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Inclusive education for Internally Displaced Children in Kenya: children perceptions of their learning and development needs in post-conflict schooling

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Abstract

The Kenyan society has been characterised by tribal-political-instigated violence since the declaration of multiparty democracy in 1991. The 2007/8 post-election violence (PEV) particularly saw the scattering of families where some children lost months or years of schooling; others were permanently excluded from education, while the participation and achievement of those arriving in school were characterised by complex needs and experiences. This paper aims to analyse literature and report on findings from creative activities with 16 conflict-affected children (9–12 years) regarding their experiences and understandings of inclusive education during their post-conflict school-life. I conducted an intrinsic case study with aspects of ethnography in a post-conflict community primary school in Kenya whose majority (71%) pupil population was attributed to internal displacement following the 2007/8 PEV. Children perceived inclusive education in regard to their own learning and development needs as involving access and acceptance in the new school community, social-emotional development, 'peer-keeping' and community-consciousness. Whilst valuing their teachers' pursuit for inclusion-sensitive practices, children's understanding of their own circumstances resulted in group-made strategies like 'peer-keeping' and peer-constructed rules of interaction, helping them negotiate systemic constraints and distortion of values. This study underscores the fundamental role of children in social integration in post-conflict circumstances.

Keywords: Kenya, Inclusion, Conflict-affected children, IDPs, Learning and development needs

Background

Whilst policy and scholarship consistently impress on advancing more inclusive schools for different groups who are perceived as at risk of exclusion from or within education (World Conference on Education for All 1990; Dakar Framework of Action 2000; Ainscow and Miles 2009), marginalisation of conflict-affected children has received relatively limited attention within inclusion agendas (UNESCO-IIEP 2009). Today, societal fragmentation and dissolution of governments following social violence/wars adversely affect education systems (Mazawi 2008) with profound implications for post-conflict

reconstruction (Ma 2008). Yet, how educators negotiate inclusive practices for conflict-affected children in circumstances of social upheavals can be interesting, because, as Davies (2004) and Oduol (2014) point out, the global demand for ‘good governance’ for instance provides prescriptions for educational practices which may constrain teachers’ attention to contextual reality and priorities. Also, persistent overemphasis on narrow cognitive competences negates research findings that conflict-affected pupils may value multiple forms of learning (Winthrop and Kirk 2008).

The aim of this paper is to understand how inclusion, i.e. presence, participation and achievement (Ainscow and Miles 2009:3) of conflict-affected children, can be understood during post-conflict schooling. I examine literature to situate children’s experiences of in/exclusion in education in the aftermath of social violence. I outline the methodology I adopted for my case study then discuss the findings from two semi-structured creative activities with 16 conflict-affected. Findings indicate children’s perceptions of inclusive education in relation to their own learning and development needs. Whilst not claiming for generalisation from this intrinsic case study, evidence herein is insightful in understanding related situations.

Education in Kenya

Kenya subscribes to many international conventions that require members to domesticate inclusive education agendas, including the ‘World Conference on Education for All (1990)’ and ‘Salamanca Statement, 1994’. Kenya’s commitment is demonstrated in her local frameworks such as: ‘Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on Education, Training and Research’ that guides education practice in Kenya; ‘Kenya Education Sector Support Programme’ (KESSP) through which recommendations in the Sessional Paper are implemented, and ‘The Kenya Constitution 2010’ amongst others. Kenya’s quest for inclusive education was further asserted during the International Conference on Education in Geneva on ‘Inclusive Education, The way to the Future, 2008’ (Ministry of Education 2008) stating her expanded scope of ‘inclusion’ to involve all groups perceived as vulnerable to exclusion beyond the traditional focus on special education needs (SEN). Currently, Free Early Childhood Development Education, Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education are core priorities (Republic of Kenya, Sessional Paper No.14 [ROK-SP14] 2012). Government spending on education is the largest public expenditure accounting for 6.5% of Gross Domestic Product by 2007/2008 (Kenya Institute for Public Policy and Research Analysis 2009); however, Kenya is also dependent on foreign donors in funding education calling for continued international consultations and partnerships (International Monetary Fund 2012). Importantly, the government recognises that:

Marginalized, hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups are characterized by not having a clear institutional framework to oversee the development and implementation of policies and strategies developed by the State (ROK-SP14:41).

For instance, for locational/regional marginalisation, two disadvantaged communities are identified: people living in urban slums and informal settlements under abject poverty, and those living in harsh Arid and Semi-Arid Lands characterised by periodic droughts. The Ministry of Education (MOE) provides a situational analysis for these two groups and proposes interventions towards supporting their learning and development

(MOE 2012:66). Although Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are marginalised due to violent displacements and relocations, education arrangements for displaced children do not receive similar attention. While IDP camps may have slum-like conditions (UNDP 2011), they are not necessarily informal settlements located in urban areas (Kenya Human Rights Commission [KHRC] 2011), besides the many IDPs integrated in communities (Kamungi 2013). This leaves displaced children in a gap in terms of policy interventions.

Notably, Kenya is a signatory to the Great Lakes Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (UNDP 2011). Despite this affiliation, a survey by Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice [KPTJ] (2010) found that many IDPs experience 'locational diversity' i.e. living in multiple sites due to delayed resettlement and insecurity in former homes/farms. Accordingly, attention is diverted from long-term effects of violence amongst Kenyans to unending rhetoric on holding perpetrators of post-election violence, accountable. The situation is exacerbated by politicians' fixation on strategizing for the next elections (in 5 years' time) soon after elections. Such prioritisation curtails attention to the social-economic and educational reality of many conflict-affected children in Kenya.

Impact of violence on education of children

Accessing education

Globally, although statistics on the impact of war on education are unclear, by 2011, there were an estimated 10.5 million refugees around the world, about 27.5 million people forcibly displaced within their own countries, 19.5 million being children (Basic Education Coalition 2015:1). In Kenya, recurring political-instigated violence has resulted in displacement of many families and disrupting access and participation in education for many affected children. The Kenya Prevention, Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and Affected Communities Act 2012, defines IDPs as:

A person or groups of internally displaced 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, large scale development projects, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed and internationally recognised state border. (p. 4)

Between 1991 and 1997, election-related clashes displaced over 600,000 people in the Coast, Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western provinces, with schools closing and families fleeing (KHRC 2011:8–9). In 2007/8 PEV, over 650,000 people were displaced and at least 1300 lost their lives (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2013) alongside disruption of livelihoods for many young people (UNDP 2009). Between 2012 and 2013, inter-community clashes in parts of the country displaced 118,000 others (HRW 2013). Protracted displacement, i.e. prolonged displacement without prospects of a durable solution (Dryden-Peterson 2011) results in missing out or erratic patterns of schooling, and potentially pushes pupils beyond their primary school age-span, towards such detrimental labels as 'over-age' learners. As Sommers (2009:1) observes, many violence-affected young people remain out of school due to being over-age with no realistic hope of ever enrolling.

While the ‘over-age’ factor has been shown to contribute to school disaffection and attrition in Kenya (Somerset 2007), accessing education remains challenging for IDPs, and is especially bleak for secondary schools aspirants (KHRC 2011:4). The Ministry of Education in Kenya defines ‘access’ as “the opportunity availed for one to enter education and training” while its related term ‘admission’ refers to “the granting of opportunity for a qualified person to pursue education” (MOE 2012: viii). This implies that lack of access to education for displaced children narrows their chances of admission (qualifying) to pursue education.

Acceptance in the new school community

Inclusion seeks to address the barriers to education that are deeply entrenched in social and professional attitudes, values and misconceptions about diversity (Ainscow and Miles 2009), which often determine acceptance or alienation of ‘others’. Alongside their unprecedented socially stigmatising labels (e.g. ‘IDPs’), conflict-affected children may encounter non-normative and potentially, exclusionary social-cultural experiences in new locations. As Dryden-Peterson (2011) argues, there often is a danger of physical integration without social integration. When host communities are reluctant to co-exist with newcomers, both parties may experience a perceived sense of instability. As schools are not immune to community differences, teachers and pupils can be compromised along societal affiliations (Weinstein et al. 2007). The tension can be associated with, for instance, sharing [scarce] resources with the displaced (Kamungi 2013) or overworking of teachers. After 2007/8 PEV, schools near IDP camps experienced surges in enrolments making it difficult for children to experience meaningful learning (KHRC 2011). Conversely, resource provisions for IDPs can supposedly increase their dependency on others, or can end-up benefiting the privileged through corruption (KHRC 2011).

Furthermore, experiences of ethnic-related displacement can produce fear, suspicion and mistrust of ‘others’ (Miller and Affolter 2002); sometimes from emotional frustrations accumulated from violence, or in trying to fit into a new unprecedented environment. Children may experience difficulties in mingling with others, fearing adults, or tending to be excessively clingy, fearing victimisation or abandonment (Kum 2011:68). To the stereotypical observer, this behaviour can be interpreted as lack of independence or disinterest in relationships, rather than reaction to foreignness or sense of alienation. Alexander’s (2004) conception of ‘cultural trauma’ provides some insight in situating pupils’ perceived sense of alienation or fear. For Alexander, cultural trauma occurs when a collectivity feels they have been subjected to a “*horrendous event*” that leaves enduring marks upon their group consciousness and memory, changing their future identity in irreversible ways (2004: iv). Consequently, patterned meanings of their collective identity are dislodged, creating a sense of shock and fear. Thus, individuals’ expectations of security and capability, anchored in cultural and emotional structures of the collectivity they are part of, are destabilised. Reflectively, they perceive the atrocity as obliterating core aspects of their integrity, including their past, present and future. Yet, this trauma process allows groups to not only construct new forms of moral responsibility but also identify pathways for action. The implication is, pupils’ impaired sense of community membership becomes not only mutual, but ingrained in their awareness, forming basis for constructing meanings of their in/exclusions. Equally, Smelser

(2004) argues that individual's memory of atrocity is situated in time and space (context). Essentially, individual trauma is constructed along personal experience (Giller 1999), each individual exhibiting subjective meanings to the same atrocity. In mitigation, an individual represses events towards coping or adapting, yet triggers of individual memory and accompanying affect do surface past experiences. Whilst individuals attempt to defend against these affects, ultimately, these are converted into patterned behaviours or organic tendencies such as inhibition, shame or hesitations (Smelser 2004). Drawing on Sayer's (2005) argument on 'moral acceptance', emotions and their accompanying sentiments should be taken seriously as they have a bearing on the wellbeing of those who express them—whether victims or non-victims. He argues that our evaluations of 'others' provide not just commentaries about them, but defines how we as evaluators relate or act towards others. For instance, where teachers from the majority group in post-conflict situations display negative dispositions against non-normative groups (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:15), certain sentiments are employed to justify their in/actions. Such situations increase chances for devaluation of newcomers' individuality or heritage, or in Shields' (2004:117) term, being 'pathologised'. Kum (2011) reported how negative relationships at school had adverse socio-emotional challenges for conflict-affected refugees in a UK study. Resulting alienation reportedly pushed some pupils into finding solace in those with similar attributes. Accordingly (p. 75), teachers called the new [solace] groups 'gangs' and were "*demonised ... as perpetrators of trouble*". Such experiences have a bearing on the moral development of conflict-affected pupils whose values are potentially 'distorted' following dehumanising incidences witnessed or experienced during social violence (Boyden and Ryder 1996).

Insensitive policies

Commentators have argued that government policies or policy oversights in education can create 'legitimate' grounds for discrimination against non-normative groups or in nurturing intergroup exclusions or separation (Salmi 2006:11; Gallagher 2010). UNICEF (2014:1) also notes how international education communities prioritise education for "*economic productivity and efficiency rather than the promotion of social cohesion and reconciliation*." In Kenya, although the well-documented goals of education depict a quest for all-inclusiveness (MOE 2012a:23), the re-alignment of the education sector to the new 'Kenya Constitution 2010' envisioned education for its young people as engendering particular characteristics:

To be internationally competitive and economically viable, the Republic of Kenya requires an education system that will produce citizens who are able to engage in lifelong learning, learn new things quickly, perform more non-routine tasks, capable of more complex problem-solving, take more decisions, understand more about what they are working on, require less supervision, assume more responsibility, and as vital tools to these ends, have better reading, quantitative reasoning and expository skills. (MOE 2012:24)

A critical look at this positive description of an ambitious nation provides insights into potential challenges for schools serving diversity. For instance, there are those who for various reasons may not be quick learners in the examination-oriented curriculum,

whilst others thrive in collaborative-working requiring some form of supervision. Such policy guideline may promote competitiveness rather than collaboration in schools with implications for marginal attention to those requiring diverse support. Indeed, school improvement agendas have been blamed for overemphasis on measurable test-scores with scant attention to subjects enhancing intergroup co-existence, e.g. peace education, human rights education or global citizenship (UNESCO 1996; Davies 2004). In Kenya, schools are expected to ensure that “*recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all*” (UNESS-Kenya 2010: x). Along this thinking, ‘ability difference’ has become a big issue in pursuing inclusive practices, especially where learners are perceived as ‘less-able’ or those with talents outside the core subjects. Yet, after cessation of conflict, ‘over-age’ children may arrive in school without prior exposure to formal education (Sommers 2009) positioning them as ‘a problem’ in the highly structured and examination-oriented curriculum. As Davies (2005) argues, emphasis on credentials and competitiveness along global standards potentially creates a dichotomy of losers and winners, besides strained social relations as groups strive to outperform others along narrowed cognitive competences.

Furthermore, young people in post-conflict settings arrive in school with profound exposure to social cruelties (UNICEF 1996) some exhibiting troubled and troublesome behaviour (Boyden and Rider 1996) for having participated in violence for survival, or forcefully recruited by militias equipping them with “*power of the gun*” (Sommers 2009:35). Similarly, when society allows those who commit violations against human rights get away with it due to a culture of impunity (HRW 2013), the violence culture is potentially reinforced amongst young people (UNICEF-Kenya 2009) resulting in strained teacher–pupil relationships as reported in Kenyan schools (Dattoo and Johnson 2013). Besides PEV-related violence, implementation of corporal punishment policy in Kenyan schools is still problematic (Mweru 2010). Accordingly, it provides ‘easy’ means to managing troublesome behaviour. As Davies (2004) posits, repeated experiences of violence in and outside school can result in children perceiving ‘threat’ as daily danger. This situation can stimulate self-protection habits for some children e.g. self-exclusions, thus avoiding intimidating places like schools (Salmi 2006). Yet, an understanding and response to children’s needs and behaviour difficulties in post-conflict schooling is fundamental in not only combating reproduction of conflict and victimisation (Davies 2004) but also promoting children’s continued access, participation and achievement in education. This review of literature leads to my research question: “How did conflict-affected children perceive their own learning and development needs in relation to their inclusion in education after post-election violence in Kenya, and how were these needs addressed through their interactions with their teachers?”

Methods

Design

This paper represents a segment of a case study conducted between September 2013 and April 2014, exploring pupil and teacher perceptions of learning and development needs of conflict-affected young people and how inclusive education was understood and negotiated in this respect. I conducted the study in one public primary school in Kenya whose 71% pupil population (51% from IDP Camp and 20% housed in a local

orphanage) was attributed to internal displacement after the 2007/8 PEV. I undertook an intrinsic case study (Stake 2003) with aspects of ethnography (Crang and Cook 1995) being interested in the particularities of this “*information-rich case that manifested the phenomenon of interest intensely*” (Patton 1990:171). Taking an interpretive approach to making sense of data (Creswell 2009), I targeted obtaining experiences of conflict-affected children with their teachers and/or peers, those that made pupils ‘really like coming to school’ despite possible hardship in their circumstances. Thus, more positive rather than negative experiences were anticipated.

Participants

Sixteen 9- to 12-year olds (8 boys and 8 girls) were invited to reflect on what inclusion in education meant for them, focusing on their memorable schooling experiences since joining this particular school. Pupils identified by their class-teachers (on my request) as those most at risk of exclusion, yet remained in school, were selected for the purpose of capturing ‘intense’ experiences (Patton 1990). This aimed to examine how actions by teachers might support access, acceptance and participation even in circumstances that participants perceived as ‘acute’. While this selection criterion could potentially draw historical feelings of ‘victimisation’ or new insecurities, I assured pupils my position of perceiving them as ‘victors not victims’ whilst adopting what I considered as ‘non-intrusive questions’ targeting more positive rather than negative experiences at school. I explained to the selected children my interest (Kirk 2007) in learning about ‘inclusive education’ from their own perspectives. This sought some understanding of how pupils experienced schooling as potential beneficiaries of the all-inclusive education initiative in Kenya, particularly, as victims of violence with differentiated needs. While more selectees would have provided more data, I opted for in-depth and intense experiences from selected pupils.

Consent, participation and trustworthiness

I fulfilled the BERA and University of Edinburgh research requirements and contacted the school’s headteacher to express my interest and provide details of my study. I then obtained consent to access the school from the County Director of Education. At school, I discussed with and issued pupils and parents with opt-out consent letters. I assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity (Kirk 2007). Consistent with Guba’s (1981) principles of ensuring rigour in qualitative studies, trustworthiness was in-built into the research design. Credibility (truth value) i.e. the degree of similarity between data collected and the phenomenon represented required building trust, familiarity with pupils and progressive immersion (*ibid.*). Two pre-activity meetings were conducted for introduction and details of participation; these facilitated my access into pupils’ life-spaces. I made clear to the pupils about their right to withdrawal at any point. I utilised two different creative activities to generate data (Punch 2002; Gallagher 2010) i.e. semi-structured write-ups and ‘spider’ diagrams which offered pupils creative opportunities for self-expression, each tool making up for the limitations of the other, thus enhancing credibility. Fundamentally, a search for similarities in data where multiple subjective realities exist presents limitation in “*absolute knowledge of what the real world is like*” (Guba 1981:80). Thus, I accounted for pupils emerging views in their entirety whilst

Table 1 Children's creative activities

Activity	Description/prompts	Processes
Activity 1 Write-ups	Having been in this school up to standard/grade four now: write something about your schooling experiences mentioning 1) Your pseudonym, age, where you live and when you joined this school 2) Write what inclusion in education means to you and your memorable experiences since joining this school 3) Write the activities you most like participating in and what they make you feel 4) Mention those teachers who make you really like coming to school and what they do to influence your continued participation and achievement in education	50 min Foolscape used allowing flexibility in writing length Initial checking of write-ups for any concerns Write-ups collected for analysis Codes used for teachers e.g. HT for head-teacher or ET for English teacher
Activity 2 'Spider' diagram	Draw a three-body segment insect (not anatomically correct, but conveniently dubbed 'spider' herein) On each body-part, indicate two teachers who make you really like coming to school and what they do to inspire your participation and achievement in school Activity explained: crawling spider signified their schooling journey	40 min Pupils drew diagrams indicating statements for each select teacher Codes used for teacher names as above

examining data against pupils' own multiple perceptions. Towards dependability, an audit trail of all procedures followed for data collection and analysis were detailed.

Methods

Table 1 below shows two creative activities used by pupils to reflect on their schooling experiences. I analysed data thematically. I prepared data reduction matrices (Miles et al. 2014) for both activities allowing constant comparison of all the responses from pupils. I then developed a network analysis of emerging issues (Thomas 2013:236) enabling refinement and comparison of themes with literature.

Positionality

As a former Kenyan teacher, a female of mixed tribal affiliation, my insider–outsider position required constant awareness. For instance, my interest in the study developed whilst working with children affected by PEV. Thus, I was not only a 'human instrument' generating data (Merriam 2009:219; Creswell 2009) but I had self-values alongside a local 'historical inventory' which inevitably re-surfaced when participants recounted their experiences. This required constant monitoring and self-consciousness, whilst guarding against 'going native' (Guba 1981). My teacher-status also suggested a possibility that some teachers might find some of my questions rather 'obvious' e.g. 'What do you perceive as the needs of conflicted-affected children?' Nevertheless, as Thomas (2013:157) suggests, I utilised my prior knowledge of context to "*see outside myself*" and prioritised the particularity of this case, teasing out the stories of those living it and suspending other curiosities (Stake 2003).

Limitations of case study

Case study strategy allegedly limits generalisability (Thomas 2011); resulting findings being intimately tied to the time and context under study. However, beyond

Table 2 Pupils' profile information with additional remarks

Name	Sex	Age	Area of residence	Year of joining school	Additional remarks
Felista	F	10	IDP	2010	Emotional difficulties, 'poet' and comedian
Foska	F	11	IDP	2010	Dual-ethnicity, 'poet'
Jey	F	10	IDP	2010	Orphan (sibling reared)
Joan	F	10	IDP	2010	–
Joy	F	11	IDP	2010	Difficulties in written work
Isabella	F	12	IDP	2010	Continuous medication, personal problems
Shaline	F	10	IDP	2010	–
Zippy	F	11	IDP	2010	–
Dan	M	10	IDP	2010	–
Deric	M	11	IDP	2010	–
John	M	12	IDP	2010	Difficulties in written work
Noah	M	10	Non-camp	2012	Unsettled family—moves between homes
Peter	M	9	IDP	2010	Continuous medication
Shem	M	12	IDP-out	2010	Sometimes sells scrap metal
Sinbird	M	12	IDP	2010	Dual-ethnicity; 'good artist'
Vern	M	9	Non-camp	2010	Lives 7 km away from school

NB: All names are pseudonyms; 'IDP' connotes those living in the camp. 'Dual-ethnic' herein means having parents from two different [opposing] tribes

demonstrating “*what is important about that case in its world*” (Stake 2003:140) my interpretations and thick contextual description allows readers to decipher meanings that might be transferable to their own circumstances (Stake 2003; Shenton 2004) potentially offering “*the force of example*” in resolving relatable issues (Flyvbjerg 2006:228; Thomas 2011). Moreover, by situating my reviewed literature and subsequent comparison of findings with global understandings of inclusive education and post-conflict reconstruction, modest transferability is possible.

Findings and discussion

Pupils' profile information

Table 2 above provides basic profile information about participating pupils. Some have additional information provided by their class-teachers, or as emerging from activity sessions.

From Table 2, apart from Noah, all other children joined the school in Standard/Grade 1 and had remained in school for 4 years. The majority of pupils resided in the IDP camp, with only three non-camp children, although Shem lived in the camp before relocating with his parents. Pupils' write-ups and teachers' views suggested that all pupils were experiencing an interaction of concerns which shaped each pupil's schooling experiences, differently. Foska and Sinbird were dual-ethnic and were each separated from one parent due to PEV-related concerns. From their class teachers, Foska relocated to the camp with her mother and other siblings because her mother belonged to the 'evicted tribe', leaving their father behind because he belonged to the 'evicting tribe'. Sinbird relocated with his father leaving his mother behind for similar reasons. Felista was noted to have severe emotional difficulties and had attacked a boy severely hurting him “*perhaps because of what she saw during the violence*” (Deputy). Felista's class teacher said she was traumatised from her past and was occasionally absent-minded, aggressive or

withdrawn. Vern lived 7 km away from school and left before I completed my fieldwork. Noah reported 2-weeks late for first term, 2014. His grandmother took over his caregiving after his family's fragmentation. Jey was orphan and sibling-reared. She noted how she had self-isolating tendencies on arrival in the new school. Isabella and Peter were on long-term medication, which not only depleted scant family resources, but impacted on their daily schooling routines. Peter for instance wrote that his parents discouraged him from schooling, whilst Isabella mentioned wanting to give-up school due to her 'many problems'. John and Joy were 'over-age' and their writing ability indicated struggling with academic work. While these conditions suggest disorientations in pupils' lives, Felista and Foska had poetic abilities and were well recognised in this school. Both noted how participation in poetry activities made them really like school. It is against this background profile I analyse the perceptions of the 16 conflict-affected children regarding their learning and development needs from a 'inclusive education' understanding.

Pupils' learning and development needs

The following themes emerged from data generated from pupil's activities, through constant comparison, iterative interaction with data and literature, and a network analysis.

- i. Access and acceptance.
- ii. Social-emotional development.
- iii. 'Peer-keeping'.
- iv. Community-consciousness.

Access and acceptance

All pupils indicated concern about their exclusion from education before the construction of the new school. Pupils saw accessing school at last as a 'dream come true'. Joan wrote, *"First before I came to this school it was very difficult for us to get into a school, when I got in, I felt like somebody who wanted to learn very much"*. Isabella said, *"My first day I was very happy to be in school, I would never think there will be a school built near for us"*. Whilst Isabella indicates aspects of cultural trauma (Alexander 2004) by reflecting on, and attributing exclusion from education to their new collective identity [*us*—IDPs], Joan linked exclusion to material needs, *"I felt very good to be sponsored, if I was told to buy uniform, school bag, textbooks and exercise books, I know I could not do all those things"*. Challenges in accessing education for conflict-affected young people are reported in other conflict settings, e.g. Sri Lanka (Earnest 2013), Rwanda and Burundi (Obura and Bird 2009).

Alongside access, the majority pupils were anxious about being accepted in their new school community with indications of uneasiness about forming new relationships. Although the new school was purposely constructed by sponsors to offer children a new start, to some children, fear of 'others' lingered and affected their psychological wellness at school.

The first time I came to this school I was excited and overjoyed, but I feared some children and all the teachers. When I did wrong I was frightened and very, very ashamed, so I could run into the class and close the door. After some weeks I started being free, the teachers liked me more and more. I like this school because pupils like me, I don't have enemies all of them help me. (Jey)

Although alienated by fear, Jey felt secure and trusting after knowing that she had no ‘enemies’ in the new school and that both pupils and teachers were helpful. By perceiving school as a safe and welcoming environment, her emotional safety and social relations were enhanced making school meaningful to her. Following loss of family during the PEV, Jey’s sentiments also suggest undertones of individual trauma. She initially attempted to defend against these traumatic affects (Smelser 2004) by self-alienation; her shame diminishing with perceived acceptance. For Dan, acceptance was manifested through the knowledge that he was loved and supported to rebuild a future which might have seemed doomed by PEV experiences: *“When I came to this school, I saw that people love me, I saw everyone is with me and I felt so happy to see people love me in this school and they are helping me to build my future” (Dan)*. Pupils’ perceived detachment from ‘others’ resonate Alexander’s (2004) ‘cultural trauma’. Due to breakdown of emotional and cultural expectations, pupils’ dislodged meanings of collective identity are palpable, nevertheless, how the new school community identified with pupils’ victimhood offered solidarity thus enhancing integration.

Acceptance was further enhanced through recognition and nurturing of pupils’ individual capabilities, including in non-examinable subjects. A majority of pupils felt that recognition by teachers and peers enriched their participation in school, expanding their learning experiences across the school community in distinctive ways. Felista valued school for such recognition, *“By the time I got to standard four, I had developed ability to perform comedies. Everybody knew my talents, my teachers knew my talents, and I was very happy for this,”* and so did Sinbird, *“My first class teacher, she loved me because I was her good artist. I drew pictures and people were amazed”*.

Yet, of particular concern to a large majority of these pupils in relation to ‘acceptance’ were tests taken prior to admission and subsequent grade progression. These tests created uncertainty about initial acceptance in this school, a feeling of inadequacy in case of ‘failing’ or, were determiners of progression along grades—and this was disturbing to pupils. Joan feared that ‘failing’ would mean ‘no-admission’.

It was very difficult for us to get into a school... I was fearing, my mother was also having great trepidation. When I heard that I had passed my examination and I am allowed to get into this school my heart was full of excitement (Joan)

Noah noted, *“For me to be able to come to this school I did an examination and I passed”* indicating the significance of ‘passing’ in relation to admission. Conversely, despite anxiety or prospects of non-acceptance, how teachers responded to pupils’ attainment in school ‘entry-tests’ provided psychological stimulation for some pupils, enhancing self-esteem and pupils’ perceptions about education.

...The following day we did an examination, I became number two, headteacher deputy and the senior teacher, were very excited. They told me to study very hard and you will become a doctor. The following day at night I dreamt that I’m in the hospital treating sick people. (Zippy)

In the spider diagrams, Zippy noted that she liked school because her class teacher always called her ‘doctor’ because she was good in science.

Considering violence and displacement disorients children and creates uncertainty about everyday life (Earnest 2013), it was not surprising that pupils had a strong interest in their school's predictability and cultural expectations. What made Noah (who joined the school later) really happy was the reassurance he got from their teachers:

The headteacher, deputy, senior teacher and class teacher talked many good things about the school, the performance, behaviour, school property and cleanliness. I heard all the words about this school and wished it will be the best school ever. I was very excited and said to me, my wishes, dreams and hopes came true. (Noah)

Others expressed it differently. Peter was eager and happy to “*know many things about our school*” because he wanted “*to learn and know many things*”. For Joy, walking and seeing things around the school compound with her class teacher not only bonded her with the new environment, but enlightened her on expectations, like individual responsibility and shared-ownership: “*She told us from the first day that we love our school, flag, flowers, everything we see in this school, we love one another and work very hard*”.

Subsequently, expectations like needing to ‘work hard’ made pupils accept responsibility in making their participation in education successful as they focused on future prospects. This way, children knew they had to invest individual efforts to negotiate other less pleasant aspects of schooling, e.g. test regimes, in order to progress. Isabella said, “*I am working hard in school so that I can succeed in my exams so that I can be promoted to the next class*”. Shem wrote, “*I did my exams, I passed and I was able to move up to class four*”. By attributing success to individual effort, children perceived failure more as individual responsibility and less as the school systems. For instance, while teachers reportedly supported pupils variously e.g. Shem said, “*My maths teacher helps me to do maths*”, there were other indications that ‘working hard’ in the broader educational context involved progression-determining tests. Joy and John (12-year olds) repeated Grade 4 in January 2014, despite being ‘over-age’ for this grade. Both apparently accepted blame for their ‘failure’. Joy said that she repeated because “*I had low marks*” while John said “*I did not pass test*”.

While the foregoing evidence indicates that through diverse gestures, practitioners can help ease pupils’ apprehension and disorientation after violent displacement, unpopular normalised practices in Kenyan schools like ‘entry tests’ supposedly exacerbated fear of rejection or discrimination for already rejection-vulnerable children. Pupils’ views suggest that more welcoming and supportive environments can facilitate their transition from violence towards adjustment in school-life and beyond. Yet, the practice of reductive assessments along measurable outcomes continues in Kenyan schools (KIE 2010) regardless of children’s need for development in other areas e.g. social-emotional development.

Social-emotional development

When asked to mention those teachers who made them really like coming to school and how teachers influenced their participation in education, in both write-ups and spider diagrams, pupils explicitly appreciated their teachers for nurturing positive attitudes towards group relations, particularly through school values. Such values emerged as promoting group-interdependence and respect for others, whilst enhancing a sense of

social-emotional wellbeing. Dan noted, *“When we are fighting, class teacher teaches us behaviour and how to try to understand one another.”* Foska wrote, *“Headteacher teaches us well, to be generous, kind and honest, and as we agree with him, he is a very good headteacher.”* Pupils were happy that teachers enhanced individual and group wellbeing through peer-constructed values. A few pupils e.g. Joan noted that pupils had written their *“own rules on the classroom wall,”* suggesting pupils’ participation in constructing their reference point of acceptable behaviour. Other pupils expressed how they liked learning about behaviour, respect or responsibility during classroom lessons. Deric for instance liked learning about *‘adabu’* (manners/politeness) which equipped pupils with knowledge about relating and respecting others. *“I come to school so that I can learn a lot about adabu, like respecting parents, teachers, grown-ups and even my juniors”*

While cultivating joint values potentially harmonised rules for group interaction, as Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue, such rules may not necessarily alter pupils’ background-orientations. For instance, half the pupils mentioned cases of pupils who liked fighting or disturbing others and how teachers always intervened in unlearning violence or remediating order. For example, Peter noted, *“I enjoy life at school because when you are misbehaving the teacher will punish you.”* Peter’s sentiments echo what Nicholai and Triplehorn (2003:11) see as children’s need for harmony. These authors argue that during violence, some children lose their sense of living in non-confrontational ways, and schools can provide the space for re-adjustment. By inculcating group values and incorporating pupils in constructing their own shared values, there were indications that teachers in this school nurtured the principles of care, acceptance and concern for ‘others’; fostering what emerged as ‘peer-keeping’.

‘Peer-keeping’

Peer-keeping presented as pupils’ means for nurturing a sense of collective-ownership of themselves, or of minding one another’s concerns through follow-ups and peer dialogue. The majority of pupils expressed what emerged as their ‘peer-connectedness’ as instrumental in inculcating a sense of togetherness; even mediating retention for those likely to self-exclude for different reasons. Isabella mentioned having *“many problems at home”* but said she really liked school because *“my friends always support me at school”*. Foska noted, *“Even at school, my friends support me to not leave school. They say, in future when I meet them in offices, how will I feel?”* Foska indicated that such intimate dialogue enhanced her resilience in school, wishing to avoid any alienation from her friends in future. Peter’s peers insistently encouraged him to attend school even against his parents’ wishes: *“My own problem about school, my parents tell me, ‘don’t go to school’ my friends tell me every morning, ‘go to school’”* suggesting the role of peer-connections in tackling home-related exclusions. Whilst Shem reportedly did scrap-metal deals risking his participation or exclusion from education, he expressed his happiness that *“my friends at school help me to learn better”*.

In the spider diagrams, pupils explicitly indicated how their teachers reinforced peer-keeping in and outside school. Jey liked the headteacher for reminding them to always *“come early in the morning to discuss work together, and learn more together.”* Vern added, *“Headteacher tells us that we come to school early and support one another”* while Isabella noted, *“our class teacher say we do homework together and come to school together.”*

Shaline who was good at reading really liked school because, *"Library teacher asks me to help other pupils who cannot read, I help them until they know how to read."* Looking at Jey's initial fears: *"I feared all pupils and teachers ... [but] I have no enemies in this school, all of them help me"*, it sounded like this 'peer-connections' created grounds for pupils unlearning social alienation, it countered fear of 'others' and desensitised peer competitiveness towards collaborative learning cultures. The implication was that peer-keeping offered valuable socio-emotional back-up amongst pupils in the process of their learning and development, thus diminishing fears, whilst avoiding potential exclusions triggered by initial uncertainties or environmental pressures. It is possible to say that pupils' awareness of the difficult circumstances under which they were navigating education enhanced such peer-solidarity. It was clear that pupils did not perceive themselves as *"passive victims, but as active survivors of experience"* (Nicholai and Triplehorn 2003:11) and combated shared hardship through mutual support. It also felt like pupils were bringing elements of what Kamungi's (2013) study termed as IDPs' solidarity (e.g. community self-help groups) into their goals of education, or perhaps resisting the IDP stigma by constructing positive group affinities (Young 2005:2). This mid-set signalled a forth theme, community consciousness.

Fostering community-consciousness

Pupils revealed their awareness of existing societal inequalities amongst Kenyan communities. They explicitly reflected on the symbolic meaning attached to education, particularly as equipping them with skills to escape their current adversity, with prospects of enhanced socio-economic status, respectability and responsibility for other disadvantaged groups in their community. Deric wrote,

I want to learn and when I grow up and complete university, I will help my parents and all those people of long ago who never had enough education ... I would like to be a doctor after education, to be able to help sick people ... treat them and save them from early death, may God help me and help all the other pupils to work very hard and be respectable people everywhere we go.

Deric's assertion suggested that pupils' viewed successful education as resulting in 'good jobs' (e.g. doctor) and securing societal respect. Indeed, some pupils believed that lower-income jobs made people less-valuable, and avoiding less-valuable jobs could only be possible through education. Vern wrote, *"My life in school is to prepare me for my future life because when I grow up I do not want to be a beba"*. (A beba is usually a city market casual porter, uneducated, not well-groomed, and typically hired to carry heavy loads on his shoulders for a few pennies). Foska expressed worries that without education qualifications, she would miss out good jobs in future and experience feelings of social rejection: *"In future when I meet them [my friends] in offices, how will I feel?"* Foska and her peers seemed to visualise educated people as having little to do with uneducated or those people with less-valuable jobs. For John, education linked to respect. *"I want to be well educated and become a respectable person in future."* Pupils' sentiments indicated their sensitivity to inclusion/exclusion from education, particularly, the role of education in social mapping, social relations and, the social stigma associated with living in circumstances of poverty e.g. IDPs status. Reflections of this new identity (Alexander 2004)

provided children stimulus and pathways to overcome their hardship e.g. their resilience in education.

Essentially, pupils perceived education as a community good to be shared through acts of community pay-back or altruism. Isabella wrote, *“Inclusive education means I can get education and make up my life, I help my parents and other needy people”* while Dan wrote, *“It means when I become a big man I too help my relatives and people with disabilities”*. Their degree of social responsiveness however carried tones of both historical and situational disadvantage and injustices. Deric pointed out historical deprivation in education: *“I will help all those people of long ago who never had enough education”*. Zippy, Felista and Shem also mentioned that people were dying in their community for lack of medical care, while some pupils emphasised the need for respect for all. This community-orientedness by pupils resonated Takayangi’s (2010) findings in a slum school in Zambia where orphans and vulnerable children preferred remaining in their local poorly resourced school asserting belonging and commitment to their own community. Importantly, although violence resulted in children’s dependence on others to a certain extent, e.g. Isabella noted, *“Every child here has a sponsor, we have sponsors who provide money for activities and exam”*, most pupils explicitly perceived this dependency as a necessity for the present but not a future option. For instance, Jey valued education, *“So I can help myself in the next future and help my family”*, whilst Joan wanted education in order to *“...control my life, have independence, and help my parents and grandparents”*. Such thoughts suggested pupils’ desire to be economically in charge unlike conventional assumptions that poor communities have ‘dependency syndrome’.

Conclusions

This case study has revealed the contextual dynamics shaping inclusive practices in post-conflict schooling, children’s views of their needs, and depictions of teachers’ influence on pupils’ behaviours, relationships and attitudes towards education. Importantly, pupils did not emerge as vulnerable victims exclusively depending on adults to make sense of their learning and development, but aligned their educational goals to own hardship and aspirations. While PEV risked pupils’ vulnerability to exclusion from/within education, pupils’ awareness of societal disadvantage and environmental pressures made them active actors in facilitating their own education, e.g. working hard to pass exams, peer-keeping to safeguard peers wellbeing and engendering a hopeful attitude in life. They sought after social responsibility, with awareness of societal inequalities including: social divisions (they desired acceptance in the new school); social disadvantage (the sick, those with disability or education deprivation); and discriminative regimes (fearing exams or denial of admission/progression). Essentially, teachers influenced pupils’ relational behaviours and liking of school by recognising and nurturing different individual talents, reconstructing pupils’ sense of self-worth, and psychologically preparing pupils to navigate the ‘less pleasant’ school structures. The findings indicate that teachers can stimulate children’s role in unlearning violence, victimisation or social divisions e.g. by encouraging dialogue and creating spaces for group-constructed rules of interaction, thus nurturing inclusive mid-sets.

Recommendations

Following these findings, recommendations are made for policy, practice and research: there is need for an explicit education policy targeting IDPs, considering their ‘silenced hardship’ and, disparities in terms of erratic patterns of access to education. Likewise, the practice of inclusive education in Kenya requires underscoring the intersected nature of pupils’ needs beyond SEN. E.g. how locational displacement interacts with other aspects of marginalisation to impede access, participation and achievement in education, e.g. girlhood, poverty, disability. The study also recommends creation of spaces where young people can securely dialogue on issues that divide/unite communities and further, research into how such action might contribute towards post-conflict reconstruction. Besides, research into how pupils can link schools to communities towards combating antagonism between communities, would be insightful.

Abbreviations

HRW: Human Rights Watch; IDC: Internally Displaced Children; IDP: Internally Displaced Persons; KESSP: Kenya Education Sector Support Program; KHRC: Kenya Human Rights Commission; KIE: Kenya Institute of Education; KPTJ: Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice; MOE: Ministry of Education; PEV: post-election violence; ROK-SP14: Republic of Kenya Sessional Paper No.14; SEN: special education needs; UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; UNESCO-IIEP: UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning; UNDP: United Nations Development Program; UNICEF: United Nations Children Emergency Fund; UNESS: United Nations Education Support Strategy; WC-EFA: World Conference, Education for All.

Authors’ contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors’ information

I trained and worked as a primary school teacher in Kenya. I undertook my Masters in Education (Learning and Teaching) at the University of Wolverhampton (2009–2010). I later pursued my Ph.D. (2012–2016) at the University of Edinburgh where I also worked as a tutor in teacher education; teaching on issues of inclusive education and social justice. I have also worked as a Research Assistant at the two Universities.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the intellectual guidance and moral support offered to me by my Ph.D. supervisors at the University of Edinburgh.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests. The work is composed by the corresponding author only.

Availability of data and materials

Materials supporting the conclusions of this article are available in my Ph.D. Thesis, in the Ph.D. Archives of the University of Edinburgh repository at (<https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/22804>).

Ethics approval and consent to participate

I fulfilled the BERA and University of Edinburgh research ethics requirements and obtained consent to access the school from Nakuru County Director of Education. At school, I sought informed consent from all teachers, then, discussed with and issued pupils and parents with opt-out consent letters. All names used are pseudonyms. Participants were made aware and consented to the publication of this work in my PhD Thesis and subsequent publications.

Funding

My Ph.D. scholarship was partly funded by the University of Edinburgh through ‘Principal Career development Scholarship’. There were no obligations attached to this funding.

Publisher’s Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received: 5 December 2017 Accepted: 14 March 2018

Published online: 27 March 2018

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