Armed Conflict in Colombia: A Review from the Impacts and Contributions of Education

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ABSTRACT

Thesis. The armed conflict in Colombia has had a profound impact on education, affecting teachers, students, families, and communities. This review aims to examine the effects of the conflict on education and explore the contributions of education in promoting peace and social reconstruction.

Concept. Key concepts addressed include human rights, peace-building through education, and the role of education in conflict transformation. Education, shaped by violence, has become both a tool for addressing human rights violations and a means of fostering peace and justice in conflict-affected regions. This qualitative study employs a documentary review approach, analysing 123 articles and theses published between 1996 and 2020. From these, 40 were selected based on their relevance to the research topic, providing a comprehensive understanding of the intersection of armed conflict and education in Colombia.

Results and Conclusion. The review reveals significant human rights violations against teachers in Colombia. Despite these challenges, various efforts have been made to promote peace through education, including community initiatives and policies aimed at transforming conflict into opportunities for justice and peace. Education is shown to not only respond to violence but also actively contribute to societal transformation.

Originality. This study offers an original contribution by examining the role of education in addressing the impacts of the armed conflict and promoting peace in Colombia, focusing on educators' experiences and their contributions to societal reconstruction.

Keywords: social science education, armed conflict, Colombia, teachers, peacebuilding

Introduction

For over fifty years, Colombia has endured an internal armed conflict resulting in thousands of deaths, millions of victims of various forms of violence, and widespread psychosocial, economic, environmental, political, and moral damage throughout the country. Addressing the cessation of violence, repairing the resultant damage, and preventing future occurrences are central issues across various fields of knowledge, with education being particularly prominent.

This bibliographic review aims to present key findings that enhance our understanding of the armed conflict and its potential impacts on education and its stakeholders. Additionally, it will explore efforts to contribute to peacebuilding through the significant work of teachers who, despite contextual limitations, endeavour to transform classroom conditions to foster healthy and formative environments at all educational levels.

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Recognising the impacts suffered by the education sector can provide insights into the broader dynamics of the internal conflict and illuminate how education—its processes, content, methodologies, and objectives—has been affected by violent conflict. In contexts marred by violence, education is deemed a crucial element in various stages of intervention: whether aiming to achieve, maintain, and build peace (peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding), or to prevent, resolve, and transform conflicts—these being two sides of the same coin.

In such contexts, there are evident educational needs for all social sectors: those on the front lines, witnesses, inheritors, and bystanders. To adequately address these needs, programme designs and classroom activities must be contextualised and tailored to the targeted population, aligned with the aims and objectives of the educational process. These aims should be deliberated and refined to pursue the common good and foster a better, more humane world for all.

Often, these considerations are overlooked when designing policies, programmes, activities, or educational resources. Several factors contribute to this oversight, but one notable issue is the belief that peace represents a singular concept, rather than acknowledging multiple forms of peace, varying levels of engagement, and different roles the educational

system can fulfil. This issue reinforces educational approaches that may not be universally relevant in all circumstances. It does not imply that these approaches are detrimental but suggests they could be improved. Ian Harris (2004) notes that the fastest-growing approach to peace education in the West focuses on resolving intra- and interpersonal conflicts. This approach emphasises 'life skills' education, including cooperation, negotiation, communication, decision-making, emotional management, empathy, and preparation for dealing with peer pressure. It has become predominant in many curriculum plans and educational programmes, leading many educators to assume it meets the needs of their students.

Similarly, initiatives in education related to international peace face a comparable challenge. Much of what is termed peace education has been conceptualised and designed based on the logic that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, advocating for human rights and fundamental freedoms to prevent hostilities between nations, cultural clashes, and particularly ethnic conflicts from causing further atrocities. Education on, in, and for human rights through democracy and citizenship education became central to peace education, defending these rights not only culturally but also structurally. However, these historical foundations and prevailing educational paradigms may not fully address the diverse and evolving needs of societies affected by conflict today. There is a pressing need to reconsider and adapt educational approaches to peace to be more contextually sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to the multifaceted challenges of fostering lasting peace in varied social and cultural contexts.

While the aforementioned approaches are certainly valuable and necessary, they are insufficient for addressing the issues of violent conflict comprehensively. Although not always necessary, it is important to note that these approaches can function effectively without contextualising the conflict, identifying its particularities, causes, dynamics, and the damage it has inflicted on individuals, communities, social fabric, natural environment, social institutions, etc. Consequently, they may not contribute to resolving these issues either. Without recognising the specific issues relevant to the context and the population targeted by the intervention, it will be challenging to refine educational aims and purposes. Instead, educational discourses on conflict resolution and civic education are likely to continue being reiterated without significant advancement.

In Colombia, peace education is notably influenced by these two approaches. For instance, the general guidelines for implementing the Peace Chair in Colombia indicate that:

> Education for Peace is directly associated with citizenship education, that is, the education of citizens who relate to each other peacefully, who actively participate through peaceful and democratic means in initiatives aimed at improving living conditions in their immediate contexts and in society at large, who contribute to strengthening democracy and the Rule of Law, who respect laws and public goods, who value and respect differences, who build a historical memory that helps them understand the past to construct a more peaceful, inclusive, and democratic present and future, who relate carefully and responsibly to animals and the environment, all within a framework of respect for Human Rights. (Chaux & Velázquez, 2017, pp. 7–8; translated by the authors)

One might argue that historical memory could bridge the gap by addressing both existing conflicts and potential peace in affected territories. However, this perspective is not entirely accurate. Firstly, the Peace Chair's focus is not on historical memory but rather on citizenship education. Historical memory is merely one of twelve suggested topics for classroom discussion, alongside others such as: Justice and Human Rights; Sustainable Use of Natural Resources; Protection of Cultural and Natural Riches of the Nation; Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts; Prevention of School Bullying; Diversity and Plurality; Political Participation; Moral Dilemmas; Social Impact Projects; History of National and International Peace Agreements; and Life Projects and Risk Prevention. Institutions are encouraged to address two of these topics, which means that not every student participating in the Peace Chair programme will necessarily engage with the past and present violence of their country, reflect on it, or be motivated to become agents of change. Furthermore, they may not have the opportunity to explore various peace and reconciliation practices—efforts that many Colombians have long pursued to resist their own cruelty and brutality.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that history classes were not mandatory for over 30 years, making it highly unlikely that generations of Colombian students between 1987 and 2019 engaged with recent Colombian history in their social sciences curriculum. As a result, a significant task for the Colombian educational sector is to integrate classroom activities that facilitate conversation, deliberation, and reflection on conflict and peace in a manner appropriate for primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

Moreover, there is another crucial task beyond the classroom that can significantly inform the necessary educational actions for relevant peace education: identifying how the education sector itself has been affected by violent conflict. This task is essential for expanding the effectiveness of peace education.

The role of memory in education extends beyond merely recounting horrors; it is vital to extract lessons for the future, as articulated by Tzvetan Todorov (2013). Constructing educational sector memory through the voices of teachers allows for recognising aspects that must be addressed and safeguarded by other institutions and social actors, as well as by the education sector itself. This is crucial for preventing new afflictions, addressing issues arising from armed conflict, and enriching educational practices by acknowledging those who strive to guide them towards peace-building. It aligns the goals and purposes of peace education with the educational needs of the communities.

To understand how teachers and educational communities have been affected by armed conflict, how they have responded, how they have been transformed, and what lessons can be derived for peace-oriented education, a conceptual review and examination of the background are necessary. This approach provides a comprehensive perspective on the issue and helps reveal the findings gathered thus far.

This qualitative study employed a documentary review approach with the primary aim of identifying and analysing the most pertinent trends, theories, and empirical findings related to education and armed conflict. The review process followed a systematic methodology to identify, select, and analyse relevant literature in the field.

The process began with the establishment of clear inclusion and exclusion criteria for the documents. Inclusion criteria comprised studies and documents that specifically addressed the intersection of education and armed conflict, with a focus on Colombia. Exclusion criteria were applied to materials that did not meet these criteria or were outside the defined publication range of 1996 to 2020. Exhaustive searches were conducted in prominent academic databases, including Colombian university repositories, Scopus, Web of Science, Dialnet, and Redalyc. Key terms such as "armed conflict," "Colombia," "teachers," and "peacebuilding" were utilised during these searches to ensure the retrieval of relevant literature.

After compiling the initial search results, a rigorous selection process was undertaken to filter documents based on content relevance and methodological adequacy. Titles and abstracts of the articles were scrutinised to assess their alignment with the review's objectives. Following this, selected articles were read in full to extract detailed information regarding key findings, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies employed in the primary studies. The analysis included a narrative synthesis of the main themes and emerging trends, as well as a comparative analysis of different perspectives presented in the reviewed literature.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the review also considered the contextual factors affecting the studies, such as the socio-political environment in Colombia during the time of research. This allowed for a nuanced interpretation of the findings in relation to the broader context of armed conflict and its impact on education.

A total of 123 articles and theses published between 1996 and 2020 were reviewed, from which 40 were selected for their relevance to the search topic. This selection process ensured that the most pertinent and high-quality sources were included in the review.

This methodological approach provided a comprehensive and critical overview of the current state of knowledge in the study area, highlighting both areas of consensus and ongoing controversies within the academic literature. By synthesising the findings and comparing different perspectives, the review aimed to offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between education and armed conflict and to identify potential avenues for further research and intervention.

The Violent Armed Conflict in Colombia

Massacres, forced disappearances, grieving families mourning the loss of loved ones, violence, and territorial displacements have split human history into two distinct periods. Over five decades ago, the armed conflict in Colombia began—a war that, according to Ana Milena Montoya Ruiz (2008), has been marked by bloodshed and has left numerous physical, economic, social, and psychological scars that are difficult to forget.

Determining the origins of the war is a formidable and complex challenge due to the varied perspectives on its inception. Some scholars trace its roots to the bipartite conflict structured in the mid-19th century. Astrid Martínez Ortiz (2015) notes that by

the late 1940s, violence began to escalate, partly due to the strong allegiance of the population to the two traditional parties. These parties evolved into opposing political subcultures, fuelling episodes of violence that intensified over the years.

Other experts argue that the war solidified in the aftermath of the National Front, a process initiated in response to conflicts between the traditional parties competing for control of the country. This pact between the Liberal and Conservative parties aimed to share power for four presidential terms, thereby legitimising these two parties as the sole entities to alternately govern the country between 1958 and 1974. The ultimate aim was for this power-sharing arrangement to resolve the violent conflict between party supporters and to end the confrontation and its severe consequences within the country (Diago, 2017).

However, it was following the death of leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán that Colombia experienced a revolution, leading to the emergence of the first guerrilla groups. Martínez Ortiz (2015) identifies two distinct periods of violence in Colombia: from 1946 to 1964, and from 1964 to the present. The first period, known as "La Violencia," was marked by substantial bloodshed, which, according to Manuel Guedán and Ricardo David Ramírez (2004), was the armed conflict that most radically affected freedom of conscience.

The second period, beginning in 1964, is characterised by the formation and evolution of guerrilla groups, including the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the ELN (National Liberation Army), and the EPL (People's Liberation Army). This era also saw the rise of "second-generation" guerrillas such as the M-19 (April 19 Movement), MAQL (Quintín Lame Armed Movement), and PRT (Revolutionary Workers Party). Additionally, there was an increase in drug trafficking and the emergence of paramilitary groups.

Paramilitarism, as one of the many actors in the war, has its origins in the mid-term of Julio César Turbay's presidency (Salas, 2009). Turbay established private security groups to protect political and economic interests, as well as to guard against violence from guerrilla groups seeking to dominate territories and gain political leverage. This development was a response to the state's failures in negotiations and the lack of security in areas affected by guerrilla activity. In the view of Ángela Milena Salas Garcia (2009), this approach to defence contributed to the emergence of self-defence groups, especially in rural areas. These groups were primarily focused on protecting their assets and personal well-being, frequently turning to violence, including murder, as a means of seeking retribution.

The Responsibilities of Education

We are accustomed to viewing education as something that invariably has positive effects or, at the very least, holds the potential for them. It is no accident that education is regarded as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is enshrined

as a fundamental right in the Colombian Constitution. This generally positive role attributed to education extends to the realm of armed conflict; education is often perceived as a means to contribute to the prevention, resolution, and transformation of armed conflicts into scenarios and practices of peace.

Education can contribute to resolving armed conflicts in various ways. One perspective highlights that conflicts tend to emerge and spread in marginalised regions, where poverty eradication is hindered, and there is a lack of access to the positive aspects of economic integration (Oxfam GB, 2000). If education equips children and adolescents with life skills that open doors to a dignified and productive life, it can help them view participation in armed groups not as the only means of survival, but as a pathway to a dignified future. This necessitates, on the one hand, education that is relevant to the present and future lives of students, and on the other hand, a societal structure that effectively provides opportunities for them.

Another way education could contribute to preventing, halting—or at least not exacerbating—and transforming armed conflict stems from the ethical and political formation expected from schools. Such formation would help develop citizens who respect themselves and others, and who learn about their communities at various levels—family, school, neighbourhood, municipality, country, region, planet—with critical and empathetic thinking. Consequently, they would engage peacefully in transforming their communities and society at large. This political inclusion of children and adolescents as active participants in their communities would serve as a preventive factor—by encouraging them to seek peaceful solutions to social conflicts—as well as a means of halting—by motivating them to adopt a civic stance against violence and war-promoting policies—and repairing—by guiding them in actions to address the damages caused to society in general and to victims in particular with regard to armed conflict.

However, as some authors (e.g., Bourdieu, Freire, Giroux) suggest, education can also produce forms of inequity and exclusion. This can occur through mechanisms such as social reproduction, the creation of submissive individuals through 'banking' education, or by neglecting to address social injustices, among other factors.

This negative role of education for society and life in general also extends to armed conflict. Kenneth D. Bush and Diana Saltarelli (2000) have referred to this as "the two faces of education." This secondary role, as a promoter of armed conflict, manifests through various pathways. One such pathway mirrors the positive potential of education to prevent or mitigate armed conflict: if education, rather than opening opportunities for a dignified life, actually creates exclusion and inequity, it becomes a catalyst for the emergence and perpetuation of armed conflict. Specifically, by providing inequitable access to education—both in terms of coverage and quality/relevance—and since education leads in various ways to social success and dignified lives, those initially disadvantaged are much more likely to pass these disadvantages to their children, thereby reinforcing initial inequities. According to the aforementioned theory, inequity and social exclusion fuel armed conflict.

Additionally, there can be more specific ways in which education within schools and classrooms might promote armed conflict. For example, this could occur through the transmission of a culture that legitimises violence, both in interpersonal relationships and between social groups. Marcela Bautista and Gloria González argue that "teachers act as actors in the conflict, for instance, in how they use pedagogy and curricula to perpetuate inequity and disputes between ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic groups, and the role they play in armed conflict dynamics" (Bautista & González, 2019, p. 300).

Schools can also contribute to armed conflict by providing an education that neither demonstrates nor effectively encourages the pursuit of a dignified life through peaceful means. The scepticism about whether education can truly fulfil its role in offering opportunities for everyone to achieve a dignified life is poignantly captured by a statement from a mother in a region heavily affected by violence: "Young people don't want to study because they know that their education won't benefit them. They see little chance of entering university, and teachers don't guide them" (Mother from rural Cauca, 2002, as cited in Carvajal Salcedo & Vargas Guevara, 2004, p. 25).

Moreover, as Lynn Davies (2010) notes, schools can become instruments of war by serving as sites of physical and symbolic attacks; by reproducing "normalcy" and perpetuating the status quo; by legitimising the use of violence, corruption, and gender disparity; or by implementing counterproductive policies—such as dividing schools along religious lines, as observed in Bosnia-Herzegovina—which further entrench ethno-nationalist rivalries. Additionally, a controversial aspect of education in these contexts involves what Jamil Salmi (2006) refers to as "violence by omission," where students are not educated about the conflict or genocide, particularly within their own country. Instead, they may be provided with tools to analyse conflict critically or question various versions of events only in abstract terms, or through a focus on interpersonal conflicts, or conflicts occurring in other countries.

This does not imply that issues of intra- and interpersonal peace are irrelevant to the peace-building process. However, they are insufficient in contexts where violent conflict has occurred or is ongoing, as they do not address the root causes, actors, conflicting interests, and internal dynamics that facilitate the production and escalation of violence.

The recognition of these negative roles within the education sector has been the focus of investigations by truth commissions, such as Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación de Perú (CVR, 2003). The CVR examined the educational system, the teaching profession, and universities as actors in the conflict. Among its findings, the CVR highlighted that the expansion of educational services from 1950 led to a decline in quality while generating unrealistic expectations of social advancement. This disillusionment, according to the CVR, made individuals more receptive to violent discourses. The CVR also identified that authoritarian pedagogies, which stifled critical and creative thinking about social realities, further contributed to this receptivity.

The primary aim of such investigations is to acknowledge the responsibilities of the education sector in the production and perpetuation of violence. This recognition

seeks to identify issues that need addressing and correction to prevent further harm to the sector, educational institutions, and their members. By acknowledging these issues, efforts can be directed toward repairing past damages and implementing reforms to ensure that education plays a constructive role in promoting peace and social justice.

DISRUPTIONS TO THE EDUCATION SECTOR AND ITS RESPONSES

Typically, an educational system is designed to uphold the right to education for all children and adolescents in times of peace and "normalcy." However, armed conflicts, particularly prolonged ones such as in Colombia, introduce special conditions that significantly affect the educational system. These conditions impact all stakeholders, both at macro and micro levels within schools and classrooms. As María Adelaida Vélez Posada (2010) notes:

> when considering the effects of armed conflict on teachers, it is necessary to analyse two types of impacts. The first consists of harmful effects that hinder teaching work — specifically, impacts on students and the school environment — or indirect effects. The second type of impact is direct and involves the victimisation of teachers. (Vélez Posada, 2010, p. 44; translated by the authors)

The first type of impact encompasses issues such as school takeovers or militarisation of school spaces, attacks on infrastructure and access routes, co-optation by armed groups, and the diversion of educational resources for war purposes. Other impacts can directly affect educational processes in the classroom, such as censorship of topics, manipulation of official history, promotion of authoritarian pedagogies, militaristic cultures, and advocacy for resolving conflicts through violent means. These impacts highlight structural issues that must be addressed and corrected if the education sector is to effectively contribute to peace-building.

The effects on students can be particularly severe. The 1996 United Nations report *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, presented by Graça Machel, documents the devastating effects of war on boys and girls, and strongly criticises the international system for neglecting their needs. Flor Alba Romero Medina (2012) summarises these impacts on children and adolescents as follows:

> Children and young people are much more vulnerable in situations of armed conflict: they are susceptible, among other things, to recruitment, to accidents with landmines, to being sexually exploited by armed actors, resulting in enduring harsh life experiences, abruptly halting their childhood and youth, dropping out of school, suffering infections and sexually transmitted diseases, and for many, being forcibly displaced from their homes. (p.14; translated by the authors)

An educational response to these situations falls under the domain known as "education in emergencies," which focuses on reinstating the right to education amid humanitarian crises, whether these are natural—such as earthquakes, floods, and droughts—or human-made—such as violent conflicts, wars, and genocides. These interventions are essential because such emergencies significantly disrupt education. The effort to sustain schooling in these contexts is based on the belief that it restores a sense of normalcy, provides stability and hope, facilitates social interactions and integration, promotes the creation of safe, supportive, and nurturing environments, aids in developing coping mechanisms, serves as a foundation for international and inter-institutional collaboration, and coordinates relief efforts (Barakat et al., 2013; Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Kirk, 2007; Winthrop & Matsui, 2013). However, in Colombia, the protracted armed conflict has consistently and extensively impacted education, such that this exceptional situation has become the norm.

The specific conditions of contexts heavily affected by armed conflict present a wide range of challenges for schools. These challenges include impediments to providing educational services and facilitating access for children and adolescents. Schools may also need to address new aspects of students' needs, such as ensuring their safety or attending to their physical and mental health. These issues bear similarities to those encountered in education during emergencies.

Unlike the international focus of education in emergencies, responses from teachers and educational communities are situated within specific local contexts. Therefore, these responses are adapted to local conditions and resources. This localisation is also influenced by the strong connections teachers develop with their communities, which makes these processes significant within their specific contexts and worthy of detailed understanding (Carvajal Salcedo & Vargas Guevara, 2004; Chaves Salazar et al., 2016; Venegas Martínez, 2022). Thus, it is crucial to contextualise educational responses to emergency situations and chronic crises to illuminate the possibilities and opportunities for enhancing these responses.

The second type of impact highlighted by Vélez Posada directly affects teachers. Psychological impact is perhaps the most extensively studied aspect (Vélez Posada, 2010). For instance, Marcela Lizarralde argues:

> Teachers find themselves immersed in a war environment that fosters a culture of violence, affecting not only their actions but also their self-perception. One of the immediate effects of such violence is on the identity of both individuals and communities, a consequence of the primary objective of military actions, which is to undermine the resistance of the 'enemy.' To achieve this, there is a deliberate effort to dismantle social structures and demoralise both civilians and combatants by attacking their self-respect through organised violence. This violence not only inflicts physical harm but also seeks to erode human dignity (Lizarralde, 2003, p. 3; translated by the authors).

However, direct impacts on teachers can also manifest in other forms. Of particular interest for this study are the ways in which teachers reassess the meaning of their educational profession and the concept of education itself (Chaves Salazar et al., 2016), as well as how these impacts affect their personal relationships and overall life.

Background of Affected Teachers

In the international arena, the report *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict-* presented by Bush and Saltarelli in 2000 (UNICEF, 2000), has had a significant impact on subsequent research into the roles education plays in violent conflicts. This report addresses four critical issues that have shaped both research and practical applications in the field:

- It challenges the common belief that education is always beneficial, as noted by Mehr Khan in the report's preface. This emphasises the complex relationship between formal education and the creation and continuation of violence.
- It frames contemporary armed conflicts not as conflicts between countries but primarily as internal conflicts arising from ethnic hostilities within countries.
- It acknowledges the limitations of education in addressing and resolving issues of ethnic hatred within fundamentally intolerant educational contexts.
- It explores pedagogical possibilities for peacebuilding, focusing on demilitarising the mind, problematising the context, articulating alternatives, and altering the rules of engagement.

Since the publication of this report, various studies have pursued new critical avenues. For instance, some researchers have re-evaluated how education contributes to peace consolidation (see Gill & Niens, 2014; Harris, 2004; Novelli & Smith, 2011; Winthrop & Matsui, 2013). Others have investigated how education has been used to perpetuate new violence, incite revenge, and spread hatred (see Davies, 2010; Kagawa, 2005; McCully, 2012). Additionally, some studies have explored how the education system itself has been a victim of armed conflicts (Novelli & Selenica, 2014) and the broader responses it can offer to address the problems it has caused and to overcome its limitations (see Barakat et al., 2013; Novelli & López Cardozo, 2008; Shah, 2012).

In Colombia, numerous studies have investigated the impacts of the armed conflict on teachers and the education system at various levels. The term "affected" is understood to encompass any harm or damage caused by social violence (Aristizábal, 2019) within the context of the armed conflict, including displacements, physical and psychological harm, and other forms of loss. Marcela Lizarralde (2003), in his work "*Maestros en zonas de conflicto*" [Teachers in conflict zones] examines some of these impacts, focusing particularly on the psychological effects experienced by teachers working in areas heavily

affected by armed conflict. Lizarralde identifies a range of psychological responses among teachers, categorising them as: normality, indifference, isolation, mimetic acts, resignation, relocation, and taking risks.

An educational proposal for working with children and adolescents in schools significantly affected by armed conflict, derived from the Pedagogy and Child Protection (PPN) project, is described by Romero Medina (2012). Based on a thorough analysis of the impacts on both the population and the schools, the proposal outlines several modules for transforming educational practices: School, individual, and context; Children as rights holders; Resilience; Depolarisation and conflict resolution; Gender differential approach; and School projects.

Romero Medina (2011) also provides a comprehensive documentary study on the impacts on education in the department of Antioquia over two decades (1985–2005). This study is divided into impacts on physical spaces and territory—such as bombings, use of schools by armed actors, and landmine presence—impacts on teachers—such as threats, transfers, and particularly murders—and impacts on children and adolescents—primarily recruitment.

Yorley Alexandra Rodríguez Castro's research (2016), titled *Entre recuerdos y enseñanzas docentes en conflicto nacional. Problemáticas de la labor docente dentro del conflicto armado político-militar a través de historias de vida de docentes en Cundinamarca y sur del Tolima entre los años 1993 y 2003* [Between memories and teaching teachings in national conflict. Problems of teaching work within the armed political-military conflict through life stories of teachers in Cundinamarca and southern Tolima between 1993 and 2003] addresses the central question: How can the main issues of teaching work within the political-military armed conflict be identified through the life stories of teachers who worked in Cundinamarca and Southern Tolima between 1993 and 2003? This study explores the life stories of three teachers who experienced the severe violence of the 1990s in remote areas of Tolima and Cundinamarca. Through their narratives, the research seeks to underscore the significance of these teaching experiences for the profession's development and their essential role in a country where education is a vital tool for post-conflict recovery.

José Miguel Chaves Salazar et al.'s study (2016), titled "*Docentes amenazados en el marco del conflicto armado colombiano*" [Teachers threatened in the context of the Colombian armed conflict] explores how the daily lives of teachers in a school setting transform after being victims of threats within the armed conflict. One of their key findings is the impact of these threats on the interpersonal relationships teachers establish with various members of the educational community. This study provides valuable insights into how threats affect teachers' daily lives and their vocational commitment to education.

A recent study conducted by Bautista and González for the Compartir Foundation, titled "*Docencia rural en Colombia. Educar para la paz en medio del conflicto armado*" [Rural teaching in Colombia. Educate for peace in the midst of armed conflict](2019), examines the experiences of teachers and school principals across 15 schools nationwide.

The study highlights how armed conflict has affected their educational work and personal trajectories throughout their careers.

Several authors have investigated the impact of the Colombian armed conflict on educational coverage, quality, and school dropout rates. María Julieth Palacios (2017) provides a comprehensive literature review focusing on macro-level influences at national or regional scales, predominantly within the field of education economics. Additionally, more localised studies, such as Yenny Marcela Patiño's (2017) research "*Influencia del conflicto armado en el desempeño escolar de los estudiantes de la Institución Educativa Técnica Miguel Zapata del municipio de Argelia – Cauca*" [Influence of the armed conflict on the school performance of the students of the Miguel Zapata Technical Educational Institution of the municipality of Argelia–Cauca] offer insights into specific contexts.

Broader research on the impacts of armed conflict on schools, both urban and rural, has also been conducted. For instance, Carlos Gómez et al. (2019) investigate the effects of armed conflict on three schools in Medellín in their study *"La escuela y su afectación en medio del conflicto armado en Medellín"* [The school and its impact in the midst of the armed conflict in Medellín]. Similarly, Jorge Julián Osorio (2016) documents the challenges faced by students' families at an institution in Nueva Colonia, Urabá Antioquia, and the conditions under which they strive to exercise their right to education.

These studies collectively reveal the extensive impacts and victimisations experienced by educational institutions and their stakeholders, proposing strategies to address crises urgently and transform schools into spaces for peace-building.

Overall, the literature on the complex relationship between education and armed conflict in Colombia demonstrates significant interest in understanding the multifaceted impacts on educational institutions and their communities—especially students, teachers, and their families. While researchers, the state, and various national and international organisations have proposed numerous initiatives to address these challenges and support peace-building efforts, there is a notable gap in studies that focus on the local responses and initiatives taken by schools, teachers, and the educational community amidst armed conflict. This proposal aims to fill this gap by examining transformations and lessons learned from these local responses and considering the often-overlooked perspectives of higher education in this context.

Conclusions

In contexts affected by violent conflict, the educational sector has been the focus of significant research, addressing at least three major issues: the impact of conflict on education, the role of education in perpetuating various forms of violence, and the potential of education to foster a culture of peace.

The third issue has garnered the most research attention, likely due to education's traditionally positive connotations and its role within the classroom. However, understanding

how educational actors, institutions, curricula, and pedagogies have been adversely affected by armed conflict is also crucial. This understanding can illuminate the issues that need repair and those requiring attention at structural, institutional, and classroom levels. Such insights can improve educational quality and enhance the sector's contributions to peace-building efforts.

Recognising how the absence or presence of certain content, attitudes, and relationships has facilitated or promoted powerlessness, apathy towards social problems, receptivity to violent discourse, normalisation of violence as a conflict resolution method, and even recruitment into armed groups is vital. This recognition is essential for transforming the educational sector to effectively contribute to a culture of peace.

A deeper understanding of the impacts and responsibilities of the educational sector in relation to armed conflict can provide better guidance for curricular and pedagogical approaches to peace education. This involves moving beyond superficial interventions or simply incorporating peace topics into existing disciplines. Instead, it requires making informed decisions that position education as a central actor in transforming armed conflict into scenarios and practices of justice and peace.

Research into the victimisation of Colombian teachers within the framework of armed conflict highlighted a severe human rights crisis, with 808 educators killed between 1991 and 2005 (Escuela Nacional Sindical [ENS], 2007). Additionally, various forms of violence, including illegal detentions, forced disappearances, forced displacement, threats, and exile, have been reported (GCPEA, 2014; O'Malley et al., 2010). Reports of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities from 2009 to 2012 placed Colombia alongside countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Sudan, and Somalia, where the education system has been severely affected by violent conflict. Over 100 attacks on schools, universities, personnel, and students were documented, impacting over 1,000 students, teachers, and other educational staff, and involving attacks on educational buildings or their use for military purposes (Novelli & Selenica, 2014).

Research into how armed conflict has harmed both the educational sector and its personnel remains relatively underexplored. Identifying different types of impacts and corresponding practices for prevention, repair, and redefinition of conflict within the educational sector is crucial. Constructing individual and collective memories can facilitate a better understanding of these impacts and common issues that need addressing. This reflection can also improve educational practices by considering both the positive and negative effects of conflict.

Indeed, the resilience, solidarity, and courage displayed by individuals and communities in response to violence offer profound insights and potential pathways for transformation. Their ability to redefine their professional roles, infuse new meaning into their educational initiatives, and persevere amidst adversity serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for others facing similar challenges.

These experiences underscore the importance of reinterpreting the past to inform future actions and provide alternatives for navigating and overcoming conflict. They

highlight that even when the outcomes seem negative—such as paralysis, fear, or denial—the need for psychosocial intervention becomes evident. Addressing these issues within a community of learning can foster healing, support, and progress.

Reflecting on these connections between education, conflict, and peace is crucial. It encourages a re-evaluation of current educational practices with a focus on improvement and adaptation. This approach can ensure that educational systems not only survive in conflict situations but also contribute constructively to peace-building and social transformation.

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