

# Conflict and Education

## Mapping the Field in Literature?

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### Abstract

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*The paper begins with the conceptualisation of the term 'conflict' for broader understanding of the field 'conflict and education'. How literature has reflected on education as a victim of conflict is the first argument of this paper. This is followed by another argument; how education creates and promotes conflict. Then the paper also thoroughly discusses the role of education as an ambassador for peace in conflict settings. Lastly, we argue for a new area of inquiry that is currently omitted and underdeveloped within the field and that is, how conflict can have positive impact on education. This area in the field of education and conflict seems to have the potential to create a new discourse among theorists and practitioners for future research. That we call as Post Conflict Educational Growth and Development.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an ineradicable part of the human condition (Copper, 2003). It is a very fluid, mobile and ambiguous term (Liban, 2006), which is often used interchangeably with violence, at the level of national and international politics (Bruck, Justino,

Verwimp and Avdeenko, 2010), and has been derived from a latin word 'confligere' which means to strike together (Barash and Webel, 2002). Wars and unrest are often described as conflicts (Doucet, 1997; WHO, 2015). Conflict can be seen from different perspectives, approaches

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and in different contexts; it can mean different things to different groups. For example, it can refer to a debate, a disagreement, argument, contest, dispute, or quarrel, a struggle, battle or confrontation, to a state of unrest, turmoil, chaos (Wall and Callister, 1995). All such terms can be used to explain conflict situations in different social settings from the inner emotional or psychological process of the individual relationships within or between different social groups such as family, village, town, state, culture, or even countries. But, a more global approach to conflict is violence, and conflict usually has negative connotations. Sociologists are of the opinion that conflict is something which is common, everyday occurrence of which is natural and unavoidable a social fact of which we all had direct experience (Fink, 1968; Wall and Callister, 1995). Doucet (1997, 2003) looked at conflict as an intricate social phenomenon which is a trait associated with the human existence that is essential for the survival of the society. He has conceptualised the conflict as:

*“Conflict arises when parties disagree about the distribution of material or symbolic resources and act on the basis of these perceived incompatibilities. The definition emphasises that conflict is both perceptual and behavioral. Violence is only one form among a range of other possible ways of expressing conflict or engaging in conflict behaviour”* (Doucet, 1997, p. 176).

Correspondingly, Agerback (1996) has reflected on conflict from dispute point of view. According to him:

*“In the sense of dispute, conflict is of course universal in the politics of family, community and nation. In that sense, any dynamic human system is by nature a conflictive one, encompassing the play of opposing interests. The crux lies in how such conflict is managed. So long as the social and political processes provide channels for dialogue, participation and negotiation, conflict plays a constructive role. Where such channels are blocked, and yet basic needs go unmet, then resentment and desperation build up. The outcome is protest, repression and violence”* (Agerback, 1996, p. 27).

Similarly, Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Faculty, School of Education at Harvard University and co-author of *Educating Children in Zones of Conflict: An Overview and Introduction*, defines conflict typically as any situation in which armed violence over government or territory emerges and disrupts the lives and livelihoods of citizens (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). It is a social fact that conflict has now become a global problem (Bhargava, 2006; Nigussie, 2014). It affects every aspect of human life and social institutions like education, health, structure, development and all that a human being requires on this planet for survival (Gallagher, 2004). History reveals that conflict is historical in nature and the roots

of conflict develop over many years and the post-effects of conflict can create an outcrop of instability (UNO, 2001). For this reason, the literature on conflict tends to define zones of conflict as not only situations where there is active armed violence, but also those that have been affected by armed conflict in the past (Mundy and Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Novelli and Cardozo (2008) advocated that armed conflict in the global context is changing in its symbolic structure and is now becoming characterised by cultural discrepancies. There are no signs that the world is becoming a less conflict place (Bhargava, 2006; Davies, 2004), especially children are at risk because of growing conflicts. The issue of conflict confronts to many countries, generates an encouraging growth of scholarship aimed at determining the effective delivery of education in conflict situations (Justino, 2014; Wharton and Oyelere, 2011). Armed conflicts too have an impact on the supply and demand of education (Shemyakina, 2011). Therefore it seems logical to study the relationship between conflict and education from various theoretical and disciplinary perspectives.

### **CONFLICT AND EDUCATION: A NEW EMERGING FIELD**

The field of conflict and education is receiving increased attention within the media, in the academic field and from policymakers and practitioners (Justino, 2014; Paulson and Rappleye, 2007; Ishiyama and Breuning, 2012).

Yet, it remains a 'field in its infancy' (Barakat, Connolly, Hardman and Sundaram, 2013; Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005). This is reflected in the plethora of terms that have been used to describe this emerging field, including conflict and education, 'education for reconstruction', 'education in crisis situations', 'emergency education', 'education in fragile states', 'education and conflict', and 'education and instability' (Hilker, 2011; Karpinska, Yarrow, and Gough, 2007; Smith, 2005). But, the area is more represented by the terms like 'education and conflict' as well as 'conflict and education' in the literature. This budding field of study therefore runs across a wide range of contexts (Smith, 2005). The gap between theory and practice in the scholarship of education and conflict still remains a challenge (Bernardo and Baranovich, 2014). The literature available is too restricted to incorporate the 'wide range of experiences' of conflict that education has retained in conflict areas (Sommers, 2002, 2006). But now the trend has changed from the last decade especially after 11 September 2001, as there has been an alarming series of devastating and extremely publicised conflicts across the world (Masten and Narayan, 2012). A growing body of research is emerging about education and conflict over the last decade (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004; Paulson and Rappleye, 2007; Poirier, 2012; Mundy and Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Smith

and Vaux, 2003; Justino, 2014). Education in post-conflict transitions has become the focus of a growing body of research among researchers and educationists as it is seen as being critical to the reconstruction process and consolidating peace and stability (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004; Pigozzi, 1999; Kagawa, 2005; Paulson, 2011; Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005). However, the existing literature in this emerging field provides us with three interconnected analytical frameworks which describe the current relationships between education and conflict. In our conceptual model, we have attempted

to present these relationships and have also figured out where the gap lies. These relationships are as follows: (a) Education as victim of conflict, in other words, the multifarious impacts of conflict on education, (b) Complicit role of education in conflict, and (c) Role of education in peace building (Figure 1). But, there still exists another relationship between education and conflict about which literature is still silent. Our focus is to highlight that gap. Let us first elaborate these frameworks in order to have a broader understanding of the area and argue for new relationship in the field.

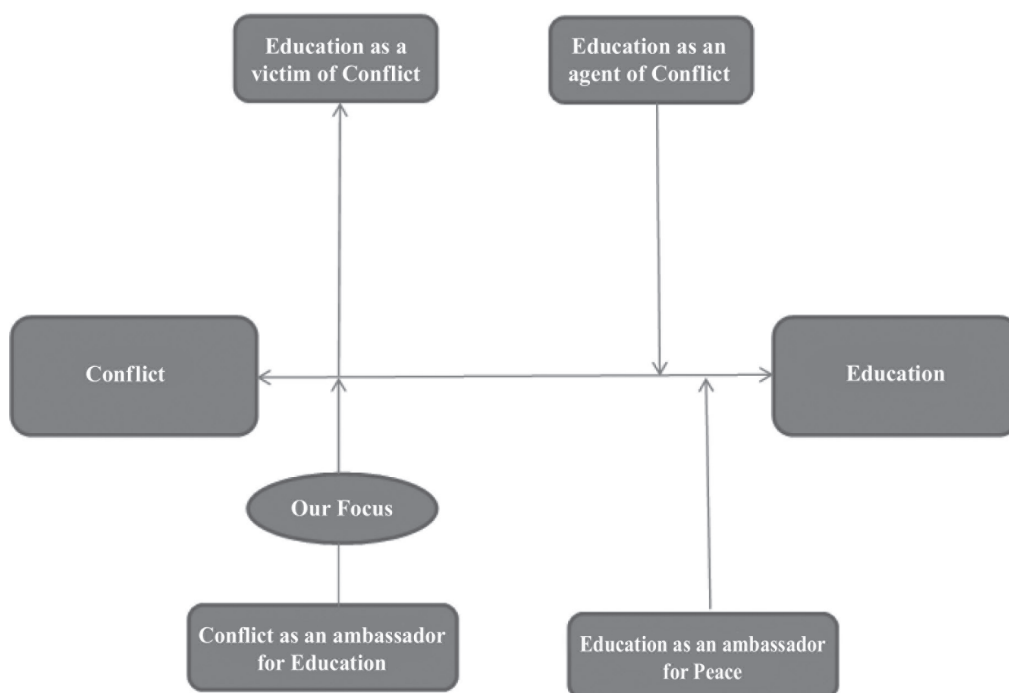


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

**CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR  
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN CONFLICT AND EDUCATION**

**A. Education as Victim of Conflict**

It is now an established fact that armed conflict has the strong potential to have negative impact on every aspect of the human society especially education (Blattman, 2009; Stewart, Fitzgerald, and Associates, 2001). Generally, education becomes the first victim of conflict. Much has been written about the harmful effects of conflict on education. It is reported that 28 million children who are out of school still live in conflict-affected poor countries (Barakat *et al.*, 2013; UNSG, 2012; GPEE, 2012; UNESCO, 2011). Recently, there has been a shift to document this systematically through a series of UNESCO funded publications (O'Malley, 2007; UNESCO, 2010) that articulate the variety of ways in which education opportunities, actors and institutions can be negatively affected by conflict such as attacks on students and teachers, schools, sexual violence, forced entry into army. It destroys education infrastructure, reduces budget on education and prevents children from attending classes regularly (Justino, 2014; Wharton and Oyelere, 2011). Educational institutions are often a target for groups hostile to the government because of the association with state authority (UNDP, 2005). Conflict damages the institutions and process

of education as a result of which, intellectual as well as academic growth gets hampered. Armed conflicts have a very strong negative effect on schooling of children (Akresh and Walque, 2008). By and large, conflicts are trouble creators for mankind.

Conflict causes major harm and brings with it devastating consequences for a country, including casualties, displacement and the obliteration of public infrastructure especially educational institutions and human resource (Abdi, 1998; Buckland, 2005; Poirier, 2012). Presence of armed conflict often weakens the government's ability to offer education to its citizens (Amin and Naqshbandi, 2013; Bhargava, 2006). The impact of armed conflict on children and their education is both far-reaching and complex (Roger, 2002), and it gives birth to various psychological problems among children and adults. Conflict causes problems in harmonising academic calendar across war-affected regions (UNICEF, 2005), while educational institutions remain closed for an indefinite period of time (Bruck, 1997) and have a harmful socio-psychological impact on students' intellect (Sany, 2010).

Seitz (2004) identifies three different levels upon which conflict can affect education. Firstly, it affects children directly through the loss of parents, loss of relatives, physical violence, sexual assault, rape, need to leave home, recruitment

as child soldier, displacement, etc. Secondly, the damage caused by war and conflict have a direct negative effect on the process of schooling, in terms of the danger to get there, and also the economic situation might no longer allow children to enrol for schooling (Davies, 2004). Thirdly, educational infrastructure and institutions become targets and are destroyed for political reasons or sometimes accidentally. Children are more vulnerable to the impacts of armed conflict because of their crucial age period where they are still forming identities about themselves and their place within their families, the neighbourhood and the world in general (Narayan, 2002). Children in war-affected regions or armed-conflict zones get exposed to myriad vulnerabilities, threats and impairments, endangering their health and well-being (Rashid, 2012). Children are deprived of freedom; killed or orphaned; become targets of armed people; many are detained for months together; face torture and inhuman treatment at the hands of counter-insurgent agencies and bear the system's apathy (ACHR, 2010; Shakya, 2011). It has been universally accepted that armed conflicts bring long-living traumas with them for children (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), which not only affect psychological processes of children but also affect them biologically (Hajai, Chandrashekha, Raju, and Arora, 2005). Trauma can change the way children view their world (Monsen,

2002). All such problems proceed as barriers in their educational trajectories (Baker, Gardner, Chang, and Walker, 2009; Poirier, 2012; Peltonon and Punamaki, 2010).

Yet, worldwide a considerable number of children lack basic resources that can promise their healthy psychosocial development and these children are deprived of educational opportunities and safety due to armed conflicts. As cited earlier, more than 28 million children of primary school age group are out of school in conflict-affected countries. This is 42 per cent of the world's total out-of-school children population (UNESCO, 2011). Even in conflict-affected countries where considerable effort has been put for expanding access to primary education, reports reveal that primary school education achievements are still very low (Mundy and Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Conflict affects education in many contexts like it results in the death or displacement of teachers, staff and students (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Justino, 2014).

According to the UN statistics, approximately two million children have been killed and six million seriously injured or permanently disabled in armed conflicts in the past decade across the conflict-affected countries (Marcal, 2003; World Bank, 2005). The negative consequences of wars, terrorism, military violence and poverty on children's psychosocial development and mental health are of great concern. Therefore,



effective interventions and strategies to reduce their emotional suffering and promote their mental health are considered one of the major global mental health challenges (UNICEF, 2004). Beyond the human costs and physical destruction, armed conflict is draining some of the world's poorest countries of financial resources. Instead of diverting their budgets towards productive investment in human capital through education, many countries are still wasting their money on unproductive military expenditure (UNESCO, 2011). All this discussion articulates the iniquitous and multifarious impacts of conflict on education and human resource.

### **B. Education as an Instrument for Conflict**

The second major area of research inquiry is to explore the ways, education depending on its nature, content and delivery can be used as an instrument for conflict. This area in the field of education and conflict publicly got attention with the publication of *The Two Faces of Education* by Kenneth D. Bush and Diana Saltarelli in the year 2000. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argued that how educational systems can be manipulated to drive a wedge between people, rather than drawing them closer together. Since education reflects the society around it, therefore attitudes that flourish beyond the school walls will, inevitably, filter into the classroom. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) provide a range of examples

of different forms of violence in education: the uneven distribution of education and educational opportunities, denial of education as a weapon of war, manipulation of history for political purposes; the manipulation of textbooks; education as a weapon of cultural repression; the conveying of images asserting superiority of one group over another and segregated education. Their publication paves the way for further critically informed research in the field. Similarly, a World Bank report (Buckland, 2005) advocates that “educational systems and schools, which are widely expected to play a role in mediating the relationship between ethnic and religious groups and so build ‘social capital’ at the same time often stand accused of deepening conflict among ethnic, religious, and other social groups” (Buckland, 2005, p. 9).

Similarly, Lynn Davies’ (2004) path-breaking work on education and conflict, complexity and chaos, demonstrates the multiple ways education can serve as a means of conflict through educational policies and practices that exclude minorities, exacerbate class and gender differences, and exclude students through a war or hate curriculum (Davies, 2004). Likewise, a number of research studies have also analysed the complex and multifaceted role of education in conflict settings (like Buckland, 2006; Gallagher, 2004; Smith and Vaux, 2003; Novelli and Lopez-Cardozo, 2008; Paulson, 2011)

and have advocated that education promotes conflict through a number of ways like curriculum, pedagogy, discrimination and through other school practices. Tawil and Harley (2004) state that the content of the curriculum affects education's ability to facilitate coexistence or fuel detestation. The literature has specifically focused on the structure and content of education systems, and on how they may reproduce and exacerbate conflict in different contexts (Davies, 2011; Gallagher, 2011; Paulson, 2011). Degu (2005) argues that education can contribute to the creation of widespread civil violence or the strengthening of existing conflict. Education systems are still used to transmit the ignorance, prejudice and social injustice that make societies less cohesive, more divided and, ultimately, more likely to descend into conflicts (UNESCO, 2011). Smith (2005) views education correspondingly as a 'political tool for ideological development' to generate conflict among academic circles. Education can in turn persuade situations of conflict — either contributing to violence or working for creating a philosophy for justification of violence and often fuel violence by providing insufficient or unequal access and/or the wrong type of education (Barakat *et al.*, 2013; Smith and Vaux, 2003; Davies, 2010; Hilker, 2011). To conclude, educational institutions are often part of the cycle of violence, but they have the potential to break and

reverse that cycle (UNESCO, 2011; Winthrop and Jackie, 2008).

### **C. Education as an Instrument for Peace**

It is an accepted fact that education has potential for promoting peace for mankind (Winthrop and Jackie, 2008). Education leads to citizenship, creates various options and provides a path to development and is a primary vehicle by which children can lift themselves out of conflict situations and obtain the means to participate in various development programmes (Manuchehr, 2011). There are a number of research studies that reveal the power of education as a means for peaceful co-existence in conflict situations. Education is an instrument for peace-building, child protection, human rights promotion, defense and protection of democracy in the conflict zones (Bekerman and McGlynn, 2007; Kaur, 2006; McGlynn, 2009; Novelli, 2010; Pheralia and Garratt, 2014; Uwazie, 2003). Education is robust instrument for creating peace and non-violent ideologies in conflict areas. Perhaps more than in any other sector, education provides many visible peace dividends which play a vital role for the survival of peace agreements. Davies (2004) argues that educational institutions have been resilient to the challenges posed by conflict like in countries such as Lebanon, Nepal, Uganda, Bosnia and Liberia. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) in their work argue that the positive face



of education goes beyond the provision of education for peace programmes, reflecting the cumulative benefits of the provision of quality education. These include the conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity, the nurturing of ethnic tolerance, the inclusion of linguistic diversity and the ‘disarming’ of history. Likewise, Novelli (2010) opined that much of the literature focuses narrowly on ‘the two faces of education’ — namely, that education can prevent war but also foster violent conflict, and education as good for trade, and consequently neglect the complex relationships between education and peace, especially how education will act as foundation for peace. Education has universal bent for promotion of brotherhood and peace (Dupuy, 2010). Educational institutions can be used to provide a safe space and sense of normality during times of conflict and can contribute to the physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection of children, adolescents and young learners (Barakat *et al.*, 2013). In conflict places, education works for peace-building and reconciliation as it helps in shaping new attitudes, behaviours and build a new social capital (Winthrop and Jackie, 2008). In this way, education can contribute towards reducing inequalities, overcoming prejudices and building new social values and institutions in the conflict zones (Save the Children, 2013). Burde (2014) advocates that establishment and maintenance of community-

based elementary schools in conflict-affected countries like Afghanistan will serve as a means to provide education for all and will ensure peace in the society. Brannely, Ndarhutse and Rigaud (2009) have marvelously outlined that:

*“Education is also increasingly perceived as a key factor is restoring normalcy and hope, a necessity that can be both life-sustaining and life-saving, providing physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection”* (Brannely *et al.*, 2009, p. 33).

This paradigmatic shift in conflict management and resolution, which accompanied the emergence of peace building programmes, is documented in a number of UN documents such as *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) and the *Brahimi Report* (2000). The term ‘peace building’ was in use among scholars and practitioners of conflict transformation since the early 1970s, and it was popularised by Johan Galtung (1976) in his popular work, *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peace building*. According to him, peace-building seeks to address and overcome structural contradictions that lie at the root of conflict. Central theme in Galtung’s (1976) work is the search for positive peace, which has a relevance for addressing and overcoming issues of structural and cultural violence, as well as the exploration for human solidarity, empathy and social justice (Galtung, 1976). All this can be achieved through education (Burde, 2014).

However, in more recent years several international organisations have examined the potential contribution that education can make to peace. In this regard, UNESCO (2011) has called for a joint effort to unlock “the full potential of education to act as a force for peace”. Alike, World Bank (2005) also outlined the role of education for peace as:

*“Educational programming in post-conflict societies cannot be business as usual. Education has a critical role to play in the wider reconstruction of the society, from building peace and social cohesion to facilitating economic recovery and getting the country onto an accelerated development track”* (World Bank, 2005, p. 27).

This is testified by various policy reports of UNICEF (2011), UNESCO (2011), Save the Children (2013), World Bank (2005), and many other organisations. Various international and local organisations are working for promoting peace through education across various conflict zones of the world and are deeply committed to developing and implementing educational projects that promote awareness about human rights, tolerance, child rights, humanitarian law, peaceful resolution of disputes and final conflict management. Educational institutions like schools can be used as a space for creating the peace and resolve the conflict for the welfare of humankind. London (2007) writes:

*“Out of school, one is exposed to all manners of perils, the same perils that*

*face grown-ups, and one must usually face these perils alone. In school, however, a child can sit and play; can spend time with other children and not have to do any of the labour that comes outside the schoolhouse walls. One’s only job in school is to learn. Children in school socialise; they feel like part of a community, a feeling that is all too scarce during times of war”* (London, 2007, p. 32).

Briefly speaking, education is an ambassador of peace and can act as a solvent for removing the social evils and inequalities which emerge in conflict zones. Education works as a source of inspiration and ray of hope during war-like situations and is a gateway for the socio-economic development of people living in conflict regions.

### **A NEW PERSPECTIVE: POSITIVE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON EDUCATION?**

The thing which does not kill you makes you strong, as advocated by Nietzsche (1955), is the ontological foundation of my argument. Each setback teaches us a new facet of life and compels us to rethink our goals, aspirations and reorient our paths (Kalam, 2013; Khan, 2012; Sternberg, 2014). There is another side of the situation which is still unexplored and hidden in the literature of education and conflict. Do conflicts have some positive impact on education? The dictum seems against the common sense but literature has given some indications that conflict can also have some

positive aspects for education and society. In the article, 'Experiences of Children in Armed Conflict in Nepal', Shakya (2011) writes:

*"Children faced many difficulties and have experienced some positive changes. One visible positive impact on children is they have become articulate, self-confident and conscious of their rights. They have learned to question tradition, culture and authority. They are expressive and articulate in explaining their ideas and views. Furthermore, they are confident to talk to individuals, masses or outsiders. Even girls are not shy or timid as in the past. They are forthcoming and helpful. Girls and young women are ready to take leadership roles. Travel to different parts of the country exposed many of them to human and geographical diversity and changed their worldview, whereas usually they would have been limited to their villages and their communities. They did not have opportunities to deal and interact with diverse groups of people, which they later got with the start of the conflict"* (Shakya, 2011, p. 560)

Similarly, from India, in the trouble-torn state of Jammu & Kashmir around 1990s, there was suddenly an increase in terms of enrolment at school level (Parlow, 2013). There is a good reason for that. People realised that future of our children will only depend on education, therefore mass opinion build up was towards education. Despite the effects of violence perpetration and trauma, children

are also resilient and have tendency to continue their educational trajectory (Sommers, 2006; Betancourt and Khan, 2008) and for young people in most conflict-affected countries, resuming their education is the primary means of supporting resiliency and encouraging positive reintegration into society (Davies, 2010; Zuilkowski and Betancourt, 2014). Similarly, Felman and Laub (1992) ask:

*"Is there a relationship between crisis and the very enterprise of education? To put the question even more audaciously and sharply: Is there a relation between trauma and pedagogy? In a post-traumatic century, a century that has survived unthinkable historical catastrophes, is there anything that we have learned or that we should learn about education that we did not know before? Can trauma instruct pedagogy, and can pedagogy shed light on the mystery of trauma?"* (Felman and Laub, 1992).

What do these lines reveal? Conflicts and traumas are able to develop positive changes among human beings and such a theme is old in the literature. Certain questions also arise which require research attention and investigation. Do the traumas have some positive aspects for education also? Do conflicts bring some positive changes among the outlook of citizens towards education? Do conflicts help to reshape and rebuild our educational structure better than the previous one? Do conflicts help in the enrolment of

children in schools? These questions are still unexplored empirically in the literature. On the side, creating meanings and development out of adversity and traumatic situations is now psychological reality. Because theoretically it has been proved as in the year 1995 when Calhoun and Tedeschi developed the theory Post-Traumatic Growth in the area of psychology advocating that positive change out of traumatic situations is universally possible. The concept has been studied across various domains but it is still unexplored in the field of education and conflict. I believe that it is time to disseminate the new terms like Post-Conflict Educational Growth, Post-Conflict Educational Development, and Post-Traumatic Academic Growth with proper conceptualisations and theoretical trajectory for advocating a new debate in the area that conflict and traumas can have positive impact on education. I call researchers throughout the globe to investigate this idea across various conflict societies by conducting empirical and qualitative studies.

### **CONCLUSION**

Increasingly, education is acknowledged as one of the best investments states can make for promoting peace and minimising conflict (Burde, 2014). Education is the primary vehicle by which children can lift themselves out of conflict, poverty, exclusion and gain the means to participate fully in their communities

(Burde, 2014; Manuchehr, 2011). It has been universally accepted that education is an efficient means to promote reconciliation and peace. Education has been declared as the fourth pillar of humanitarian response (Machel, 2001). Overall, the discourse recognises that armed conflict, war, turmoil and unrest are seen as the greatest obstacles to human development. Unfortunately, huge challenges have to be overcome to run the education systems in countries at war or in post-conflict situations because education has to respond to diverse educational concerns in very different social and political settings. Education in a conflict zone has to address all the aspects of the society for peace-making and peace-building and take into consideration all the positive as well as negative challenges which conflict has put before us. There is a need to conduct more research and evaluation to understand the complex and critical processes of education in relation to conflict, especially at the local level from the conflict-affected areas (Brown, 2011; Harber, 2004; Davies, 2004; Mundy and Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Policymakers emphasise that education heals the psychosocial wounds of war, promotes social inclusion, resolves unemployment crises, delivers democracy, builds peace and promotes economic and social development among people of affected areas (Buckland, 2006; Ishiyama and Breuning, 2012), that is why children

too have strong aspirations for future education in such places. Education policies should be designed in such a way that peace should be given a chance to get rebirth in the conflict zone and textbooks should be designed accordingly. Just focusing on structure and buildings will not be sufficient for education. Education has to be the ambassador of peace

for the entire society both living and non-living creations. Gallagher (2004) has beautifully argued in his book, “..... does not, in itself, solve all the problems of a divided society a more proactive approach is not only needed, but arguably the problems of a divided society will only be addressed if they are constantly and explicitly addressed”.

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