

REQUEST RESPONSE

Global rapid evidence review of the linkages between education and societal security

There is ongoing debate about education's role in stability and societal security, with some evidence showing it fosters understanding and inclusivity and acts as a protective environment, while others suggest it can exacerbate existing inequalities and divisions. Given current global crises, the importance of investing in access and quality education is more important than ever. This review examines the role education plays in human and societal security at national and regional levels.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Figures	3
Tables.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
1. Research objectives	5
2. Research questions	5
3. Scope of research	5
4. Background theory.....	5
4.1 Links between education and global and societal security	5
4.2 Peace and security.....	7
5. Findings.....	9
5.1 Overall findings	9
5.2 Education's impact on peace and conflict, compared to other factors	9
5.3 Education as a driver of conflict.....	10
5.4 Education as a driver of peace.....	15
6. Conclusion	17
References	18

FIGURES

Figure 1 – Relationship between education and conflict	8
Figure 2 – Sustainable peacebuilding in education: The 4Rs Analytical Framework	8
Figure 3 – History of modern schooling in Afghanistan	13

TABLES

Table 1 – Relevance of education programming to post-conflict transformations	6
Table 2 – The negative and positive ways in which education and ethnic conflict interact.....	7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper sets out the emerging findings from a rapid evidence review on the impact of education provision on peace, security, and stability. The report sets out the key theories that seek to explain the interactions between education, peace, conflict, and security.

A key finding is that there is a growing body of knowledge regarding how education can drive both violent conflict and peace, based largely on whether and how education is provided and distributed, or even perceived to be distributed. A theme that recurs throughout the literature is that, particularly in fragile contexts with weak national institutions, the perception of inequitable education provision or the perception of active discrimination against one or more groups can be a key factor that increases the risk of violent intrastate conflict. In this report, case studies are provided on the impact of education on peace and conflict in Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Iraq.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Education plays a dual role in societal security**, with the potential to either serve as a transformative tool for societal change and peacebuilding, or to protect existing culture as a means of promoting security. Tensions exist between education as a mechanism for societal change versus societal maintenance.
- **Inequitable education access—real or perceived—is a significant driver of intrastate conflict**, especially in fragile and low-resource contexts. Disparities across ethnic, religious, and regional lines can fuel grievances and increase the risk of violence.
- **There is strong theoretical support—but limited causal evidence—for education’s role in peace and conflict**, with most research focusing on the impact of conflict on education, rather than the reverse. Research shows that for education to positively contribute to peace, the provision of education services must be: quickly restored, perceived to ‘benefit all’, and be visible in order to increase confidence in the state.
- **The positive impacts of education on peace and security are limited by significant time lags**, as changes take time to implement and have societal impact. Furthermore, children—education’s primary beneficiaries—have limited capacity to influence society before reaching adulthood.
- **There is a risk that education systems can be politicised and weaponised**, as seen in case studies from Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Iraq, where state and non-state actors use education to promote ideological agendas, marginalise groups, or assert control—deepening societal divisions.
- **Positive peacebuilding outcomes are linked to inclusive, context-sensitive education systems** that promote equity, recognition of diversity, and inter-group reconciliation. The 4Rs Framework (Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation, Redistribution) provides a useful structure for considering how education can be a tool for peace. *Figure 2, pg. 9.*
- **Teachers are key agents of peacebuilding and social cohesion**, especially during post-conflict transitions. However, their effectiveness depends on support systems, professional development, fair working conditions, and inclusion in coherent policy frameworks — conditions which are not always met.
- **Donor and international engagement can both help and hinder** peacebuilding through education. When poorly coordinated or inequitably distributed, aid may reinforce existing inequalities and exacerbate conflict risks.

1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this review is to synthesise existing evidence on the interconnection between education and global security, specifically highlighting how education might impact national, regional, and global security.

The research approach is a rapid literature review, supported by key informant interviews. The paper is evidence-based and intended to be practical and useful to both technical experts and policymakers. The synthesis is transparent on where there is evidence, where there are gaps, and where evidence is mixed or is contested.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question in this review is:

- What is the role of education in increasing national, regional, and global stability and security? What are the short-, medium-, and longer-term contributions of education investments towards global security?

This paper recognises the Education Research in Crisis and Protracted Conflict (ERICC) framing of conflict and crisis, which states that although there are distinct types of crises—armed conflict and violence, climate-induced/environmental disasters, forced displacement, economic crisis and shocks, health epidemics and pandemics, governance/political crisis—many crisis situations will involve a combination of two or more of these types (Falk, Pherali, Diazgranados, & Homonchuk, 2024). This paper primarily focuses on evidence related to armed conflict and violence, including societal security (defined below), with minor comments on security/stability more widely.

3. SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The research scope is global with a focus on low- and middle-income countries and primary and secondary education. Where there is strong evidence from high-income countries and/or tertiary education, that has been included. The literature review focuses on research published within the last ten years. National-level case-studies are also included to exemplify the role of education in security.

4. BACKGROUND THEORY

4.1 Links between education and global and societal security

Recent work (Shanks, 2019) on the interactions between societal security and education uses the following definition of societal security:

‘The ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or acute threats. More specifically, it is about the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom’
(Waeber, Buzan, Kelstrup, & Lemaitre, 1993)

This security therefore is more than just defence of a country's territory or the physical health of its people, but also considers the identities within that society.

Shanks points out that the recent literature has shifted education's role with regards to societal security by focusing on education's peacebuilding potential and the positive impact inclusive education systems can make in societal change. Simultaneously, within the international relations sector, there is an enduring focus on education's role in promoting security by protecting existing culture. These two points of view can promote a disconnect in the understanding of the role of education in societal security, with the former having a role in transforming society, and the latter having a role in maintaining society as it is. This mirrors the shift in education to focus on conflict- sensitivity, to avoid the possible negative effects of education that might drive conflict, to a focus on peacebuilding and the positive role education can play in avoiding conflict (Smith, 2010). In a review of the role of education in peacebuilding, Smith et al propose the following framework for how education relates to post-conflict transformation, showing the many ways in which different types of education programmes can influence different aspects of security and peacebuilding.

Table 1 – Relevance of education programming to post-conflict transformations

Post-conflict transformation	Focus of programming	Types of programmes
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demilitarization Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration Security and policing reform Justice system Community safety 'Fundamental freedoms' conscience, speech, movement, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency-relief programmes Child protection, registration Refugee and IDP education Schools as safe places Disaster Risk Reduction Accelerated learning for former combatants Schooling restoring normality Education about the impact and consequences of violence Anti-corruption programmes Human rights education
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constitutional reform Political institutions Representation Elections Political freedoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education programmes about political rights Education programmes on child's rights, including girls' rights Civic and citizenship education Participation programmes Media education
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transforming the conflict economy Redirecting resources from conflict to development Addressing unemployment Developing new skills for economic regeneration Addressing economic inequalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accelerated education programmes with a focus on foundational literacy and numeracy Development of skills to support economic regeneration TVET programmes
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social capital Social cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child-friendly spaces Psychosocial support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Socialisation with adversaries o Inter-group conflict o Shifting social identities o Social networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Education programmes about social and cultural rights o Peace education programmes o Dealing with the past, truth and reconciliation o Coexistence education
--	---	---

4.2 Peace and security

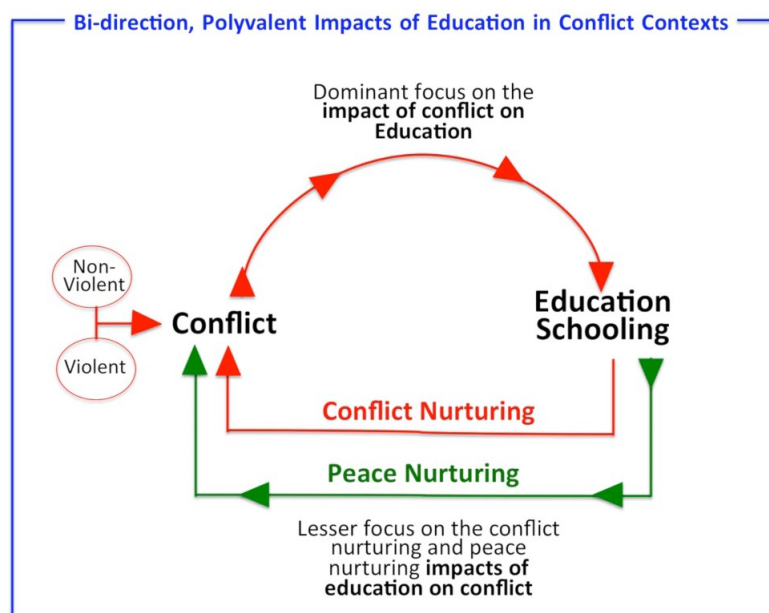
There is a significant body of literature on how education could interact with peace, conflict, stability, and security; much of this is theoretical and much research addresses the impact of conflict on access to education. This section briefly summarises the theory of how education and peace/conflict interact.

The seminal work of Bush and Saltarelli (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) outlines the negative and positive ways in which education interacts with ethnic conflict (see **Table 2**).

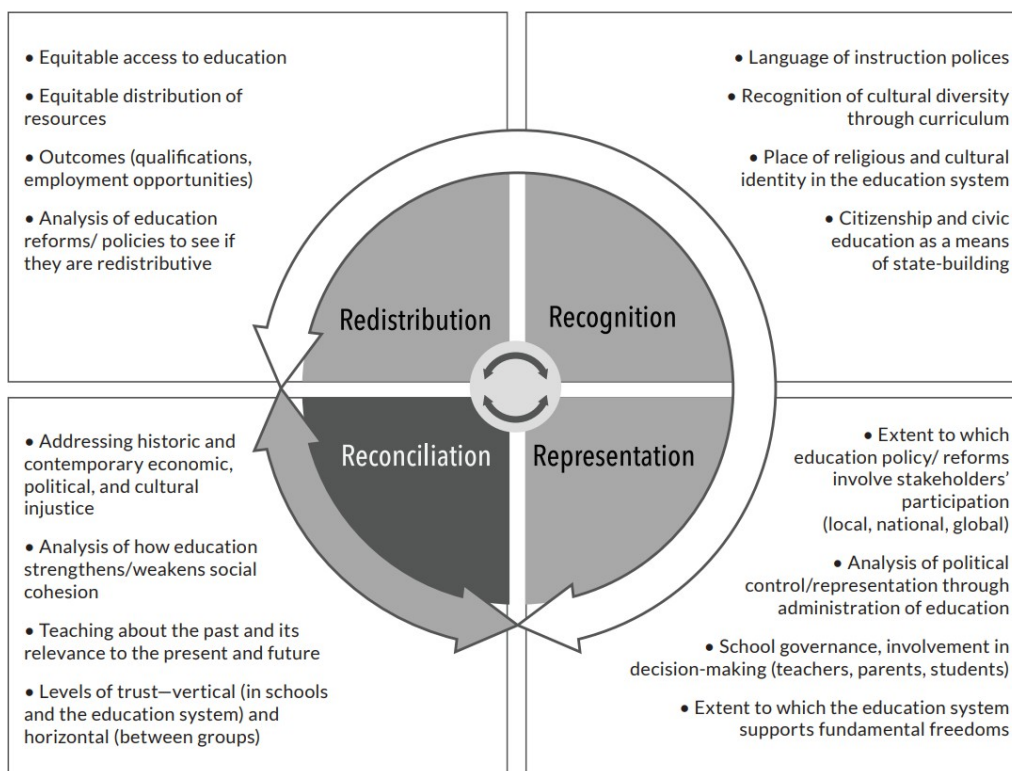
Table 2 – The negative and positive ways in which education and ethnic conflict interact

Negative	Positive
The uneven distribution of education	Conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity
Education as a weapon in cultural repression	Nurturing and sustaining an ethnically tolerant climate through education
Denial of education as a weapon of war	The de-segregation of the mind
Manipulating history for political purposes	Linguistic tolerance
Manipulating textbooks	Cultivating inclusive citizenship
Self-worth and hating others	The disarming of history
Segregated education to ensure inequality, lowered esteem and stereotyping	

This is represented in **Figure 1** below, from a presentation Bush gave 16 years after the original paper (Bush K. , 2016). The conflict-nurturing red line is the negative impact education can have, which increases instability and conflict risks. The peace-nurturing green line is the positive impact of education, which fosters peace and stability. It also reflects the sector's typical analytical focus on the impact of conflict on education with less focus on the impacts of education on conflict.

Figure 1 – Relationship between education and conflict

A subsequent model for how education can positively contribute to peace is the 4Rs Framework (Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation, and Redistribution), see **Figure 2** (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, & Smith, 2017). This model was developed by the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, supported by UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education, and Advocacy programme.

Figure 2 – Sustainable peacebuilding in education: The 4Rs Analytical Framework

These theoretical approaches demonstrate clear, viable interactions between education and peace. The next section evaluates the strength of evidence on the impact of education on peace and conflict.

These interactions will have an impact over different time horizons. Rapidly expanding education systems to address inequalities is challenging, as demonstrated by the lack of progress towards SDG 4. Similarly, changes in curricula to make them conflict-sensitive at a minimum, and to positively promote peace, take time. There is also a lag between these changes being made and there being an impact on peace and social cohesion at a national level, as the education systems this paper is discussing are focused on children, who have limited capacity to influence society until they become adults themselves. Although education may be a key factor in driving social cohesion and fostering peaceful societies, there may be a significant time lag before there is meaningful impact.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Overall findings

There is a strong set of theoretical literature on how education interacts with conflict. However, there is far less literature on the impact of education on conflict than on the impact of conflict on education. There is a growing body of knowledge regarding how education can drive both violent conflict and peace, based largely on whether and how education is provided and distributed, or even perceived to be distributed. A theme that recurs throughout the literature is that, particularly in fragile contexts with weak national institutions, the perception of inequitable education provision, or the perception of active discrimination against one or more groups, can be a key factor that increases the risk of violent intrastate conflict. Examples are also provided of how education provision can be used to lower risks of conflict, particularly the role of teachers themselves.

Evidence from the wider literature outside of education, that looks at all root causes of violent conflict, generally supports the theory that education can be a driver of both conflict and peace within countries. Some of the stronger evidence shows correlations over time between inequitable education provision and increased risk of conflict, but there is limited evidence clearly demonstrating a *causal* relation between the two, given the highly complex nature of conflict and the multiple underlying factors. Given the focus in the literature on the impact of conflict on education, and on conflict within countries, no literature reviewed for this rapid review analysed the link between education and interstate violent conflict. And, possibly given the multitude of factors that influence security, none of the literature reviewed demonstrated evidence of the timeframes under which education can foster peace and security or drive conflict.

5.2 Education's impact on peace and conflict, compared to other factors

Lack of public services, including education, or poor quality and unequal delivery of public services, can be drivers for intrastate conflict.

Before addressing the evidence on how education impacts peace and conflict, this section reviews non-education-specific global evidence on drivers of peace and conflict to assess to what extent education features within the broader root causes of conflict.

A 2023 evidence review of root causes of violent conflict does not mention education specifically. Root causes they analyse are: resource-related root causes of conflict, which includes territory and resource abundance or scarcity; governance-related root causes, which include political systems and

corruption; and root causes relating to inequality, which include horizontal inequality and gender inequality. Under corruption, they do state ‘where the institutions charged with delivering services are politicised or captured, corruption can generate popular “distrust, dissatisfaction, and grievances with the existing political system”’ (SIDA, 2023). Services expected of a government would typically include education.

The World Bank’s 2018 book *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (World Bank, 2018) addresses how development systems could interact with diplomacy, mediation, security, and other tools to prevent violent conflict. It reviews evidence of ‘what works’ in different countries to promote peace, as well as identifies various root causes of violent conflict. Inequality is broken into vertical inequality (inequality among individuals or households), and horizontal inequality (inequality among groups), with a stronger relationship between horizontal inequality and violent conflict than vertical inequality and violent conflict. They recognise that although ‘the relationship between inequality and conflict is not clear or direct’, reducing inequalities is likely to lower risks of conflict. They also address intersecting dimensions of exclusion, as perceptions of exclusion and injustice are present in many conflicts. They find that ‘participation and inclusion of women and young people strengthen a country’s capacity to manage and avert conflict’. Regarding education, they find that the ‘persistence of economic and educational inequalities ... for a large fraction of the population, may contribute to grievances that pose a risk of future violence.’ Education is also relevant in that it strongly correlates with future economic prosperity and well-being and has an integral role in national identity and social cohesion. They provide examples of post-apartheid South Africa and Sri Lanka where education policy was used to marginalise certain groups within society. In Nepal they found that horizontal education and life expectancy inequalities were significant factors in explaining violent conflict in Nepal. Another finding was that a lack of religious literacy, which could arise due to a secular education system or a lack of education, ‘increases susceptibility to extremism more broadly, because an individual may not be equipped with a thorough understanding of religious tenets or critical thinking skills’ and that in Africa ‘higher-than-average years of religious schooling, was found to be a source of resilience against recruitment for violent extremist causes’.

A 2017 book, prepared for the US military, *Understanding Conflict Trends: A Review of the Social Science Literature on the Causes of Conflict*, specifically analyses causes of both interstate and intrastate conflict. It makes no specific mention of education as a contributory factor to conflict, however it does find that ‘weak and poorly governed states are particularly at risk of intrastate conflict’ and one of the factors that contributes to this is the limited capacity to offer public services, which would include education. This lack of public service provision leads to poverty and ‘grievances and creates space for militant groups to function, thrive, and recruit’. It does not draw the same link between public services (and therefore education) and interstate conflict (Watts, et al., 2017).

The following literature is education-specific and provides evidence of how education impacts peace and conflict.

5.3 Education as a driver of conflict

5.3.1. Inequitable access to education can drive conflict

The evidence reviewed finds that inequitable access to education, or the perception of inequity, can be a driver of intrastate conflict, making education highly political, especially in fragile or low-resource contexts.

A 2015 review of education and peacebuilding (Smith & Ellison, *The Integration of Education and*

Peacebuilding: A Review of the Literature, 2015) synthesised the findings of three previous reviews and additional literature, totalling 79 pieces of evidence. Its key findings were:

- Service delivery, which would include education, can both positively and negatively contribute to both peacebuilding and state-building. Education is of particular importance due to its integral role in wider social and economic benefits, and 'exclusion from education has been a key grievance cited in a number of conflicts.'
- For education to positively contribute to peace, they find three important factors:
 - Quick restoration of education services can restore confidence in the state and therefore reduce risk of conflict.
 - It is important, especially in areas of high inequalities where there has been discrimination against particular groups, that this restoration must be perceived to 'benefit all'.
 - Provision of education must be visible to increase confidence in the state.
- Education that is distributed unevenly or insensitively to local context, or in ways that appear to be political manipulation, could, on the other hand, be a driver of conflict.
- Community participation is therefore important in how education is provided to drive social cohesion.
- However, evidence on the impact of education initiatives on social cohesion 'tends to be highly context specific and there is a general critique that social cohesion programmes may have little impact if they focus on interpersonal relations when the underlying causes of conflict are institutional and systemic.'

This finding on equity is supported by the 2015 paper 'Does horizontal education inequality lead to violent conflict?' (Omoeva & Buckner, 2015), which asked three research questions:

1. Does education inequality between ethnic and religious groups increase the likelihood of violent conflict?
2. Does education inequality between subnational regions within a country increase the likelihood of violent conflict in that country?
3. Does the relative disadvantage of a subnational region compared to the country as a whole increase the risk of violent conflict in that subnational region?

They used two datasets – the Education Inequality and Conflict Dataset and the Subnational Education Inequality and Conflict Dataset – to analyse the relationship between conflict onset and inequality measures of mean years of schooling. They also controlled for other factors that contribute to the likelihood of violent conflict, including: level of economic development, past history of conflict, political regime, country population size, geographic terrain, ethnic and religious fractionalisation, and economic inequality.

In regards to question 1, they found 'a statistically significant and quantitatively large relationship between ethnic and religious inequality on likelihood of conflict in the 2000s' and that 'one standard deviation in the Group Gini coefficient on mean years of education is associated with more than double odds of violent conflict', suggesting a relationship between inequitable access to education for ethnic and religious groups and the risks of violent conflict, although this was not consistent across time. This relationship was not present between 1970 and 1990, but did appear 'more powerfully' in the years since 2000.

With regards to questions 2 and 3, they found that ‘subnational educational inequality is a strong predictor of civil war regardless of the time period’, although results here were ‘inconclusive’ in sub-Saharan Africa. They concluded that ‘subnational regions that are disadvantaged relative to the nation as a whole are more likely to experience conflict-related fatalities than are more advantaged regions’ and that in the 2000s the higher the mean years of schooling inequality, the higher the chances of violent conflict.

These findings demonstrate a significant correlation between inequitable access to education and increased risk of violent conflict. Importantly, the authors recognise that this does not establish causality. Explanations of a possible causal relationship provided in the paper are that exclusion from education severely limits individuals’ life prospects, which could be an underlying driver of conflict.

Literature also highlights specific country examples where educational inequality correlates with the occurrence of violent conflict. As well as in South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Nepal as mentioned above, a 2021 paper finds that inequitable provision of education contributed to conflict in pre-independence South Sudan and is an ongoing issue in peace and stability, and in turn the impact of conflict on education varies significantly across the country (see next section for a more detailed discussion) (Moro & Tolani, 2021).

In Nepal, education was found to be one of the main causes of the People’s War, a decade-long civil war starting in 1996. Although efforts had been made to expand access to and to ‘modernise’ education, the education system reflected social and cultural prejudices, and perpetuated existing inequalities. This contributed significantly to the ‘ideology-led’ Maoist rebellion and ‘schools thus became a key battlefield of the violent conflict’ (Pherali, 2010).

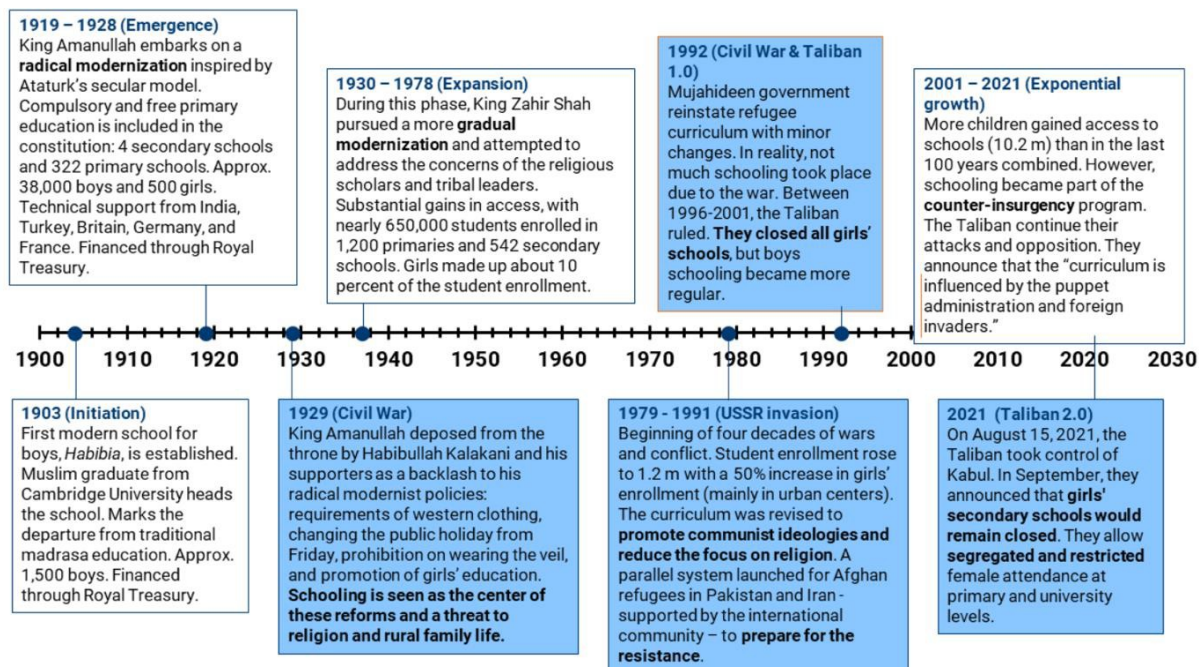
5.3.2. Case Study 1: Cycles of education expansion and violence in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, education has been politicised and (mis)used to promote violence and further entrench inequality for decades. For example the Taliban first closed all girls’ schools between 1996 and 2001, while boys’ education grew (Qargha, 2022). An analysis of textbooks in Afghanistan found examples of texts that promote violence. Under the Mujahideen government, textbooks for class 4 have no references to peace education, but do support of the government and ‘supports fighting with Russian forces and communist government forces’, with questions referring to bullet speed calculations and killing of Russian soldiers (Yazdani, 2015).

In 2022 the Taliban, back in control of Afghanistan, banned girls from attending secondary school, undoing decades of work by local actors and the international community to support girls’ education (Qargha, 2022). Qargha argues that ‘unless national and international education development programs systematically address larger societal problems through a dialogue brokering local concerns with global aspirations and view education as an ecosystem rather than a single model, education will continue to be a cause of conflict rather than a source of unity, especially for fragile states, like Afghanistan.’ The Taliban leadership treats girls’ education as ‘political leverage’ with both their base in Afghanistan and the international community, and allowing girls to attend secondary school may have risked weakening support from their base. Historically education has always been contentious within Afghanistan, with governments feeling the need to balance international pressure to modernise and internal pressures to maintain religious and cultural identities, with girls’ education in particular at the forefront of this struggle. There is also an urban-rural divide within Afghanistan regarding views on education, with rural communities favouring the madrasa system and traditional religious and cultural identities, and urban communities preferring the more international view of education as a tool for modernisation and economic development. This has resulted in cycles of

education expansion and violent conflict. Qargha argues that international actors have focused predominantly on increasing access to education, without ever addressing the connections between education and conflict. **Figure 3** illustrates this cycle of expansion of education followed by conflict.

Figure 3 – History of modern schooling in Afghanistan



(Qargha, 2022)

Qargha argues that to stop this cycle and make education a source of unity, rather than conflict, would require both national and international actors to tackle three sources of conflict. Firstly, embracing a complex education system, rather than trying to simplify it to a single delivery system. Secondly, providing platforms for dialogue within the country and internationally to address sources of division. This would form the basis of discussion to agree a vision for the education system. Finally, a redesign of the education system that allows students to move between the different elements of the education system and receive qualifications.

This approach demonstrates the comprehensive efforts that would be needed to not only redesign the education system but address how it interacts with all of society, a long-term project that would need significant sustained coordination and support.

5.3.3. Case study 2: Politicisation of education in Iraq and deepening societal divides

Armed groups in Iraq can have significant control over education provision. In Nineveh province, Iraq's Shia armed groups, known as al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Forces), influence 'educational programmes, institutional appointments, and extracurricular activities, shaping young Iraqis' perceptions of nationalism, sectarianism, and even regional geopolitics' (Palani, 2025). This involvement of armed groups in education, not in parallel but within state education, blurs the boundaries between state and non-state actors, eroding the authority of the state and legitimising armed groups: 'local youth see them not only as legitimate authority figures but also as indispensable service providers'. This drives a cycle of 'societal militarisation' and reinforces societal divisions (Palani, 2025).

Research in Kirkuk shows ‘how the current education system in Kirkuk risks undermining Baghdad’s legitimacy in the region and creating intercommunity grievances in the city’ (Shanks, *The Politics of Education in Iraq: The Influence of Territorial Dispute and Ethno-Politics on Schooling in Kirkuk*, 2018). Several factors have contributed to this. The underfunding of public services after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, combined with ethno-political contests, has created varied support for ‘ethnically defined schools’ and ongoing contestation of the curriculum. Schools have often faced external influences and interference from organisations seeking to establish a presence in Kirkuk, which undermines school efforts on fostering cultural identity and heritage as politics and identity are increasingly linked.

5.3.4. Case Study 3: Influence of education on peace and conflict in South Sudan

South Sudan has been affected by conflict and fragility since before it gained independence in 2011. This case study looks at the role education has played in South Sudan both in driving conflict and in promoting peace.

A 2021 study uses the 4R framework to analyse the interactions between education, conflict, and stability in South Sudan with the following findings (Haider, 2021).

There has been consistent low investment in an education system that has been severely affected by conflict and a lack of resources. Elites are able to send their children to private schools or abroad, so have limited personal incentives to support the national education system. Through the education system the government has also sought to impose a singular culture, taught either in English or Arabic, in a country with over 60 languages. Although there has been a mother tongue policy, the resources and teaching capacity to deliver this are scarce, meaning it is rarely implemented. Both these aspects of the politicisation of education are risks for driving instability.

Education provision is also highly inequitable, another driving factor of conflict risk, with wide access disparities between different states and counties. Rural areas in particular suffer from low access with girls out-of-school and more likely to drop out than boys. In one of the poorest countries in the world, parents understandably struggle to afford the direct and indirect costs of education, and due to cultural norms may prioritise boys’ education over girls’. This results in large numbers of unskilled and excluded youth who are therefore more at risk of joining armed forces (Haider, 2021).

Although there is a policy that promotes a ‘South Sudanese identity, despite the diversity within the country, research found that local-level education actors feel neglected and unheard, which limits the recognition of diversity, and reinforces perceptions of marginalisation and exclusion. Although classroom observation research found that teachers rarely used inclusive teaching approaches, promoted critical thinking, or cooperation, there was anecdotal evidence “that efforts to bring teachers together from different warring groups for training activities had a positive impact on relationship building, with greater willingness to work together as professionals. Teachers however are extremely poorly paid, if paid at all, and have very limited training, with many not having completed primary or secondary education themselves. Many are forced to teach in English despite having limited proficiency. In conflict-affected situations, teachers would ideally be highly trained, paid, and capable in transformative education. Lack of pay and health have also been found to lead to high teacher absenteeism. All of these factors contribute to a highly unequal education system that has the potential to fuel future conflict, potentially for generations if significant portions of the population are excluded and marginalised.” (Haider, 2021).

In this context there have been donor efforts to support the education system, for example FCDO’s Girls’ Education South Sudan programme (GESS), USAID’s South Sudan Teacher Education Project

(SSTEP), and programmes from a number of NGOs. These have often been aimed at supporting education for marginalised groups to close inequalities, for example GESS is aimed at girls' education and Oxfam's accelerated learning programme (ALP) was aimed at IDPs and host communities who had missed education because of conflict.

However, there is evidence that because aid to education has been historically distributed unevenly across the country, this may have in fact strengthened inequalities and further contributed to risks of conflict. Teacher training is an example of support that has been prioritised in urban areas of 'safe zones', meaning there is little support for teachers in the most crisis-affected and fragile parts of the country. Development partners were also found to interact more with senior-level officials at state and county levels, leaving local-level actors again neglected. This has in part been offset by programmes aimed at strengthening community level participation, for example through supporting school-based management and the use of parent teacher associations (PTAs). In some cases PTAs were either inactive or set up for the sole purpose of qualifying for participation in a development programme. There is positive evidence on the impact of GESS cash transfers on girls' enrolment, and that donor programming has improved gender-responsive teaching. Research on the Ibba Girls' School programme, a small initiative to support girls' education, found 'that girls who attend the school report developing respect for other people and helping to stop quarrels' (Haider, 2021).

Education is intrinsically linked to conflict, or at least the risk of conflict in South Sudan. There is evidence that donor support can mitigate this, however, uneven or uncoordinated donor support can risk strengthening the inequalities that already exist and further increase the risk of future conflict.

5.4 Education as a driver of peace

A 2022 research piece engaged with local peace actors in diverse post-conflict and conflict-affected societies (Nesterova, Kim, & Amaglo-Mensah, 2022). Participants were from or had worked extensively on peacebuilding in Indigenous Australia, Cameroon, Indigenous Canada, Chile, Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel, Lebanon, Liberia, Nigeria, Palestine, the Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Uganda. All participants 'identified education as a key element of both preventing and resolving conflict and building peace'. Their key findings are the importance of education in peacebuilding; the forms of education required for peacebuilding; the role of education in changing attitudes, values, and behaviours; and the role of education in transforming and building inter-group relationships. This education can be through both the formal education system and through non-formal or informal education spaces. They indicated the key role education can play in transforming attitudes, values, and ultimately behaviours. A final finding was the role education can play in 'changing attitudes and mentality from violence-centred to peaceful and nonviolent, especially when discussing reconciliation and inter-group relationships between parties of conflict'. Participants viewed youth as key actors in promoting peace through their communities.

5.4.1. The role of teachers in peacebuilding

A 2016 research report uses the 4Rs framework to analyse teachers' role in peacebuilding and social cohesion and includes case studies for Pakistan, Myanmar, South Africa, and Uganda (Sayed & Novelli, 2016). In each country they analyse:

1. Conceptions of teacher agency
2. Teachers and violence
3. Teacher governance focusing on teacher recruitment and deployment
4. Teacher accountability and trust

5. Teacher professional development (initial and continuing)
6. Curriculum and textbooks

Some of the key relevant findings are:

- In transition moments there is a window of opportunity and space for a more explicit approach to peacebuilding and social cohesion in education
 - This reflects that the period when countries are emerging from conflict is a key opportunity to advance social cohesion and peacebuilding. At the time of writing (published in 2016), the authors suggest Myanmar as a positive example of where this occurred, whereas in South Africa this approach was not sufficiently capitalised on by opposition movements led by the ANC against apartheid in 1994. Events in Myanmar since call this into question.
- Teacher agency for social cohesion and peacebuilding as determining and determined
 - They suggest there are two ways in which teacher agency is determined: experiential determination, which is social class and experiences of conflict; and teachers' interactions with institutions.
- Developing a more radical conception of teacher agency for social cohesion and peacebuilding
 - The positive role teachers could play in peacebuilding and social cohesion could depend on how teachers are themselves treated by the sector, with issues of status, income, and conditions of service key factors that could be improved.
- Affective shift in education is evident, but under-developed
 - There is a growing global recognition of the role of education in peacebuilding and social cohesion, with the report noting the importance of good quality education, particularly for the poor.
- An explicit focus on peacebuilding and social cohesion in teacher professional development
 - They found that continuing professional teacher development can empower teachers to be agents of peace and social cohesion.
- An explicit peacebuilding and social cohesion curriculum focus
 - They find that teacher professional development and curriculum approaches to peacebuilding and social cohesion are most effective when embedded in a coherent policy framework.
 - Language policy and language of instruction in particular can be drivers of conflict.
 - Both teacher professional development and curriculum initiatives for peacebuilding and social cohesion should be integrated in an overarching policy framework to ensure that interventions are not disparate and fragmented.
- Donors
 - They find that international agencies and donors can have a strong influence on education policy and therefore peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts, with examples from Uganda and Pakistan.

The review suggests that teachers can play an integral role in education being a positive force for peacebuilding and social cohesion with some examples from the case-study countries, that their involvement needs to be part of a comprehensive policy framework approach, possibly supported by

donors, and that it should capitalise on key moments when countries are emerging from conflict.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a growing body of knowledge regarding how education can drive both violent conflict and peace, based largely on whether and how education is provided and distributed, or even perceived to be distributed. A theme that recurs throughout the literature is that, particularly in fragile contexts with weak national institutions, the perception of inequitable education provision or the perception of active discrimination against one or more groups can be a key factor that increases the risk of violent intrastate conflict.

REFERENCES

- Bush, K. (2016, February 25). *Beyond the Two Faces of Education Towards a Normative Understanding of Education in Conflict and Emergencies*. Retrieved from UCL Institute of Education: <https://mediacentral.ucl.ac.uk/Play/1931>
- Bush, K. D., & Saltarelli, D. (2000). *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Retrieved from https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/80473/1/Bush_2000_Two_Faces_of_Education_.pdf
- Falk, D., Pherali, T., Diazgranados, S., & Homonchuk, O. (2024). *Understanding the Dimensions of Conflict & Crisis*. ERICC Technical Brief. ERICC. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.27119604>
- Haider, H. (2021). *Education, Conflict, and Stability in South Sudan*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. Retrieved from https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/report/Education_Conflict_and_Stability_in_South_Sudan/26434321?file=48183925
- Moro, L. N., & Tolani, N. (2021). *Education in South Sudan: Focusing on Inequality of Provision and Implications for National Cohesion*. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science. Retrieved from https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/111063/1/CRP_education_in_south_sudan_published.pdf
- Nesterova, Y., Kim, E.-J., & Amaglo-Mensah, T. D. (2022). The purposes of education in peacebuilding: Views of local peace actors in diverse (post-)conflict societies. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 34(2), 103–124. doi:10.1080/14781158.2024.2382679
- Novelli, M., Lopes Cardozo, M. T., & Smith, A. (2017). *The 4Rs framework: analyzing education's contribution to sustainable peacebuilding with social justice in conflict-affected contexts*. Brighton: University of Sussex. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23446700.v1>
- Omoeva, C., & Buckner, E. (2015). *Does horizontal education inequality lead to violent conflict?* New York: UNICEF. Retrieved from https://figshare.com/articles/online_resource/ERICC_Technical_Brief_Understanding_the_Dimensions_of_Conflict_Crisis/27119604?file=52978967
- Palani, K. (2025). *Armed Influence in Education: Shaping Iraq's Future through Education*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep.
- Pherali, T. (2010, November). Education and conflict in Nepal: Possibilities for reconstruction. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 8(4), 591– 610.
- Qargha, G. O. (2022, June 21). *The relationship between schooling and conflict in Afghanistan: Lessons for balancing local and global aspirations*. Retrieved from Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-relationship-between-schooling-and-conflict-in-afghanistan/>

- Sayed, Y., & Novelli, M. (2016). *The Role of Teachers in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion: Synthesis Report on Findings from Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda*. Brighton: Research Consortium Education and Peacebuilding, University of Sussex. Retrieved from <https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/15-Role-of-teachers-in-peacebuilding-synthesis-report-final.pdf>
- Shanks, K. (2018). The Politics of Education in Iraq: The Influence of Territorial Dispute and Ethno-Politics on Schooling in Kirkuk. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 4(1), 141 – 163. Retrieved from https://archive.nyu.edu/bitstream/2451/42483/2/JEiE_Vol4No1_The-Politics-of-Education-in-Iraq_August2018.pdf
- Shanks, K. (2019). Societal security and education in deeply divided societies. *Education and conflict review*. Retrieved from https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10081578/1/Shanks_Article_02_Shanks.pdf
- SIDA. (2023). *Root Causes of Violent Conflict – An Evidence-Based Overview*. Sundbyberg: SIDA. Retrieved from https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2023/05/02102900/Root_causes_of_conflict_Evidence_Brief_web.pdf
- Smith, A. (2010). *The influence of education on conflict and peace building: Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011*. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/223388/Influence-of-education-on-conflict.pdf
- Smith, A., & Ellison, C. (2015). *The Integration of Education and Peacebuilding: A Review of the Literature*. The Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding.
- Waeber, O., Buzan, B., Kelstrup, M., & Lemaitre, P. (1993). *Identity, migration and the new security agenda in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Watts, S., Kavanagh, J., Frederick, B., Norlen, T., O'Mahony, A., Voorhies, P., & Szayna, T. (2017). *Understanding Conflict Trends: A Review of the Social Science Literature on the Causes of Conflict*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1063z1.html
- World Bank. (2018). *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington DC: World Bank. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/28337>
- Yazdani, H. (2015, February 3). *Peace Education in Afghanistan: A Comparative Study of Conflict and Post-Conflict School Textbooks*. Retrieved from Global Campaign for Peace Education: <https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/peace-education-afghanistan-comparative-study-conflict-post-conflict-school-textbooks/>