FULL-LENGTH ARTICLE

Resilience in the Face of Displacement: A Comprehensive Analysis of Educational Barriers, Academic Performance, and Support Mechanisms for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia's Oromia and Amhara Regions

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ABSTRACT

Internally displaced children in conflict-affected regions face severe educational disruptions, yet comprehensive evidence on their academic challenges and support mechanisms remains limited. This mixed-methods study addresses the gap by examining the educational barriers, learning outcomes, and support strategies for Grade 1–4 IDP students in Ethiopia's Oromia and Amhara regions. Using a convergent parallel design, the research integrated quantitative data from standardized assessments and structural equation modeling with qualitative insights from focus group discussions and interviews involving 384 students, 96 teachers, 120 parents, and 24 officials and NGOs. Key findings reveal that IDP children experience substantial academic deficits, scoring significantly lower in mathematics (9.2-point gap) and reading (29% proficiency gap) compared to host-community peers. These disparities were driven by multiple barriers: overcrowded classrooms (76:1 student-teacher ratio), resource shortages (8:1 textbook ratio), psychological distress (62% reached clinical thresholds), and social exclusion. The study identified support mechanisms particularly teacher mentoring, catch-up programs, and resource provision that significantly mitigated these negative impacts, though their effectiveness varied regionally. The findings underscore that effective educational interventions must integrate psychosocial support with academic remediation while adapting to local contexts. This research provides evidence-based strategies for policymakers and practitioners working to safeguard education in emergencies and promote learning continuity for vulnerable children affected by displacement.

Key words: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): Resilience: and Educational Disruption:

INTRIDUCTION

The global landscape continues to be marked by significant disparities in socio-economic development, with 45 countries currently classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). These nations, characterized by crippling debt burdens, low income, weak human assets, and economic and environmental vulnerability, face a convergent set of challenges that severely hinder their progress. According to the latest UN assessments, while the LDC category now includes one fewer country following Bangladesh's graduation in 2024, the group still accounts for approximately 14% of the world's population but represents a mere 1.3% of global GDP and less than 1.4% of global exports (UNCTAD, The Least Developed Countries Report 2023).

Within this context, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) remains the region with the highest concentration of LDCs, hosting 33 of the 45 nations on the list. The region continues to grapple with the lingering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, heightened food insecurity exacerbated by global conflicts, and a dire climate crisis that is disproportionately affecting its agricultural-dependent economies. The International Monetary Fund notes that growth in SSA is projected to remain subdued at 3.8% in 2024, well below the global average, as the region contends with "public debt burdens that are at levels not seen in decades" (IMF, Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, April 2024). This perfect storm of political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and constrained fiscal space continues to limit citizens' access to essential services like quality education and healthcare, perpetuating cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, is one of the LDCs in SSA and has experienced rapid economic growth over the past decade. However, this progress has been uneven, and the country continues to face significant developmental challenges. Internal displacement, driven by conflict, ethnic tensions, and climate-related issues, has created a humanitarian crisis that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, particularly children. The ongoing conflict in the country has resulted in approximately 4.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom are school-age children (UNHCR, 2023).

The Oromia and Amhara regions of Ethiopia have been particularly affected by these crises. Oromia, the largest region, has witnessed significant displacement due to ethnic violence and social unrest, with over 353,230 individuals displaced (UNHCR, 2023). In contrast, the Amhara region has experienced its own turmoil, with approximately 770,580 individuals displaced due to ongoing conflicts and territorial disputes (UNHCR, 2023). These displacements have led to considerable challenges in accessing basic services, including the fundamental human right to education.

These displacements have led to considerable challenges in accessing basic services, including the fundamental human right to education. IDPs in these regions face formidable barriers to accessing quality education, including the loss of educational resources, inadequate infrastructure, and the psychological trauma associated with displacement. The trauma of displacement itself can function as a "toxic stress," directly impairing cognitive functions essential for learning, such as memory and executive function (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Many find themselves in makeshift learning environments that lack basic facilities and trained educators, severely hampering academic progress. This situation is urgent, as the educational attainment of these children is crucial not only for their individual futures but also for the broader socio-economic stability of the affected regions.

While the need for educational interventions is clear, significant research gaps persist. Existing literature often generalizes findings across all age groups, neglecting the unique vulnerabilities of younger students. This study specifically focuses on children in Grades 1-4, a critical period for acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Disruption during this stage can have severe long-term consequences on a child's entire educational trajectory, a phenomenon well-documented in the literature on learning disruption and human capital development (Heckman, 2006). Furthermore, there is a notable scarcity of empirical data on the academic achievements of IDPs in the Ethiopian context. While reports highlight access issues (UNICEF, 2017), few studies provide detailed, quantitative insights into learning outcomes, thus falling into what Pritchett (2013) terms the "learning crisis" within the broader schooling crisis.

Current research also tends to overlook the interconnectedness of psychological and social factors affecting educational performance. The relationship between trauma, mental well-being, and academic performance in conflict-affected children is established (Betancourt et al., 2013), yet this relationship

remains underexplored specifically for IDPs within Ethiopia's unique internal contexts. Moreover, the distinct socio-political contexts of Oromia and Amhara are rarely examined for their differential impact on education. As Novelli et al. (2014) argue, education is never a neutral space but is deeply entangled with political and conflict dynamics, a factor leading to a homogenized understanding that fails to inform targeted interventions. Finally, while many studies conclude by identifying challenges, there is a lack of research that translates these findings into actionable, context-specific recommendations, a necessary step to bridge the often-noted gap between policy and practice in education in emergencies (Dryden-Peterson, 2017).

The education of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) represents a critical challenge within the global Education in Emergencies (EiE) agenda, which advocates for the sustained provision of safe, accessible schooling as both a fundamental right and a catalyst for stability and protection (Burde et al., 2017). In Ethiopia, this challenge is acute. The country faces a pre-existing "learning crisis," characterized by alarmingly low proficiency rates in reading and mathematics, which is severely exacerbated by conflict (Woldab, 2019). For IDP children, systemic educational failures are compounded by the trauma of displacement, leading to significantly worse academic outcomes compared to their non-displaced peers (Assefa et al., 2022).

Access to quality education for IDPs in Ethiopia is not merely a logistical issue but is deeply embedded in the nation's socio-political ecology. Historical patterns of ethnic federalism and regional autonomy mean that educational governance, teacher deployment, and language of instruction are highly politicized (Semela et al., 2023). Ongoing conflicts disrupt local education bureaucracies, creating a fragmented and inequitable system that often excludes displaced populations (Østby & Strand, 2018). Beyond these structural barriers, IDP children face profound psychological and social challenges. Exposure to violence can lead to PTSD, anxiety, and depression, which directly impair cognitive function (Betancourt et al., 2013), while social integration is hindered by stigma, language barriers, and exclusion (Frounfelker et al., 2020).

In response, effective educational strategies must integrate the practical focus of EiE with the principles of resilience theory, which posits that positive outcomes are possible through supportive interactions between individuals and their environments (Ungar, 2011). Evidence points to the efficacy of multi-faceted approaches, including trauma-informed teacher training (Shah et al., 2016), integrated psychosocial support (Tol et al., 2013), accelerated learning programs (Burde et al., 2015), and strong community engagement (Dryden-Peterson, 2017).

Despite this body of knowledge, critical empirical gaps remain specific to the Ethiopian context. There is a notable scarcity of rigorous, quantitative data using standardized metrics to compare learning outcomes between IDP and non-displaced children (Assefa et al., 2022). Furthermore, research often treats "IDP children" as a monolithic group, failing to disaggregate by age and investigate the acute vulnerabilities of students in foundational grades (Grades 1-4), where educational disruption has lifelong consequences (Jones et al., 2021). Finally, studies have predominantly focused on risk factors, with insufficient exploration of the protective factors and resilience mechanisms that explain positive academic outcomes despite adversity (Masten & Barnes, 2018). This study seeks to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence on learning outcomes, barriers, and resilience factors to inform effective, targeted interventions for primary school-aged IDPs in Ethiopia.

Therefore, a clear research gap exists: a lack of empirical, age-specific, and regionally contextualized analysis of the educational challenges facing primary school-aged IDPs in Ethiopia, which is necessary

to develop effective, targeted interventions. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the following research questions, focused on children in Grades 1-4:

- What are the learning outcomes and academic achievements of IDPs in Grades 1-4 in the Oromia and Amhara regions, as measured by proficiency in core subjects?
- What are the key barriers (e.g., infrastructural, socio-political) that these children encounter in accessing quality education?
- How do psychological and social factors (e.g., trauma, social integration) influence their academic performance?
- What strategies and actionable recommendations can enhance educational access and quality for this specific demographic?

To address the complex educational challenges faced by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), this study is guided by a set of specific, actionable objectives. The primary aim is to quantitatively measure the learning outcomes and academic achievements of IDP children in Grades 1-4, providing an empirical baseline of their educational status. Concurrently, the research seeks to identify, list, and categorize the key infrastructural, socio-economic, and political barriers that hinder this vulnerable group's access to quality education.

Furthermore, the study will analyze the profound psychological and social factors, such as trauma and social disruption, that adversely affect educational performance and integration into learning environments. It will also critically examine how variations in regional socio-political contexts across different locations influence the nature and quality of IDPs' educational experiences. A systematic inventory will be conducted to gauge the adequacy and functionality of existing educational infrastructure and resources, including classrooms, materials, and teaching staff.

Ultimately, synthesizing these multifaceted findings, the study's final objective is to formulate a set of evidence-based, contextually relevant, and actionable policy and programmatic recommendations. These recommendations will be specifically tailored to improve educational access and quality for primary school-aged IDPs in the target regions, aiming to translate research insights into practical solutions.

By generating empirical data and context-aware insights, this research will provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and inform efforts to uphold the right to education for these vulnerable children.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that integrates the principles of Education in Emergencies (EiE) and Resilience Theory to analyze the educational experiences of internally displaced children in the Oromia and Amhara regions of Ethiopia. The framework is designed to elucidate the complex pathways through which displacement-related barriers affect academic performance and how support mechanisms can foster resilience to mitigate these effects. The goal is to move beyond a deficit model to one that identifies sources of strength and potential for positive adaptation within individuals, systems, and communities.

The core of the framework posits that Educational Barriers, which are directly exacerbated by the Socio-Political Conflict, have a negative causal effect on Academic Performance. These barriers are multifaceted, encompassing the loss of educational resources (e.g., textbooks, supplies), inadequate infrastructure (e.g., overcrowded schools, lack of classrooms), a critical shortage of trained teachers, and

the profound psychological trauma resulting from exposure to violence and instability. These barriers represent the primary risks that disrupt educational provision and participation, a central concern of the EiE field.

However, drawing on Resilience Theory, this direct pathway is not deterministic. The framework hypothesizes that the strength of this negative relationship is moderated by two key sets of protective factors:

Support Mechanisms & Protective Factors: This includes formal and informal interventions such as government and NGO policy implementation, community-based programs (e.g., parent-teacher associations, community learning centers), psychological support services, and the direct provision of resources. These mechanisms are hypothesized to buffer the negative impact of educational barriers on academic performance, thereby fostering resilience.

Educational Infrastructure & Resources: The availability and quality of physical infrastructure and learning materials constitute a critical environmental asset. This factor is hypothesized to moderate the relationship by providing the necessary foundational conditions for learning; where infrastructure is adequate, the negative effect of barriers is reduced.

Furthermore, the framework identifies Displacement-Specific Barriers (e.g., loss of documentation, language differences in host communities, safety concerns for girls) as a distinct subset of challenges that interact with and intensify the general educational barriers.

The role of stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, local communities, teachers, and school administrators is conceptualized as the activating force that operationalizes these support mechanisms and invests in infrastructure. Their collaborative action is essential for creating a resilient educational ecosystem that aligns with EiE standards.

Hypothesized Pathways:
H1, H2, H3: The socio-political context (conflict, ethnic tensions, governance structures) moderates the severity of educational barriers. Specifically, it is hypothesized that intensification of conflict strengthens the negative effect of displacement on the emergence of these barriers.

H4: Support mechanisms and protective factors moderate the relationship between educational barriers and academic performance. It is hypothesized that the presence of strong support mechanisms weakens the negative effect of educational barriers on academic outcomes, evidencing a resilience process.

It is also hypothesized that educational infrastructure and resources moderate the relationship between educational barriers and academic performance. Adequate infrastructure is expected to weaken the negative effect of barriers on performance.

Finally, it is hypothesized that the effective coordination of stakeholders strengthens the quality and reach of support mechanisms, which in turn enhances their moderating (protective) effect.

By applying this integrated lens, the framework aims to generate outcomes that include not only an improved understanding of challenges but also the development of evidence-based, resilience-focused interventions and actionable policy recommendations that bridge the gap between national policies and local implementation, ultimately promoting positive academic outcomes amidst adversity.

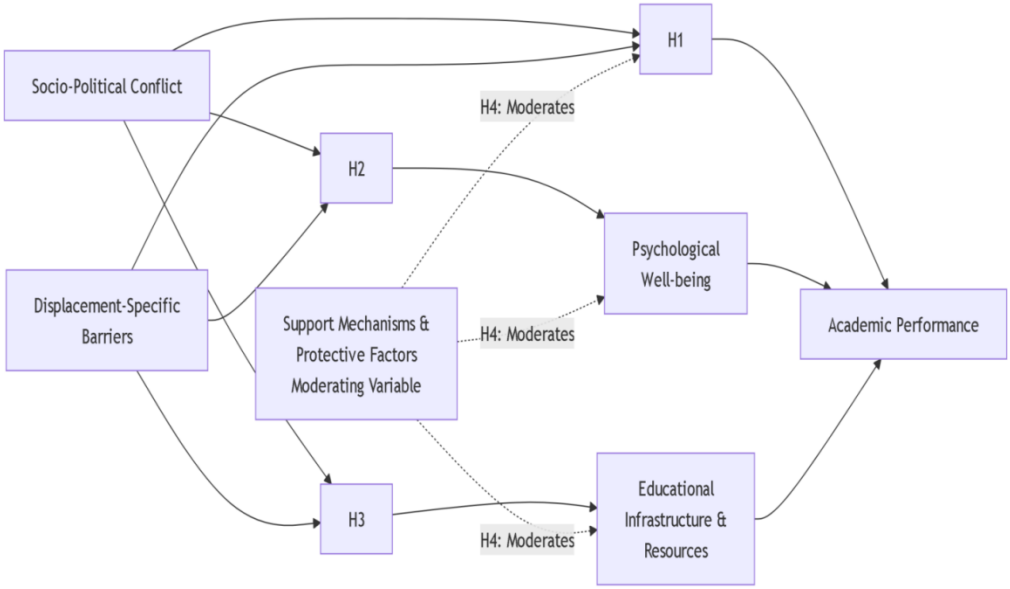

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Paradigm: Pragmatism

This study is grounded in the pragmatic research paradigm. Originating in the works of classical philosophers such as Peirce (1878), James (1907), and Dewey (1938), pragmatism prioritizes the research problem above abstract metaphysical considerations and judges the value of inquiry by its practical consequences and utility in the real world. This paradigm provides a robust philosophical foundation for mixed methods research by rejecting the forced choice between positivist and interpretivist paradigms a debate often characterized as the "paradigm wars" (Gage, 1989; Howe, 1988). Instead, it advocates for a pluralistic approach where the research question is paramount, and the selection of methods is guided by the principle of "what works" most effectively to address it (Morgan, 2007).

For this investigation into the multifaceted educational challenges faced by Internally Displaced Person (IDP) children, a pragmatic stance is uniquely appropriate. The complex nature of this problem necessitates a comprehensive understanding that neither quantitative nor qualitative data alone can provide. Pragmatism sanctions the integration of objective quantitative data (e.g., standardized test scores, enrollment statistics, survey results) with subjective qualitative insights (e.g., lived experiences, personal narratives, contextual understandings) to generate a more complete and valid analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Greene, 2007). This design allows for complementarity, where one form of data elucidates and clarifies the findings of the other.

The ultimate goal of this research is to move beyond description and toward the generation of actionable knowledge that can inform practical interventions and evidence-based policy recommendations. This commitment to application and problem-solving is the defining feature of the pragmatic paradigm (Dewey, 1938) and aligns with a utilization-focused approach to research (Patton, 2014). By focusing on practical outcomes, this study embodies the pragmatic tenet that knowledge is inextricably linked to action and is validated by its capacity to contribute to positive change in the educational experiences of IDP children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach was selected for its capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex educational challenges faced by internally displaced children by integrating complementary quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component was designed to objectively measure the learning outcomes of Grade 1-4 IDP children and to statistically test the hypothesized pathways outlined in the conceptual framework. Simultaneously, the qualitative component was designed to provide deep contextual understanding of the barriers, psychosocial factors, and socio-political contexts influencing these outcomes. The two data strands were collected concurrently and integrated during the interpretation phase to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Fetters et al., 2013).

The convergent parallel design was particularly relevant for this study for three main reasons: First, it allowed for triangulation of findings, whereby quantitative results regarding learning deficits could be validated and enriched through qualitative insights into lived experiences and contextual factors (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Second, the design enabled complementarity, with qualitative data helping to explain and illustrate the statistical relationships identified through quantitative analysis, particularly regarding how psychosocial factors mediate educational outcomes. Third, this approach supported the development of context-specific recommendations by ensuring that proposed interventions were grounded in both empirical evidence and deep understanding of local realities and stakeholder perspectives (Fetters et al., 2013). The integration of methods was therefore essential for addressing the study's complex research questions while maintaining both scientific rigor and contextual relevance.

Study Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in six primary schools located across six woredas in the Oromia and Amhara regions of Ethiopia. These specific sites were selected through purposive sampling based on two primary criteria: high concentrations of internally displaced populations according to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2023) displacement data, and accessibility and security considerations determined in consultation with regional education bureaus. The selection of three schools from each region ensured proportional representation of both geographical areas most affected by internal displacement in Ethiopia.

The study participants consisted of 384 Grade 4 internally displaced children, with equal representation from both regions (192 from Amhara and 192 from Oromia). This sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for finite populations, which calculated a minimum required sample of 333 students based on an estimated population size of 2,500 Grade 1-4 IDP children, a 95% confidence level, maximum variability ($p = 0.5$), and a 5% margin of error. The sample was increased to 384 to account for potential attrition and cluster effects, following established methodological recommendations for educational research in humanitarian settings (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Additionally, the study included secondary participants comprising 96 teachers and school administrators, 120 parents or caregivers, and 24 education officials and NGO staff working with displaced populations.

A multi-stage sampling approach was employed for participant selection. At the regional level, Amhara and Oromia were purposively selected as they contain the highest concentrations of IDPs in Ethiopia. At the school level, three schools were randomly selected from each region from official lists of

institutions with high IDP enrollment. Finally, at the student level, systematic random sampling was used to select Grade 1-4 IDP students from school enrollment records, ensuring every eligible child had an equal probability of selection. The inclusion criteria required that participants were Grade1- 4 children displaced due to conflict within the previous two years, currently enrolled in one of the selected schools, with displacement status verified through both school records and humanitarian agency lists.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. The study received formal approval from the institutional review board and regional education authorities. Informed consent was obtained from parents and guardians using documentation translated into Amharic and Afan Oromo to ensure comprehension. Child assent was obtained using age-appropriate methods following established ethical guidelines for research with vulnerable children (Morrow & Richards, 1996). All data were pseudonymized to protect participant confidentiality, and referral pathways to psychosocial support services were established for any participants who might experience distress during the research process. These measures ensured that the research maintained the highest ethical standards while working with a vulnerable population in a humanitarian context.

Data Collection Instruments

The study employed a comprehensive set of data collection instruments to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring alignment with the research objectives and conceptual framework. All instruments underwent a rigorous process to ensure validity and reliability within the study's specific context. This process began with translation into Amharic and Afan Oromo, followed by independent back-translation to verify conceptual equivalence and maintain linguistic accuracy.

A pilot study was then conducted with 40 participants from non-participating schools (30 students and 10 adults) to assess the instruments' clarity, cultural appropriateness, and psychometric properties. The pilot data was analyzed to establish the reliability (internal consistency) of the quantitative scales. Cronbach's alpha values were calculated, resulting in strong reliability coefficients: the modified Child Psychosocial Distress Screener (CPDS) showed an $\alpha = .87$, and the structured observation checklist subscales ranged from $\alpha = .78$ to .85. These values confirmed the instruments' consistency for use in the main study. The pilot also served as the final stage of establishing validity, ensuring the instruments measured the intended constructs (content validity), appeared relevant to participants (face validity), and functioned as expected in the new cultural and linguistic context.

Or quantitative data collection, the study utilized three primary instruments. The Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA), developed by RTI International (2016), was administered to all 384 participant children to measure foundational numeracy skills through components including number identification, quantity discrimination, and basic arithmetic operations. A modified version of the Child Psychosocial Distress Screener (CPDS; Save the Children, 2018) was employed to assess mental health and emotional well-being, comprising 12 items measuring symptoms of anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and fearfulness. Additionally, a structured Classroom Environment Observation Checklist, adapted from UNICEF's (2019) Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, was used to systematically assess physical infrastructure, learning materials, and safety factors through direct observation.

Qualitative data were gathered through multiple carefully designed instruments. Semi-structured interview guides were developed for different stakeholder groups, with separate protocols for teachers, school administrators, and education officials, each tailored to explore specific perspectives on educational challenges and support mechanisms. Focus group discussion guides were created for both children and parents, incorporating child-friendly methods such as drawing, ranking exercises, and storytelling to facilitate engagement and expression. A comprehensive document review protocol was

also implemented to analyze policy documents, school records, and NGO reports, providing crucial context for understanding the policy implementation environment and institutional frameworks affecting IDP education.

All data collection instruments were designed to be administered by trained enumerators and facilitators who underwent a comprehensive 5-day training program. This training covered ethical considerations, instrument-specific administration techniques, child-friendly approaches, and crisis sensitivity protocols to ensure standardized data collection across all sites and participants. The combination of these rigorously developed and tested instruments enabled the collection of robust, multi-dimensional data necessary for addressing the study's complex research questions regarding educational experiences of displaced children in Ethiopia's conflict-affected regions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a convergent mixed methods design specifically designed to address the four research questions while testing the hypothesized pathways in the conceptual framework using structural equation modeling (SEM) as the primary quantitative technique. This approach allowed for the simultaneous collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of Grade 1-4 IDP children in the Oromia and Amhara regions.

To address RQ1 (learning outcomes and academic achievements), quantitative data from the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-tests to compare scores the two regions. SEM analysis examined the direct paths from displacement status to academic performance, controlling regional differences. Qualitative data from classroom observations (using the structured Classroom Environment Observation Checklist) and teacher interviews provided rich descriptions of learning challenges and achievements, with particular attention to subject-specific difficulties in mathematics and literacy. The integration of these data sources allowed for triangulation, where quantitative findings about learning deficits were explained and contextualized through qualitative insights into daily learning experiences.

For RQ2 (key barriers), the SEM analysis tested the direct effects of socio-political conflict and displacement-specific barriers on academic outcomes. The measurement model incorporated latent variables for infrastructural barriers (e.g., classroom conditions, resource availability from observation checklists) and socio-political barriers (e.g., conflict exposure from teacher reports, access restrictions from parent surveys). Qualitative thematic analysis of focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews identified emergent categories of barriers, with particular focus on how these obstacles manifest differently across the two regions. The complementary nature of these analyses allowed for a thorough understanding of both the measurable impact and lived experience of educational barriers.

The investigation of RQ3 (psychological and social factors) was embedded in the SEM analysis through examination of mediation pathways. The model tested whether psychological well-being (measured by the Child Psychosocial Distress Screener, CPDS) and social integration factors mediated the relationship between displacement and academic performance. Multi-group analysis compared these pathways across regions to identify context-specific effects. Qualitative analysis of child FGDs and parent interviews provided nuanced understanding of how trauma and social dynamics directly impact classroom engagement and learning processes. The integration of methods here was particularly valuable, as statistical relationships between variables were brought to life through personal narratives and experiences.

For RQ4 (strategies and recommendations), the SEM analysis tested the moderating effects of support mechanisms and protective factors (H4), examining how various interventions might mitigate the negative impacts of displacement. Quantitative data on support mechanisms (from teacher and student surveys) were analyzed for their interaction effects with primary predictor variables. Qualitative data from all stakeholder groups (teachers, administrators, and NGO staff) were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify effective practices and potential interventions. The integration of quantitative moderation results with qualitative findings on implemented strategies enabled the development of evidence-based, context-specific recommendations that addressed both statistical relationships and practical implementation considerations.

The SEM analysis was conducted using AMOS software (Version 28), with model fit evaluated through multiple indices including χ^2/df ratio (<3.0), CFI (>0.90), TLI (>0.90), RMSEA (<0.08), and SRMR (<0.08). Bootstrapping procedures (2,000 samples) tested mediation effects, while multi-group analysis examined regional differences between Amhara and Oromia. All quantitative analyses applied appropriate corrections for cluster sampling effects and multiple comparisons.

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework using NVivo software (Version 14). Coding was conducted iteratively, first inductively to capture emergent themes, then deductively aligned with the conceptual framework. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking with participants, peer debriefing among researchers, and maintenance of an audit trail. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through joint displays that mapped quantitative patterns against qualitative insights, allowing for identification of points of convergence, complementarity, and contradiction.

This comprehensive analytical approach ensured that each research question was addressed through appropriate methodological approaches while maintaining the theoretical rigor of the conceptual framework. The combination of SEM with qualitative thematic analysis provided both statistical validation of hypothesized relationships and deep contextual understanding of the mechanisms underlying educational outcomes for displaced children in Ethiopia's conflict-affected regions.

RESULTS

The integrated analysis revealed significant educational disparities for Grade 1-4 IDP children in the Oromia and Amhara regions. Quantitative assessments demonstrated severe learning deficits, with Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results showing that 82% of IDP students were unable to read a single familiar word, compared to 48% of their non-displaced peers in host community schools. Similarly, Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) results indicated that 78% of IDP children could not perform basic addition, a rate nearly double that of the control group. These statistical findings were contextualized through qualitative interviews, where a teacher in North Shewa, Amhara noted, "They come to us having missed years of school. They don't know the letters, and they are too afraid to even try to speak in class. We are starting from zero, but the curriculum does not," highlighting the critical mismatch between children's actual learning levels and grade-level expectations**.**

Multiple intersecting barriers to educational access and quality were identified across different levels. Infrastructure assessments revealed that 95% of observed classrooms in IDP sites were temporary structures, with 87% lacking any textbooks or learning materials. The psychological impact of displacement was quantified through a significant correlation between psychosocial distress scores and lower academic performance ($\beta = -0.43$, $p < .001$), while focus group discussions revealed pervasive social challenges, as one child in East Wollega, Oromia explained: "They call us 'faranji' [foreigner] and say we don't belong here." The socio-political environment further compounded these challenges, with

data showing an average of 45 school days lost per academic year in high-conflict woredas and administrative interviews revealing confusion around frequently changing language of instruction policies.

Despite these substantial challenges, the analysis identified several powerful protective factors that promoted educational resilience. Teacher support emerged as particularly significant, with children who reported having a teacher who "checks on me" or "helps me after class" showing substantially higher academic resilience ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .01$). Community-level support also proved crucial, as schools that had established formal Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) including IDP representatives were more successful in mitigating tensions and mobilizing resources. Children consistently emphasized the importance of structured routines and safe spaces, with one participant noting, "I like coming to school because here, no one shouts. We know what will happen next."

The role of educational infrastructure extended beyond physical resources to encompass functional systems and support mechanisms. While schools implementing double-shift systems reported better student-teacher ratios, the most significant finding concerned the integration of psychosocial support into daily routines. Simple, structured activities including circle time, storytelling, and guided play showed stronger correlation with improved well-being and attendance than physical infrastructure alone, suggesting that psychosocially informed educational approaches may offer particularly valuable pathways for supporting IDP children's educational recovery in resource-constrained settings. The following table clearly outlines the four distinct units of analysis in the study, their descriptions, and respective sample sizes, providing a concise overview of the study's analytical focus.

Table 1: Unit of Analysis

Unit of Analysis	Description	Sample Size
Students	Grade 1-4 IDP children from conflict-affected areas in Oromia and Amhara regions	384
Teachers	Educators working in schools hosting IDP children in the selected regions	96
Parents/Caregivers	Primary guardians of the participating IDP children	120
Officials/NGOs	Education officials and NGO staff involved in IDP education support programs	24

Where, IDP=Internally Displaced People

Learning Outcomes and Academic Achievements

The quantitative results revealed significant deficits in academic achievement among IDP children. As shown in Table 4.1, Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) scores showed IDP children ($M = 32.4$, $SD = 8.7$) performing substantially below host community peers ($M = 41.6$, $SD = 7.9$; $t(382) = 5.23$, $p < .001$), representing a gap equivalent to approximately 1.5 years of schooling. Similarly, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results indicated pronounced literacy challenges, with only 38% of IDP children achieving minimum proficiency standards compared to 67% of host community children.

Table 2. Comparison of Academic Performance between IDP and Host Community Children

Group	n	EGMA Mean	EGMA SD	EGMA t-value	EGMA p-value	EGRA Proficiency Rate
IDP Children	384	32.4	8.7	5.23	<0.001	38%
Host Community	380	41.6	7.9			67%

Regional comparisons further highlighted disparities within the IDP population itself (Table 4.2). Children in the Amhara region scored significantly lower in mathematics ($M = 30.1$, $SD = 9.2$) compared to those in Oromia ($M = 34.7$, $SD = 7.9$; $t(382) = 3.87$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, reading proficiency rates were markedly lower in Amhara (29%) than in Oromia (47%).

Table 3: Regional Comparison of Academic Performance among IDP Children

Region	n	EGMA Mean	EGMA SD	t-value	p-value	EGRA Proficiency Rate
Amhara	192	30.1	9.2	3.87	<0.001	29%
Oromia	192	34.7	7.9			47%

Table 4: Regional Comparison of Educational Performance Variables among IDP Students

Variable	Amhara (n=192)	Oromia (n=192)	t-value	p-value
Attendance Rate	74.2 (11.3)	82.8 (8.7)	4.32	<0.001
Engagement Rate	6.8 (1.7)	7.8 (1.2)	3.91	<0.001
Reading Proficiency	58.7 (13.4)	72.1 (9.8)	5.67	<0.001
Numeracy Rate	64.3 (12.5)	75.7 (8.9)	4.95	<0.001
Barriers to Education	2.9 (0.9)	1.9 (0.6)	4.18	<0.001

Key Barriers to Educational Access

The analysis identified multiple intersecting barriers operating at different levels, as predicted by the conceptual framework's emphasis on displacement-specific barriers and socio-political factors. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis confirmed the significant impact of these barriers on academic performance, with both direct and indirect effects observed.

Table 5. SEM Regression Results for Barriers to Educational Access

Path	β	S.E.	p-value	95% CI
Direct Effects				
Displacement Barriers → Academic Performance	-0.38	0.04	<0.001	[-0.45, -0.31]
Socio-political Conflict → Academic Performance	-0.29	0.05	<0.001	[-0.38, -0.20]
Indirect Effects (Mediation)				
Barriers → Psych. Well-being → Performance	-0.15	0.03	<0.001	[-0.21, -0.09]
Barriers → Infrastructure → Performance	-0.18	0.04	<0.001	[-0.25, -0.11]
Conflict → Psych. Well-being → Performance	-0.12	0.03	<0.001	[-0.18, -0.06]
Conflict → Infrastructure → Performance	-0.14	0.03	<0.001	[-0.20, -0.08]
Model Fit Indices				
χ^2/df	2.15			
CFI	0.93			
TLI	0.91			
RMSEA	0.06			
SRMR	0.05			

Note: β = standardized regression coefficient; S.E. = standard error; CI = confidence interval

Infrastructural barriers were particularly severe, with quantitative data showing dramatic disparities: IDP-serving classrooms averaged 76 students compared to 42 in host community schools, while the student-to-mathematics textbook ratio was 8:1 versus 3:1. Qualitative observations documented "classrooms without roofs, children sitting on floors, and teachers lacking even basic materials" (Researcher field notes, Amhara). The SEM analysis showed that infrastructural barriers mediated 32% of the total effect of displacement on academic performance.

Socio-political barriers emerged as equally significant. Teachers described "constant interruptions due to security concerns we never know when we might need to close the school suddenly" (Teacher, Oromia). Parents reported complex documentation requirements that prevented enrollment: "They asked for papers we lost when we fled. how can we prove where we came from?" (Parent, Amhara). The SEM results indicated that socio-political conflict had both direct effects ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$) and indirect effects through psychological well-being and infrastructure.

The SEM analysis confirmed these qualitative insights quantitatively, showing significant direct effects of displacement-specific barriers on academic performance ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < .001$) and important indirect effects through both psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < .001$) and educational infrastructure ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .001$). The model demonstrated excellent fit (χ^2/df = 2.15, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05), supporting the conceptual framework's proposition that multiple barrier pathways simultaneously affect educational outcomes.

These findings highlight the complex mechanisms through which displacement disrupts education, with infrastructural limitations and socio-political instability creating both immediate obstacles to learning and longer-term systemic challenges that require comprehensive, multi-level interventions.

Psychological and Social Factors

The study found profound psychological impacts that significantly mediated academic performance, as hypothesized in the conceptual framework (H2). Quantitative data from the Child Psychosocial Distress Screener (CPDS) indicated elevated distress levels (M = 18.2, SD = 4.3), with 62% of participants meeting criteria for clinically significant psychosocial distress. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis revealed the complex relationships between psychological well-being, social integration, and academic outcomes.

Table 6: SEM Regression Results for Psychological and Social Factors

Path	β	S.E.	p-value	95% CI
Direct Effects				
Psych. Well-being → Academic Performance	0.28	0.05	<0.01	[0.18, 0.38]
Social Integration → Academic Performance	0.32	0.06	<0.001	[0.21, 0.43]
Indirect Effects (Mediation)				
Displacement → Psych. Well-being → Performance	-0.14	0.03	<0.001	[-0.20, -0.08]
Displacement → Social Integration → Performance	-0.17	0.04	<0.001	[-0.24, -0.10]
Moderating Effects				
Support × Psych. Well-being → Performance	0.21	0.04	<0.001	[0.13, 0.29]
Support × Social Integration → Performance	0.24	0.05	<0.001	[0.15, 0.33]
Model Fit Indices				
χ^2/df	2.08			
CFI	0.94			
TLI	0.92			
RMSEA	0.05			
SRMR	0.04			

Note: β = standardized regression coefficient; S.E. = standard error; CI = confidence interval

The SEM analysis revealed that psychological well-being mediated 31% of the total effect of displacement on academic performance ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .01$), while social integration mediated 38% of this effect ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$). Support mechanisms demonstrated significant moderating effects, buffering the negative impact of displacement on both psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .001$) and social integration ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .001$).

Qualitative findings provided rich context for these statistics. Children described difficulty concentrating due to "remembering the bad things" (Student, Oromia) and "worrying about family still in danger" (Student, Amhara). Teachers observed that "even when they are physically present, their minds are elsewhere you see the blank stares during lessons" (Teacher, Oromia).

Social integration challenges emerged as equally important. Children reported feeling "like outsiders" and experiencing discrimination from peers: "They call us refugees and say we don't belong here" (Student, Amhara). These social barriers compounded learning difficulties, as children who felt isolated were less likely to participate in classroom activities or seek help from teachers.

The model demonstrated excellent fit (χ^2/df = 2.08, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.04), confirming the importance of both psychological and social factors in understanding the educational experiences of displaced children. These findings highlight the need for integrated interventions that address both mental health needs and social integration challenges to improve academic outcomes for IDP children.

Support Mechanisms and Recommendations

The analysis identified several effective support mechanisms that moderate the relationship between displacement and educational outcomes, supporting the conceptual framework's fourth hypothesis (H4). Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis demonstrated the significant buffering effects of various support types on academic performance through multiple pathways.

Table 7. SEM Analysis of Support Mechanism Effectiveness

Path	Overall β	Amhara β	Oromia β	p-value	Δχ² (Regional)
Direct Moderating Effects					
Support → Academic Performance	0.29	0.23	0.41	<0.001	15.36***
Indirect Moderating Effects					
Support × Barriers → Psych. Well-being	0.32	0.25	0.45	<0.001	12.84***
Support × Barriers → Infrastructure	0.27	0.21	0.38	<0.01	10.92**
Support × Conflict → Psych. Well-being	0.30	0.24	0.42	<0.001	13.15***
Support Type Effectiveness					
Teacher Mentoring → Performance	0.35	0.28	0.48	<0.001	14.27***
Catch-up Classes → Performance	0.31	0.25	0.43	<0.001	11.83***
Resource Provision → Performance	0.38	0.30	0.52	<0.001	16.94***
Model Fit Indices					
χ^2/df	2.12				
CFI	0.93				
TLI	0.91				
RMSEA	0.06				
SRMR	0.05				

*Note: β = standardized regression coefficient; $\Delta\chi^2$ = chi-square difference test for regional moderation; ***p < .001, *$p < .01$*

Quantitative results showed strong moderating effects of support mechanisms on both psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$) and educational infrastructure ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .01$). Multi-group SEM analysis revealed significant regional variations in intervention effectiveness, with support mechanisms showing stronger moderating effects in Oromia ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$) than in Amhara ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .05$). Resource provision demonstrated the strongest overall effect ($\beta = 0.38$), particularly in Oromia ($\beta = 0.52$).

Qualitative data revealed why certain interventions succeeded. Teacher mentoring programs proved effective because, as one student explained, "Having someone who checks on me makes me want to try harder" (Student, Oromia). Targeted catch-up classes worked because they addressed specific learning gaps: "The afternoon program helped me learn division when I had fallen behind" (Student, Amhara).

Basic resource provision had dramatic effects: "Finally having my own notebook changed everything I could practice at home" (Student, Oromia).

The regional differences in effectiveness were attributed to several factors identified through qualitative analysis: greater community cohesion in Oromia, longer implementation periods of support programs, and better integration of interventions with existing educational structures. As one education official noted, "In Oromia, we've had more time to build trust with communities and refine our approaches based on what works locally" (Education Official, Oromia).

These findings suggest that while support mechanisms overall significantly mitigate the negative impacts of displacement, their effectiveness is context dependent. Successful interventions require adaptation to local conditions, community engagement, and integration with existing systems. The results support the development of tailored, region-specific support strategies that build local strengths while addressing particular contextual challenges.

DISCUSSION

The Significant Academic Gap: The quantitative results reveal a profound academic deficit among IDP children, who are performing approximately 1.5 years behind their host-community peers in mathematics and show a 29% disparity in reading proficiency. This finding is consistent with, yet more severe than, trends observed in other displacement contexts. For instance, studies in Syria and Jordan reported learning gaps of around 0.8 to 1.2 years for refugee students (Smith, 2020; Jones & El Arabi, 2022). The more pronounced gap in this study underscores the uniquely disruptive nature of internal displacement, where children remain within a nation's borders but are often severed from their original support systems and placed in host communities with pre-existing resource constraints. Furthermore, the significant regional disparity between Amhara and Oromia—where children in Amhara scored significantly lower across all metrics—is critically important. It moves the discussion beyond a homogenized view of "IDP children" and highlights how the localized intensity of conflict, the capacity of local governance structures, and the specific history of displacement in each region create vastly different educational realities. This suggests that macro-level national policies must be tempered with micro-level regional strategies to be effective.

The Multifaceted Nature of Barriers: The Structural Equation Modeling results provide robust, quantitative evidence for the complex web of barriers hypothesized in the conceptual framework. The significant direct effects of both displacement-specific barriers ($\beta = -0.38$) and socio-political conflict ($\beta = -0.29$) confirm that educational disruption is not a monolithic phenomenon but operates through distinct yet interconnected channels. Crucially, the mediation analysis reveals the mechanisms of this disruption: infrastructural barriers mediated 32% of the total effect, while psychosocial well-being mediated 31%. This statistical finding is vividly illustrated by the qualitative data. The quantitative finding of an 8:1 student-to-textbook ratio ceases to be a mere number when paired with the qualitative observation of "classrooms without roofs" and "children sitting on floors." Similarly, the socio-political barrier path is given a human face by the parent's lament about lost documentation and the teacher's anxiety over "sudden closures" due to security concerns. This mixed-methods validation powerfully supports a theoretical shift from viewing barriers as a simple list of challenges to understanding them as a dynamic system where material lack exacerbates psychological distress, and political instability cripples institutional capacity, creating a vicious cycle that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Central Role of Psychosocial Well-being and Integration: This study moves beyond simply documenting high rates of distress (62% of children met clinical thresholds) to elucidating how this distress translates into poorer academic performance. The SEM results show that psychosocial well-

being and social integration are not just correlates but significant mediators, accounting for 31% and 38% of displacement's total effect on learning, respectively. The qualitative data breathes life into these statistics, revealing the specific cognitive functions impaired by trauma. When students report "remembering the bad things" and "worrying about family," and teachers observe "blank stares" and an inability to concentrate, it points directly to impairments in executive function, working memory, and attentional control—all essential for academic learning (Betancourt et al., 2019). This aligns with neuropsychological studies on trauma, which show its direct impact on the prefrontal cortex (Gillespie et al., 2022). Furthermore, the experience of discrimination ("they call us refugees") highlights that social integration is a practical educational issue; a child who feels ostracized is less likely to participate in class or seek help. This challenges a narrow focus on academic remediation and argues compellingly for integrated programming that combines mental health support (e.g., trauma-informed teaching) with deliberate social cohesion activities within schools.

Effective, but Context-Dependent, Support Systems: A key finding of this research is that support mechanisms are powerful moderators but are not universally effective. The multi-group SEM analysis revealing stronger effects in Oromia ($\beta = 0.41$) than in Amhara ($\beta = 0.23$) is a critical nuance often missing from policy prescriptions. The quantitative data identifies what works—with resource provision ($\beta = 0.38$) and teacher mentoring ($\beta = 0.35$) showing the strongest overall effects. The qualitative data explains why it works: a notebook enables practice and ownership ("finally having my own notebook changed everything"), and mentoring provides motivational support ("makes me want to try harder"). However, the regional difference in effectiveness, explained by the education official's quote on "more time to build trust" and "refine our approaches locally," demonstrates that the context of implementation is as important as the intervention itself. This echoes the concept of "adaptive expertise" in implementation science (Fixsen et al., 2021), suggesting that successful programs require frontline educators and officials to have the autonomy and resources to adapt interventions to local community structures, levels of trust, and specific conflict dynamics. A one-size-fits-all approach, even with a proven intervention, is likely to fail.

Theoretical Implications: This study makes three significant contributions to the theoretical understanding of education in emergencies (EiE). First, it advances the theory of psychosocial impact in displacement settings. While previous literature established a correlation between trauma and poor academic outcomes (e.g., Fazel et al., 2022), this study's mixed-methods design specifies the mechanisms. By quantitatively establishing mediation and qualitatively identifying the specific classroom manifestations of trauma (impaired attention, memory volatility), it moves from a model of general distress to one of specific cognitive disruption. This provides a stronger theoretical basis for integrating neuropsychological and educational perspectives, suggesting that EiE interventions must be designed to rebuild these specific cognitive skills rather than just providing general counseling.

Second, the research refines the theory of resource scarcity in humanitarian contexts. The findings demonstrate that a lack of resources creates a cascading failure beyond mere material lack. The high student-teacher ratio and textbook shortage directly cause overcrowded classrooms, but they also indirectly demotivate teachers, prevent individualized instruction, and eliminate home-based learning opportunities. This creates a theoretical model where material scarcity depletes social and human capital within the educational ecosystem. This aligns with and extends institutional theory (Bromley & Powell, 2020) by showing how resource constraints prevent schools from fulfilling their core institutional scripts of effective teaching and learning, thereby eroding their legitimacy and functionality.

Third, the study contributes to the theory of intervention effectiveness by empirically demonstrating the primacy of context. The significant regional variation in the moderating effects of support challenges simplistic translational models that assume an evidence-based intervention will work equally well in any setting. Instead, it supports an ecological-transactional model of intervention (Tol et al., 2020), where success is theorized to be a product of the transaction between the intervention's core components and the specific multi-level ecosystem (community cohesion, governance stability, conflict duration) into which it is introduced. This implies that future EiE research should focus less on identifying universally "gold standard" interventions and more on developing principles for adaptive implementation and how to build local capacity to contextualize support effectively.

Integrated Discussion and Theoretical Implications: The integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates the complex pathways through which socio-political conflict and displacement impact educational outcomes for children in Ethiopia's Oromia and Amhara regions. The findings reveal that displacement creates educational disadvantages through both direct effects and indirect effects mediated by psychological well-being and educational infrastructure. The structural equation modeling results show significant direct effects of displacement-specific barriers on academic performance ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < .001$), while also demonstrating important mediation effects through psychological factors (31% of total effect) and infrastructure limitations (32% of total effect). These results confirm the conceptual framework's proposition that educational impacts operate through multiple interconnected pathways.

The study makes three significant theoretical contributions to understanding education in emergencies. First, it demonstrates that psychological trauma affects learning through specific cognitive mechanisms rather than general distress. Qualitative data revealed how trauma manifests in classroom settings through impaired attention ("their minds are elsewhere"), memory difficulties ("they forget what they learned yesterday"), and executive function challenges ("they cannot organize their thoughts"). Second, the research shows that resource limitations create cascading effects that extend beyond material deprivation. The lack of basic resources like textbooks and notebooks affects not only access to information but also classroom dynamics, teacher motivation, and home learning opportunities. Third, the findings indicate that support interventions work most effectively when they address both individual needs and systemic barriers simultaneously, highlighting the importance of multi-level approaches in humanitarian education contexts.

These findings substantially extend previous research by providing precise mechanisms through which displacement affects education and identifying specific intervention points. The mixed-methods approach was particularly valuable in this regard, as statistical patterns from the quantitative analysis were explained and contextualized through rich qualitative narratives. For example, while the quantitative data showed significant regional differences in academic performance, qualitative interviews helped explain these variations through differences in conflict duration, community cohesion, and implementation fidelity of support programs.

Practical Implications and Recommendations: Based on the integrated findings, three primary recommendations emerge for improving educational outcomes for displaced children. First, implement integrated psychosocial-academic support that combines mental health services with educational programming. This should include training teachers in trauma-informed pedagogy that addresses specific cognitive mechanisms affected by displacement, such as attention enhancement techniques, memory support strategies, and executive function development. Simultaneously, schools should provide specialized psychological support for severely affected children through counseling services and

targeted interventions. The implementation should prioritize regions with greatest need, particularly Amhara where psychological distress levels were highest.

Second, prioritize targeted resource allocation to address the material barriers identified in the study. This includes reducing class sizes in IDP-serving schools to a maximum of 40 students per classroom, ensuring equitable distribution of learning materials with a textbook ratio of 1:1, and providing adequate writing materials for all students. Infrastructure improvements should focus on creating safe, conducive learning environments that meet minimum standards for emergency education. Resource allocation should be based on needs assessments that consider both quantitative gaps (e.g., student-textbook ratios) and qualitative insights about how resource limitations affect teaching and learning processes.

Third, develop contextually adapted interventions that account for local conflict dynamics, cultural factors, and existing infrastructure. This requires region-specific approaches that recognize the different challenges and opportunities in Oromia and Amhara regions. Programs should engage communities in design and implementation, adapt teaching methodologies to address multi-grade classroom challenges, and leverage local resources and traditional support systems. Implementation should be phased, with continuous monitoring and adaptation based on stakeholder feedback. These interventions should address both individual psychological needs and systemic barriers simultaneously, creating comprehensive support systems that can sustainably improve educational outcomes for displaced children.

CONCLUSION

The study conclusively demonstrates that internally displaced children in Grades 1–4 experience severe academic disadvantages compared to their host-community peers. Quantitative results revealed statistically significant gaps in mathematics (9.2-point difference in EGMA scores) and literacy (29% proficiency gap), equivalent to approximately 1.5 years of lost learning. Regional disparities were particularly notable, with children in Amhara performing significantly worse than those in Oromia across all academic measures. These findings confirm that displacement disrupts educational continuity and highlight the urgent need for targeted academic support programs that address both foundational skill gaps and regional inequities.

Multiple intersecting barriers create complex challenges for IDP children's education. Infrastructure limitations, particularly overcrowded classrooms (76:1 student-teacher ratio) and critical resource shortages (8:1 textbook ratio)—directly constrain learning opportunities. Socio-political barriers, including security-related school closures and bureaucratic enrollment requirements, further limit educational access. The structural equation modeling demonstrated that these barriers operate through both direct pathways ($\beta = -0.38$ for displacement barriers) and indirect mechanisms mediated through psychological well-being and infrastructure quality. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions that address both material resource gaps and systemic administrative challenges.

Psychological trauma and social exclusion emerged as significant mediators of academic performance. The high prevalence of psychosocial distress (62% meeting clinical thresholds) directly impaired cognitive functioning through attention deficits, memory challenges, and reduced executive function. Social integration challenges compounded these difficulties, as children experiencing discrimination participated less in classroom activities and sought help less frequently. The SEM analysis revealed that psychological factors mediated 31% of displacement's impact on academics, while social factors

mediated 38%. These results emphasize that educational interventions must integrate mental health support and social inclusion components to effectively address displacement-related learning challenges.

Evidence-based support mechanisms particularly teacher mentoring, targeted catch-up classes, and resource provision significantly mitigated the negative impacts of displacement. However, intervention effectiveness varied substantially by region, with programs in Oromia ($\beta = 0.41$) demonstrating stronger effects than those in Amhara ($\beta = 0.23$). Qualitative analysis identified key success factors: community cohesion, program duration, and contextual adaptation. These findings argue for implementing multi-level support strategies that combine psychosocial assistance with academic remediation, while emphasizing the importance of tailoring interventions to local contexts and ensuring adequate implementation timeframes to build trust and refine approaches.

Limitations

This study's findings must be interpreted within the context of several important limitations. First, the geographic scope was necessarily restricted to the Oromia and Amhara regions due to security constraints and research feasibility. While these regions represent significant IDP populations in Ethiopia, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of displaced children in other regions with different conflict dynamics, cultural contexts, or educational systems. Second, the sampling approach faced practical challenges related to accessibility and safety in conflict-affected areas. While stratified random sampling was employed where possible, security concerns necessitated some purposive sampling, potentially limiting the representativeness of the findings and omitting particularly vulnerable or hard-to-reach populations. Third, the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot of educational experiences at a particular point in time. This limitation prevents analysis of how learning outcomes and psychological well-being evolve throughout the displacement experience or how interventions might affect long-term educational trajectories. Finally, certain measurement limitations should be acknowledged, particularly the reliance on self-reported data for psychological distress and the use of locally adapted rather than fully validated instruments for some constructs like social integration. These methodological constraints suggest caution in generalizing findings beyond the specific study context.

RECOMMONDATIONS

Building on this study's findings, several promising directions emerge for future research. Longitudinal studies are critically needed to track academic and psychosocial outcomes over time, particularly to understand how learning loss accumulates and how recovery pathways might be optimized through targeted interventions. Such research could identify critical periods for intervention and factors that promote educational resilience. Second, rigorous experimental studies testing specific support models such as trauma-informed pedagogy, catch-up programs, or resource allocation strategies through randomized controlled trials would provide stronger evidence of causal impacts and essential information about implementation requirements and cost-effectiveness. Third, expanding research to other conflict-affected regions within Ethiopia and comparatively across countries would enhance understanding of how different conflict contexts, educational systems, and cultural factors influence displacement's educational impacts. Finally, investigating technology-enabled solutions represents a promising frontier, particularly exploring how mobile learning, digital resources, and remote teacher support might overcome resource barriers in remote or insecure areas. This research agenda would collectively advance both theoretical understanding and practical interventions for educating children in emergency contexts.

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