



# BEYOND DISRUPTION: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF ARMED CONFLICT AND EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

*This qualitative case study explores teachers' experiences of the February 23, 2024 armed conflict in Campagao, Bilar, Bohol, Philippines, and how the incident shaped the teaching-learning process. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured focus group discussions with public elementary school teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that despite fear, uncertainty, and disruption, teachers demonstrated strong pedagogical commitment, adaptive practices, and sensitivity to learners' trauma. Educational resilience was evident through flexible instruction, curriculum improvisation, and sustained school-community engagement. However, these efforts were largely self-driven and occurred amid limited institutional support, particularly in psychosocial services and professional development. The study also highlights the often-unseen emotional toll borne by teachers in conflict-affected settings. By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences in a rural Philippine context, this study contributes context-specific insights to the education-in-emergencies literature and underscores the need for trauma-informed, teacher-centered, and conflict-sensitive educational interventions.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Armed Conflict, Education In Emergencies, Teachers' Lived Experiences, Educational Resilience, Trauma-Informed Teaching, Qualitative Case Study*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Armed conflict remains a significant threat to education, resulting in loss of life, displacement, and persistent violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (Amnesty International, 2023; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2024). Defined by the United Nations as armed confrontation between opposing parties, armed conflict consistently disrupts social systems, with education among the most affected sectors (United Nations, 1999). Beyond physical damage to schools, armed conflict alters the emotional, professional, and pedagogical conditions under which teaching and learning occur.

In conflict-affected settings, teachers occupy a critical yet vulnerable position. Research in education in emergencies highlights that teachers experience psychological distress, role expansion, and professional disruption, while simultaneously being expected to provide stability, protection, and continuity for learners (Agbor et al., 2022; Haruna & Mohammed, 2022). These dual responsibilities position teachers not only as affected individuals but also as key agents of educational resilience in crisis contexts.

In the Philippines, localized qualitative research on teachers' experiences of armed conflict remains limited, particularly in rural settings. Although Bohol was declared insurgency-free in 2010, its history of armed encounters reflects continuing vulnerability (Torres Jr., 2011). This vulnerability resurfaced on February 23, 2024, when an armed encounter occurred in Campagao, Bilar, Bohol, leading to community disruption and class suspensions at nearby schools, including Campagao Elementary School.

Despite growing global literature on education in emergencies, the lived experiences of Filipino teachers navigating conflict remain underrepresented. Existing studies often emphasize system-level outcomes, leaving limited insight into how teachers interpret disruption, adapt pedagogical practices, and sustain learning amid insecurity. Addressing this gap is essential to developing context-responsive, trauma-informed educational interventions.

This qualitative case study explores teachers' experiences of the February 23, 2024 Campagao armed conflict and their enactment of educational resilience at Campagao Elementary School. By foregrounding teachers' narratives, the study examines how educators navigate disruption, maintain professional commitment, and preserve teaching-learning processes in a conflict-affected rural school. The findings contribute to the education-in-emergencies literature by offering context-specific insights to inform conflict-sensitive policies and teacher support mechanisms.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine teachers' experiences of armed conflict and educational resilience in a conflict-affected school setting. A qualitative case study is particularly appropriate in education-in-emergencies research as it allows for in-depth exploration of lived experiences, meanings, and adaptive practices within a bounded context. The case focused on Campagao Elementary School in Bilar, Bohol, Philippines, which was directly affected by an armed encounter on February 23, 2024.



The participants were public elementary school teachers assigned to Campagao Elementary School during the armed conflict. Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers who had direct experience of teaching before, during, and after the incident. This approach ensured that participants could provide rich, experience-based insights relevant to the study's focus on disruption and resilience in emergency contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured focus group discussions, allowing participants to narrate their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies in their own words. Interview questions explored teachers' experiences during the conflict, its impact on teaching-learning processes, and the strategies they employed to sustain educational continuity. The focus group discussions were conducted in a manner sensitive to participants' emotional well-being, consistent with ethical standards for research in conflict-affected settings.

Data from the focus group discussion were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This method enabled the identification of patterns related to disruption, adaptation, and resilience across participants' narratives. Themes were developed inductively and refined through iterative coding to ensure credibility and analytic rigor.

Ethical clearance of Holy Name University's Ethical Review Board was secured prior to data collection. Informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw were ensured. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, trauma-informed research practices were observed throughout the study. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of an audit trail.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The analysis of teachers' narratives revealed eight interrelated themes that illustrate how armed conflict disrupted the teaching-learning process while simultaneously eliciting forms of educational resilience. These findings highlight teachers' roles as both affected individuals and adaptive agents in emergency contexts.

#### **3.1. Resilience in Pedagogical Commitment Amid Crisis**

Despite fear and uncertainty, teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to sustaining instruction. Participants emphasized teaching as a moral and professional duty, reporting continued reporting to school, flexible lesson pacing, shortened programs, and the use of printed modules when necessary. Collegial solidarity further strengthened this resolve, as teachers drew courage from one another to continue teaching. These findings highlight pedagogical resilience, consistent with the education-in-emergencies literature, which frames teachers as key stabilizing agents during crises.

#### **3.2. Maintaining Perceived Safety Through Adaptive Security Measures**

Teachers adopted adaptive measures to preserve a sense of safety, including restricting school access, monitoring unfamiliar individuals, and maintaining heightened vigilance. While participants acknowledged that absolute safety could not be guaranteed due to the school's proximity to the conflict area, these practices reflected proactive risk management. Such adaptive responses illustrate how learning environments in emergencies are shaped not only by infrastructure but by teachers' protective actions.

#### **3.3. Sensitivity to Trauma and Individualized Support**

Teachers displayed heightened sensitivity to learners' trauma-related behaviors, including fear, withdrawal, restlessness, and emotional distress. Participants adjusted discipline, offered reassurance, and provided individualized support, particularly to learners directly exposed to the conflict. These practices align with trauma-informed approaches in education in emergencies, emphasizing empathy and flexibility over rigid classroom control.

#### **3.4. Curriculum Adjustment and Improvisation in Crisis Contexts**

Instructional disruptions required teachers to adjust pacing, repeat lessons, and prioritize essential competencies. Improvisation emerged as a key strategy, with teachers integrating learners' conflict-related experiences into lessons and using alternative delivery modes when face-to-face instruction was disrupted. These adaptations reflect curriculum flexibility as a form of resilience in crisis contexts.

#### **3.5. Continuity of Assessment Without Contextual Adaptation**

Assessment practices largely remained unchanged, with teachers continuing to use written and oral evaluations. However, subtle adjustments, such as leniency with deadlines and simplified questioning, were reported. This finding suggests a tension between maintaining academic standards and responding informally to learners' post-conflict circumstances, a recurring challenge in emergency education settings.



### 3.6. Sustained Community Presence Amid Conflict

Teachers sustained engagement with parents and stakeholders through meetings and home visits, reinforcing trust and continuity. Their visible presence in the community signaled stability and reinforced their professional identity, highlighting the role of teacher–community relationships in supporting education during emergencies.

### 3.7. Professional Stagnation and Lack of Institutional Support

Participants reported limited institutional support and the absence of targeted professional development or psychosocial interventions following the conflict. Teachers were excluded from stress debriefing activities, revealing gaps in systemic support for educators in crisis contexts. This stagnation underscores the need for teacher-centered support mechanisms in education-in-emergency responses.

### 3.8. The Unseen Emotional Toll on Teachers

Teachers' accounts revealed an enduring emotional burden characterized by fear, hypervigilance, and social withdrawal. While rarely foregrounded, these experiences point to the hidden psychological costs of teaching in conflict-affected environments. The findings emphasize that teacher resilience often coexists with unaddressed emotional strain, reinforcing calls for trauma-informed and teacher-inclusive emergency education policies.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study explored teachers' experiences of the February 23, 2024 Campagao armed conflict and its impact on the teaching–learning process. The findings show that teachers demonstrated strong professional commitment, adaptability, and resilience across multiple domains of practice despite fear, uncertainty, and disruption. Instructional continuity was sustained through flexible pedagogy, curriculum adjustment, learner-centered support, and active school–community engagement. These efforts, however, were largely driven by teachers themselves rather than supported by formal institutional mechanisms.

While resilience was evident, the study also revealed critical gaps in crisis-responsive systems. Teachers reported minimal access to psychosocial support, limited professional development related to emergency contexts, and exclusion from post-conflict interventions such as stress debriefing. The emotional toll of teaching amid armed conflict—often unspoken—persisted alongside professional dedication. These findings underscore that resilience in conflict-affected education settings should not rely solely on individual commitment but must be reinforced through systemic, trauma-informed support structures.

By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences in a rural Philippine school, this study contributes to the education-in-emergencies literature by highlighting the dual realities of pedagogical resilience and institutional absence. Recognizing teachers as both frontline responders and affected individuals is essential to sustaining education during and after armed conflict.

### *Implications and Recommendations*

- Education and Safety Stakeholders.** The Department of Education, relevant national agencies, the Municipal and Barangay Local Government Units of Bilar and Campagao, the Bilar Municipal Police Station, and the Bilar Public Schools District Office should strengthen teacher protection, psychosocial support, and peace education initiatives. Crisis-sensitive education policies must be enforced, including the implementation of localized contingency and continuity plans. Investments in school safety infrastructure and improved inter-agency coordination are critical to ensuring the safety of learners and teachers.
- Campagao Elementary School Community.** School leaders, teachers, and learners should continue strengthening school-based safety protocols and adopt adaptive, trauma-informed teaching practices. Active participation in safety programs and psychosocial activities can help sustain a supportive learning environment during emergencies.
- Other Stakeholders and Private Organizations.** Non-government and private organizations may support recovery efforts through resource provision, counseling services, and capacity-building programs that enhance crisis preparedness and resilience.
- Future Researchers.** Future studies may include learners' perspectives, examine academic and psychosocial outcomes, and explore community coping mechanisms to inform more holistic education-in-emergencies frameworks.

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