

Our Community, Our Future: Community-Driven Educational Management and Leadership in War Zones

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Abstract

This study investigates the resilience and efficacy of community-driven educational initiatives in the conflict-affected Karenni region of Myanmar, where traditional state-run schools have been destroyed or abandoned due to ongoing military conflict. Leveraging Collective Leadership Theory, the research explores how local communities sustain education through distributed leadership and collaboration. Using a mixed-methods approach, data from 249 teachers across 49 self-reliant schools were analyzed to understand the dynamics of community-driven education. The findings underscore the critical role of collective leadership and strong community involvement in maintaining educational continuity amidst severe disruptions. Despite significant obstacles, high levels of teacher satisfaction and effective community engagement highlight the success of these grassroots efforts. The study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to enhance educational resilience in similar conflict zones globally, emphasizing the importance of targeted support and recognition of local educators' contributions.

Keywords: community-driven education, conflict zones, collective leadership theory, educational resilience, Myanmar Karenni Region

1. Introduction

Education is crucial for personal and societal growth, but in conflict-affected areas like the Karenni region in Myanmar, it faces major disruptions. Located in eastern Myanmar, Karenni State encompasses areas such as Demawso, Hpruso, Pekon, Moby, and Loikaw, home to a diverse population of approximately 420,000 people (Wei 2024). Since the military coup on February 1, 2021, the region has experienced severe turmoil, leading to one of the most significant humanitarian crises in the country. Over 80% of the state's population has been displaced due to ongoing conflict and targeted military operations against civilian areas (Wei 2024). Civilians, including women and children, have been used as human shields and subjected to arbitrary arrests and executions, prompting international sanctions and calls for accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Corritti et al. 2023).

This displacement has profoundly impacted the community's educational landscape. Many state-run schools have been destroyed, abandoned, or turned into military bases, leaving children without formal education. A shortage of teachers and supplies, combined with the constant threat of violence, creates ongoing challenges for these communities. In response, over 400 self-reliant schools have been established in areas controlled by resistance forces. These schools predominantly serve internally displaced persons (IDPs) and operate largely on internal funding and donations from within the region. Despite significant challenges, limited resources and security risks, these community-led schools strive to provide education to children affected by the conflict (Kantarawaddy Times 2024).

This study focuses on the Karenni region, heavily affected by conflict, to explore community-driven educational management and leadership despite the hardships. Through survey data, this research provides insights into how local communities initiate and sustain educational initiatives. It highlights the collective leadership practices and resilience of grassroots educational efforts, demonstrating how community involvement and adaptive strategies have maintained education under extreme conditions. These findings are crucial for developing effective strategies to support education in similar conflict-affected regions globally.

2. Background

Karenni (Kayah) State, located in eastern Myanmar, has a complex history marked by rich ethnic diversity and persistent conflict. Various ethnic groups, including the Karenni (Red Karen), Kayan (Padaung), Kayaw, and others, each with distinct cultural identities and traditions, reside in the state. Historically, these groups maintained some autonomy, especially during the colonial period when the British recognized Karenni as separate from Burma (Mathieson, 2009). However, post-independence centralization policies led to tensions and insurgencies as these ethnic groups sought greater autonomy and recognition of their rights. These policies exacerbated historical grievances, leading to prolonged conflicts and significant humanitarian crises, resulting in widespread displacement and profoundly impacting the region's social and economic fabric (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2021; Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019; World Bank, 2021).

Before the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar was undergoing significant political and educational reforms. The country experienced tentative democratization starting with the 2010 general elections, leading to a quasi-civilian government under President Thein Sein, and further reforms following the 2015 elections, which brought Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) to power. Despite these political strides, unresolved ethnic conflicts persisted, with various ethnic armed groups seeking greater autonomy (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Myanmar's educational infrastructure faced numerous challenges even before the coup, characterized by underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. According to UNESCO, government reforms aimed at improving education quality and access showed uneven progress, with significant disparities between urban and rural regions (UNESCO, 2019). In Karenni State, these disparities were pronounced, with many schools lacking basic facilities and qualified teachers, contributing to low enrollment and high dropout rates (World Bank, 2021). New curriculums and teacher training programs were introduced to enhance educational outcomes, but ongoing ethnic conflicts and political instability often hindered these efforts (Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019).

The events leading up to the 2021 military coup were marked by increasing tensions between the civilian government led by the NLD and the military, known as the Tatmadaw. After the NLD's landslide victory in the November 2020 general elections, the military alleged widespread electoral fraud without providing substantial evidence. On February 1, 2021, just hours before the new parliament was set to convene, the military detained Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other senior NLD officials, declaring a state of emergency and transferring power to Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The coup's immediate impact was profound and multifaceted. Nationwide protests and a civil disobedience movement emerged, leading to violent crackdowns by security forces. This unrest exacerbated existing conflicts in ethnic regions like Karenni State, increasing displacement and humanitarian crises as the military intensified operations against ethnic armed groups and civilian populations (International Crisis Group, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The 2021 military coup profoundly disrupted the education sector, leading to widespread school closures, destruction of educational infrastructure, and displacement of students and teachers. Over 80% of Karenni State's population has been displaced due to ongoing conflict and targeted military operations against civilian areas (Wei, 2024). UNICEF (2021) reports that over 12 million children were affected by school closures following the coup. The military's violent crackdowns led to the destruction of numerous schools, particularly in conflict-affected areas. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), schools have been directly targeted, with some repurposed as military bases, exacerbating educational disruption. As a result, many students and teachers have been displaced, with the United Nations estimating that over 220,000 people have been displaced in Karenni State alone since the coup (UNHCR, 2021). Specific incidents of violence against educational institutions include the use of live ammunition and tear gas in schools, as well as the arbitrary arrest of educators involved in the civil disobedience movement. These attacks have created a climate of fear and instability, further hindering access to education and contributing to the broader humanitarian crisis (World Bank, 2022).

In response to the educational crisis caused by the 2021 military coup, local communities in Karenni State have shown remarkable resilience by establishing self-reliant schools. These grassroots initiatives, often led by local educators, parents, and community leaders, aim to provide continuous educational opportunities despite the ongoing conflict. Local educators play a critical role by adapting teaching methods and curricula to the challenging circumstances, ensuring education remains accessible to displaced children. Parents and community leaders contribute by organizing and funding these makeshift schools through donations and local resources (Kantarawaddy Times, 2024). For example, in various internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and

conflict-affected townships like Demawso and Hpruso, community-driven efforts have led to the establishment of over 400 self-reliant schools. These schools have been instrumental in maintaining educational services and fostering a sense of normalcy and hope among children and their families (UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2022). The impact of these grassroots initiatives extends beyond education, promoting community cohesion and resilience in the face of adversity.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Impact of Conflict on Education

The impact of conflict on education has been extensively documented, with numerous studies highlighting the disruption caused by violence and displacement. Conflict-affected areas often experience the collapse of formal education systems, necessitating alternative approaches to ensure continued access to education. In such contexts, community-driven initiatives become crucial.

Dryden-Peterson (2011) underscores that in conflict-affected regions, the collapse of formal education systems often necessitates alternative approaches to maintain access to education. This is where community-driven initiatives play a critical role. Davies (2013) emphasizes the importance of local communities in sustaining education during crises, arguing that community involvement enhances the resilience of educational systems. Research by Tauson and Stannard (2018) supports this view, highlighting the success of grassroots efforts in maintaining educational continuity in various conflict zones. No (2024) examined how schools, communities, and families in Myanmar conflict areas, worked together to keep education going during conflict. The study found that local efforts, like adjusting school schedules and offering emotional support, were essential in ensuring students could continue learning. This highlights the critical role of community leadership and resilience in maintaining education during times of crisis.

Bell (2011) provides a comprehensive analysis of the quantitative impact of conflict on education, demonstrating that armed conflict has lasting effects on educational attainment and literacy rates. The study reveals that conflict exacerbates existing inequalities in school participation, particularly affecting girls, poor households, and ethnic minorities. Rai (2020) explores the negative impact of conflict on education in South Asia, focusing on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The chapter discusses the wide-ranging consequences of conflict on children's education, including damage to school infrastructure, loss of young lives, and disruption of school schedules. The study argues for the establishment of schools as zones of peace to protect children's safety and education during conflicts.

Cervantes-Duarte and Fernández-Cano (2016) investigate the short and long-term impacts of armed conflicts on education and educational agents through a multivocal review. The review categorizes the consequences into nine areas, including damaged infrastructure, loss of educational and protective functions of families, and behavioral problems among students. The study highlights the infringement of basic human rights and the right to sound education during childhood due to conflicts. Smyth (1999) discusses the various ways in which education is affected by political and civil unrest and armed conflict. The paper examines the lack of financial support, destruction of school buildings, and targeting of teachers. Smyth also explores interventions to address the educational needs of children, such as Oxfam programs that provide psychosocial support and human rights education to refugees and displaced populations.

Fry et al. (2018) conduct a global systematic review and meta-analysis to estimate the impact of violence in childhood on educational outcomes. The study finds that all forms of violence significantly affect educational attainment, with affected children more likely to drop out of school and perform poorly academically. Justino (2011) reviews empirical research on the impact of violent conflict on education, identifying key mechanisms that link conflict with educational outcomes. The study emphasizes the long-lasting effects of minor shocks to educational access and the significant gender differentials in educational outcomes due to conflict. Commins (2017) explores how fragility, conflict, and violence inhibit learning opportunities and outcomes for millions of children. The World Bank report discusses the need for education systems to be reformed to deliver quality learning outcomes and skills for life and work, highlighting the interplay between conflict, political instability, and educational attainment.

3.2 Mental Health and Education

Dimitry (2011) systematically reviews the literature on the mental health of children and adolescents in conflict zones in the Middle East. The review finds high levels of trauma among these children, with significant prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder. The study identifies factors that mediate between exposure to conflict and mental health issues, such as socio-economic adversity and social support. Kadir et al. (2018) review the direct and

indirect effects of armed conflict on children, emphasizing immediate harms like death and trauma and long-term impacts such as disrupted education and unsafe living conditions. The report advocates for comprehensive measures to protect children's rights and ensure their access to education during conflicts.

3.3 Community-Driven Initiatives and Collective Leadership

Collective Leadership Theory, as outlined by Friedrich et al. (2009), provides a framework for understanding how educational management can be effectively distributed among multiple individuals in conflict zones. This approach underscores the importance of collaboration, shared decision-making, and the utilization of diverse leadership skills. In the context of Karenni State, this theory is particularly relevant as local educators and community members collaborate to maintain educational services despite severe disruptions. Harris (2008) and Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009) argue that collective leadership enhances resource management, builds resilience, and fosters community involvement. These principles are evident in the Karenni region, where self-reliant schools have been established to address the educational needs of displaced children. Studies by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) and Spillane (2006) further support the effectiveness of distributed leadership in promoting educational continuity and adapting to changing circumstances. No (2024) found that community and teacher resilience are crucial for sustaining education in conflict zones, as teachers in Myanmar, supported by strong community involvement, were able to maintain student engagement through grassroots efforts such as makeshift schools in IDP camps, ensuring educational continuity despite challenging conditions.

Barron (2011) reviews the World Bank's use of Community-Driven Development (CDD) in conflict-affected areas, highlighting its effectiveness in giving communities control over project resources. The review suggests that CDD projects can improve social relations, build local institutions, and enhance civic capacity, making them valuable in post-conflict recovery. Paulson (2007) calls for closer collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of education and conflict. The thematic issue explores central policy questions and programming imperatives, emphasizing the need to include local educational initiatives in policy planning to address the most urgent educational needs in conflict zones.

Edwards (2014) examines the trajectory of community-based education decentralization in El Salvador, demonstrating how conflict contexts can be leveraged to experiment with and entrench certain educational policies. The study shows the importance of community engagement in sustaining educational initiatives in post-conflict settings. Utsumi and Muradi (2024) investigate the role of community behaviors in fostering educational resilience in conflict zones. Their study in Afghanistan finds that community behaviors such as gender-related behaviors and security-related atmospheres significantly enhance access to education. The findings highlight the importance of community social capital in fortifying educational resilience. Bellino et al. (2016) explore the impact of community-based educational models in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of community engagement in sustaining education amidst conflict. The study identifies three dimensions of sustainability: changed attitudes toward education, student transitions from community to government schools, and community ownership of educational initiatives.

3.4 Inclusive and Flexible Education Practices

De La Fuente (2022) emphasizes the importance of inclusive education practices for marginalized children in crisis situations. The study advocates for the integration of psychosocial support through social-emotional learning to help displaced children build resilience and succeed academically. Ager et al. (2015) reviews the role of local faith communities in promoting resilience during humanitarian crises. The study finds that these communities provide valuable material and non-material resources and highlights the challenges and opportunities for greater partnership with humanitarian organizations. Utsumi (2022) uses a difference-in-differences approach to estimate the spillover effects of conflict on primary education access in Afghanistan. The findings suggest that community financial contributions can mitigate the negative impact of conflict, especially for girls, providing insights for better educational policies in conflict-affected countries.

Eden et al. (2024) explores the impact of parent and community involvement in education on social improvement. The review highlights the positive effects of collaborative efforts between parents, communities, and educational institutions, emphasizing the importance of such partnerships in enhancing educational outcomes and fostering cohesive communities. Shah et al. (2019) examine the rise of resilience within the Education in Emergencies community, identifying its growth in prominence and the shifts it reflects in education provision in conflict-affected contexts. The study argues that dominant conceptualizations of resilience may limit its transformative potential. Creed and Morpeth (2014) discuss the role of open distance and flexible learning (ODFL) in maintaining educational continuity in emergency and conflict situations. The study highlights the potential of ODFL to reach marginalized populations and bridge gaps between formal and non-formal education sectors.

Reeder and Polizzi (2021) investigate the impact of UN peacekeeping missions on educational attainment in conflict zones. Their study finds that UN deployments increase educational attainment and reduce gender disparities, demonstrating the critical role of peacekeeping in restoring education in post-conflict settings.

3.5 Challenges and Practical Approaches

Larkin (2013) reviews the book "Educating Children in Conflict Zones," which provides insights into the challenges of delivering quality education to children in war-affected areas. The book offers empirical case studies and reviews policies and approaches to international assistance, highlighting the educational needs of these children and practical challenges in meeting them.

Despite the extensive documentation of the impact of conflict on education and various strategies proposed to mitigate these effects, a significant gap remains in understanding the specific mechanisms through which community-driven educational initiatives sustain educational services in the face of ongoing conflict. Existing studies emphasize the importance of collective leadership, community engagement, and flexible management structures, but there is limited empirical evidence on how these elements interact and adapt over time in specific contexts such as Karenni State. Moreover, the role of local educators and their strategies for overcoming resource constraints and security challenges in maintaining educational continuity is underexplored.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed examination of community-driven educational management and leadership in Karenni State, focusing on the experiences and practices of local educators and community members in sustaining education amidst severe disruptions. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this research will explore how collective leadership is operationalized in self-reliant schools, identify adaptive strategies employed by community-driven schools, assess the extent and nature of community engagement, and generate empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these initiatives. The study aims to offer actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and practitioners involved in education in conflict zones, thereby enhancing the resilience and effectiveness of educational services in similar contexts globally.

4. Methodology Research Design

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to understand community-driven educational management and leadership in conflict-affected areas of the Karenni region in Myanmar. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and strategies involved.

4.2 Survey Design and Sampling

A structured survey was distributed to 249 teachers across 49 self-reliant schools in Kayah (Karenni) State and Pekon Township, including 15 high schools, 17 middle schools, and 17 primary schools. The survey comprised closed-ended questions for quantitative data collection and open-ended questions for qualitative insights.

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. Key informants such as school leaders and local education officials were initially approached to participate, who then helped identify additional teacher participants, ensuring a diverse sample.

4.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Stata software, employing descriptive statistics to summarize findings. This analysis focused on key demographic characteristics of teachers, perceptions of headmaster leadership, school capacities, teacher satisfaction levels, community dynamics, opportunities for capacity building, school committee activities, local organizational support, and safety measures.

Qualitative data from the open-ended questions were reviewed and analyzed based on common themes. The responses were examined to identify key insights and patterns related to teachers' motivations, healthcare management for students, recommendations for educational organizations, and strategies for sustaining education in conflict zones.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts Lowell under protocol 23-133-THA-EXM, effective February 5, 2024. The study adhered to ethical standards and guidelines, as reviewed and approved by the IRB.

5. Theoretical Framework

Collective Leadership Theory emphasizes the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities among multiple individuals rather than centralizing power and decision-making in a single leader. This approach values

collaboration, shared decision-making, and the synergistic benefits of diverse leadership contributions. In conflict zones, such as the educational settings in Karenni State, collective leadership can be particularly effective in mobilizing community resources, fostering resilience, and sustaining educational initiatives. The principles of distributed roles, collaborative decision-making, mutual influence, shared goals, and interdependence among members create a flexible and adaptive management structure that can better address the dynamic challenges of conflict-affected environments (Friedrich et al., 2009; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

In the context of this study on Karenni State, Collective Leadership Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how local educators and community members collaborate to sustain education amidst severe disruptions. By distributing leadership tasks across various members of the community, collective leadership helps in pooling resources and leveraging the diverse skills available within the community. This approach is particularly useful in managing the scarcity of educational materials and facilities in war-torn areas. The involvement of parents, local organizations, and other stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and commitment, which is crucial for sustaining educational initiatives. Building leadership capacity through training, fostering a collaborative culture, and encouraging community participation are essential strategies for implementing collective leadership effectively in these challenging environments. This study aims to highlight how these principles are applied in the Karenni region to maintain educational services despite the ongoing conflict (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Day et al., 2011).

6. Quantitative Findings

6.1 Key Demographic and Educational Characteristics

The survey data revealed that a significant portion of teachers in Karenni State are young women. Specifically, 87.95% of the participants were female, and 61.85% were university students (Table 1). This highlights the critical role of educated women in these community-driven educational initiatives. Furthermore, the majority of teachers were volunteers (87.55%), with a significant number serving in primary schools (65.86%). This demonstrates a strong community commitment to sustaining education despite the ongoing conflict. Both local villagers (58.37%) and internally displaced persons (41.63%) were actively involved, underscoring the community's resilience and collaborative efforts.

Table 1. Demographic and Educational Characteristics of Teachers

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Township	Demawso	44	17.67
	Hpruso	24	9.64
	Loikaw	11	4.42
	Moby	41	16.47
	Pekon	129	51.81
	Total		249
Gender	Female	219	87.95
	Male	26	10.44
	Not mentioned	4	1.61
	Total	249	100
Education Level	Bachelor Degree	37	14.86
	Graduate Degree	6	2.41
	High School Student	49	19.68
	Not mentioned	3	1.2
	University Student	154	61.85
	Total	249	100
Living Condition	Internally Displaced	102	41.63
	Local Villager	143	58.37

	Total	245	100
School Level	High School	103	41.37
	Middle School	89	35.74
	Not mentioned	4	1.61
	Primary School	53	21.29
	Total	249	100
Role of Teaching	High School Teacher	15	6.02
	Middle School Teacher	61	24.5
	Not Mentioned	9	3.61
	Primary School Teacher	164	65.86
	Total	249	100
CDM or Volunteer	CDM	28	11.24
	Not Mentioned	3	1.2
	Volunteer	218	87.55
	Total	249	100

6.2 Teacher Perspectives on Headmaster Leadership Skills

Teachers' evaluations of their headmasters' leadership skills were largely positive, with 46.99% rating them as good and 19.28% as very good (Table 2). However, a small percentage (5.22%) indicated that significant improvements were needed. This feedback suggests that while the overall perception of leadership is strong, there are areas for development to enhance leadership effectiveness within these community-driven schools. Effective leadership is essential for mobilizing and maintaining collective efforts, supporting the theoretical emphasis on distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making.

Table 2. Teacher Perspectives on Headmaster Leadership Skills

Rating	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	48	19.28
Good	117	46.99
Average	47	18.88
Needs Improvement	9	3.61
Needs Significant Improvement	4	1.61
Not Mentioned	20	8.03
Total	249	100

6.3 Capacity and Resilience of Community-Driven Schools

Despite significant challenges, 27.71% of the community-driven schools catered to over 200 students (Table 3), demonstrating the community's resilience and commitment to education. Additionally, 21.69% of schools served between 101 and 150 students, indicating that these grassroots efforts can handle large student populations. This reflects the effectiveness of community-driven educational management and leadership in sustaining educational initiatives amid ongoing conflict.

Table 3. Capacity of Community-Driven Schools

Total Students in School	Frequency	Percent
Above 200 students	69	27.71%
Between 151 and 200 students	21	8.43%
Between 101 and 150 students	54	21.69%
Between 81 and 100 students	24	9.64%
Between 50 and 80 students	32	12.85%
Less than 50 students	39	15.66%
Not Mentioned	10	4.02%
Total	249	100.00%

6.4 Teacher Satisfaction in Conflict-Affected Areas

Teacher satisfaction levels were notably high, with 65.40% of teachers reporting being satisfied and 15.19% being very satisfied with their roles (Table 4). Only a small percentage were dissatisfied or unsure. This high satisfaction reflects the resilience and commitment of teachers in sustaining educational initiatives. The positive feedback indicates that teachers feel supported and valued in their roles, which can be attributed to the collaborative efforts and shared leadership within these community-driven educational settings.

Table 4. Teacher Satisfaction Levels in Conflict-Affected Areas

Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Percent
I am not satisfied at all	8	3.38%
I am not sure	10	4.22%
I am not very satisfied	28	11.81%
I am satisfied	155	65.40%
I am very satisfied	36	15.19%
Total	237	100%

6.5 Community and Relationship Dynamics

Teachers reported predominantly positive relationships with parents, community members, students, and colleagues. A significant 67.07% of teachers described their relationship with parents and community members as good, and 60.24% indicated a good relationship with their students (Table 5). Additionally, 85.94% of teachers have a good relationship with their colleagues. These findings underscore the strength of community bonds and the collaborative nature of these educational efforts. Effective educational initiatives in conflict zones heavily rely on positive community relationships and collaboration.

Table 5. Community and Relationship Dynamics

Relationship	Category	Frequency	Percent
Parents and Community	In a good relationship	167	67.07%
	In a very good relationship	11	4.42%
	Not Mentioned	8	3.21%
	Not in a very good relationship	10	4.02%
	Not sure	53	21.29%
	Total	249	100.00%
Relationship with Students	In a good relationship	150	60.24%
	In a very good relationship	4	1.61%
	Need to build a stronger relationship	8	3.21%
	Neither good nor bad relationship	73	29.32%
	Not Mentioned	14	5.62%
	Total	249	100.00%
Relationship with Colleagues	In a good relationship	214	85.94%
	In a very good relationship	19	7.63%
	Not Mentioned	10	4.02%
	Not in a very good relationship	6	2.41%
	Total	249	100.00%

6.6 Opportunities for Capacity Building

While 65.86% of teachers reported having some opportunities to build their teaching capacity, 16.06% indicated having limited opportunities (Table 6). Ensuring robust capacity-building initiatives is essential for enhancing teacher effectiveness and sustaining educational initiatives. This highlights the need for targeted support to improve professional development opportunities for teachers in these challenging environments.

Table 6. Opportunities for Capacity Building

Opportunity Level	Frequency	Percent
Less opportunity	40	16.06%
Not Mentioned	8	3.21%
Many opportunities	37	14.86%
Some opportunities	164	65.86%
Total	249	100%

6.7 School Committee Formation and Meeting Frequency

A high level of community organization was evident, with 93.17% of teachers reporting that their camps or villages have formed school committees (Table 7). Most of these committees hold monthly meetings (47.39%), while 42.17% meet as needed. This regular interaction between teachers and committees demonstrates a structured approach to community-driven educational management. Regular meetings are crucial for maintaining coordination and addressing challenges collaboratively.

Table 7. School Committee Formation and Meeting Frequency

Category	Frequency	Percent
School Committee Formation		
No, we don't have	10	4.02%
Not Mentioned	7	2.81%
Yes, we have	232	93.17%
Meeting Frequency		
Not Mentioned	13	5.22%
Bi-weekly meetings	3	1.20%
Monthly meetings	118	47.39%
No regular meetings, meet as needed	105	42.17%
Unknown	6	2.41%
Weekly meetings	4	1.61%
Total	249	100%

6.8 Support From Local Organizations

Support from local organizations plays a vital role in sustaining educational initiatives. As reported by 63.05% of teachers, local organizations provide substantial help, while 14.86% stated that they receive the best possible support (Table 8). However, 16.87% noted limited assistance. This support is essential for overcoming resource constraints and maintaining educational services in conflict-affected areas.

Table 8. Support from Local Organizations

Category	Frequency	Percent
Not Mentioned	13	5.22%
They always support at their best	37	14.86%
They do not help that much	42	16.87%
They have been helping to an extent	157	63.05%
Total	249	100%

6.9 Presence of Bomb Pits in Schools

Safety measures, such as the presence of bomb pits in 58.54% of schools (Table 9), highlight the serious safety considerations necessary to sustain educational activities in conflict-affected areas. The community's efforts to protect both students and educators underscore the harsh conditions under which education is being provided and the resilience required to maintain it.

Table 9. Presence of Bomb Pits in Schools

Category	Frequency	Percent
No, we don't have	99	40.24%
Not Mentioned	3	1.22%
Yes, we have	144	58.54%
Total	246	100%

7. Qualitative Insights

7.1 Motivations to Become a Teacher in Conflict-Affected Areas

Teachers expressed a strong desire to help rebuild disrupted education and support children and their families. Statements like *"every child should have access to any school in any situation"* and *"I want to help rebuild the disrupted education for the kids"* reflect their profound commitment. This motivation is crucial for sustaining educational initiatives in such challenging conditions.

7.2 Healthcare Management for School Children

Teachers often take on significant responsibilities in managing healthcare for school children, working alongside health workers, parents, and village committee members. One teacher noted, *"We collaborate with health workers and village committees to ensure the well-being of our students."* This collaborative approach highlights the importance of community-driven efforts in sustaining essential services amidst ongoing conflict.

7.3 Recommendations for Local and International Educational Organizations

Teachers emphasized the need for local and international educational organizations to recognize their graduation certificates, establish better learning centers, and provide basic educational needs such as writing tools and learning aids. They also recommended special scholarships for children in conflict-affected areas. One teacher stated, *"Recognizing our certificates and providing basic educational tools are crucial steps."* These recommendations reflect the principles of community-driven educational management and collective leadership.

7.4 Sustaining Education in Conflict-Affected Areas

Teachers highlighted the need for support from NGOs, financial aid for teachers, and provision of educational materials. Suggestions included *"Encourage support from NGOs"* and *"Provide financial support for teachers."* Collaboration among CDM teachers, volunteers, and the community was emphasized, with a focus on unity and cooperative efforts. Statements such as *"Continue working together cooperatively"* and *"There should be more qualified teachers to ensure quality education"* underscore the critical role of collective leadership and community involvement in maintaining educational initiatives amidst conflict.

8. Discussion

The findings strongly align with the principles of Collective Leadership Theory, which emphasizes distributed leadership and collaboration (Friedrich et al., 2009). The positive evaluations of headmasters' leadership skills and high levels of teacher satisfaction underscore the effectiveness of shared leadership in these community-driven schools (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). The involvement of young, educated women as volunteers highlights the critical role of community members in sustaining education, supporting the notion that community involvement enhances resilience (Davies, 2013; Tauson & Stannard, 2018).

The substantial capacity of community-driven schools, despite resource constraints, demonstrates the community's resilience and adaptive strategies. This supports existing research on the importance of flexible management structures in conflict zones (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Spillane, 2006). The strong positive relationships among teachers, parents, and students reflect the importance of community bonds in maintaining educational continuity (Harris, 2008).

The findings regarding limited capacity-building opportunities indicate a need for targeted support to improve professional development for teachers, aligning with literature on the importance of teacher capacity in sustaining education (Cervantes-Duarte & Fernández-Cano, 2016). The vital role of local organizations in providing support underscores the importance of external partnerships in overcoming resource constraints (Barron, 2011).

The presence of bomb pits in schools highlights the harsh conditions under which education is provided and the community's efforts to ensure safety. This aligns with the necessity for adaptive strategies in conflict-affected areas (Rai, 2020).

In summary, the study highlights the effectiveness of community-driven educational initiatives in the Karenni region through collective leadership, strong community involvement, and adaptive strategies. These findings provide actionable insights for enhancing educational resilience in conflict zones globally.

9. Conclusion

The study provides valuable insights into the resilience and adaptive strategies of community-driven educational initiatives in the Karenni region. The findings illustrate the effective application of Collective Leadership Theory in sustaining education amidst conflict. The positive evaluations of leadership, high teacher satisfaction, strong

community relationships, and substantial support from local organizations highlight the collaborative and resilient nature of these initiatives.

To further enhance educational resilience in conflict-affected areas, it is crucial to address the identified gaps in professional development opportunities and ensure continued support from local and international organizations. Recognizing the efforts and qualifications of local educators, providing necessary resources, and fostering community involvement are essential steps towards sustaining education in these challenging environments.

By understanding these dynamics, this study offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and practitioners involved in education in conflict zones, thereby contributing to the development of effective strategies to support education globally in similar contexts.

10. Limitations and Future Study

This study is limited by its focus on a specific region and the use of self-reported data from teachers, which may introduce bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the survey does not capture changes over time. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of community-driven educational initiatives and include perspectives from students, parents, and local leaders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape in conflict zones.

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