberate selection of schools where children displaced by armed conflict are taught. The advantage of using purposive and convenience sampling methods is that they are less complicated and consume less time, which is suitable for this two-year research project.

The purposive and convenient sampling methods have certain advantages but also come with drawbacks. These methods may not fully represent the research population, which means that the findings cannot be generalized (Kothari, 2004). However, the findings of this research are not intended to be applied to every context of war, which allows for the use of these sampling methods in this research (Creswell, 2012). The hope is that the research findings will help fill gaps in literature and stimulate further reflection.

3.4. SAMPLE SIZE

Sample size is considered to mean the number of participants in a research project (Cohen et al., 2011). The maximum number depends on when the point of saturation is reached, which is the point at which theoretical completeness is attained. At this point, the new data that is collected does not bring any new perspective or idea to what has already been drawn from the previously collected data (Cohen et al., 2011; Flick, 2011; Charmaz, 2008). Fourteen participants were involved in this study.

These participants have been presented by use of a table, as found in Appendix 7. For the sake of anonymity, codes will be used to identify the participants. For example, T⁵, Y¹⁵ will stand for teacher of year fives with teaching experience of 15 years. This will not only help in transparency but will also give a clear picture of the cream of the participant population in this research. This will also help the readers of this work to judge the reliability and validity of the data collected and the conclusions drawn from it.

As would be noticed in the table of participants in appendix 7, anonymity was observed. This is for the sake of confidentiality which was promised to every participant in an explicit way on the participant information forms. These forms were sent out well ahead of the data collection so that those who accepted to take part in this research were able to make an informed decision.

3.5. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The concept of data analysis is understood to mean the critical and systematic construction or drawing of meaning from the data that has been collected from participants in a research project (Brinkmann, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Researchers have not given universal approval to any one method to be employed for analyzing qualitative data. This implies that it is up to each researcher to make a choice of a data analysis method and provide the required justification of suitability (Creswell, 2012).

In this research, the method that was used to analyze the data collected from the participants was the thematic approach designed by Creswell (2015). This method is referred to as a thematic approach since it leads to the formation of themes which are relevant for the interpretation of the thick data provided by the participants (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Creswell, 2012). Additionally, this data analysis approach captures or reflects the general sense of activities that feature in qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2009).

The following diagram gives a snapshot of what the thematic approach for data analysis, designed and advocated by Creswell, looks like:

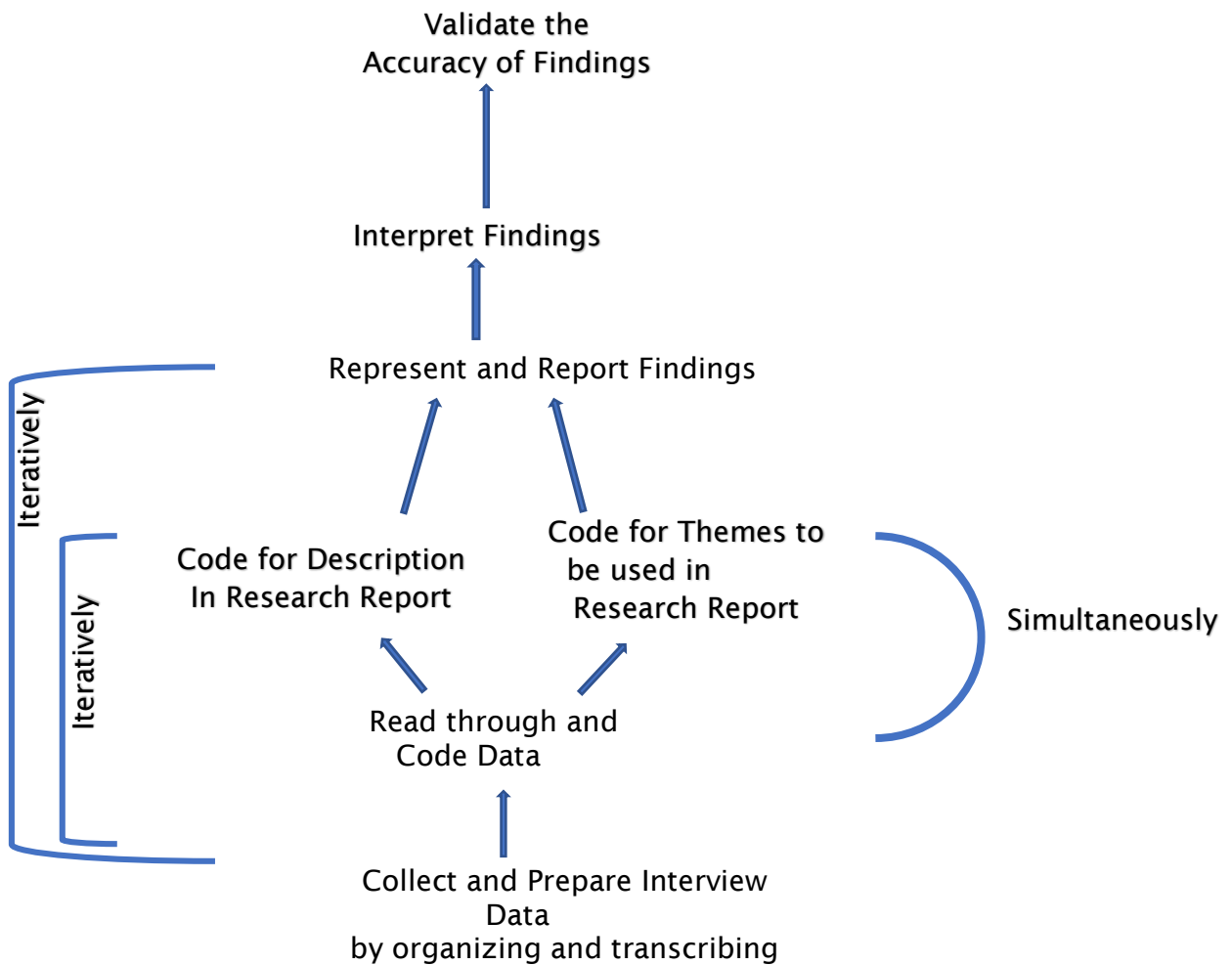


Figure 3: Qualitative Process of Data Analysis and Interpretation
(Adapted from Creswell, 2015, pg. 237).

With the thematic analysis approach, each recorded interview is immediately followed by the labelling of audio records with codes that are identifiable. After this, the audio records are stored in a folder for transcription. This is done immediately after every interview, and the labelled audio records are stored in different folders. Transcription of these audio records is done progressively. Transcription is understood to mean converting of qualitative data which is in the form of field notes or audio records, to

written text (Creswell, 2015). While doing this, care is taken to minimize the loss of data (Esterberg, 2002).

After completing the progressive transcription process, the transcribed data (written text) is combined following the interview questions. Then, the transcribed data is analyzed by means of textual colouring followed by labelling.

To carry out the analysis effectively, careful reading of the transcribed data is required. During this preliminary reading, initial coding takes place. Initial coding helps in the formation of themes and descriptions. Coding is defined as the allocation of labels, otherwise referred to as codes, to sections of a written text (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012). The approach of coding that was used is inductive. This inductive approach ensures that themes are generated from the data collected rather than from already existing literature (Cohen et al., 2018).

The formation of themes was achieved through grouping of similar quotes (Creswell, 2015). Iterative reading of the transcribed data is important as it can lead to the identification of many quotes as possible. The identification of main themes is based on how frequent their supporting quotes appear (Creswell, 2015). A brief demonstration of the formation of themes is shown in Appendix 1.

Validation of findings was done after the main themes were formed. This involves strengthening of the validity and reliability of findings by cross-

checking (Creswell, 2012). The concept of validity in qualitative research implies the degree to which the actual situation which is being investigated is reflected in the findings of a research (Schensul, 2012; Kumar, 2011). On the other hand, reliability has to do with the dependability or trustworthiness of the data that is collected and presented in the research (Merriam, 2009).

Additionally, reliability and validity were strengthened in this work by means of faithful transcription of recorded interviews, as well as proper and honest presentation of findings (Cresswel, 2014).

Also, as advocated by Creswell (2012), there was writing of memos all through the collection and analysis of the data from participants. Memos refer to personal notes that help to shed more light on data collected leading to more effective analysis and presentation of findings (Charmaz, 2008).

3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important for academic research to observe ethical principles which are relevant to its design and data collection methods (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Given that in this work, primary data was collected from participants working in a school institution with established hierarchy, permission was obtained from the appropriate authority – the headteacher. This is referred to as gatekeeper approval and this has to be solicited and obtained via formal email (Creswell, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). For the sake of transparency, this is presented in appendices 2 and 3.

It is also of ethical importance to give participants sufficient information and time to make an informed and free decision to participate in a research project. With this, they will grant their informed consent which they will manifest by signing consent forms that will be provided them (Bell, 2002). In this light, I sent out the participant information sheets with all relevant details about this work to the participants via email. This was done in good time before data collection. A sample of both the participant information sheet and the consent form are also be included in the appendices 4 and 5.

Worth noting is the fact that reception of informed consent from participants was not done only once in this work. Repeated request of consent is important since every participant must be free to decline from contributing to the research project at any point (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Therefore, added to the first informed consent provided by the participants, participant consent was solicited before each interview session (Creswell, 2014).

Another important ethical consideration in this work was the avoidance of anything that could potentially cause harm to any participant (Miles *et al.*, 2014). One strategy that helped to uphold this was the observation of anonymity and confidentiality. This is very relevant to this research since participants will be talking about the realities of war. In doing this, they may make mention of things that if presented without appropriate anonymity, could put them in harms' way. Therefore, the final research report will not carry any information that can betray any participant's identify or disclose what a particular participant contributed (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Wengraf, 2001).

In a bid to foster anonymity and confidentiality, the transcription of the interview records did not involve any third party. By this approach, no third party had direct access to the individual contribution of participants. The interview records were then deleted after every transcription. The transcribed data was also coded and stored safely throughout the research.

Still in a bid to uphold good ethical practice in this work, there was honest presentation of the findings of other literature sources. This is a practice that makes for research integrity (Adèle & Bruin, 2012). Research integrity was also strengthened by proper acknowledgement of the information obtained from works of different authors. This was done through adequate referencing (Wm, 2003).

Additionally, it is of ethical importance to ensure reciprocity. This has to do with enabling the participants to understand the benefits of participating in a research project. This is recommended since their participation also involves sacrificing time and probable incurring of expenses (Creswell, 2012; Wm, 2003; Cohen et al., 2018). The participant information sheet clearly explained that there is no financial compensation for participating in this research project because of my limited financial means. Notwithstanding this, it was mentioned that this work will be of benefit to the education of children whose learning ability has been affected by their displacement due to war. This assurance was made in hope that possible strategies will be discussed that could enable teachers who deal with displaced children, to adopt more

inclusive approaches. This will hopefully be of greater support to the displaced children.

This chapter has discussed the relevant research design this work. The underpinning philosophy has also been highlighted. Additionally, the relevant method of data collection, sampling of participants and the strategies for analysis of the research data have been discussed. The important subject of good ethical practice in research has also been given due consideration. The next chapter of this work will focus on presentation of findings from the data presented by the research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will present the findings obtained from analyzing the data collected from the research participants. Through a comprehensive analysis, we identified key themes that form the main findings. These research findings will be presented thematically following the main research questions.

4.1. GENERAL IMPACT OF ARMED-CONFLICT ON DISPLACED STUDENTS

The first main research question was:

- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteacher of School A in Bamenda Cameroon, regarding the impact of the on-going armed conflict on displaced students?

Two main themes were identified in the data analysis that answered this research question viz:

The sense of insecurity among students; and
students' lack of interest in schooling;

An illustration of how these themes emerged is presented in appendix 1.

4.1.1. The Sense of Insecurity among Displaced Students

The sense of insecurity emerged from the responses of the participants as an aspect that was greatly manifested by the displaced students.

As mentioned by one respondent, the students who are from the villages that were greatly affected by the fighting, manifest great panic and a

heightened sense of insecurity while lessons are going on. “While in class, they appear to expect chaos and interruption of lessons” (P4, M, Y¹¹).

According to another teacher, one of the factors that fuelled the sense of insecurity among the displaced students was the dreadful sound of gun shots that characterized the fierce fighting in the areas they escaped from. One of the teachers indicated the following during the interview: “...the children have shared how they are yet to get over the absolutely scary sound of sophisticated machine guns and blasts of incredibly powerful explosives” (P1, M, Y⁵).

Some of the respondents also noted that from their interaction with the students, they understood that the displaced students got so used to gunshots that they could distinguish the sound of the guns of the separatist fighters from that of the state army. One teacher highlighted this as follows:

My students from the volatile villages in Bamenda, where the fighting was rife, shared how they could identify the gunshot of the separatist fighters from that of the military. When they got the sound of the military guns, they immediately abandoned everything and made for the forest with their families, knowing that it was to be a bloody day in the village. This is because when the military went out on assault against the separatists, they often razed down every obstacle on their way. I believe that this experience has built up some anxiety in the displaced students which is expressed overtly or in a subtle way at times (P2, F, Y⁷).

Based on the responses, it seems that the students still believe that there could be a sudden outbreak of crossfire at any moment, even though they are

now living and studying far from their villages. This belief persists because gun battles have been so frequent that it seemed unusual not to wake up to the sound of panic-inducing gunshots. Another teacher noted:

When one is teaching and they hear any sudden and strong sound from the surrounding neighbourhood, they just become panic-stricken...Some of them rush out of their benches and run to the back of the class just to realize that the other students are embarrassed by their reaction to what is considered usual sound pollution in the city (P6, M, Y7).

4.1.2. Lack of interest in school

Many of the teachers indicated that majority of the displaced students in their classes expressed hesitation coming to school. One teacher shared the following:

I feel that the displaced students have associated the thought of school with horror. This is because of what they lived in their former schools in their villages. Some of their teachers and peers were tortured before their own eyes. Separatist fighters and state military paraded weapons in and around their schools in their villages. Most of what they remember about school life for the past 4 years is dreadful. I can understand why they are not very keen to come to school (P3, F, Y8).

Another teacher mentioned a similar experience. According to this teacher, many of the displaced students in her class have repeatedly expressed their desire to stay away from school. A good number of these students maintain that they have been interrupted from schooling for two or three years or even four and so are struggling to get back into the routine of ordinary

school life (P7, M, Y¹¹). A teacher who spoke with much frustration noted that she could detect from the engagement of the displaced students that they really would have preferred to be doing something else than sitting in class to study (P9, M, Y⁹).

The lack of interest in schooling was confirmed by many of the respondents who mentioned that displaced students recorded the highest number of absences. Some of the displaced students stay away for about three to four days in a consecutively. One teacher said: “They seem not to be bothered. One of my students told me that she has lost the zeal to live, talk less of studying, as her parents have all been killed” (P3, F, Y⁸).

One can glean from this finding that some of the displaced children gave the impression of depression. Their mental health appeared to have been severely compromised by the reality of their grave loss. They are, therefore, low emotionally and not motivated even to live. Their lack of zeal to put energy into studies can be understood from this perspective.

It was also evident in the responses that some of the displaced students were more concerned about their relations whom they had left back home. Three teachers attested to this. One said:

I was really concerned when I realized that a good number of the displaced students in my class were not engaging with lessons at all. So, I had to do a personal investigation. From this, I realized that they were more concerned about the state of things back in

their villages from where they were displaced than schooling (P14, F, Y⁵).

Another teacher noted that she really struggled with the lack of motivation that is so obvious among the displaced students in her class. She expressed her concern as it was apparently affecting the engagement of the rest of the students. Class activities that are to be performed in groups do suffer a lot, and the displaced students are most often a source of discouragement to the other students who are more eager to study:

This teacher said the following in her own words:

I am sorry, I may appear to be tagging a negative label on the students who joined my class this year, from the restive villages. Of course, this is not my intention. However, I must be honest with you that I lost patience at some point. In fact, one day, I really felt like asking many of the displaced students to take sometime off just to put themselves together and reconsider their attitude towards schooling. But I knew this would not be the right thing to do. However, I must say a small number of them are making great efforts to engage with class activities especially group tasks, but evidently, they are really not up to basic expectation that I will have from my students. My heart goes out to the displaced students because I know they carry a lot in them. I keep making the effort to draw them into the lessons, but it is just so hard (P9, M, Y⁹).

A third teacher mentioned that she has gone as far as visiting the families hosting the displaced students to see what could be done to motivate them at home. This teacher also said she made the extra effort to keep in touch with these families over the weekends just to provide them with additional

support to keep the displaced students interested in studies. As this teacher indicated:

The displaced students hardly performed their lesson activities that are meant to be completed at home. Majority of those who do not engage with assignments to be done over the weekends are the displaced students. Some who try to do it just do not manifest any degree of commitment in doing the assignments. It is clear to me that they are struggling with the interest in schooling. Their minds are just somewhere else. I have no doubt of course, because the stories they have shared with me are really not easy to contend with. These students really need much help to have that zeal for studies enkindled in them. I feel sad because they need to study to be able to live responsible lives and look after themselves and their family members who would survive the ongoing war (P11, F, Y⁴).

A couple of respondents also noted that the lack of interest in school was so expressed by the displaced students in their attitude of late coming to school. One teacher said he usually has the first lesson of the day and cannot count the number of times the students who just joined his class this year from the volatile areas have been late.

They come late and sometimes miss more than three quarters of the lesson. Some of them live with families that are not too far from school, so it is not so much a matter of distance that they have to cover to school. It is clear to me that their persistent late coming has to do more with a lack of desire for schooling. I have tried to speak with some of them and they really do not have any concrete reasons for coming late so often (P6, M, Y⁷).

One of the teachers who teaches the students preparing for the Ordinary Level (OL) of the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (GCE) noted with deep frustration, the fact that the displaced students in her class were so nonchalant about the major exam that they have been registered to write. The teacher noted:

I was really frustrated by the fact that I organize extra classes for catch-up with the aim of bringing the displaced students up to speed with the rest of the students, but majority of these displaced students just stay away. Most of these classes are organized after regular school hours and the displaced students just always seem to be looking forward to the last bell for end of lectures. I don't think they are really eager to further their education at the moment. Perhaps, that is not the main preoccupation they have now and fair enough; they have got too much to deal with. They really need help, I must say. We, the teachers, are really trying our very best to keep them interested and engaged in their studies, but seems our efforts are not yielding the required results (P2, F, Y7).

Another teacher of the fourth-year group that are making final steps towards completion of curriculum for the OL for Cameroon GCE, expressed great worry. He said students in his year group should normally be fully engaged as they are making great efforts to complete the curriculum. However, the general attitude in his class is really affected negatively by the evident indifference of the students who just joined the cohort this year from the war tone villages. They really seem to have divided attention and more inclined towards being away from school. They need to work harder than the rest of

the students to get fully prepared to move to the 5th year during which they will take the first major national exam, the Cameroon GCE (P5, F, Y⁶).

We teachers really feel bad when our students are lagging. I have personally been trying to get my students work hard. Unfortunately, the displaced students in my class are really not investing the required energy. They don't even seem to have the energy to invest in the studies. I don't want to blame them for this, but it just seems we are not heading for good performance at the major exams. This is not the lone goal of education, I know, but it is crucial for their advancement in their educational journey (P8, F, Y¹⁴).

4.2. LEARNING CHALLENGES MANIFESTED BY DISPLACED STUDENTS IN CLASS

The second main research question for this investigation is the following:

- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteacher of School A about the learning challenges that are manifested by the children who have been displaced by armed conflict.

This research question was answered by the following themes that emerged from the data collected:

Inability to concentrate in class

Low self-esteem

Lack of trust and respect for teachers

4.2.1. Inability to Concentrate in Class

Most of the participants in this research noted that concentrating in class is one of the outstanding challenges they have noticed among the displaced students. Gleaning from the responses, one understands that the images of the violent activities of the belligerent parties that the displaced students experienced, were still fresh in their minds. The impact of these images appears to be still very strong to the point that the displaced students sometimes begin crying in class. One teacher noted the following:

I had a very difficult day in class and this was just one of several instances. I was trying to revise some test questions and realized that one of the displaced students had red and watery eyes. Knowing what the displaced students had experience during fighting in their villages, this was not very surprising to me. Talking with this child later, she explained to me that she finds it hard to get over the horror she witnessed, perpetrated towards her sick mum. This student added that the thought of this flashes up in her mind while she is in class and she finds it just so difficult to do away with the thought nor handle the emotions that it evokes (P11, F, Y⁴).

Other participants indicated that many of the displaced students in their classrooms manifest a similar tendency as a result of the traumatizing experiences they have gone through. One of the teachers explained the following:

I feel most of the time that the displaced students are not connected with what is happening in class. I notice this when I ask my students questions to assess their level of assimilation of the subject of the lesson. I often ask questions and point students to answer. It is

worth noting that many of the displaced students will not put up their hands anyway. Then, when I point any of them to explain what they have understood from the lesson, I sometimes feel like I am rather humiliating them. These displaced students hardly demonstrate that they have been following the lesson. It is clear to me that they are really struggling to put their full attention on what we are doing in class. I am, however, not surprised because a lot has happened to them and their families. I therefore try to be as patient as possible, although I can only be patient to an extent, as progress with lesson has to be made for the sake of the entire cohort (P7, M, Y¹¹).

Another participant attributed the displaced students' inability to concentrate to the current circumstances that they are living in. According to this teacher, it is not only the threats, destruction of family property, killing of loved ones, or the disturbing sounds of gunshots and explosions experienced by these displaced children in the villages from where they have escaped, that are compromising their ability to concentrate. This teacher asserted that from her interaction with the displaced children in her class, there are other factors that contribute to the intermittent nature of their ability to concentrate in class. This teacher explained:

I had to make time to talk to many of the displaced students in my class in a bit to seek ways I could help them to put in more energy in class activities. These students made me to understand that their trauma is very much compounded by the precarious circumstances many of them are faced with in the families that are accommodating them. Quite a few of them noted that they experienced severe discrimination in the families that accommodate them. Some noted

that they are made to feel that they are additional burdens to their host families and blamed often for the family challenges. A good number of them mentioned that they are labelled as rogues coming from the heart of violence. Based on this, they are often blamed first for anything that is not in order in the house. In case anything goes missing, they are the first to be suspected. They are also caused to do most of the chores as if they have to compensate for the favour given them. Such experiences even occur when the host families are relations of the displaced students. I think these displaced students are really undergoing what I can term, 'severe postwar circumstantial duress'. With this, they cannot keep their minds steady in class (P5, F, Y⁶).

4.2.2. Low self-esteem

Another aspect which emerged from the contribution of the participants as an aspect that constitutes a learning challenge among displaced students is low self-esteem. According to the teachers who spoke about this aspect, many displaced students looked low on themselves for several reasons. One of these is that some displaced students feel that they are treated in a condescending way by fellow students:

I was really disturbed to learn from some of my students who came from the volatile villages that they suffer from mockery perpetrated by the students whose families are resident here in town. These displaced students noted that they are all referred to as parasites, who have no home and are not of any value. I personally had to bring this up in my class and cautioned all the students to refrain from manifesting condescending tendencies towards the students who have escaped from violent areas to seek refuge in town. Of course, students often behave as if they have taken on board such advice

but you know how young people could be inclined to making jokes of their peers (P14, F, Y⁵).

Apart from the attitude of classmates that cause the displaced students to have low self-esteem, some participants mentioned that the thought of being without parents caused the displaced students to feel that they are less fortunate and unequal to the other students. One participant shared the following:

I think the displaced students in my class thought they were so disadvantaged by the fact that they have either lost their parents or are separated from their parents who give them an immediate sense of security. With this mindset, they tend to look low on themselves and feel envious. One of my students made it clear to me that she feels she would have done better if her parents were still alive. This student was very categorical that she feels envious of other students whose parents are still with them in town or other students who are living with their guardians in town. It has been a daunting task to help these students realize that they are equally important and valued in class as every other student is valued. I have tried to point out to these displaced students the positive aspects about their lives and the hopes that they need to look forward to, in a bit to give them impetus and courage (P10, F, Y¹⁰).

It also emerged from the contribution of some participants that low self-esteem appeared to cause many displaced students not to participate courageously in class. According to one participant, some displaced students felt that they were still strangers in their new school and not sure if they will be tolerated when they give a wrong answer, especially by their peers. Another participant noted:

The majority of the students who joined my class this year from their razed down villages where fighting has been very fierce, find it difficult to hold a strong image of themselves. I see them looking so shy and so unsure of themselves. One aspect that compounds the state of things is the fact that some of the students have not succeeded in establishing stable relationships with other students, so they feel they are not equals. I made the extra effort to have a personal discussion with some of the displaced students as we have been encouraged to do by our headteacher. From this discussion, I realized that the students from the other villages where there has been fatal battles think so low of themselves that they consider it too lofty to talk in class with the rest of their friends listening. I think it is a huge challenge to get these students understand that everyone in school has the right to express themselves irrespective of their background (P8, F, Y¹⁴).

It also emerged in the contribution of one participant that low self-esteem among the students who come from the volatile villages had age difference as a contributing factor. According to this participant, the interruption of education in villages when the crisis erupted 7 years ago caused quite a few children to stay at home or escape with their families to the forests for safety. This meant many children advanced in age but were very much behind academically. Having come to town where school had relatively been stable, many of the displaced students find themselves among students, some of whom are five years or six years younger. A participant indicated:

The age difference in my class is so conspicuous. Once one steps into the classroom, one immediately realizes from the physical presentation of the students that there is a huge age gap among

them. Although not many of the displaced students talk in class, the few who do so often talk with adult voice and I can notice the much younger students giggling. I believe this has contributed very much to the inferiority complex among the displaced students. A good number of them seem to be too conscious of the fact that they are not in their age group. They seem to be reminded almost all the times that they have lost much. Again, I feel that they just feel that they can't bond well with the rest of the much younger children. It is indeed quite a task to help them come to terms with the fact that this is their new reality which they have to adapt to and forge on. It is like sitting in class with a child who is a lot younger than one's youngest sibling. The feeling is not a funny one, I know. I noticed that the displaced students are quick to draw the conclusion that they are being mocked for their age difference or lack of relevant academic progress. So, as a teacher, I only just try to encourage them and do my best not to give them the impression that feeds this unproductive conception which they hold about themselves (P1, M, Y⁵).

4.2.3. Lack of Trust and Respect

Most of the participants noted in their contribution that a good number of the children who just joined their year groups from the areas where violence is rife have serious difficulties in building relationships with other students. The main reason noted for this is the difficulty to trust. It was evident from the contributions that the displaced children live in intense fear that they do not believe in being protected if they open up to any other person. They have learned to be secretive as this was a survival mechanism as they faced threats presented to their family members. Lack of trust therefore made classroom engagement quite a challenge. One participant explained:

I have found it absolutely difficult getting the students who came in this year especially from the turbulent areas to be able to interact with their classmates in constructive ways. Most of these displaced students are so secretive to the point that they are not keen to be spontaneous and interact with friends. There are some subjects that impinge on social life and students are expected to share how some aspects apply to their lives or how they can apply these aspects to their family lives or current social circumstances. Understandably, the displaced students may not have any families living with them, but they also fear even revealing anything about the families they live with. Being secretive is already a part of their lives and this makes them build a wall around them which is difficult to penetrate (P5, F, Y⁶).

Another participant noted this aspect of lack of trust when he expressed great difficulty in the attempt to help the displaced students. This teacher said:

As a teacher, it is important to have some background knowledge of one's students to be able to offer them relevant support. Despite the huge number of students in my class, I have personally committed myself to knowing the children who joined us this year from the war torn areas. I have thought of giving up on several occasions, but as a teacher, I challenged myself to be patient. However, I must say it is unfortunately an arduous task to get the displaced children share their stories. One can see that they are not stable emotionally, but one cannot just rely on assumption. It is important to hear them speak. This is extra time for me and extra energy. But I am often so frustrated that I can't get anything substantial out of a good number of them. One openly told me that they have known all sorts of threats and so become used to being absolutely discreet. Another student

mentioned that he had to conceal the hideout of his elder brother who was hunted by both the state military and the separatist fighters. This is the sort of life they had become used and trust is now a very difficult aspect to cultivate (P2, F, Y⁷).

Added to the aspect of lack of trust in both their classmates and teachers, it was clear in the contribution of some participants that many of the displaced children were noted for disrespectful conduct towards teachers. According to one participant, the experiences of the displaced children with the separatist fighters, some of whom they worked closely with, have caused them to be very bold (P6, M, Y⁷). Some of the displaced students manifest outright stubbornness in class and during extra-curricular activities such as sports, tidying of classroom and club activities. According to one teacher, the displaced students were noted for having their own frame of mind about things and were stubbornly following their own preferences (P13, M, Y⁸). One teacher noted with a tone of disappointment:

You see, I sound really frustrated sharing this with you. But, I must note that I have always had the passion to help these children who joined us from areas that were badly hit by armed clashes between the state military and the separatist fighters. I am aware that these children have lost a lot and need much support to come up to speed with the rest of the cohort. Unfortunately, majority of these children in my class seem so disloyal. Some of them refuse to take down notes when the rest of their classmates are doing so. I have in some occasions asked them to do some extra work in a bit to help them catch up with what they have lost, but I felt helpless and humiliated when the children just don't show any interest. I know they have a lot they are dealing with, but I can see in their attitude grains of

stubbornness. Apparently, the rough experiences they have lived have made them just so difficult to adjust. It is even more frustrating when this lack of respect is done in a subtle manner. They don't verbalize their disrespect, but it is noticeable in their conduct. It seems they feel that no one can do anything worse than what they have already seen and gone through. I thought of resorting to a harsh method with promise of punishment, but that just seemed to be too mild compared with the threats they have already become used to before living their villages (P9, M, Y⁹).

The disrespectful attitude of some of the displaced students caused some teachers to teach with some degree of fear. Some participants noted that they were not too sure what the silent stubbornness of the displaced students could lead to. These participants noted that for a child to be that stubborn and not ready to follow instructions and who, moreover, has come from an area of violence, it is probable that they may have a mechanism of defense which may not be too safe. The students therefore are feared for what they could do since they might have learned a rough lifestyle from the separatist fighters who took refuge amongst the villagers, using them as shields against the attacks of the state military. As the participants noted, many of the displaced students appeared to have been forced to offer help to the separatist fighters and in the course of this, might have been taught the way of brutality. A participant maintained:

When I realized that some of the children from the villages where there has been severe fighting were just resistant to instructions, I became very careful. Some of them who had missed school for many years are now grown and muscular with frightful countenance. Just

their look at times scares me because I don't know what may be cooking up in their minds. I remember one teacher was molested by one of the displaced students because he spoke harshly to him in class. So, it is really difficult to deal with these students who have been exposed to such violence and related tendencies (P13, M, Y⁸).

One participant indicated that disrespect, which was very much noticeable among the displaced students, but not limited to them, is encouraged by the large class sizes. According to this teacher, the influx of children who escaped violence with families or guardians to schools in town has resulted in large class sizes in almost all year groups. With the crowded classrooms, quite a few students sleep off during lessons, distract themselves with phones that they sneaked into class, and do not carry out class exercises etc. This tendency was noted to be higher among the displaced students who manifested disrespect towards many teachers. One participant mentioned:

It is absolutely daunting to handle children who have filled a classroom to the rafters. This ballooning class number is due to the huge intake of the children displaced from their villages due to armed conflict. Such children need a lot of attention and support to stay focused. Also, they are already used to a life of chaos, and they seem to always want to provoke a situation of chaos around them in class. Even though they don't talk much in class, their actions could be very provocative, and I find this quite disrespectful and disruptive. It is a great thing to accommodate the children from the troubled villages, but I must say it is difficult to tame the lifestyle of disregard of instructions, an attitude which many of them have cultivated in the course of their exposure to the activities of the separatist fighters and the state military (P11, F, Y⁴).

4.2.4. Language barrier

A serious learning challenge that emerged from the contribution of the participants in this research is language barrier. Most of the displaced students are good at speaking their local dialects and were struggling with English Language which is a second language in Cameroon. Even before the eruption of the crisis, the children in the villages had to make very serious efforts to get used to speaking and writing in English language. One participant noted that the students in his class who joined this year from the areas where school had been interrupted due to intense fighting, had forgotten most of the English language they learned in primary school:

Having been teaching first year students in secondary school for the past eight years, I have had to deal with quite a few learning challenges in children who just joined secondary school from different backgrounds. However, the situation of the children who came in this year from the war zone villages is particularly tough. I say so because many of them abandoned the English language which they had studied in primary school and spoke only their dialects for the past 7 years. This is because there were no schools in the villages due to the armed conflict. As a result of this long gap of no interaction with the English Language, these children now find it so difficult to follow lessons. I consider them as slow learners and I am always paying keen attention to give them more time for every activity (P4, M, Y¹¹).

Another participant who mentioned the challenge of language indicated that the test papers he finds most difficult to mark are those of the children

who came from the war zone villages. These children seem not to grasp questions mainly because their ability to read and interpret is very weak:

I remember one occasion in which I lost patience while marking a test script and just crossed a whole sheet because trying to make sense out of what was scribbled was just so hair splitting. It was not only the poor handwriting that made the marking of the test script difficult, but the language was absolutely unclear and incomprehensible. I later revisited this sheet and checked the name again after it dawned on me that it may be one of the new students who had escaped from the villages enveloped in violence. On checking, I confirmed my guess and had to take time to make some sense out of what was written. But to be honest, it was an up-hill task. This is just one of many cases wherein I have struggled with test scripts or assignment books of the children who just joined our school this year from the villages where there is intense fighting. I think some basic lessons on English language will greatly help them overcome the language barrier which they now have and which is a serious barrier to effective learning (P10, F, Y¹⁰).

4.2.5. Lack of basic learning material

Many participants spoke about the lack of basic learning material among the displaced students. According to them, this constitutes a huge learning challenge both in class and back at home. One participant noted that many of the children from villages who are now living with relations in town cannot afford all their required notebooks or exercise books (P7, M, Y¹¹). Another participant indicated that it was almost a daily experience for the children who are from the war zone villages to beg their classmates for pens. Sometimes, when going round the class to check the notebooks, it is noticed

that majority of those who have nothing taken down are the children who have escaped the villages where fighting is rife (P4, M, Y¹¹). One participant said:

It is quite difficult for a child to use sheets of papers that are not held together simply because there are not enough note books. I have many displaced children in my class and what I noticed with much frustration is that they have not got enough money to buy didactic materials. Some have to beg sheets of paper from their peers and copy notes on them. They end up misplacing or mixing up the sheets of paper. This makes reading lesson notes difficult. Of course, their revision for tests and exams will be impacted negatively (P10, F, Y¹⁰).

Added to the lack of sufficient notebooks, some participants highlighted the lack of required basic textbooks. One noted:

It is rather unfortunate that our education system encourages the frequent change of textbooks. This is compounded by the high cost at which the textbooks are sold. So, students can hardly use the textbooks their senior ones used. It is also difficult to buy used textbooks which will be a lot cheaper. With this challenge, things have really been so difficult for the students who escaped their villages to town due to the ongoing fighting between the Cameroon military and the separatist fighters. Understandably, these students and their families or guardians are barely making ends meet. Some goodwill families have opened their doors to accommodate the displaced students while they study, but most of such families are only struggling and so cannot afford much financial support for the displaced children. Consequently, the displaced children go without the relevant basic textbooks. They are therefore not able to do assignments back at home or do extra reading. This poses a huge

challenge on their ability to learn well and pace up with the rest of the cohort (P13, M, Y⁸).

4.2.6. Inconsistency in class attendance

The contributions of the participants in this research highlighted the reality of high records of absences by many of the children who moved from their villages to town to study as a result of the raging armed conflict. This also constitutes a serious learning challenge. Several reasons account for this inconsistency in class attendance. One of the reasons has already been mentioned in relation to the theme of indifference to school. Another reason is the inability to pay tuition fees on time. One participant noted:

You know, our education system is such that proprietors of non-state schools pay their teachers and run the entire school affairs largely from the tuition fees collected from students. This makes the collection of tuition fees very crucial and every student must meet the deadlines for the payments. There are lots of other levies meant to aid the effective running of the non-state schools. Unfortunately, many of the children who have come from the villages leaving their family properties behind, either destroyed or unattended, have no source of income here in town. Some of their hosts can only manage to provide them with food and few basic needs but cannot take care of the school fees. This makes things very difficult for the children. They are sent away over and over for fees. As a result, they miss many lessons and class activities (P3, F, Y⁸).

Still in relation to high record of absences among the displaced students, one of the participants in this research mentioned:

It is so difficult to deal with such frequent absences. My greatest worry is that the students from the villages that are gravely affected by the ongoing fighting are those who need more support from us teachers. However, they are rather the ones who are sent home over and over for fees. It is sad that the school authorities cannot run the school and pay the teachers without due collection of fees. But this is causing a great learning challenge to these students who have escaped violence to join our school in town (P2, F, Y⁷).

The difficulty in paying fees which leads to interruption in class attendance among the displaced students was also highlighted by a participant who mentioned the following:

These children who have now been forced to move to town both for safety for education, were able to raise money for their education while back in their villages. Most of them engaged in farming and sold their produce to merchants who came from the city to buy from the village markets. Some of the villagers brought their items directly to town to sell and they were able to save good amounts of money with which they took care of fees and other needs. Unfortunately, not only have their farms and crops been destroyed, but many of them cannot also even access their farms either due to destroyed roads or threat of being attacked by the belligerent parties. The story of many farmers who have been caught by stray bullets or who have been molested by either the state military or the separatist fighters has scared many from going to farm. So, the main source of income for the families in the villages has been destroyed. The displaced students, who are now schooling in town, cannot rely much on their families back in the villages. Now in town, they have to make do with the little support they get from people of goodwill and their guardians or relations. So, paying their fees on time is just near impossible for

a good number of the displaced students. Unfortunately, this precarious situation does not exonerate them from paying fees since the school proprietors need the money to pay the teachers and run the schools. The government has not given any extra subsidy to cater for the fees of the displaced children. So, it is difficult. These children are not consistent in following lessons, and this is just a huge challenge for effective learning (P8, F, Y¹⁴).

Another participant talked about the serious efforts he made to speed up coverage of the curriculum before the next fee-drive date:

Once, when I realized that the next fee-drive date was approaching, I was in no doubt that many of the poor children who joined our school from the villages will be going home. They had already been sent home several times before as this is a strategy to get some parents pay fees, especially those who can afford but are just slow to do so. I put in my best although I was aware that my speed was a bit too fast for the children from the villages who were able to learn at a much lesser pace. I tried to strike the balance and was able to cover more than I would have done at my usual pace. Even though I succeeded in doing this, I really felt so bad when the fee-drive team came around and called the names of students who had to go home. I felt like crying when I saw that the vast majority of those leaving the class with everything of theirs to go home for incomplete tuition fees were the displaced students. Of course, I had to carry on with lessons, but I really struggled to do so since I was aware of the fact that these children were losing quite a lot and their learning was greatly compromised (P12, F, Y⁷).

4.3. TEACHING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ASSIST DISPLACED CHILDREN AND THEIR PERCEIVED IMPACT

The third research question that guided the investigation in this work is the following:

- What are the teaching strategies that have been employed to address the impact of the armed conflict on displaced children? If any, how are they benefitting the displaced children?

This research question was answered by the following two themes:

Building confidence in the students

Group work

One-to-one approach

4.3.1. Building Confidence in the Students

Most of the participants mentioned that lack of confidence was a very noticeable aspect among the displaced students. To improve their learning capacity, efforts to boost their confidence in class and towards education in general emerged from the contributions as a key strategy. One participant noted that he employed affirmative remarks when addressing the displaced students. According to this teacher, he felt that his teaching strategy helped boost the confidence of his students in general, but particularly, it was great support to the displaced students:

I felt that failing to sound positive towards the displaced students who held very negative thoughts about themselves would really not

help them engage with lessons with the required confidence. Most of the children who just came from the villages where there has been intense fighting have not been that confident of their academic potential and their worth. So, by using many positive, affirmative, and encouraging words of praise, I think, I am succeeding to transform the atmosphere in my class. Although it is impacting my entire class positively, my main target are the displaced students. I am happy that this strategy is yielding some fruits. This is evident in the way the displaced students are increasingly attempting to speak in class, applying themselves more than before in group tasks and in extra-curricular activities (P4, M, Y¹¹).

One participant observed the importance of making encouraging remarks in assignment books and test papers. This is because the students, especially the displaced students seemed inclined to think that they were regarded to be below standard in everything no matter their efforts (P12, F, Y⁷).

4.3.2. Group Work

Several participants in this research underscored the challenge working with large classroom sizes. To address this, many of them resorted to making more frequent use of group work. These participants reported that they found this strategy quite helpful to the displaced students. One participant shared the following:

I could not just cope with the chaos and lack of engagement that was encouraged by the vast number of students in my class. I was driven mad when I discovered that some students had nothing to show in their books towards the end of the day. So, by using little

groups, I was able to get all the students engaged more with the lesson. I made use of many activities that required the children to participate as much as possible in their respective groups. I feel that the children who joined us from the volatile villages benefitted from this approach as their confidence was boosted in the smaller groups (P4, M, Y¹¹).

Another participant noted that the lukewarm attitude of many of the displaced students was greatly addressed through creation of small groups which are diverse. In other words, the teachers tried to put bright students in different groups so that they could support those who are struggling. According to one participant:

It will be absolutely useless to group intelligent students into one group and put students who are all struggling in another group. It does take time to do the right thing and that is what I have been doing. I tried to take note of the students who are struggling, many of whom are children who came from the villages where fighting has been fierce. I tried to spread these distribute them across the different groups. I also made sure that everyone in the groups got involved and not allow the brighter students to dominate. I felt that this really created a good ground for the building of relationships and better understanding of lessons (P8, F, Y¹⁴).

4.3.2. One-to-one Approach (OTOA)

Many participants did mention their efforts to organize private support sessions with the displaced students. One noted that she arranged with the host family that some displaced students living with them could stay behind for an hour after closing time. During this time, she talks to the individual

students and explores different means of providing them better understanding of what has been taught during the day. This teacher further maintained:

These private sessions did help a great deal given that the displaced students could express their understanding of what has been taught without being afraid of being jeered at by other students. Although feeling unsure, many of them say the right things and are helped to believe that they are capable of grasping like the other students (P2, F, Y⁷).

Another participant indicated his use of the OTOA by noting the following:

I sacrifice part of my break time quite often to have a private session with the displaced student whom I notice to be struggling most each day. When teaching, I am very keen to observe those who are alert and well engaged as well as those who are merely just present but not fully focused and who demonstrate lack of comprehension. During these private sessions, I realized that the displaced students are more comfortable to ask questions and clarify their doubts about what was taught in class. I usually wrap-up the one-to-one sessions just before the bell signals the end of break (P9, M, Y⁹).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter, the main findings from the analysed data collected from the participants has been presented. Evidently, the main findings have answered the three main research questions. The first research question was answered by the following two themes: “The Sense of Insecurity among displaced Students” and “Lack of interest in school”. Five main themes answered the second research question: Inability to concentrate in class; Low

self-esteem; Lack of trust and respect; Language barrier; Lack of basic learning material; Inconsistency in class attendance. Finally, three themes answered the third research question: “Building confidence in the students;” “Group Work” and One-to-one approach.

The presentation and analysis of the main findings in this chapter in line with the three main research questions gives one the understanding that the on-going armed conflict in the English-Speaking part of Cameroon has taken a great toll on students. Evidently, the displaced students find studies so hard because of the several learning difficulties that are war-related as presented by the research participants. Although the data indicates that teachers are making efforts to support these displaced students, it is noticeable that there is no collective strategy designed to support the displaced students.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This research project was aimed at investigating the special education needs in children who are displaced due to fierce fighting in the context of the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, a west African country. As evidenced by the data collected from participants in this research and past literature, armed conflict results in huge displacement of families. Children of school age are subjected to challenging circumstances as they have to continue their education in new environments. Additionally, the reality of war leaves them with emotional and psychological scares that pose a severe challenge to their participation in standard educational practice.

This chapter will discuss the key findings that have been presented and analyzed in the preceding chapter. In doing this, Due consideration of the theoretical framework and past research findings will be observed. The three main research questions which have guided every stage of this research project will be the main pillars around which this discussion chapter will be hinged. A summary of the main discussions will close this chapter.

5.1. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS THAT ANSWERED THE FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION

The first research question considered the impact of the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon on displaced children:

What are the perceptions of teachers and headteacher of School A in Bamenda Cameroon, regarding the impact of the on-going armed conflict on displaced students?

Based on the findings that addressed this research question, it is clear that one of the main impacts of the ongoing armed conflict on displaced children is a lasting sense of insecurity. The responses from teachers and principals revealed that the displaced students were living in an atmosphere of paralyzing fear and uncertainty.

This persistent fear poses a significant challenge for the displaced children, as highlighted in the Global Monitoring Report discussed in the literature review chapter of this project. According to the report, intrastate armed conflicts often lead to violence that greatly affects innocent civilians (Global Monitoring Report, 2011). Violations of human rights laws by warring parties in intrastate armed conflicts create lasting fear in those exposed to the conflict (Global Monitoring Report, 2011; Pherali & Sahar, 2018; Tidwell, 2004; Jacob, 2015). This sheds light on the situation of displaced children who are gripped by a sense of insecurity even when far removed from the volatile areas.

It is evident that the reality of fear is one of the major impacts of armed conflict that disrupt educational structures. This is in line with the conclusion of Jones & Naylor (2014), who identify fear as the third most severe of the ten channels through which armed conflict compromises access to education. Unfortunately, the findings reveal that education has become a subject that evokes fear due to the deliberate targeting of educational structures and

personnel by belligerent parties (Pherali & Sahar, 2018). Education is sometimes weaponized as a means to advance socio-political agendas, as individuals are labeled as sympathizers or traitors based on their involvement in education during armed conflict.

It is considered a natural right for every child to have the opportunity to pursue education in a suitable environment, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international documents. Therefore, it is unjust for parties involved in armed conflicts to blatantly disregard these international laws. Even during conflicts, it is essential for all parties to establish and respect safe havens for the continuous education of children, as emphasized by the United Nations. Access to education must be maintained even in crisis situations such as violence resulting from armed conflict, as stated by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2008.

The fear experienced in conflict zones often leads to disengagement from the educational process. Education should be a valued pursuit, sought after by families for the development of responsible individuals beneficial to society. This aligns with the definition of education by Fielding and Moss (2011) as the fostering and support of the general well-being and development of children and young people, enabling them to interact effectively with their environment and lead fulfilling lives. Noddings (2005) also argues for the intimate connection between happiness and education, asserting that education should aim at promoting happiness. While it's important to note that happiness varies

among different groups, the focus on delight and fulfillment is a common aspect. Murray (2023) identifies four purposes of education, known as the four Es of education: enhancement, equality, emancipation, and eudaimonia, which implies flourishing.

It is unfortunate that education, which should be desirable and encouraged (Noddings, 2005; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Murray, 2023), has instead become a source of fear for children displaced by war, as evidenced in this research. It is important to recognize one possible cause of the indifference shown by these children towards education, leading to class boycotts or dropping out of school, which is depression. Some displaced children are so consumed by grief over the loss of family members that they lose all motivation to live, let alone study. This is supported by previous research (Thapar et al., 2022; Christie et al., 2021) which suggests that depression leads to a decline in engagement in activities. Therefore, considering the adverse impact of depression on psycho-emotional well-being and functioning (Thapar et al., 2022; Gunnarsson et al., 2023; Christie et al., 2021), it is not surprising to see a lack of interest in school among children displaced by war, as reported in this research.

Unfortunately, displaced children are often encouraged to continue their studies in new areas without being given the necessary support to cope with the impact of war-related depression, which significantly damages their well-being. As confirmed by Yokoya et al. (2018), the situation worsens when people in certain contexts lack a proper understanding of the symptoms of

depression. However, it is positive to note from the findings that some teachers are aware of the psychological and emotional struggles faced by children displaced by war.

Based on previous research, it can be argued that it is a serious oversight if displaced children are not provided with some form of rehabilitation, and instead are pressured to continue their education in their new environment as if everything is okay (Thapar et al., 2022). Rehabilitation involves offering personalized support to help individuals manage and recover from physical and/or mental health challenges (Royal College of Occupational Therapy, 2024). Since depression can persist, recur, and remit (Thapar et al., 2022), it is important to not only provide one-off rehabilitation support, but also to offer continuous mental health support to the displaced children who still struggle with the bitterness and frustration of their immense loss.

It is crucial to take every necessary step to provide mental health support to displaced children so that they can engage in participatory learning, as this promotes inclusion (Hornby, 2014). Every child, regardless of their needs, must receive adequate support to participate in standard education and develop their unique potentials (Rapp & Corral, 2021). It's essential to note that inclusion, which goes beyond mere physical presence (Lewis & Norwich, 2005), could possibly be inadvertently ignored with regard to children displaced by armed conflict. In some contexts, people and government officials may focus only on enabling displaced children to relocate and enroll in new schools. While this is praiseworthy, much more needs to be

done, considering that learning is an actively engaging process that requires full collaboration between teachers and learners (McKeachie, 2002; Serekoane, 2016; Sherry, 2019). Without adequate support for collaboration, being physically present in the classroom could still be fruitless.

The preceding argument about the need to support displaced children so that they can effectively participate in the learning process aligns with Hornby's (2014) understanding of Inclusive Education. According to Hornby (2014), inclusive education entails recognizing the diversity in needs and strengths of children and responding appropriately to these needs. With this approach, all children who need personal support could be fully engaged in the learning process without feeling left behind or unaccompanied.

5.1.2. Discussion of Findings that answered the second research question.

The second main research question focused on the learning challenges manifested by the children who have been displaced by the ongoing armed conflict.

What are the perceptions of teachers and headteacher of School A in Bamenda Cameroon, regarding the impact of the on-going armed conflict on displaced students?

The responses of the participants in this research revealed that inability to sustain concentration during class lessons and activities was a significant challenge among the displaced children. This finding is consistent with the view of past researchers. Awng (2017) maintains that the inability to sustain

concentration in lessons and class activities is an aspect greatly manifested by students who live the reality of armed conflict. According to Awng (2017), this poses a huge challenge to effective learning by children who have had to deal with the enormous challenges of armed conflict. The position of Awng (2017) is corroborated by that of Buriel *et al.* (2019) who presents the sound of gunshot as one of the elements of armed conflict that account for concentration challenges. This position also agrees with that of Tidwell (2004) who maintained that the sound of gunshot evokes the feeling of insecurity in students which serves as a barrier to mental sobriety.

It is thus evident that the displaced children were still suffering the mental impact of exposure to the sound of horrifying gun exchange. Based on this, their ability to concentrate was greatly compromised. Gleaning from the mutual enquiry theory which views teaching as a cooperative enterprise involving active participation of both teachers and learners (Kumar, 2012), one would say the situation of the displaced children constitute a learning challenge.

Researchers have also identified the sound of bomb blast as an element of armed conflict which compromises serenity of mind and therefore the ability to concentrate in studies. In the study of Nra & Vibulphol (2020), carried out in Myanmar, it was concluded that bomb blast was a source of profound fear that greatly compromised the ability of students to sustain concentration during lessons and class activities.

The effect of the war-related trauma manifested by the displaced children in the war-torn English speaking regions of Cameroon which has significantly undermined their ability to concentrate in class has been confirmed by several past research projects. In their research, Buriel *et al.* (2019) concluded that war-related trauma results from the exposure to the sound of gunshots and bomb blasts. This is the experience of the displaced children in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon as revealed by the findings. These students have been forced to move to schools in the town centre without any emotional support. As such, they still continue to be haunted by their past experiences of horror. This is understood better in light of the finding of Kostelny & Ondoro (2016) who concluded that when children displaced by war move to other areas with the baggage of unresolved mental health issues, they will require additional support. This is because they will continue to be traumatized as their minds constantly go back to the experience of horror which they lived. It is no surprise therefore that participants in this research noted that displaced students still showed signs of distress that led to lack of concentration.

The foregoing discussion highlights once more the need for mental health support for the displaced children. The traumatizing circumstance to which they have been exposed suffice to provoke symptoms of depression which would impact participation in activities (Lakasing *et al.*, 2020). This undermines the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process which according to the theoretical framework of this research – the mutual inquiry

theory, should have a dialogic character, involving active participation of both teacher and learner (Lakasing *et al.*, 2020; Mercer & Howe, 2012). This interactive nature of teaching and learning cannot be smooth if the displaced children's emotional and psychological health do not favour a participatory and interactive atmosphere in class (Serekoane, 2016; Sherry, 2019).

It was also revealed in this research that many of the displaced children in the English-speaking restive regions of Cameroon are not only distressed and thus traumatized by their past experiences of war, but also by their current circumstances in their new environment. Their sense of loss was reinforced and made more intense by the harsh and discriminatory attitudes their hosts manifested towards them. As such, the sense of loss of family and property which was reawakened due to their new circumstances aggravated or reinforced their trauma. This is also understood in line with the conclusion of several research projects (Kostelny & Ondoro, 2016; Burde *et al.*, 2017; & Awng, 2017). According to these researchers, distressing circumstances gravely undermine the ability of students to concentrate in class. Thus, the displaced students who already carry a baggage of anxiety merely continue in a vicious cycle of events that do not enable them to be sober enough for class activities.

It is clear that if the displaced children who are severely affected psychologically by the distressing experiences of war are to participate effectively in class, there is need for the chain of trauma provoking events to be discontinued. One way of doing this is establishing of social support which

fosters positive contextual conditions and favourable interpersonal factors which help to bring about wellbeing (Maercker & Horn, 2013; Vallières *et al.* 2021). Unfortunately, this research has revealed that this chain continues for many children who are displaced and have to study in areas that appear to be relatively calm.

One can therefore regard the inability to concentrate or the struggle to sustain concentration during lessons as a learning need which children displaced by armed conflict manifest. This is supported by the argument of Kauffman *et al.* (2018) who maintain that the lack of basic natural skills for learning constitutes special education need (SEN). In this case, the learning need is not based on neurotic related deficiency which is considered to be biological (Bradley & Danielson, 2002). Rather, this learning need is due to emotional and psychological turmoil arising from exposure to stressful circumstances (Awng, 2017; Buriel *et al.*, 2019). This need for more support for the enhancement of concentration, as noticed in the displaced children, must therefore be treated as a learning need which is related to the ongoing war.

It is crucial to consider the impact of war on children's education, as education is a fundamental right for every child, even in times of conflict (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008). We need to discuss how the inability to concentrate can be considered a special education need related to war.

Based on the previous discussion, we can view the displaced students' inability to sustain concentration as a learning challenge that is not rooted in physical impairments, which are typically associated with learning challenges (Norwich, 2005). Instead, this challenge could be seen as emotionally based, given that it arises from the experiences of ongoing armed conflict. Bradley & Danielson (2002) suggest that disabilities stemming from emotional challenges often result from societal experiences. This explains very well the situation of the displaced students. From the findings of this work, the children displaced by the ongoing armed conflict are not only traumatized by their past experiences. Their psychological and emotional scares are renewed and even deepened by the new circumstances they have to face especially in their host families, some of which continue to torture them mentally as revealed in the findings of this research.

This research findings also highlight the issue of low self-esteem among children affected by armed conflict. This poses a significant barrier to effective learning, as the research framework emphasizes the collaborative nature of the learning process between teachers and students. Active participation in learning requires self-confidence, and children must feel that their contributions are valued in a dialogic learning environment.

Lack of confidence can be considered a special educational need, as it may lead to self-exclusion from class activities and passive participation in exercises. Teachers have a responsibility to support their students' confidence

levels, and mental health support may also be necessary, particularly for children affected by war who may experience depression and low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem can also lead to distrust, both in oneself and in others. The research indicates that displaced children may struggle to trust their classmates and teachers, possibly due to past experiences of betrayal and a fear of not being accepted. This lack of trust and self-esteem can hinder collaborative teaching and learning, as it may prevent students from participating in class discussions and forming friendships.

Lack of trust could also hamper inclusivity, as it results in emotional and physical distancing, or passivity (He, 2022). This is a learning challenge that could be attributed to war-related circumstances. Research has shown that many displaced children find it difficult to trust their teachers and peers due to the effects of war. Additionally, it is not surprising to observe disrespectful attitudes among children displaced by ongoing armed conflict. This can be understood in the context of research by Bradley & Danielson (2002), who suggest that emotionally based disabilities may manifest as temper tantrums, abnormal mood swings, and bizarre motor acts.

Another issue highlighted by the research is the language barrier among children displaced by war. Many of them have been away from school for several years and have been using their native dialects. Suddenly, they are required to resume studying in English, alongside children who have not experienced any interruption in their English language exposure. This situation challenges inclusivity, as language is a tool for inclusion (Nag, 2024).

The lack of the necessary English language skills for self-expression could lead to apparent indifference or lack of motivation to participate in activities (Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017). It is clear that the language barrier could compromise the ability of displaced children to actively engage in learning.

While language barrier alone may not be categorized as a war-related special educational need, in this context, it is considered as such. The ongoing armed conflict has led to the interruption of studies in volatile villages, making English language proficiency a difficulty for displaced children.

5.1.3. Discussion of Findings that answered the third research question.

The third research question sought to investigate the response that teachers made towards the war-related learning needs of the displaced children:

What are the teaching strategies that have been employed to address the impact of the armed conflict on displaced children? If any, how are they benefitting the displaced children?

The responses from participants revealed a significant gap, indicating a lack of a comprehensive school strategy to support the learning needs of displaced children.

Despite this challenge, individual teachers implemented their own strategies, with one key approach being the use of various techniques to boost the confidence of the displaced children. This strategy aligns with the theoretical framework of teaching and learning employed in this research.

According to educational theories by Serekoane (2016), Sherry (2019), McKeachie (2002), and Montessori (2015), children's confidence plays a crucial role in engaging them in the learning process, making teaching and learning more participatory and interactive. Ghafar (2023) emphasizes the importance of confidence, defining it as a cognitive perception encompassing competence and lovability. According to Ghafar (2023), confidence is vital for success in academics and other areas of life. This perspective aligns with Rea (2024), who highlights the invaluable benefits of boosting learners' confidence. It is important for children to feel capable and encouraged to express their comprehension of lesson topics and participate in class activities:

Confidence is also a big factor in keeping learners engaged with their education and the world around them. We know that by increasing confidence, you're allowing the learner to believe they have the potential to achieve and reduce their fear of failing. This motivates them to attend school or college regularly, have better focus during classes, and complete coursework and exams to the best of their ability.

One can agree with Rea (2024), who draws inspiration from the reflections of Banack et al. (2007). They maintain that building confidence in students strengthens optimism among them. From the foregoing, one could argue that a lack of confidence could be one of the factors that undermine interest in schooling on the part of the displaced children, as revealed by the findings of this research. This can be understood in the light of some past studies. For example, it was concluded in the study of Pajares & Miller (1994), Bong (2002), and Zimmerman & Kitsantas (2005) that traits such as increased

dedication to studying, enthusiasm, and heightened motivation are exhibited by learners who possess self-confidence. According to these researchers, such learners persevere even during hardship. This is certainly relevant to the situation of the children displaced by the ongoing armed conflict, given that they are currently dealing with the pain of loss, the trauma of their experiences, and the persistence of hardship and unfair treatment by some of their current host families.

It is crucial for teachers who have displaced children in their classrooms to recognize the diversity of abilities, especially given that the displaced children find themselves in a disadvantaged position regarding proficiency in the English language. This is the sort of diversity that Ghafar (2023) encourages teachers to look out for. According to Ghafar (2023), in educational settings, different cohorts of students concurrently exhibit varying levels of self-assurance, some possessing a notably high level while others exhibit a significantly diminished level of self-assurance. It is agreeable that this diminished level of self-assurance, tantamount to a lack of self-confidence, could bring about poor performance, especially in core subjects such as English and Maths (Rea, 2024). Such comparative underperformance could be a recipe for the reality of depression, given that it is an anxiety-provoking occurrence (Lakasing et al., 2020). This could explain the frustration and low self-esteem of the displaced children who notice that their peers do better.

One can therefore maintain that making an effort to boost the confidence level of the displaced children through the use of affirmative language and

praising their little achievements is, in a way, mentally therapeutic. This is supported by Rea (2024), who regards confidence as a key skill for mental fitness for learners. Rea (2024) therefore encourages the use of “confidence-targeted exercises to support underachieving learners. This is congruent with the efforts of the teachers who are trying at a personal level to adopt strategies that could boost the confidence of the children displaced by the ongoing armed conflict.

5.2. LIMITATION OF THIS STUDY

Throughout this study, we encountered some challenges. The telephone interviews were affected by network instability at times, leading to interrupted discussions and, on one occasion, requiring the call to be stopped and reinitiated. However, we were able to capture most of the vital information provided by the participants. Another challenge was the limited availability of literature on the war-related challenges faced by school children displaced by fighting.

While the consulted studies provided some insight, additional related studies would have greatly benefitted the literature review and discussion sections of this work. Despite these challenges, the collected data was sufficient to address the main research questions. Furthermore, the data analysis, presentation, and discussion of findings were all completed to the researchers' satisfaction.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the findings of the study are discussed in relation to existing theoretical and empirical literature. This discussion is based on the main research questions that guided the study. It is evident from this discussion that there is a clear link between the respective findings that answered the three research questions. The key finding is that fear or the sense of insecurity appears to have a causal link with the non-engagement or indifference towards education manifested by displaced children. The aspect of depression is also discussed as being linked to the non-engagement of displaced children in the learning process. In relation to the second research question, the inability to concentrate is discussed. The manifestation of low self-esteem and lack of confidence is also part of this discussion and is shown to have a link with the lack of trust manifested by the displaced students. Finally, in light of the third research question, the importance of boosting the confidence of learners, particularly the displaced children, is examined.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This research was aimed at investigating the special educational needs manifested by children displaced in the ongoing armed conflict in the English regions of Cameroon. To achieve this aim, three research questions guided the entire investigation and discussion. The first focused on the general impact of the armed conflict on displaced children from the point of view of teachers and headteachers. The second was geared towards finding out the learning challenges manifested by displaced children still from the point of view of teachers and headteachers. The third centered on the strategies that have been employed to address the learning challenges of the displaced children, if any.

A clear contextual background was presented, and relevant past research were identified and discussed alongside the theoretical framework and related concepts. This research took on a qualitative approach and data was collected from a single school in Bamenda with the use of interview questions.

The findings revealed that the main impacts of the conflict on displaced children were a sense of insecurity and lack of interest in education. The learning challenges included an inability to concentrate in class, low self-esteem, lack of trust and respect, language barriers, and a lack of basic learning materials. Additionally, it was found that there were no formal strategies in place at the school, but some teachers had implemented their

own approaches such as confidence-building activities, group work, and one-on-one support.

The reality of insecurity greatly affected the willingness of displaced children to fully engage with education, confirming the findings of the 2011 global monitoring report. According to this report, armed conflict, especially intrastate armed conflict, triggers patterns of violence that create lasting fear among innocent civilians (Global Monitoring Report, 2011). This conclusion is supported by other researchers such as Pherali & Sahar (2018), Tidwell (2004), Jacob (2015), and Jones & Naylor (2014), who also highlighted the serious impact of armed conflict-related fear on the educational process. These researchers ranked fear as the third most severe barrier to accessing education.

From this research, it can be inferred that fear poses a significant obstacle to effective performance in any activity. If displaced students continue to struggle with anxiety and panic resulting from exposure to horrific fighting, they are likely to face ongoing challenges in engaging with the educational process.

The research also confirms that displaced children experience war-related learning challenges, falling into the category of special educational needs rooted not in physical or functional biological defects, but in psycho-emotional turmoil (Bradley & Danielson, 2002). The primary learning challenge noted among displaced children is the inability to concentrate. According to the findings, displaced children are still dealing with trauma

caused by exposure to gunfire, bomb blasts, harassment, loss of loved ones, and destruction of family property.

Given the difficulty to sufficiently concentrate during lessons, it is evident that learning cannot be effective from the point of view of the mutual enquiry theory. As noted in this work, the mutual enquiry theory views teaching as a cooperative enterprise which requires active participation both from the learners and the teachers (Kumar, 2012). In the light of this theoretical framework, the inability to concentrate constitutes a special learning need, manifested by the displaced children.

It is therefore important to recognize that children who have been displaced by war require additional support when transitioning to new areas for education. Kostelny & Ondoro (2016) confirm that these children often carry unresolved mental health issues that can hinder their ability to engage in learning, which should be interactive and participatory (Lakasing et al., 2020). Previous research has established a connection between exposure to war and mental health issues, as demonstrated in the study by Buriel et al. (2019). In addition to these unresolved mental health issues, the distressing circumstances that displaced children continue to face in their new environment, as indicated by the findings of this research, show that they are in great need of support in their learning. This conclusion is supported by previous studies, including those of Burde et al. (2017) and Awng (2017).

It is clear that the issue of inclusion is crucial when discussing the education of children displaced by armed conflict. The findings of this research

reveal that displaced children not only struggle to concentrate in class, which is a fundamental skill for learning according to the mutual inquiry theory of learning (Kumar, 2012), but they also exhibit traits that pose serious obstacles to effective learning. These traits, such as low self-esteem and lack of trust, have been shown to be closely linked to the trauma that displaced children continue to experience due to past violence and the distressing circumstances of their new environment.

The main conclusion of this research is that armed conflict has a significant impact on displaced children. It is an oversight to emphasize that children displaced by war should simply return to school and continue their education without appropriate support. Displaced children have special needs and require specific attention in order to effectively engage in dialogic learning. This can only be achieved if the displaced children are mentally sound, emotionally stable, and optimistic about their ability to thrive.

Based on the foregoing conclusion, this study recommends the following:

- It is essential to provide mental health support for displaced children through the services of professional counselors. Schools that welcome displaced children, such as School A in Bamenda, Cameroon, and many other schools in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, should have a professional counselor. According to Greenham et al. (2019), the services of professional school counselors can be beneficial for both teachers and students.

Therefore, it is not enough to simply admit children displaced by war into schools in relatively calm areas. Measures must be put in place to facilitate their active participation in the learning process. This will greatly enhance the inclusion of children displaced by war in their new educational environment, in line with the emphasis of the Salamanca declaration (UNESCO 1994) and the global movement of Education for All (UNESCO, 2000), which maintain that the inclusion of all children must be a goal pursued by all education providers.

In addition to the professional support of school counselors, it is important to recommend some form of social support network to help rehabilitate the displaced children. The studies of Maercker & Horn (2013) and Vallières et al. (2021) confirm the importance of social support for enhancing participation.

- The second major recommendation from this study is that teaching strategies that enhance the confidence level of children displaced by war need to be designed and formalized for use in schools that accommodate these children. While some teachers have recognized the need for this and made personal efforts to support the displaced children, this effort must go beyond mere individual initiatives of teachers. It needs to be part of a larger endeavor to offer unhindered access to proper learning, which is the result of active participation and cooperation between learners and teachers. Language support

is one of the aspects that needs to be catered for when designing strategies for supporting displaced children. Due to language barriers, the displaced children are not only hindered from full participation, but they also manifest low self-esteem, which certainly poses a challenge, given that learning needs to be marked by the active participation of every child (Serekoane, 2016 & Sherry, 2019).

These two recommendations could be monitored by international organizations such as UNO and UNESCO which have both emphasized the fundamental right to education even in the midst of crisis (Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948; Committee on the Rights of the Child of 2008; Boyden & June (1996). One agrees with Sommers (2009), who argues that the provision of education is an important element of humanitarian response in the context of armed conflict. Countries which are part of these international organizations need to abide by the principle of enabling every child, and in the case of this research, children displaced by armed conflict, to undergo proper education, which is marked by deliberate efforts to minimize all obstacles to effective participation and cooperation in the learning process.

Future research could investigate the reality of war-related special educational needs further and establish in greater depth how international bodies could enforce the provision of adequate educational support to displaced children as a crucial part of the humanitarian response incumbent on respective governments who should be the primary providers of education

(Ferguson, 2021). This further research could highlight how provision of education to children displaced by war as part of humanitarian response could be done while still maintaining the four essential purposes of education of Murray (2023): enhancement, equality, emancipation and eudaimonia (meaning to flourish).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: A DEMONSTRATION OF DATA ANALYSIS WITH EMERGENCE OF THEMES

Respondent	Excerpts from Responses	Codes	Themes
P1, M, Y ⁵	<p>“...the children have shared how they are yet to get over the absolutely scary sound of sophisticated machine guns and blasts of incredibly powerful explosives”</p>	<p>There is insecurity</p>	<p>The Sense of Insecurity among displaced Students</p>
P2, F, Y ⁷	<p>“My students from the volatile villages in Bamenda, where the fighting was rife, shared how they could identify</p>	<p>Anxiety in the displaced students</p>	

	<p>the gunshot of the separatist fighters from that the military...I believe that this experience has built up some anxiety in the displaced students which is expressed overtly or in a subtle way at times”.</p>		
<p>P6, M, Y⁷</p>	<p>“When one is teaching and they hear any sudden and strong sound from the surrounding neighbourhood, they just become panic-stricken...”</p>	<p>Panic</p>	

P11, F, Y ⁴	Talking with this child later, she explained to me that she finds it hard to get over the horror she witnessed, perpetrated towards her sick mum. This student added that the thought of this flashes up in her mind while she is in class and she finds it just so difficult to do away with the thought nor handle the emotions that it evokes”	Difficulty to deal with distracting thoughts in class	Inability to Concentrate in Class
P7, M, Y ¹¹	“I feel most of the time that the displaced students	Not connected with what is	

	<p>are not connected with what is happening in class...These displaced students hardly demonstrate that they have been following the lesson. It is clear to me that they are really struggling to put their full attention on what we are doing in class...</p>	<p>happening in class</p>	
<p>P5, F, Y⁶</p>	<p>I think these displaced students are really undergoing what I can term, 'severe postwar circumstantial duress'. With this,</p>	<p>they cannot keep their minds steady in class</p>	

	they cannot keep their minds steady in class”.		
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APPENDIX 2 LETTER TO SOLICIT PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPER

Reverend Father Mangoua Bertrand Ngameni

Principal,

All Saints Comprehensive College, Bayelle.

Bamenda, Cameroon.

Dear Father,

Re: An Application to Carryout Research your School.

I am a Roman Catholic Priest from the Archdiocese of Bamenda, Cameroon, presently carrying out an online PhD by research with the Silenus University of Science and Literature, which has the head office in Italy. As an integral part of this course, I have decided to carry out a research on the following topic:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO WAR-RELATED SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN DISPLACED CHILDREN WITH THE AIM OF EXPLORING EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES IN CONFLICT REGIONS: THE CASE OF BAMENDA IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

In doing this research, I will rely on primary data which I will collect through interviews with teachers. I therefore wish that you kindly grant me access to carry out this research in your school.

It is important to note that this research has nothing to do with the political intricacies of the armed conflict that is ongoing in Bamenda and the rest of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

Given the volatile socio-political situation in Bamenda, Cameroon, I will ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. I will do this by anonymising the names of participants and schools. With this, any public mention of my research will not include information that can reveal the identity of the participants in any way.

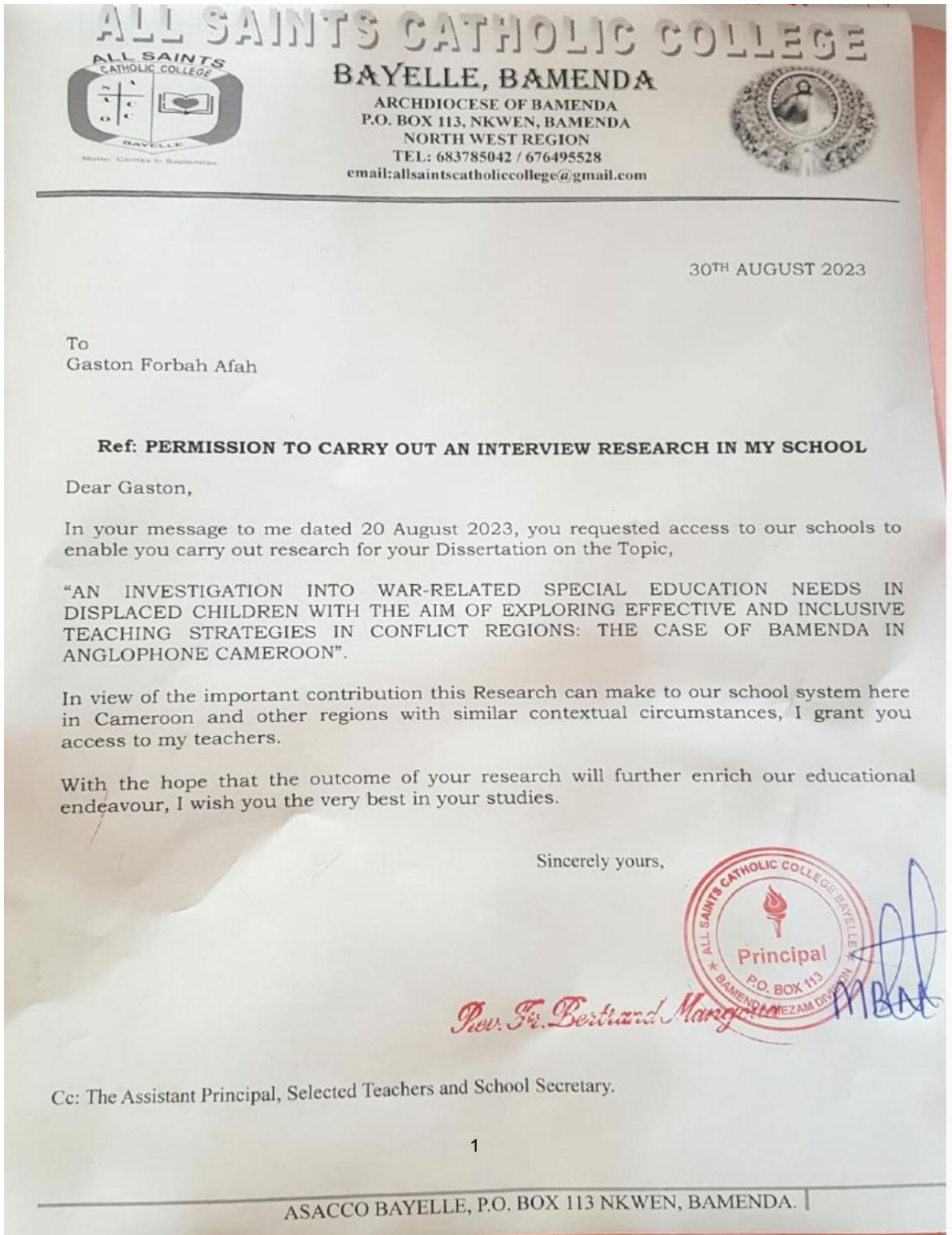
In carrying out this research, I hope to contribute to the literature on war-related special education needs in displaced children. Also, I hope to have information with which I can make helpful proposals for the adoption of effective and inclusive teaching strategies in conflict regions.

I look forward to getting your response.

Best wishes

Gaston Forbah Afah

APPENDIX 3: APPROVAL LETTER FROM GATEKEEPER



APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO WAR-RELATED SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN DISPLACED CHILDREN WITH THE AIM OF EXPLORING EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES IN CONFLICT REGIONS: THE CASE OF BAMENDA IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

Researcher: Gaston Forbah Afah

Student number: N° UNISE0531UK

I am inviting you to kindly consider taking part in the above research study. To enable you to make an informed decision, it will be important that you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please carefully go through the information below and ask any questions you may have. You may as well discuss your thoughts with others but it is your decision to be part of this research or to decline the request. If wish to participate, then you will have to complete and sign the consent form which has also been sent to you, via email.

What is the research about?

I am a Catholic Priest from Bamenda, Cameroon, presently studying an Online PhD Course with the Selinus University of Science and Literature. I completed a Masters Course in Education: Practice and Innovation, in the

University of Southampton, England. I am also a loan to the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, England, where I have been serving from 2019.

As a result of the ongoing armed conflict in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon that started in 2017, many school children have been displaced from their villages and are now resident in areas of relative calm. The one crucial preoccupation which is of great relevance to this research is measures that need to be in place to facilitate the provision of additional or relevant learning support to the children who have been displaced by armed conflict.

This research aims at investigating war-related special education needs among children displaced by violent fighting, with the hope of informing educational policy and practice in a context of armed conflict. This is a gap in existing literature which this research hopes to contribute to. For this aim to be achieved, the following research questions will inspire this investigation:

- What are the perceptions of teachers and headteachers of some schools in Bamenda Cameroon, regarding the impact of the ongoing armed conflict on displaced students?
- What are the perceptions of the teachers and headteachers about the learning challenges that are manifested by the children who have been displaced by armed conflict.
- What are the teaching strategies that have been employed to address the impact of the armed conflict on displaced children? If any, how are they benefitting the displaced children?

- What are the war-related challenges teachers face that compromise their ability to offer adequate support to the displaced children?

Why have I been asked to participate?

I have approached you requesting that you participate in this research because you are working in School A which has accommodated a significant number of displaced children since the start of the ongoing armed conflict in the English Speaking regions of Cameroon. This means from your personal experience with the children displaced by armed conflict, you are able to provide useful relevant information for this research.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Provided you kindly offer to take part in this research, you will need to use 30 minutes of your time to be part of an interview session which I will personally conduct. The interview will be done through telephone call which will be recorded so that no details of our conversation will be lost. I will send the questions to you well ahead of the time for the interview session. No third party will have access to the recorded interview. The audio file will be safely stored on my study laptop in a protected format. After transcribing the audio record, I will delete the audio file permanently from my laptop.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

I am not promising any financial reward for participating in this research project. However, any expenditure you will incur to purchase internet data, printing and scanning will be refunded to you through bank transfer or mobile money transfer (MTN Mobile Money or Orange Money Cameroon)

Are there any risks involved?

All your personal data will be anonymised to avoid any possibility of your identity being revealed. No information will also be mentioned that can reveal your identity. In this regard, the name of your school will not be mentioned in the main work. Rather, your school will be referred to as School A, Bamenda. Only my supervisor and assigned readers of my thesis will know the specific name of your school as the full gatekeeper permission will be included in the appendix of the final work to be submitted for grading.

What happens if I change my mind?

It is your right to change your mind after granting your consent to take part in the research. You can as well stop the interview at any point and ask to drop out of the research project. Even after completing the interview, you can ask that your data is not used. However, this must be done within two weeks as it will be difficult to rid the research of your data after data analysis has been done. If you happen to change your mind and wish to notify me, you can do so via the email: gforbah25@yahoo.com or the mobile contact: 07375312420.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The final result of this research project will be a complete PhD thesis which will be submitted to my supervisor for assessment.

Immense thanks for taking time to read this important information. I look forward to hearing from you about your informed decision regarding my request for your participation in this project.

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

AN INVESTIGATION INTO WAR-RELATED SPECIAL EDUCATION
NEEDS IN DISPLACED CHILDREN WITH THE AIM OF EXPLORING
EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES IN CONFLICT
REGIONS: THE CASE OF BAMENDA IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

Researcher: Gaston Forbah Afah

Student number: N° UNISE0531UK

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have had the opportunity to read and understood the information sheet .	
I was made to understand that I can ask questions about the study	
I am happy to be part of this research and to provide data that will be used for the purposes of this study as highlighted in the information sheet.	
I understand and agree that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that I can withdraw before, during or up to two weeks after the interview.	
I agree that I will provide information for this study through audio phone call interview.	
I am happy for the interview session to be audio recorded for the purposes of this study.	
I understand that the audio records of the interview will be stored on the researcher's study laptop as a protected file. I also agree that the	

audio record will be transcribed into written text and I understand that the audio record will thereafter be deleted permanently.	
I understand and agree that the transcribed text will be stored as password protected files by the researcher until the completion of the research and award of certificates.	
I fully understand that direct quotes from me may be used in the research but no identity revealing detail about me will be included.	

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

Name of researcher (print name).....

Signature of researcher

APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Study Title: AN INVESTIGATION INTO WAR-RELATED SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN DISPLACED CHILDREN WITH THE AIM OF EXPLORING EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES IN CONFLICT REGIONS: THE CASE OF BAMENDA IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

- 1.) What are your perceptions regarding the general impact the on-going armed conflict has had on displaced school children?
- 2.) What are your impressions the impact on your school cause by the admission of children displaced in volatile villages?
- 3.) How do you perceive the comportment of the children displaced by war during class lessons.
- 4.) Do the children who have joined your class from villages where there is intense fighting, manifest need for extra support in class? If, yes, explain briefly.
- 5.) Could you share with me our experience of classroom teaching after the admission of children displaced from rural villages by the ongoing war?
- 6.) What is the perception of the relationship between the children who arrived from areas of fierce fighting with the other students who have been living in relatively calm.
- 7.) Could you share briefly some of the teaching strategies you might have used to accommodate the new children displaced from the area of intense fighting?
- 8.) Could you explain any teaching strategies that might have been suggested to you by your school, if any?
- 9.) What is your assessment of the teaching strategies you have been using to support the whole class after the arrival of the children displaced by fighting.
- 10.) Do you have any other thoughts or recommendations to share in relation to your experience of teaching a class, part of which are students fleeing the horror of war?

A huge thanks to you for your time and kind participation in this study.

APPENDIX 7: DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participant Codes	Function/Status	Gender	Work Experience
P1, M, Y ⁵ (P1- Participant one, M - Male, Y ⁵ - five years teaching experience)	Teacher	Male	5 years as Classroom Teacher
P2, F, Y ⁷	Teacher	Female	7 years
P3, F, Y ⁸	Teacher	Female	8 years
P4, M, Y ¹¹	Teacher	Male	11 years

P5, F, Y ⁶	Teacher	Female	6 years
P6, M, Y ⁷	Teacher	Male	7 years
P7, M, Y ¹¹	Teacher	Male	11 years
P8, F, Y ¹⁴	Teacher	Female	14 years
P9, M, Y ⁹	Teacher	Male	9 years
P10, F, Y ¹⁰	Teacher	Female	10 years
P11, F, Y ⁴	Teacher	Female	4 years
P12, F, Y ⁷	Teacher	Female	7 years

P13, M, Y ⁸	Teacher	Male	8 years
P14, F, Y ⁵	Teacher	Female	5 years