



## **Education in Times of Crisis: Shaping the Future of Internally Displaced Children-A Case Study from Pakistan**

Waqas Idrees

*Hagler Bailly Pakistan*

*Air University, Pakistan*

[waqas.idrees@fulbrightmail.org](mailto:waqas.idrees@fulbrightmail.org)

### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the impact of education on twenty internally displaced out-of-school children over a period of nine months in a rural area of Pakistan. Two focus areas of the study were to observe (1) Change in participants' perception towards education, and; (2) Skill development of participants. Internally displaced children were enrolled in a local school and their performance was measured against non-displaced students attending regular school. An educational strategy developed by UNICEF specifically for IDPs was used to structure the study along with a hybrid learning framework to measure children's performance in three knowledge areas: foundational, meta and humanistic skills. The overall findings suggested that after eight months, the children had an increased interest towards learning; their parents were more supportive of their children's education and the children learnt life skills to financially help their families while continuing school.*

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1. Internally Displaced (ID) Children in Pakistan:**

According to UN OCHA, Internally Displaced People (IDP) are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border."<sup>[1]</sup>

As of 2017, there are more than 1.25 million registered IDPs in Pakistan [2]. Out of these 1.25 million IDPs, approximately half a million are children between the ages of

6-11[3][4]. However, the actual number is thought to be much higher as an estimated half a million IDPs are unregistered. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 52%-65% of the registered internally displaced children don't attend school [5].

### **1.2. Impact of Displacement on Children and Education:**

The crisis and subsequent displacement has severe impacts on children's well-being and access to education. Displaced children have often witnessed violence against family members or friends and, even after they have physically moved to another location, continue to feel afraid. According to a study conducted by Islamic Relief, approximately 70 percent of the displaced children suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) [6] and studies showed that girls are often the worst affected. In Pakistan, where child marriage and teenage pregnancy are often cited among internally displaced girls, dropout rates for these girls are as high as 90% [7]. A case study on Pakistan, Colombia, Sudan, and Iraq showed that population groups who are often considered marginalized in non-conflict settings, including girls and indigenous groups, are again more likely to be marginalized in their access to education in situations of displacement by conflict [6].

According to statistics published by the Global Partnership for Education, access to primary education alone leads to significant improvement in the mental and physical wellbeing of children [8], Consequently, education, if it is safe and of high quality, can save lives by protecting against exploitation and harm, including abduction, recruitment of children into armed groups and sexual and gender-based violence. Therefore, the importance of education for the psychosocial well-being of displaced children cannot be emphasized enough.

UNHCR's policy paper on no more excuses suggest four key policy measures to provide quality education to IDPs. These measures are contingent upon decision makers and education providers to address a variety of challenges for internally displaced groups that vary significantly in their situations and needs [7]. The policy measures are:

1. Enshrine forcibly displaced people's rights to education in national laws and policy
2. Include displaced children and youth in national education systems
3. Enable accelerated and flexible education options to meet diverse needs
4. Ensure an adequate supply of trained and motivated teachers

Creating the right policy and implementation environments requires time and strong partnerships and synergetic efforts between governments and humanitarian and development agencies.

### **1.3. The Present Study:**

This study investigates the potential benefits of education for internally displaced out-of-school children by observing;

1. Change in participants' perception towards education, and;

## 2. Skill development of participants.

Internally displaced out-of-school children (experimental group) were enrolled in school and their performance was measured over one school year (nine months). The findings are based on a comparison of their performance with that of regular students (controlled group), using two frameworks; one focuses on the structure of this study and the other on the learning framework.

### 1.4. Frameworks for measuring efficacy of the study:

An educational strategy for displaced children defined in UNICEF's paper [9] has been used while structuring this study (Table 1).

**Table 1: Framework as per UNICEF Study, 2015**

<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Actions proposed in UNICEF paper</b>	<b>Steps taken in present study to address actions</b>
<b>Increased access to basic education</b>	Conduct needs assessment	Profiling of internally displaced children	Interviews from ID families and Pre-study assessment to establish baseline
		School mapping	Meetings with school administration
		Identifying children	Identifying families after interviews
	Additional learning spaces	Double shift system	Adequate learning space available at school for the study
	Provide uniforms/shoes	Provision of school materials	School didn't have a uniform policy. Shoes were given to deserving children
	Enrollment drive	Raise awareness in community	Raising awareness through interviews with ID families about child education
	Improve water/sanitation services	Adequate water and sanitation services	A well-maintained system of sanitation and clean water available
<b>Improved quality of education</b>	Provide education materials	Provision of education material	School supplies provided. Post-study assessment conducted at the end of study
	Recruit teachers	Hire additional faculty	School had adequate teaching staff
	Train teachers	Provide trainings	Child psychologist provided trainings
	Build capacity at govt. level	Raise awareness at the national level	The study results will be shared with the Ministry of Federal Education

Additionally, a hybrid learning framework which focuses on foundational, meta- and humanistic skills was employed [10] due to the following observations/challenges:

1. **Financial challenge:** Children wanted to learn life skills to support their families.
2. **Lack of confidence:** Children exhibited anti-social tendencies.
3. **Hygiene issues:** Children had limited awareness about basic hygiene and ethics.
4. **Communication barrier:** Children were unable to socialize due to language barrier.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants:

The study included twenty internally displaced out-of-school children (6 girls and 14 boys, aged between 9 and 12 years). They attended school before being displaced, however post displacement, they were only doing odd jobs to financially support their families.

Four of the children also participated in a previous study on ‘Exploring the efficacy of digital learning for providing access to education to underprivileged children’ which was presented at MIT LINC’16 and were the inspiration for this study when they shared their stories with the author.

### 2.2. Study Duration:

The study took place from July 2017 to May 2018 (**Table 2**)

**Table 2: Timeline and Phases of the Study**

Stages	Time	Participants	Method
<b>First Interview – Pre-study</b>	Jul 15- Aug 1, 2017	Parents/Teachers/ Experimental group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants’ concerns/views on education and fears regarding study were documented.</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention - Phase I</b>	Aug 7 – Dec 15, 2017	Experimental group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment of students, provision of supplies.</li> <li>• Performance analyzed through class tests.</li> </ul>
<b>Second Interview - During Study</b>	Dec18-31, 2017	Parents/Teachers/ Experimental group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and children were asked about changes in perception towards education.</li> <li>• Parents and teachers shared their observations regarding changes in children.</li> </ul>

Stages	Time	Participants	Method
<b>Intervention - Phase II</b>	Jan1 – Apr 20, 2018	Experimental group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social events to foster children’s social skills.</li> <li>• A native language teacher helped children to overcome language barrier.</li> <li>• A child psychologist mentored the children.</li> <li>• Guest artisans conducted workshops to build life skills in children.</li> </ul>
<b>Third Interview - Post Study</b>	Apr 23- 27, 2018	Parents/Teachers/ Experimental group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants were asked about their perception towards education and changes in children.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation &amp; Data Analysis</b>	May 1- 15, 2018	Experimental group/Controlled group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative and quantitative data of experimental group were compared with controlled group to measure performance.</li> </ul>

### 2.3. Curriculum:

In addition to the regular curriculum, a specific curriculum was developed to target challenges (identified at end of section 1.4). These included life/career skills workshops, personal hygiene sessions, team building workshops and language classes.

### 2.4. Intervention and Data Collection:

#### *Preliminary Interview – Pre-Study:*

Parents and children from internally displaced families were asked seven research questions to gauge their interest in getting access to education. These questions were designed primarily to understand the fears/concerns faced by internally displaced people. Additionally, the teachers teaching at the local school were also a part of the interviews.

RQ1: What do you think is the most important concern for your children’s wellbeing?  
(Parents)

RQ2: How important is education for you and/or your children? (Parents)

RQ3: Have you enrolled your children in a school/academy even since you relocated?  
(Parents)

RQ4: If no, would you want your children to get quality education? (Parents)

RQ5: What are your fears if you decide to participate in this study?  
(Parents/Children)

RQ6: What is your ambition in life? (Children)

RQ7: How important do you think education is in attaining that ambition? (*Children*)

RQ8: Do you have any concerns about the experimental group? (*Teachers*)

### ***Intervention – Phase I:***

The first interviews were followed by the first intervention phase. The results of the first interviews showed that almost 40% of the children were financially helping their families by doing odd jobs (laborers, masons, apprentices at garages, cleaning houses, etc.), and their parents were concerned about the negative impact of enrolling them in school would have on the economic condition of the family. To incentivize the parents to allow their children to attend school, an arrangement was made where each child attending school would be given ¢25/day for every day that he/she attended school. In addition to this, two families without electricity in their shanties were given chargeable lamps which were charged during the day when their children attended school.

The children were registered in a local school and provided with uniforms and workbooks. Since most of our students were enrolled in the middle of school term and some of them were also working part-time, they were given extra tuitions by teachers who volunteered to participate in the study.

The first intervention phase concluded with the term exam where students took tests that were then graded by teachers teaching at the local school.

### ***Second Interview - During Study:***

At the end of the first intervention phase, the students and teachers were interviewed to find out how their experience was progressing. The parents were interviewed to see changes in their perceptions based on the students' performance (through assignments, class test and interaction with the learning environment). The following research questions were asked:

RQ9: How has your opinion on getting education changed? (*Parents/Children*)

RQ10: What additional changes would you further recommend?

(*Parents/Children/Teachers*)

RQ11: What difficulties have you faced or observed in the experimental group?

(*Teachers*)

### ***Intervention – Phase II:***

65% of the parents and 40% of the children showed interest in gaining life skills to earn money. Students participated in a design lab to develop creative thinking skills. After the second interview, around 65% of the parents and 40% of the children expressed interest in getting life skills that would help them contribute financially to the family. To promote creative thinking, the students were given access to a design lab to provide them access to smart devices and design sets on arts and engineering, e.g., Lego, Melissa and Doug, etc.

Bimonthly, guest artisans were asked to conduct workshops to help children identify skills and crafts they were interested to learn. These skills included pottery,

furniture, decorative arts, clothing, jewelry, food items, etc. Children were given the basic DIY projects to help them learn the basics of the craft.

Based on students' recommendations from the preceding interview and responses from the teachers, weekly get-togethers were arranged, where students played various games and sports. This was done to develop their social and inter-personal skills. A volunteer teacher who spoke the native language of the children and child psychologist were brought onboard to mentor the children during the second intervention phase.

For the school taught courses, in the second intervention phase students took weekly tests and submitted assignments organized by the school similarly like phase 1. The second intervention phase concluded with the second term exam.

#### ***Third Interview - Post study:***

At the end of the study, the primary participants, their parents and teachers were again interviewed to record their final responses. The following research questions were asked:

RQ12: How has your opinion on educating your children changed? (*Parents*)

RQ13: What changes did you observe after this study? (*Parents/Children/Teachers*)

#### ***Evaluation and Data Analysis:***

At the end of the study, the data was analyzed using KNIME, V3.1 and Windows Excel, and following consecutive steps of analysis were followed.

Firstly, quantitative (tests/assignments) data of the experimental group was compared against the data for the control group to evaluate the performance of the children and efficacy of the study.

Secondly, the experimental group were brought together with the control group and assigned a series of exercises to assess their social and interpersonal skills.

Thirdly, an arts and crafts fair was organized where the children were encouraged to sell handmade crafts through the skills they had learnt during the study. This was done to assess the change in the participants (parents and children) perception towards the idea that 'sending children to school makes them non-economical contributors'.

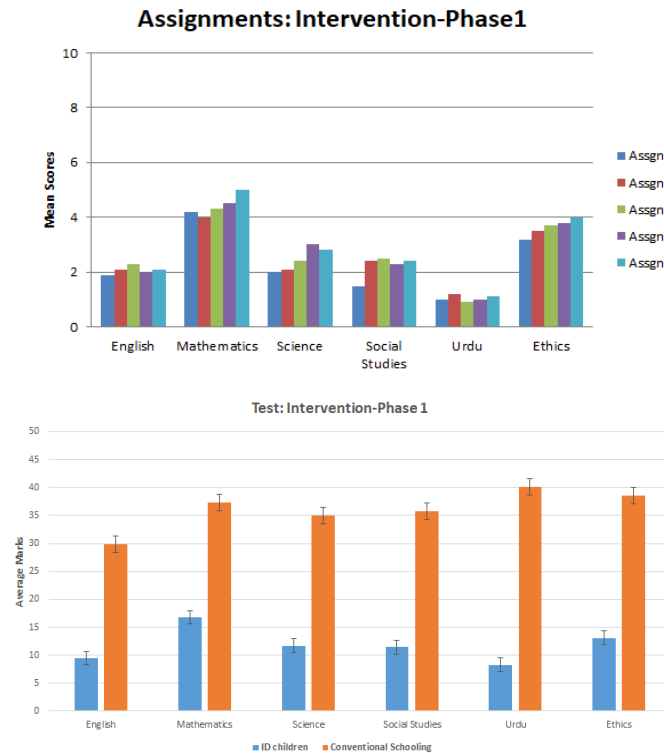
### **3. Results**

#### ***Preliminary Interview – Pre-Study:***

42% of the parents were concerned about their children's safety; 25% only wanted to get their daughters married; 15% wanted their children to work; only 18% wanted education for their children. 85% of the children wanted to financially help their families and 45% of that thought education would help them get better jobs. The rest either wanted to do odd jobs or start their own cart business. 30% of the children (all girls) feared for their security. 51% teachers were concerned about language barrier. 40% teachers were also concerned that the children would be anti-social and not adjust to a classroom setting.

### ***Intervention-Phase I:***

During this phase, the experimental group performed poorly compared to the controlled group (**Figure 1**), a plausible reason could be language of instruction which was different from experimental group's native language. However, the children



**Figure 1: Intervention-Phase 1**

scored better in mathematics as compared to other subjects.

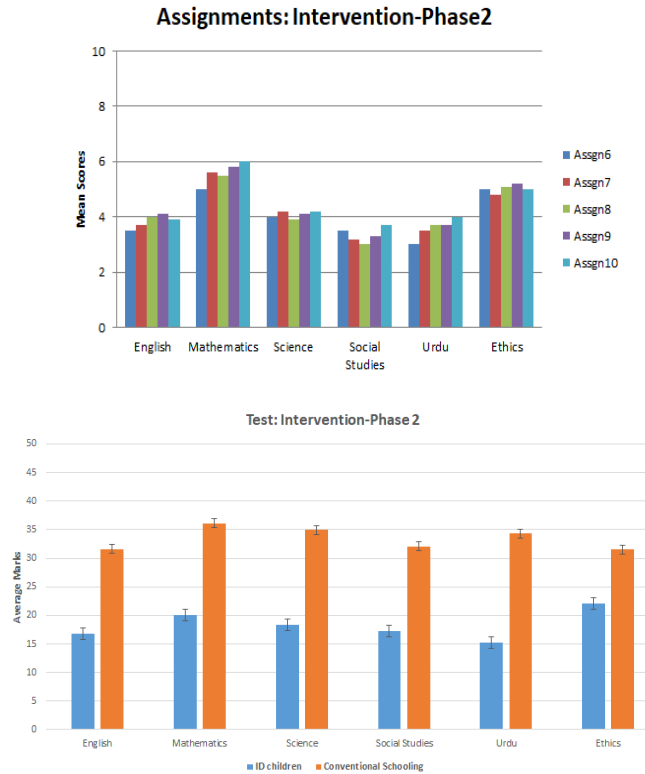
### ***Second Interview-During Study:***

63% parents observed the children were more excited about studies. 65% showed confidence in sending their girls to school and 40% wanted their children to learn life skills. 54% of the experimental group children showed happiness by being surrounded by children their own age. 61% expressed interest in learning life skills and 80% expressed concern that they couldn't learn and play with other children due to language barrier. 62% teachers observed that the experimental group was unaware about basic hygiene. 30% shared that internally displaced children remained aloof during the day due to language barrier.



### ***Intervention-Phase II:***

Academically, there was an overall improvement, especially in mathematics (**Figure 2**). The other area of improvement was ethics. This can be attributed to hygiene and life skills workshops and mentoring sessions with the psychologist.



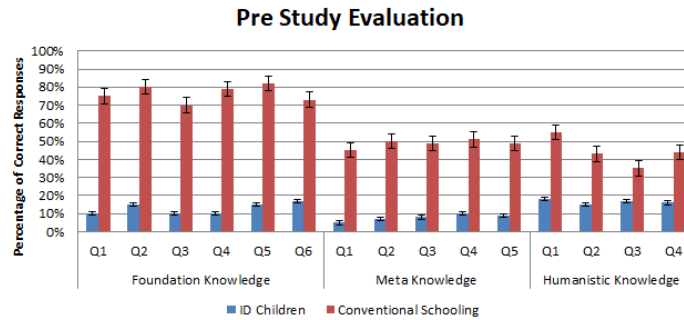
**Figure 2: Intervention-Phase 2**

### ***Third Interview – Post Study:***

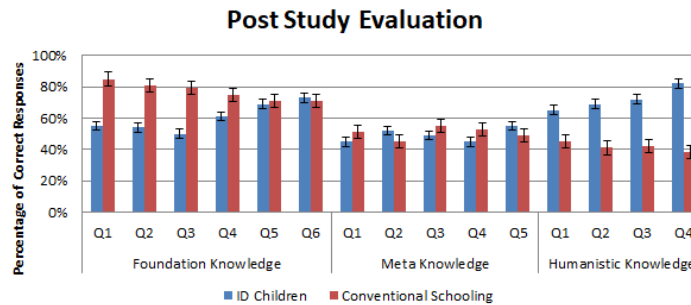
82% parents were supportive of their children's education as they were supporting their families in managing day-to-day finances. 92% children showed interest in continuing education as well as gaining life skills. 80% girls wanted to study and become teachers in the future. 91% teachers observed the children were more well-mannered, hygienic, social and confident than before; 53% noted that children's communication skills had improved.

### ***Evaluation and Data Analysis:***

The post-study evaluation showed experimental group's meta and humanistic skills increased, and they scored more on life skills compared to controlled group (**Figure 3a & 3b**).



**Figure 3a: Pre-Study Evaluation Results**



**Figure 3b: Post-Study Evaluation Results**

Also, a team challenge was set for both experimental and controlled group and they were asked to raise funds for school. Two independent graders (both child psychologists) were asked to grade both groups based on seven criteria and funds raised (**Table 3**). The decision to choose independent graders who weren't involved in the study was made to eliminate any biases. Grading was done based on the school's rubric where A:90-100, B:80-89, C:70-79, D:60-69 and E: less than 59. *The experimental group applied skills learnt in the life skills workshop and raised USD150* while the controlled group raised USD40 through a lemonade stand. The graders observed the experimental group was more methodical and used out-of-box thinking to propose an innovative solution.

**Table 3: Team Challenge Results**

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Funds Raised (USD)	150	40
<b>Graders Assessment</b>		
Collaboration	A	B
Critical Analysis of Problem	B	B
Design Procedure	A	A
Out-of-box Thinking	A	C
Attitude while solving the problem	B	C
Organization	A	B
Feasibility of Proposed Solution	A	A

#### 4. Observations:

There were noticeable changes in participant's perception towards education. At the end of the study, both parents and children showed greater interest towards education. The teachers observed an increase in the students' foundation, meta and humanistic skills. *One family reported that their daughter was making USD 50/month by stitching clothes which encouraged three more families to enroll their daughters in school.* It was also observed that internally displaced children, by doing odd jobs, had developed advanced mental-maths skills. Also, because of their past, the children had developed survival instincts where they supported each other by working in groups. This was most evident during the final group task.

#### 5. Study limitations and future research:

This study has three main limitations:

- a) First, the main problem was language barrier. Since most of the IDPs come from the north western region of Pakistan where the primary mode of communication is Pahsto, the children had trouble adjusting to the educational system in Islamabad where the primary mode of communication is Urdu and English.
- b) Second, the ID children were traumatized because of their displaced past, they were socially awkward and aloof with most of them showing signs of PTSD. One of these children got panic attack the first day he attended school and his parents decided to take him out of the study fearing for his health.
- c) Third, due to lack of funding, the study was conducted on one specific region within a rural area of Islamabad, the results presented here cannot be generalized to a larger sample set. The results of the study can vary based on several variables: location of study, mindset of people and various other socio-economic and political factors.

- d) Parents were not keen on sending their daughters to school because of; (1) economic benefits acquired from child workers, (2) established socio-cultural norms prohibiting girls from becoming more “aware”; and, (3) fear for the safety of daughters.

## 6. Conclusions

This study showed that the impacts of educating an ID child are multifaceted. Education can provide an internally displaced child with the skills to not only gain knowledge, but also develop life skills enabling them to help their families financially/socially. The children’s physical and psychological health also improved considerably by learning about basic hygiene and interacting and playing with other children. The study also revealed that stereotypes like *‘marrying girls early because they are a burden on their families’* can be effectively broken through education.

## Acknowledgment

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