Impact of Armed Conflicts on Education and Educational Agents: A Multivocal Review

Impacto de los conflictos armados sobre la educación y sus agentes: Una revisión multivocal

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Abstract. This paper investigates the short and long-term pernicious impact of armed conflicts on education and educational agents (students, teachers and students' parents), using a multivocal review by means of the integration and qualitative analysis of 60 research reports (voices) found in two databases: Web of Science and PROQUEST in the period between 1995 –date of the first founding paper- until 2014. Through the analysis of source data (voices) and taking the "multivocal review" as a method, the voices have been combined in nine categories, namely: a) Refusal and impediments to a return to education; b) Educational infrastructure damaged or destroyed; c) Cuts in or withdrawal of spending on education; d) Loss of the educational and protective functions of the family; e) Loss of the academic community; f) Non-qualified teaching staff; g) Drastic loss of skills; h) Abandoning school (population movements, destruction of networks and social environment); i) Behavioural problems: traumas, pedagogical roles and self-victimization. These categories have highlighted the serious consequences arising from conflicts, infringing as they do the most basic human rights and in particular the right to a sound education during childhood.

Keywords. Armed conflicts; education; multivocal review; qualitative synthesis study

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Resumen. Este trabajo indaga el impacto pernicioso de los conflictos armados a corto y largo plazo sobre la educación y sus agentes (alumnado, profesorado y, padres y madres del alumnado) a partir de la integración y el análisis cualitativo de 60 investigaciones localizadas en dos bases de datos: Web of Science y PROQUEST, en el periodo comprendido entre 1995 –año del primer artículo integrado en la muestra- hasta 2014. A través del análisis de dichos artículos y tomando como método la revisión multivocal, las voces han sido aunadas en nueve categorías, a saber: a) rechazo e impedimentos para regresar a la educación; b) infraestructuras educativas dañadas o destruidas; c) reducción o retirada de la inversión en educación; d) pérdida de la función protectora y educativa de la familia; e) pérdida de la comunidad académica; f) profesorado no cualificado; g) drástica pérdida de habilidades; h) abandono escolar; i) problemas de comportamiento: traumas, roles pedagógicos y auto victimización. Estas categorías han puesto de manifiesto las graves consecuencias que los conflictos generan conculcando los derechos humanos más elementales y en especial el derecho a una buena educación de la infancia.

Palabras claves. Conflictos armados; educación; revisión multivocal; estudio cualitativo de síntesis

> The Argives killed this child because they feared him?
> The epigram is a shameful one for Greece
>
> (*The Trojan Women*, 1188-91, Euripides)

Introduction

Rojas (2011) asserts that nearly everything considered as "human" can be found in childhood. When this stage of life was happy, healthy, full of affection and properly directed, people are left with the strength to deal with anything. Being a child during a time of armed conflict, however, is not an easy experience. Armed conflicts affect millions of children, their daily life being disturbed by acts of atrocity which will mark their future.

This reality affects a fundamental right of children: their education. All agents of education are affected in these circumstances: the education team, students, family, infrastructure, the school environment, *curriculum* and the strategies delivered by teachers. It is estimated that "approximately 57 million children of primary school age did not attend school in 2011" (Unicef, 2014, p. 18), and more than 13 million of those children are in the countries, directly or indirectly, affected by armed conflicts (Unicef, 2015). It happens although decades ago United nations´ agencies and other International non-governmental organizatios began to prioritize education as an essential component of humanitarian response due to the recognition that education can play a critical role in facilitating stability, imparting life-saving messages, establishing among other reasons (Mendenhal, 2014).

Armed conflict and its consequences for the community have been studied extensively within different fields. From one perspective there are studies which examine "what" and "how" people live in the places affected by conflict, such as those carried out by Spitzer and Twikirize (2012), Pedersen and Sommerfelt (2007), González y Bedmar (2012) and that of Glasgow and Baer (2011). Other studies have been undertaken from an economic perspective (López &

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Wodon, 2005), from a physical, mental and social health perspective (Kapor-Stanulovic, 1999; Rieder & Choonara, 2012; Massad et al., 2012), or have been centred on therapies to improve the personal circumstances of those affected by conflict (Minou, 2006).

When the two constructs proposed in this paper are combined, it can be observed that the majority of the retrieved literature adopts a predominantly theoretical, anecdotal or instructive approach. In view of the absence of research reports which link the two constructs of the present paper, that is to say armed conflict and education, the following research question arises: what empirical evidence is there regarding the consequences of armed conflicts on children's education, on teachers and, indirectly, on the parents of those children as educational agents?

Through this question, it is intended to combine in a document the extent of the consequences of armed conflict bring out in the current literature, through the analysis of economic, social and personal factors, –such as mental health and the actual decision to continue or not with the studies– that affect the education of children, considering necessary to emphasize the incongruity between reality and policy approaches, in order to stimulate debate enabling children to reach their right to education.

In our view, education is the most effective means to avoid conflicts in the future. Hence it is considered necessary to denounce anything that can negatively affect even deny this right.

Methodology: A multivocal review

Multivocal review, a term coined by Ogawa and Malen (1991), refers to qualitative synthesis, the purpose of which is to investigate a complex phenomenon of interest where events may not be manipulated and about which there are multiple, predominantly qualitative (but also quantitative) data sources in order to obtain a detailed description of the phenomenon being studied.

This method enables the voices collected by means of a bibliographic search to be compiled and for this information to be organised into categories and subcategories which permit the researcher to obtain a detailed description of the reality being analysed. In order to do this, six fundamental steps must be followed to guarantee the rigor of the paper being presented:

1. Reflexive precision of the topic, use of conceptual analysis (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012).
2. Selection and retrieval of pertinent documents (documentary analysis).
3. Critical review of the documents and determination of the basic units of meaning after analysis of the manifest content.
4. Processing of basic units. Hermeneutics in the categorisation. Creation of major, minor and individual categories.
5. Report of the patterns inferred as narration and/or as a concept network diagram.
6. Metasynthesis as a thoughtful evaluation of the multivocal review.

Fernández-Cano, Torralbo, Vallejo and Fernández-Guerrero (2012) proposed a similar approach to qualitative synthesis as cultural narratives that could be used as metaphors or interpretative similes for explanatory and evaluative purposes in educational research and evaluation.

Research process

Search Strategy

The search for documents was focused solely on empirical research reports dealing with the subject of armed conflict and its consequences on children's education and on their educational agents. Two databases were searched: Web of Science and PROQUEST, using the following keywords in the subject field: *conflict armed* and (*child*or school* or teach* or pedagogy*).

Data abstraction

From the original articles analysed, the following entries were inferred: title, author(s), type of document (primary, P, secondary or integrative, S, secondary analysis[3], SA), methodology (qualitative, C, quantitative, Q, or mixed, M), sample, country in conflict and consequences as defined by the code, which are not exposed here for reasons of brevity but are included and commented upon in the 'Results' section. From these entries, a category system was created based upon the mixed model (a category or consequence could be inferred in a same documents-voice) and resulting in the following general categorisation system (Table 1):

Table 1

Categorisation system of the pedagogical consequences (impact) of armed conflict upon education and its agents

	Category	Code
	Refusal and impediments to a return to education	C_1
	Educational infrastructure damaged or destroyed	C_2
	Cuts or withdrawal of spending on education	C_3
Pedagogical Consequences	Loss of the educational and protective functions of the family	C_4
	Loss of the academic community	C_5
	Non-qualified teaching staff	C_6
	Drastic loss of skills	C_7
	Abandoning school (population movements, destruction of networks and social environment)	C_8
	Behavioural problems: traumas, pedagogical roles and self-victimization	C_9

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[3] Secondary analyses (SA) are studies carried out from data which is already available, that data having been compiled by other researchers in primary studies, and which are often available in databases.

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Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Having performed the search using the above-mentioned sequence, a total of 60 documents were selected, based upon the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria: empirical study where the entire sample or part of it includes an educational agent, and which is related, directly or indirectly, to education.

Exclusion criteria: articles which are theoretical based on opinion or which are anecdotal; convention and conference documents and proceedings; documents produced by NGOs aimed at raising public awareness in developed countries at the peak of any conflict, and evaluation reports.

Fuller versions of the retrieved papers (voices) included are available in Cervantes and Fernández-Cano (2014). They have been summarised here as documentary evidence (Table 2).

Table 2

Relation and characterisation of the studies (voices) included

Author	Type	Method	Sample	Location	Cs.
Ager et al. (2011)	P	Q	403 children. Teachers and parents were the source data providers	Uganda	C3
Al-Eissa (1995)	P.	Q	106 Kuwaiti children; 120 Saudi children. Parents were the source data providers	Kuwait	C9, C2
Albertyn et al. (2003)	AS	C	Articles of the last 5 years	Africa	C4, C9
Alborz (2013)	AS	Q	6,035 households, including 10,714 children and young people	Iraq	C1, C7
Attanayak et al. (2009)	S	Q	17 studies	Multiple	C9
Bell, Méndez, Palma & Bosch (2012)	P	Q	6,353 patients	Colombia	C9
Betancourt, McBain, Newnham & Brennan (2013)	P	M	529 affected young people aged between 10 and 17 years	Sierra Leone	C9, C4
Betancourt, Meyers-Ohki, Charrow & Tol (2013)	S	C	53 articles found in three databases	N/A	C9, C4
Bragin (2012)	P	C	2 clinical examples: 1 teacher and 2 children	Uganda	C4
Bundervoet, Verwimp & Akresh (2009)	AS	Q	1,196 children (aged between 6 and 60 months)	Burundi	C1
Cáceres, Izquierdo, Mantilla, Jara, & Velandia (2002)	P	Q	1,457 household surveys	Cartagena (Colombia)	C1, C4
Carlton-Ford & Boop (2010)	AS	Q	175 countries	N/A	C7
Carlton-Ford, Ender & Tabatabai (2008)	P	Q	1,000 adolescents	Baghdad (Iraq)	C9
Carmona, Moreno & Tobón (2012)	P	M	4 groups: 21 girls; 145 boys and 194 girls; 182 teachers; and 182 policemen	Colombia	C9
Chase, Doney, Sivayogan, Ariyaratne, Satkunanatagam, P. & Swaminathan (1999)	P	Q	308 children	Sri Lanka	C1, C4, C9

Author	Type	Method	Sample	Location	Cs.
Corbin (2008)	P	C	11 child soldiers and 11 adults from the same community	Uganda	C4
Crombach, Weierstall, Hecker, Schalinski & Elbert (2013)	P	Q	124 men (42 were child soldiers in the past; 41 of the same age were not recruited)	Uganda	C9
De Castro, Camacho, Balanon & Galang (2012)	P	M	N/A	Philippines	C8, C1, C3
Denov (2010)	P	C	80 minors members of a revolutionary army	Sierra Leone	C4, C1, C8
Denov (2012)	P	C	40 girls and 36 boys members of a revolutionary army	Sierra Leone	C4, C9
Derluyn, Broekaert, E., Schuylen, G. & De Temmerman (2004)	P	Q	301 child soldiers; 71 of them participate in the IES-R (Impact of Event Scale Revised)	Uganda	C4
Di Maio, Nandi (2013)	AS	Q	45,419 children aged between 10 and 14 years	West Bank (Palestine)	C1
Dickison-Gómez (2002)	P	C	4 adults who were child soldiers	El Salvador	C4, C1, C7
Dimitry (2012)	S	C	71 documents (52,977 participants)	Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq	C9
Dyregrov, Gjestad & Raundalen (2002)	P	Q	Three cohorts. 1991: 214 Iraqi children; 1992: 101 children from Baghdad and 81 from Basra; and 1993: 104 children	Iraq	C9, C4
Edwards et al. (2012)	AS	Q	4,983 patients whose information is found in the Joint Theater Trauma Registry database (JTTR)	Afghanistan e Iraq	C1
Elbert et al. (2009)	P	Q	420 children (218 girls and 202 boys); 398 caregivers	Sri Lanka	C7, C9
Feldman & Vengrober (2011)	P	Q	232 Israeli children (aged between 1,5 and 5 years and their mothers)	Israel: Sderot (10 km from Gaza) and Tel-Aviv area	C9
Flink et al. (2013)	P	Q	279 children (90 displaced and 189 not displaced)	Bogotá, Colombia	C9
Gates, Hegre, Mokleiv & Strand (2012)	AS	Q	Countries of the several databases	Multiple	C7
Guy (2009)	P	C	3 people who were child soldiers	Democratic Republic of the Congo	C9
Harel-Fisch et al. (2010)	P	Q	24,935 students from 4 populations: West Bank, Gaza, Jewish and Arab.	Middle East	C4, C9
Hernández & Romero (2003)	P	C	7 girls (aged 13 and 17 years)	Colombia	C8
Høiskar (2001)	AS	Q	45 countries of the database	No	C9
Honwana (2009)	P	C	5 people affected by conflict	Mozambiquand Angola	C9, C7
Jordans et al. (2010)	P	Q	325 children (167 boys, 158 girls; aged 11-14 years)	Nepal	C9, C7
Jordans et al. (2013)	P	Q	96,718 children beneficiaries of a programme	Burundi, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Sudan.	C9
Kiros & Hogan (2001)	AS	Q	144,090 households; 142,614 women, 414,445 children, 87,025 dead children.	Ethiopia	C4
Kohrt et al. (2008)	P.	Q	282 children	Nepal	C9
Manuchehr (2011)	AS	C	Countries of the databases (GDDS and DQAF)	Múltiple	C2, C8

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Author	Type	Method	Sample	Location	Cs.
Miller, El-Masri, Allodi & Qouta (1999)	P	Q	669 Palestinian schoolchildren and their families	The Gaza Strip	C9
Nelson et al. (2013)	P	M	389 minors, gender-based violence survivors	Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo	C9
Noguera (2013)	P	C	160 children (90 boys and 70 girls) aged between 7 and 12 years	Mindanao- Philippines	C4, C8, C9
O'Hare & Southall (2007)	AS	Q	42 countries	Sub-Saharan Africa countries	C3
Peltonen, Qouta, S., El Sarraj, E. & Punamäki (2012)	P	Q	225 Palestinian children (aged 10 and 14 years)	The Gaza Strip	C8
Poirier (2012)	AS	Q	43 countries	Sub-Saharan Africa	C3, C8
Prior, Virasinghe, & Smart (2005)	P	Q	1,066 students	Sri Lanka	C9
Rashid (2012)	P	C	43 children in conflict-with-law (39 boys and 4 girls); their families were considered	Indian-Kashmir	C9
Rodríguez & Sánchez (2012)	AS	Q	20,642 children aged between 6 and 17 years (11,142 households of 235 towns)	Colombia	C8
Shakya (2011)	S	C	3 studies	Nepal	C2, C8, C9
Shemyakina (2011)	P	Q	1999: 3,284 children; 2003: 5,426 children	Tadzhikistan	C1, C4
Southall (2011)	AS	C	72 countries of the databases	Multiple	C9
Spellings (2008)	S	C	48 empirical studies	Africa, Colombia, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Philippines	C4, C9
Tatar & Horenczyk (2003)	P	C	37 counsellors	Israel	C6
Thapa & Hauff (2012)	P	M	290 internally displaced people	Nepal	C3
Tol et al. (2012)	P	Q	399 children	Sri Lanka	C8
Tol, Song & Jordans (2013)	S	C	53 documents	Multiple	C4
Vindevogel et al. (2011)	AS	Q	8,790 children	Uganda	C9
Winthrop & Kirk (2008)	P	M	Main sample: 482 students. Secondary sample: 66 teachers, 67 professors, 99 class observations and 6 parents	Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Bogotá	C5, C6
Zahr (1996)	P	Q	2 groups of 100 families	Bekaa Valley and East Beirut, (Lebanon)	C9, C4

Type of document; N/A: Not Available; Cs: Consequences

Results

Refusal and impediments to a return to education

The years of conflict represent an interruption to the education of these children, and for this reason many of them will often not want to return to school or they will do so belatedly. For these children (according to Shakya, 2011) this interruption to their routine and the years spent away from the classroom are a source of embarrassment when the time comes to return to education,

and they are thus unwilling to make that step. To understand this one should take into account that their peer group would have advanced and that they would be returning to class with groups of a younger age corresponding to their academic level. Many of them feel too old to go to school, although this does not diminish their willingness to receive education. The marginalisation that they suffer from members of the community also separates them in centres of learning.

Another frequent situation during a time of conflict where children are displaced is their enrolment in new centres of learning alongside different cultures. When a child is moved to from a centre of learning, he or she will need a certain time to acclimatise to that new environment. For children who have suffered the consequences of armed conflict and have been displaced as a result, the period of acclimatisation may be more complex and lengthier. Naciones Unidas. Asamblea General (1996) described in her report one reality which children have to face during population movements: states offering political asylum may refuse to provide education to refugees for fear of this encouraging them to remain indefinitely in that country. In such a case, this is not a refusal of the children themselves, but rather an impediment to them exercising their right to education.

Another important issue which prevents children from returning to education is the inadequate economic conditions of some families, forcing children to search for work (Cáceres et al., 2002).

If the positive effects which returning to learning may have on children and on their mental health are analysed, it can be seen that any rejection and/or impediment to returning to education may worsen the post-traumatic symptoms from which these children suffer, since the intervention programmes followed have to be based on a context in which school and the other educational agents have to play a part. It is for this reason that it should be considered essential to run a campaign to raise public awareness, principally among children and families, of how important and necessary returning to education is for their future.

Educational infrastructure damaged or destroyed

During the period of conflict, all infrastructures suffer damage as a result of bombing, fires and combat. Centres of learning are no exception. Both schools and universities, as well as museums, hospitals and other governmental buildings are damaged and looted (Dimitry, 2012)

When considering the reasons for these attacks and thinking of the context in which conflicts occur, it can be deduced that the ideological confrontation between the opposing factions incites them to attack those places where the population may be indoctrinated, either as a means of recruiting followers or attacking and hurting the enemy.

There are thus not only a significant number of attacks on centres of learning with the objective of destroying places where the young gather, but those places are also used as centres of recruitment and re-education in favour of the armed group occupying the centre. Many of

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the walls of these centres are used for propaganda purposes. The United Nations has observed that schools had been used as barracks, weapon storage facilities, command centres, detention centres, interrogation facilities and attack positions with firearms and weapons of observation (Naciones Unidas. Asamblea General, 2013).

The different cultures of the diverse countries in conflict lend this category a difference which may be decisive when it comes to attacking schools: gender. According to statistics, in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, where women have traditionally been submissive, all-girls schools are the most frequently attacked, followed by mixed-sex schools and, finally, all-boys schools. To a certain extent this balances the differences to be found when comparing by gender the damage inflicted. If boys are recruited into the army and consequently lose their right to education, it could be argued that the impact of a conflict is greater on boys than it is on girls. Nevertheless, due to the privation and destruction of schools and other related infrastructure, the effects are similar for both (Shemyakina, 2011). Furthermore, one should not overlook the fact that girls are also sent to the front, kidnapped and used as sex slaves, thus denying them their right to education.

It is worth mentioning that in some places education is so important that children who cannot attend a public school organise classes in different environments: under trees or in small rooms, in order to follow the curriculum set out by the education ministry of each specific country (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Another initiative of this kind is the learning communities referred to in Bragin (2012).

Cuts or withdrawal of spending on education

In economic terms, it is known that periods of conflict are seriously detrimental to the conditions of the country and, obviously, spending on arms and defence rockets. O'Hare and Southall (2007) provide data which reveals that spending on education and health is significantly lower and that spending on defence is significantly higher if there has been a recent conflict. Furthermore, according to the yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI (2013), global military spending in 2012 reached 1.756 trillion dollars. *An Education for All* monitoring report –*No progress in reducing global number of children out of school*– (Unesco, 2014) demonstrates that if wealthy countries were to reallocate 6 days of military spending to education, the deficit of 16 billion dollars required annually to achieve *education for all* would be eliminated, enabling the education of all the children in the world in 2015 (Unesco, 2011). Poirier (2012) obtains similar results. He claims that the calculation of the effects with average margin demonstrates that the percentage of children not attending school could decrease by 1.7% and that the percentage of children completing primary and secondary education could increase by 4.4 % and 2.6 % respectively, if an extra 1% of GDP were allocated to education. Moreover, the percentage of humanitarian aid allocated to education has been reducing over the years: in 2009 it was 2.2% compared to 1.4% in 2012 (Unesco, Instituto for Statistics y Unicef, 2015).

All of the information outlined in the paragraph above compels one to question what benefit is to be obtained from reducing spending on education and why, if there is a reasonably credible solution, this has not yet been implemented. Wealthy countries have political and economic interests in prolonging conflicts in less developed countries, since this implies an increase to GDP resulting from the production and export of arms to countries at war. It should be noted that 5 of the 6 main arms exporting nations are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. In addition, as long as wars are waged in poor countries, developed countries will not find themselves directly affected by the negative consequences.

Loss of the educational and protective functions of the family

The family exerts a positive influence in terms of the psychological and social support with which they provide the child soldier and children affected by armed conflicts. But furthermore, the family also has an influence on the decisions of children and consequently on their education. From one perspective, there is a positive influence, since in many places education is something which is valued and respected (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008), a factor which encourages children to attend school. Parents' fear that children may be attacked on their way to school and that centres of learning may be targeted, however, can lead to a reluctance to allow their children to attend school. During the war of Tajikistan, for instance, some parents were reluctant to allow their daughters to attend class for fear of them being persecuted by soldiers on their way to school (Gomart, 2003; Fakingham, 2000, cited by Shemyakina, 2011). Another example is to be found in De Castro et al. (2012) in which both parents and children, as a result of living some distance away from their school, decide against attending class for fear of being caught in crossfire during their journey.

Loss of the academic community

Since 2007, "there have been thousands of reported cases of students, teachers, professors, academics and other members of the educational community being taken prisoner, held in captivity, beaten, tortured, burnt alive, shot by rebels, armies and repressive regimes; imprisoned or raped by armed groups or forces in school or on their way to school" (Unesco, 2010, p. 14).

Due to their privileged position as conveyors of knowledge, their access to the most vulnerable members of the population, and their embrace of political ideals that are respected by the community, those within the teaching profession are a very tempting prey for armed groups and the military. This is evidenced in the report *Education under attack* (Unesco, 2010). In view of this situation, the teaching profession's fear of going to work is more than evident and justified, leading to reduced staff and increased teacher/pupil ratio in places where conflict is in effect. The lack of educational staff increases the difficulty of responding to the educational needs of children and even reduces the possibility of access to education.

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Non-qualified teaching staff

Many of the teachers who give classes have not been trained for the job and obtain the position as a result of being the members of the community with the highest level of education (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). The absence of qualified teaching staff may give rise to difficulties in correctly implementing the curriculum and mitigating the problems that conflicts can bring into the classroom. This represents one of the main problems with which the education system has to deal in a war context, alongside its own welfare and protection, as well as that of the children in class.

The student-teacher ratio may reach 50:1. Students often do not have teachers, the latter having fled to safer places; timetables are reduced or interrupted; "schools are often closed for long extended periods, sometimes from fear, sometimes by decree" (Ressler, Tortorici & Marcelino, 1993, p. 210).

School counsellors are another facet of the academic community which does not emerge favourably from the consequences of conflict. Population movements generate new educational challenges. Different cultures and religions are brought together in centres of learning, and creating an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence in the classroom and playground, in so far as is possible, is a complex task. The role of the school counsellor is decisive here. But furthermore, the events experienced by civilians require school counsellors to implement new psychological and support strategies aimed at reducing the anxiety following terror attacks, reassuring the children and offering them the opportunity to legitimise their feelings (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). In such moments, mutual understanding between all members of the academic community is crucial to obtaining positive results in matters of teaching and coexistence.

Drastic loss of skills

Conflict situations imply a serious alteration in the development of students' skills. It has been found that following exposure to conflict many children have problems with linguistic skills and cognitive development (Elbert, et al., 2009), and thus present specific learning and support needs (Alborz, 2013).

There exist centres of learning which encourage violent behaviour and intolerance Bush and Saltarelli (cited by Poirier, 2012) allude to the two sides of education: its positive side leads to the building of peace, and is a means of socialisation; its negative side defines education as a "catalytic weapon of war", which can foster intolerance, prevent certain groups from attending school, or exacerbate ethnic tension. For the latter of these two sides, a change to the curriculum and re-education programmes which have been imposed to encourage recruitment arises (Unesco, 2010).

Abandoning education

In conflict situations, fear is one of the principal reasons why populations abandon their places of origin (Cáceres et al., 2002). During such population movements it is frequent for the family to become separated (Chase, et al., 1999). This breaking up of the family unit, and in particular the absence of parents, can produce an increase in the percentage of children who abandon their studies in order to work, or who work more than 45 hours per week, in poorly regulated conditions which do not guarantee the chance of exercising their basic rights. (Cáceres et al., 2002).

At times where there is no conflict, in general children grow and learn while they mix with their peer group and the environment around them. The children themselves recognise how important their friends from school are as a source of help and development of their own learning (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). During conflict, however, the possibility of positive interaction between the child and the social environment is reduced. On one side, the existence of an atmosphere of fear and intolerance means that parents do not allow children to leave the house, going as far as setting limits on where they may play and on their social circle.

Education therefore plays a very important role when the moment comes to help children reintegrate into the social environment. Bragin (2012) states that school is the best remedy for children affected by conflict, as it is a place of normalised experiences, such as spending time with other children, which bring routine to their lives. Nevertheless, in spite of the greater part of society living in a conflict environment recognising the importance of education, children, immersed in that environment of violence, suffer from attacks whose only purpose is to prevent them from exercising their right to education. On 13th November 2008 it was reported in the media that in an act attributed to the Taliban, a group of girls had been attacked with acid for going to school (OTR/PRESS, 2008).

Behavioural problems in and out of school

Another of the main consequences which derive from armed conflicts are the psychological and mental disorders suffered from children during and after the conflict. In the different documents analysed, it is shown that all the participants in the study by Kohrt, et al. (2008) suffered from at least one form of trauma, among the most common of which are distraction, hostility, emotional instability, sorrow, withdrawal, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and suspicion (Al-Eissa, 1995); depression, irritability, aggression, isolation, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, and paranoia (Rashid, 2012); nervousness, anxious arousal (Dimitry, 2012); loss of the ability to concentrate, passivity, loss of spontaneity, and sorrow (Guy, 2009), and suicidal tendencies (Flink et al., 2013).

Generally, the above-mentioned problems arise as a result of frequent exposure to conflict. It should not be forgotten, however, that the worst consequences arise from the atrocities committed by children themselves playing the role of soldiers, whether that be voluntarily or involuntarily (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, NCTSN, 2005). In this way, their transition from victim to perpetrator is a carefully orchestrated reconfiguration process of their identity, the purpose of which is to sever all links with society (Honwana, 2009). This process goes temporarily beyond the conflict. Once the conflict is over, many children suffer from "appetitive aggression" (Crombach et al., 2013) and even maintain a symbolic link to the armed group, becoming their points of reference (Jiménez-Caballero, 2009).

Each of these psychological disorders leads to behavioural disorders, found in the studies of Dimitry (2012) and Miller et al. (1999), thus complicating the work of teachers as well as the children's attendance at centres of learning. Many of them suffer from aggressive and/or regressive behaviour (Al-Eissa, 1995). Even the children themselves allude to behavioural problems among the academic staff, reporting beatings, insults, corruption and cruelty (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

It is important to underline that the family environment as well as clinical intervention in the form of counselling and parents' education could be an effective measure with which to alleviate, to a certain extent, such negative effects of the conflict (Zahr, 1996).

Conclusions

Multivocal review brought to light that: a) the most affected places by the conflicto are, between other, Nepal, Uganda and Colombia; and b) that the most frequency categories are: Refusal and impediments to a return to education (C1), loss of the educational and protective functions of the family (C4) y behavioural problems (C9).

Furthermore, it has revealed, according to the aim of this research, how the different consequences suffered by children living in countries where armed conflict is a part of daily life and strongly restric the possibilities of education access. Although also disclose regrettable dates, as paradoxical as it may seem, refered to children who have to join armed groups to exercise their right to education, and that this right is violated afterwards as a consequence of political interests.

As has been demonstrated, the negative consequences which armed conflicts impose on education are far-reaching and diverse. Even so, it is a field which requires further research. In spite of the attempts of various organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF, the publications and activities of which attempt to focus the community's attention on education, it does not appear that a policy action has been adopted which condemns and, even more so, avoids acts of atrocity which condition the present and determine the future of these children (Bragin & Opiro, 2012) included university students (Bernardo & Baranovich, 2014).

On a psychological and physical level these children suffer a multitude of abuse and wrongdoing which are neither penalised nor punished by international law, leaving their lives at the mercy of mercenaries whose political ideals go against millions of lives and whose main purpose is to remove any means of conveying knowledge in order to create a submissive and easily manipulated society.

Despite the promises and best intentions defined in the EFA (*Education for All*) objectives (to educate the world population, and teach it reading and writing), and in spite of the progress which has been made since then, not one of the objectives is going to be achieved on a global scale (Unesco, 2015).

In 2013 it had already been proposed that the deadline should be extended by another 15 years, modifying the objectives set out in 2000 (Torres, 2013). As the first objectives of *Education for All* were defined in 1990, at the *World Conference on Education for All* held in Jomtien, Thailand, 25 years have been spent attempting to achieve objectives which do not coincide with the interests of every world power. In the event of the timescale being prolonged by another 15 years, as is being considered, almost half a century will have been required to attain the currently unachieved objectives and complete the tasks needed to eradicate inequalities in education.

As a pedagogist, we emphasize the need to comply with agreements and develop in schools a real education for peace, assumed by the community, to help reduce tensions and resolve conflicts nonviolently. We must prevent conflict before it becomes seen as a normal situation and act to generate the least possible impact on children. Education as a fundamental right of the child and defensive weapon against injustice, must be defended.

As stated in the report Unesco (2007), the creation of inclusive schools and universities which should become sanctuaries of peace and tolerance under the protection of every involved party is something that should be fought for, and these should contribute towards reducing tension and resolving conflicts (Unesco, 2007). This would necessitate *Education for All* no longer being viewed as a utopia, and starting instead to consider it as a reality, firmly committing to the accomplishment of the objectives defined.

Nevertheless, ensuring that all children are integrated into an educational community should not to be achieved at the expense of the quality of such education. *Banking education*, a term coined by Paulo Freire in 1970 (Freire, 2007), is to be avoided, and instead children should be involved in a liberating education which promotes critical thinking. In this way, by creating citizens capable of critical thinking, there would be no place in society for armed conflicts.

Furthermore, in so far as education and health recovery programmes are concerned, these should focus on each individual as a unique being, rather than implementing universal models and expecting the same results in a broad population group without considering the particularities and/or context of each case (Tol et al., 2013). To do so, it would be necessary to begin with qualitative analysis of the context in which the programme is to be implemented and modify it appropriately to have the possibility of improving the results for its beneficiaries.

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While the above mentioned objectives are achieved, a commitment should be made to ensure that education offers a sense of normality to daily life, something which is necessary for the emotional stability of children, on condition that political interests are not brought into play, and the children's rights are respected. According to UNICEF, those rights are based on four principles: a) non-discrimination, b) the best interests of the child, c) the right to life, survival and development and d) participation. Special mention should be given to the determination of these children and the communities of which they are part to exercise their right to education, and their view that by way of knowledge they will be able aspire to a better future.

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