Disrupted Institutional Pathways for Educational Equity in Conflict-Affected Nations

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Areas and systems affected by compounded crises, protracted conflicts, and structural violence often struggle to reform education for social reconstruction. At the forefront, we observe tireless and ambitious ventures among donor agencies, government institutions, and international and local organizations. However, in many of these cases, we also witness deepening political gridlock, stagnation, and marginalization that undermine the progress of an empowering education for citizenship that upholds principles of human rights. Causal factors to these institutional failures are often either overlooked, redacted, or undocumented in research. Evidence from Morocco, Iraqi Kurdistan, and, most of all, Lebanon illustrates the extent to which governance systems in education can either hinder or even prevent equity in education.

Every single child in the world has the right to free primary education and opportunities for secondary or vocational education, a right under Article 28 of the United Nations' legally binding Convention on the Rights of the Child.[1] However, children in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) are highly vulnerable to barriers, crises, and the absence of resources that violate their right to learn and grow in an educational context. Hence, the paradigm of equity in and through education is indispensable when examining factors that marginalize or exclude children from educational provisions. Equity in education discourse underscores the principles of fairness, whereby every child should have an opportunity to participate, and integrity, because every child has potentially significant contributions to make.[2] Arguing for equitable education through empowerment, social critic Paolo Freire calls for efforts to provide the necessary resources not only to engage but to empower all children through education.[3] Resources should be provided that ensure all children can participate in schooling where faculty and staff, such as counselors and teachers, are qualified and competent, and learning is meaningful.[4]

In LMIC affected by crises, schools are often sites of physical, emotional, and structural violence. This can manifest through children not completing primary ed-

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ucation because of early marriage and pregnancy, paid labor, recruitment in armed groups, or the unavailability of any education provision.[5] Education stakeholders – policymakers, principals, teachers, children, and parents – across these fragile contexts struggle to summon the resilience needed to minimize and recover from the impacts of adversity, such as school closures, climate change, and protracted armed conflict.[6] Education systems in conflict-affected LMIC also feature institutionalized approaches to policies and practices that sustain propensities to marginalize vulnerable children and undermine their rights to protection, provisions (such as health, education), and participation. Institutional actors consist mainly of government agencies, such as the ministries of education and finance and, arguably, donor organizations. Over time, these institutions establish pathways and interact with political drivers to determine the sustainability of governing policies and practices in education.

In this essay, I analyze institution-based factors that threaten the equity of education provisions for children living in contexts highly vulnerable to crises and conflicts. I argue that authoritarian and exclusive approaches to governance have led to shortcomings or failures of education governance institutions in conflict-affected LMIC, which have largely contributed to the structural marginalization of children and education inequity. I begin by outlining how concepts of social justice and human rights can provide a framework for examining equities and inequities in and through education. I then present three features of institutional governance of education reform and recovery during times of crises that illustrate how responses can sustain or address violations to children's equitable opportunities to learn. The first examines teacher-led school closures in Iraqi Kurdistan, Morocco, and Lebanon. Evidence is mostly drawn from media reports, as this issue is rarely documented in research studies. The second explores the processes and politics of national education strategies, with a focus on Lebanon. The third analyzes the role of institutional politics of the knowledge economy in the education sector and the availability of and access to quality education.

Social justice and human rights scholarship provide us with principles and dimensions for conceptualizing educational equity for children. Philosopher Nancy Fraser defines justice in its broadest terms as "parity of participation."[7] Fraser argues that people can only have equal opportunities to participate in society when three dimensions of justice are addressed: a redistribution of resources, a recognition of equal status, and representation in the political sphere. The utility of conceptualizing justice as equity for participation has extended to education research and discourse that examine causes and consequences of violations of children's rights, particularly to education. By adding *reconciliation* to redistribution, recognition, and representation, education scholars Mario Novelli, Mieke Lopes Cardozo, and Alan Smith produce a four Rs framework to examine

tensions in education for peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas.[8] To illustrate, children living in LMIC affected by conflict are highly vulnerable to permanent exclusion from education when remote learning provisions are distributed only to those with resources; when refugee children cannot register because they are not recognized as legal residents; when children with disabilities have no representation in school reform; and when unresolved conservative views prompt principals to remove coloring pencils from classrooms out of fear that classrooms will promote LGBTQIA+ rights. These examples show how the four Rs can be applied to identify threats to and violations of educational equity.

Equity can also feature in commitments to children's rights to education. The late Katarina Tomaševski served as UN special rapporteur on the right to education from 1998 to 2004. Tomaševski examined violations of children's rights to education by observing threats to what she referred to as the four As: the availability, accessibility, adaptability, and acceptability of education, such as structural exclusion and segregation.[9] When education is available, schools can accommodate all children, including those with disabilities and without legal status. Availability also includes the provision of qualified teachers, essential learning resources, and health and safety measures. When children can access education, they do not encounter barriers such as fees, absence of transportation to school, and identity-based discrimination. Moreover, children with different abilities can experience similar activities and receive similar resources and educator support. Adaptable provisions of education address the needs of children made vulnerable by crises, migration, and sociopolitical changes by supplying them with platforms to voice their experiences and participate in actions for social justice. Finally, education is acceptable when schools and education practitioners provide safety, support recovery, and encourage pedagogies that capitalize and value learners' diverse backgrounds and constructs of knowledge.

In addition to armed conflicts, other crises can also close schools, such as infectious disease outbreaks, the effects of global warming, and labor-related work stoppages – the focus of this section. Teachers' unions in stable democracies and conflict-affected areas often organize demonstrations to protest, typically against insufficient salary and benefits. While strikes in more stable societies often last one to two days, teachers in some conflict-affected LMIC have closed schools for weeks and even months at a time. When teachers protest by not going to school, formal schooling during that period is no longer available. Economic analyses have found that school days lost because of teacher strikes have varying impacts on student learning and employment opportunities. In Argentina, the nearly 1,500 teacher strikes between 1983 and 2014 (an average of 372 days of school closures) were correlated with lower salaries and lower levels of employability of adults who were students during that time.[10]

We can observe three trends when exploring how teacher-led school closures make schooling unavailable for children for long periods of time. One trend is the inconsistent distribution of resources to teachers: namely, unscheduled salary payments, reduced salary values, and austerity measures in contractual terms. Eight years after the 2011 political revolution in Morocco, its government withdrew health care and pension benefits from the tenured teachers' contracts, but maintained the original terms for civil servants in other sectors; in response, thousands of teachers refused to go to school.[11] Other LMIC governments altered payment schedules in response to macroeconomic changes that weakened or collapsed their economy and, consequently, exhausted their social service sectors. The drop in crude oil prices and limited international support significantly reduced the Iraqi Kurdish government's finances and, after four months of unpaid salaries in 2016, teachers and principals in the region of Sulaymaniyah went on strike.

In the case of Lebanon, its Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has gradually restructured its contractual terms with teachers, moving away from granting tenure to hiring substitutes. In Lebanon's public education sector, teachers can be contracted as a) tenured, b) contractual (per hour), or c) substitute. Teachers under tenured and contractual agreements are paid directly by MEHE, while money for substitute contracts comes from donor agencies or the school's operational funds. Teachers in the second-shift public schools allocated for Syrian refugee children are under contractual agreements with funds from donor agencies that are processed through MEHE. By 2017, MEHE stopped awarding new tenures. While contractual agreements continued, new teachers were given substitute contracts. In a rapid assessment of education in Lebanon in 2021, only 16 percent of sixty-five teachers interviewed were tenured, and more than half were on contractual agreements.[12]

Conflicts arise with contractual and substitute contracts because MEHE neither covers forced days off (that is, school days that MEHE cancels), provides social security benefits (including health care and pensions), nor secures timely payments. Under contractual and substitute contracts, teachers are normally paid every two months. Since 2019, however, teachers were paid every six or seven months, with substitute and second-shift teachers waiting up to eight months. In addition to working days lost during COVID-19 school closures, Lebanon's economic collapse and hyperinflation devalued their salaries by 90 percent; consequently, a monthly salary equivalent to USD 1,000 per month suddenly was worth less than USD 100. Some teachers I interviewed in 2021 reported having to borrow money for monthly expenses and repay lenders after getting paid six or seven months later.[13]

A second trend is the open-ended declarations of strikes in which public school teachers announce they will not return to school until their demands are met. Teachers and principals in Iraqi Kurdistan have routinely closed schools "until the government responds to our demands to pay our salaries."[14] In Morocco,

teachers' open-ended closure of schools lasted the entire month of April in 2019.[15] In Lebanon, scholar and educator Lena Bahou witnessed teacher strikes that ran for two weeks in 2012 and almost a month in 2013.[16]

During the compounded crises in Lebanon that started in 2019, public school teachers closed schools for six weeks starting in January 2021. Most recently, in 2023, public school teachers in Lebanon also closed schools for nearly eight weeks from January 9 until March 5; MEHE reported that 44 of the 1,404 public schools were fully functioning by February. In the second-shift for Syrian refugee children, the teachers protested by neither facilitating online learning when schools closed the first week of March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, nor returning to school when they briefly reopened before the end of that academic year. Research and humanitarian reports in Lebanon describe the long periods of school closures during the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 scholastic years as "lost learning," with more than 700,000 children excluded from any provision of education, and the remaining 1.3 million children having limited access to digital technology for distance education.[17] These long-term closures have recently been compounded by the ongoing Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon in response to Hezbollah's support of Hamas following the October 7, 2023, attacks. These strikes have either fully or partially closed seventy-two schools during the 2023–2024 academic year, affecting 20,000 children.[18] As the start of the 2024–2025 school year is delayed until November 4, 2024, nearly half of public schools are used as shelters from Israeli airstrikes that have forced nearly 40 percent of students in Lebanon from their homes.[19] School closures for security and safety remain indefinite as the airstrikes continue to spread across Lebanon.

A third trend is the resistance from governing agencies to reconcile teachers' grievances and injustices of misgoverning remuneration. Government authorities avoid negotiating teachers' demands by either offering to pay them incentives to return to school, punishing teachers by reducing pay for the workdays missed, firing teachers, or responding to labor actions using violence. Such resistance and violence are indicative of authoritarian regimes, as in the case of Moroccan leaders' choice to violently quell teacher-led protests during the 2010 Arab uprisings.[20] During the month-long strike in 2019, Moroccan officials announced they would fire teachers on grounds of "leaving a job without notice" and directed security forces to use water cannons to disperse teachers' demonstrations.[21] Kurdish authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan offered a monthly incentive of USD 115 to teachers in rural areas and USD 76 to teachers in urban areas to return to school during their protests in 2017; however, the teachers responded by asserting they would maintain the strikes until salary payments were made.[22] Similarly, in Lebanon, by the third week of school closures in January 2023, a MEHE official reported that teachers were offered a "productivity allowance" of USD 100 a month for October, November, and December, and then USD 90 a month starting in February, but

the teachers rejected the proposal. As protests stretched school closures into a second month through February 2023, MEHE announced it developed a dashboard for public school administrators to systematically track which teachers come to school. Such a response from the ministry was more a demonstration of authority over teachers than a negotiation with them.

The mismanagement of resource distribution, including timely salary payments, is a manifestation of failed governance that subsequently has a causal influence on discontinued provisions of education for children. Teacher-led school closures disrupt the availability of education and increase risk factors of dropping out, lost learning, and lower levels of employability. Further, authoritarian governance can directly marginalize children when weeks of teachers' protests that close schools are confronted with punishment. Any initiatives or even intentions to review and reform the public administration of teachers' compensations are overlooked or, arguably, avoided in national education strategies.

Initiatives for reform and recovery are typically triggered by periods of transition out of armed conflict or crises or through funding agreements with international agencies, such as the Global Partnership for Education and Official Development Assistance development grants. As a result, such donor or assistance agencies become influential actors in at least some of the government institutional mechanisms that develop and monitor initiatives for equitable education. But such development and monitoring of national education strategies in Lebanon undermined educational equity by ignoring challenges in governance, privileging measurable short-term reporting metrics over sustained narratives of systemic changes, and through the absence of critical and reflexive evaluations that could have iteratively informed change strategies.

Since the end of the 1975–1990 civil war, the Lebanese MEHE has produced several national education reform strategies. Quality Education for Growth was a national strategy for education reform that included a five-year (2010–2015) education sector development plan (ESDP). The ESDP expanded the five key priorities outlined in an evidence-informed national education strategy (NES) produced by the Lebanese Association of Educational Studies in 2007 (and funded by the World Bank) into ten priority areas, as seen in Table 1.[23] The ten priorities identified and addressed the aims of education in Lebanon for social reconstruction and equitable participation. Under the ESDP, priority area two focused on the prevention of dropping out of school, possibly the greatest risk of social marginalization to highly vulnerable children in low- and middle-income families in Lebanon. Component four aimed to establish a teacher-salary scale and provide professional development and incentives. Priority area six included unlocking the stalemate of producing a revised history education curriculum that was last updated in 1970. The tenth component, on governance, aimed to improve the archiving

Table 1
Process of Specifying Priorities for the Lebanon Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP)

National Education Strategy (2007)	ESDP (2010–2015)
Education available on the basis of equal opportunity	▾ Early childhood education ▾ Improving retention and achievement ▾ Development of infrastructure
Quality education that contributes to building a knowledge society	▾ Professionalization of the teaching workforce ▾ Modernization of school management ▾ Achievement assessment and curriculum development
Education that contributes to social integration	▾ Citizenship education
Education that contributes to economic development	▾ Information and Communication Technology (ICT) degree in education ▾ National qualification framework
Governance of education	▾ Institutional development

Source: Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, *National Education Strategy in Lebanon: Vision Document* (Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, 2007), https://search.shamaa.org/PDF/Reports/LEa14850NESLY2007.pdf; and Ministry of Education and Higher Education, *Quality Education for Growth* (Beirut: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2010), https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/lebanon_edsp_2010-2015.pdf.

of documents, establish a MEHE helpdesk, develop accountability and incentives measures for staff, provide training to all administrative personnel, and produce periodic reports on monitoring and evaluation. The ten priorities received grants from donor agencies, including UNICEF (USD 0.66 million per annum), UNDP (USD 2.4 million), UNESCO (USD 3 million), European Union (EUR 13.7 million), and the World Bank (USD 40 million).[24]

Hardly any information is publicly accessible (or maybe even in existence) about the processes and outcomes of implementing these ten priorities. Primary knowledge of the ESDP currently exists as anecdotal evidence from consultants and schoolteachers who participated in its implementation. Their testimonials described the mismanagement and termination of activities for retention and dropout. Education practitioners within my network shared their experiences in the citizenship education component. A veiled teacher was subjected to verbal abuse by a representative from the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) during a recruitment interview for the citizenship education curricular reform; she was excluded based on religious expression rather than qualification. Also, the teachers and experts who were recruited reported that they were assigned to merely reproduce information. They were neither engaged nor empowered to creatively inform the production of new curricular textbooks. The absence of public reports on the experiences and outcomes of carrying out the priorities' activities undermines and prevents the progress of approaches and policies for inclusive, available, and accessible education. A well-documented and transparently monitored process is an essential component of good governance and accountability. It would also provide essential information to guide subsequent education reform plans. By 2014, however, the five-year ESDP was overtaken by donor- and government-driven emergency responses to the complex politics of the war in Syria that erupted in 2011.

The unprecedented and sudden influx of refugees from Syria into Lebanon quickly positioned Lebanon as having the highest number of refugees per capita in the world.[25] As local and international nongovernmental organizations rushed to provide education and health services to the refugees, international donor agencies worked closely with MEHE to produce an education strategy framework that would allow the Lebanese national education system to benefit from humanitarian funds for Syrian refugee children. As a result, MEHE and its international partners published the education strategies *Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I) for 2014–2016*, followed by *RACE II* for 2017–2021.[26] The education reform and development initiatives in the RACE I and II strategies emphasized the need to ensure quality schooling for the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian children. The reform areas in the RACE strategies were presented under three pillars: access to education, quality of education, and capacity of the education system. While RACE is overseen by the Project Management Unit at MEHE, the implementation of its activities is primarily spearheaded by the Inter-Agency Coordination group, an education-sector coalition that comprises members from UNESCO, UNICEF, and other local and international organizations.

At this nexus of aid and development, however, political drivers overshadowed efforts to implement inclusive and sustainable reform in pedagogy and governance. For instance, as the population of Syrian refugee children rapidly grew in Lebanon, education policies focused more on ensuring access to schools while al-

most downgrading policy initiatives to reform curricula and the quality of learning and teaching.[27] The mission of ensuring that Syrian refugee children have access to public education resulted in a second-shift school schedule that segregated refugee Syrian children in afternoon classes. Moreover, indicators of success in RACE II are mostly, if not entirely, based on quantitative values. Measuring "quality education" includes tracking the percentage of children enrolled and who pass their grade level as well as assessing the provisions for "learner-centered pedagogy" by monitoring the percentage of teachers attending MEHE training workshops. For the third pillar on governance, yes/no statement indicators were designed to "signal the strengthened system capacity" of MEHE and CERD through the production of periodic reviews and reports, including those of the RACE indicators.[28] Such narrow indicators and nondescriptive measures distract policymakers and education practitioners from generating discourse and innovative approaches for inclusive participation, enhanced accountability, and empowering pedagogies. Further, these indicators facilitate quick reporting to the constituencies of donor governments' political parties who endorsed the large sums of aid to ensure that refugees are contained in Syria's neighboring countries.[29] As the RACE II period ended in 2021, the public has yet to access information that reports on the processes, outcomes, and challenges of the RACE reform strategies.

The rapid inventory of numbers of teachers and children was maintained as the primary approach to measure success indicators for the current education reform strategy, the Lebanon Five-Year General Education Plan (2021–2025).[30] This education reform strategy was produced as MEHE and the Government of Lebanon struggled through COVID-19 school closures, a collapse of the local currency, an economic depression, and the Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020. Although dated to include 2021, the strategy policy was released in December 2021. This five-year plan maintains the three pillars of the RACE strategies but with further developed program areas informed by a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis. While some aims of the Five-Year General Education Plan target contractual teachers, its reform activities focus more on provisions of professional training than on addressing the long-standing issues related to the financial and contractual models at MEHE. As the MEHE education strategies continue to focus on the growing and unresolved marginalization of children who can neither access nor find quality education, the education system gradually deteriorates: the governance of teacher contracts remains unresolved, the national curriculum reform remains in-progress since 1997, and the years of lost learning are ignored.[31]

Institutional politics of the knowledge economy determine the knowledge production necessary for progress in the education sector, and the educational knowledge for learning and teaching in schools. In this third feature of education governance, examining the politics of the knowledge economy identifies

a) who makes decisions and how these decisions are made, b) who gets to participate and how, and c) to what extent the needs of various actors and the wider community (demand) are aligned with what knowledge is available and how it is produced (supply). Under Fraser's dimension of representation, degrees of exclusive processes of participating in the knowledge economy threaten the social justice of equitable participation. The analyses below on knowledge production and pedagogical knowledge for equitable education are also contextualized within the compounded crises in Lebanon of COVID-19 and the arrival of refugees escaping the Syrian Civil War.

In Lebanon, governing institutions' responses demonstrated political dynamics that threaten the resilience of the education sector. When schools first closed in March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a network of aid agencies that had previously focused on efforts to support out-of-school Syrian refugee children – the Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon – mobilized their resources to publish a learning readiness in April 2020. MEHE, however, took a different direction and much longer to respond. MEHE focused more on producing decrees to guide schools on managing attendance and registration than actively managing and overseeing distance learning. According to a study on the resilience of Lebanon's education system when responding to compounded crises, its governing institutions demonstrated capacities that, to a concerning degree, contributed to weakening the resilience of its education system.[32]

One and a half years after schools first closed, MEHE responded with a draft strategy on distance education and its five-year general education plan. Not only did MEHE seldomly refer to existing research to support the proposed reform program areas, but the strategies were developed by a small group of individuals and primarily targeted donor agencies for funding support.[33] Furthermore, with the support of teachers, CERD produced lessons on YouTube, which were inaccessible to most people who did not have stable access to electricity, internet, or digital hardware. MEHE also collaborated with agencies such as the Red Cross and UNICEF to prepare information videos and pamphlets on COVID-19 health and safety measures. Again, however, access to this information was limited to those with electricity, internet, digital hardware, *and* the knowledge that such information was available. As a result of the economic collapse, virtually all universities in Lebanon could no longer afford subscriptions to online databases, salary values in U.S. dollars, or conference travel, with exception to those with established endowments.[34]

In nonformal and formal education, educational knowledge is designed, developed, and engaged within the national curriculum framework. The Lebanese national curriculum was last revised in 1997 as an outcome of the post–civil war reform initiatives. While this curriculum placed new emphasis on a dual Lebanese-Arab national identity for social cohesion, it was still designed for children to reproduce the information provided.[35] The reform process excluded input from school-

based stakeholders such as teachers, students, and principals.[36] Since then, efforts to revise the knowledge fields in the national curriculum have largely focused on the reduction of curricular content.[37] Moreover, curriculum reform initiatives taking place at CERD and MEHE after 2020 have relied on the participation of selected individuals and reports produced by organizations. Indeed, a departure from 2013, when policymakers at MEHE resisted qualitative findings of teachers' and learners' experiences and visions of a new citizenship education curriculum.[38]

Pedagogical knowledge – the understandings and approaches of learning and teaching – in the Lebanese public education sector lies within the jurisdiction of MEHE, which provides coaching after classroom observations, and the training bureau at CERD. Teachers have described these provisions of continuous professional learning as spaces to listen to what MEHE and CERD envision as best practices, with no intention to draw on the teachers' approaches, professional knowledge, or reflections. Without opportunities for teachers to feed into discourses on innovative pedagogy, they are structurally positioned as passive recipients of directives that only prepare them to act as transmitters of knowledge that, drawing on Freire's banking metaphor, deposit information into children as receptacles.[39]

The interplay between governing institutions and school-based users of knowledge demonstrates a "disequilibrium in the supply and demand of knowledge."[40] This imbalance results from key actors at institutional levels working without the input of stakeholders, selecting what pedagogical and content knowledge is essential (or what knowledge is in demand). The same actors then design and distribute the resources that determine children's learning experiences (supply). At the same time, school-based practitioners and learners would have identified their actual needs (demands), which are not only different from but also sometimes in conflict with the knowledge economy curated by governing institutions. As a result, the supplies received from governing institutions create an incongruity when education practitioners draw on existing resources to ensure that vulnerable children have available and accessible provisions of education.

Governance structures and mechanisms have direct and indirect effects on how children and teachers represent their experiences to improve classroom pedagogies. Governing institutions also determine how school-based practitioners receive and access resources not only for learning and teaching, but also for basic living needs vital to providing education services to children. Initiatives to reform governance have focused more on building capacities of human resources to carry out administrative and operational activities more efficiently, such as organizing archives of information, professional development, and creating policies that institutionalize planned initiatives. Rarely do such initiatives address governance processes that have struggled in response to crises that threaten education equity, including fair distribution of resources and ensuring the availability of

education. Under weak governance, new crises not only amplify existing barriers to parity of participation and children's rights to education, but also generate different forms of marginalization. Institutions managing education when driven by authoritarian political philosophy and exclusionary governance can shape policies and practices that undermine equity in education in LMIC affected by conflict.

Innovative approaches to governance reform would require a conflict analysis that maps the relations and responses among governing actors, donor agencies, school-based practitioners, and learners. The analysis should consider changes or stagnation over time and responses to crises that threaten educational equities, such as school closures, structural exclusion of people with disabilities, poor emergency response plans, unsustainable financial models, policy stalemates between political actors and education practitioners, the unavailability of strategy reports, and the exclusive participation of education strategy development. Transforming institutional governance also requires a shift in the power relations between the authorities and the public service providers from one that ensures workers follow all regulations to one that negotiates to secure fair distribution of resources to public workers and the availability of and access to quality education for children.

Other pathways for reform and recovery exist but are also often ignored or, arguably, structurally marginalized. One option is built through the empowerment and innovations of school-based practitioners, such as teachers. Innovation is a critical variable not only for economic growth and participation but also when advancing the knowledge fields of pedagogy and disciplines. Despite the significance of innovation, political actors in education governance within these contexts maintain their positional power as they discourage and prevent the empowerment of teachers as innovators and researchers. Nevertheless, niche networks of teachers and researchers have transpired through inspiration, risk-taking, humility, and organized planning. Testimonials from Lebanon and other conflict-affected areas reveal previously neglected and marginalized pathways that nonetheless can still be influential through integrity and empowerment.

Changes to approaches to learning and teaching have largely been facilitated by teacher-driven organizations in civil society. The Lebanese Centre for Civic Education and the Lebanese Association for History (LAH) are two NGOs that have supported teachers in pioneering pedagogies that engage children in collaborative, deliberative, and dialogic learning activities. The LAH, for example, has also invested in transforming the learning of history from the dominant practice of reciting text into a disciplinary approach that requires learners to critically examine multiple and even conflicting narratives to write conclusions about the past. However, the opportunity to empower teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge is limited to unpublished program evaluation reports or the exceptionally low number of academic studies.

School-level pathways allow practitioners to innovate and exercise agency to ensure equitable opportunities for their students to learn both during crises and more stable times.[41] However, in conflict-affected LMIC, such pathways are typically perceived by governing institutions as commendable but still subject to compliance. Governance practices simultaneously disempower local actors while burdening them with increasing levels of bureaucratic and managerial responsibilities. Sustainable transformations, therefore, require actors in governing institutions – donor agencies, ministries of education – to pioneer accountability measures and a democratized knowledge economy.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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