

Distance Education During Times of War: Lebanese Students' Experiences Amid the Israel-Hezbollah Conflict

Elie Daher, International Executive School, France
Soula Kyriakou, International Executive School, France
Zina Kyriakou, International Executive School, France

The European Conference on Education 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict has severely disrupted education in Lebanon, leading to the destruction of educational infrastructure and the displacement of students. In response, educators have increasingly turned to distance learning solutions to maintain educational continuity and protect students from harm in conflict-affected areas. This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the experiences of 16 Lebanese students - 9 high school and 7 university students - who transitioned to distance learning during the conflict. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, four key themes emerged: (1) students recognized the necessity of distance learning, appreciating its role in maintaining academic progress and avoiding delays in obtaining qualifications; (2) distance learning helped reduce exposure to physical harm, offering safety by limiting the need for students to leave their homes or shelters (e.g., bomb shelters); (3) the transition to distance learning was hindered by technological difficulties, including inadequate IT infrastructure and a lack of familiarity with digital tools; and (4) unreliable electricity and internet services, resulting from attacks on infrastructure, required flexibility from educators regarding deadlines and class attendance. The findings highlight both the resilience of Lebanese students and the potential of distance learning as an emergency educational intervention, while underscoring the critical need for enhanced technological infrastructure and comprehensive support systems in conflict-affected regions.

Keywords: distance learning, educational continuity, conflict-affected education, technological infrastructure, student resilience

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Armed conflicts disrupt the education of millions of children and young people worldwide, with devastating consequences that extend far beyond the immediate crisis period. UNESCO estimates that conflict-affected countries account for over 35% of the world's out-of-school children, despite representing only 20% of the global school-age population (UNESCO, 2023). Over 75 million children and youth aged 3-18 require urgent educational support in crisis-affected areas (Education Cannot Wait, 2022). Traditional responses to educational disruption during warfare, including school closures, establishment of temporary learning spaces, or complete suspension of instruction, often result in prolonged learning gaps that persist long after hostilities end. Some students lose up to two years of schooling during these disruptions (Jundi, 2024). However, the growing availability of digital technologies and distance learning platforms offers new opportunities for maintaining educational continuity even when conventional schooling becomes impossible. The recent Israel-Hezbollah conflict provides a compelling context for examining how distance learning can serve as a critical tool for educational continuity amid armed conflict.

Literature Review

Distance Learning and Educational Continuity in Crisis Contexts

Research examining distance learning as a tool for educational continuity during armed conflicts remains critically underdeveloped. A systematic review by Burde et al. (2017) revealed that while emergency education research has grown substantially, studies focusing on technology-mediated educational interventions during active conflicts remain sparse and methodologically limited. The existing literature on distance education has predominantly emerged from stable educational environments where reliable infrastructure, adequate preparation time, and intact institutional support systems are assumed (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Thompson, 2023). While these studies provide valuable insights into online pedagogy and digital learning effectiveness, they offer limited guidance for understanding how remote education functions when implemented as an emergency response under crisis conditions characterized by infrastructure damage, student displacement, psychological trauma, and institutional instability (Chee, 2025).

The disconnect between distance learning research and emergency education practice represents a critical knowledge gap. Emergency education literature has traditionally emphasized physical safety and basic service provision over educational continuity and quality (Dickson-Deane et al., 2022). This approach operates within what Dryden-Peterson (2016) identifies as a “care and maintenance” paradigm that views education during crises as temporary rather than transformative. Conversely, distance learning research has focused on pedagogical optimization in stable environments (Bernard et al., 2014), developing within techno-pedagogical frameworks that assume consistent access to resources and support systems. This disciplinary separation has created a conceptual void where neither field adequately addresses how digital technologies can serve as effective tools for preserving meaningful educational engagement during humanitarian crises.

Studies examining education during conflicts have predominantly focused on documenting damage, analyzing post-conflict reconstruction, or exploring temporary arrangements rather than investigating how educational continuity might be maintained during active hostilities (Dickson-Deane et al., 2022; Zembylas et al., 2016). The theoretical framework for

emergency education, as outlined by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2024), emphasizes preparedness and response but provides limited conceptual guidance on leveraging digital technologies for educational continuity during active conflicts. Recent meta-analyses of conflict-affected education interventions reveal a troubling absence of rigorous evaluation studies examining technology-mediated educational responses (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017).

The student perspective on conflict-affected distance learning remains particularly underexplored within educational research. While educational research increasingly recognizes the importance of student voice in understanding learning processes (Kayyali, 2024), crisis education research has traditionally privileged administrative and institutional perspectives over learner experiences (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Komatsu, 2024). This represents a significant epistemological limitation. Phenomenological inquiry emphasizes that understanding educational phenomena requires careful attention to the lived experiences of those who encounter them directly (Komatsu, 2024). Students' subjective experiences constitute primary data about how emergency educational interventions actually function in practice, potentially revealing both intended outcomes and unintended consequences that remain invisible from institutional viewpoints.

Recent global events have demonstrated both the transformative potential and inherent limitations of large-scale distance learning implementation under crisis conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an unprecedented experiment in emergency remote education, revealing that educational systems could transition rapidly to online learning when necessary, but also exposing profound digital divides and pedagogical challenges (Davey et al., 2023; Dhawan, 2020). However, pandemic-related educational shifts occurred within contexts of relative physical safety and maintained infrastructure in most developed countries (König et al., 2020). Armed conflict situations present fundamentally different and more severe challenges. In these contexts, students face immediate physical threats, educational institutions operate under extreme resource constraints, and basic services become unreliable or completely unavailable (Save the Children, 2013).

Lebanon's Educational Landscape During the Israel-Hezbollah Conflict

The recent Israel-Hezbollah conflict offers several characteristics that make it particularly relevant for examining conflict-affected distance learning. As a recent and well-documented conflict, this situation provides a contemporary case study for understanding how educational systems respond to warfare in the current technological era. This context allows for examination of emergency remote education implementation using current digital technologies and platforms representative of what educational institutions worldwide have access to today (Docherty, 2018; Wilmer, 2021). While Lebanon's telecommunications infrastructure faces ongoing challenges, basic internet and mobile connectivity remained available in many areas during the conflict, making distance learning a viable, if challenging, option for educational continuity (Docherty, 2018; Levitt, 2024; Wilmer, 2021).

Lebanon's educational system is characterized by its diversity and complexity, encompassing public, private, and semi-private institutions across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. This multi-layered educational landscape provides varied contexts for examining how different institutional types and student populations experience the transition to remote learning during crisis. Lebanese universities, in particular, have varying degrees of technological readiness and international partnerships that influence their capacity to

implement emergency distance education measures (Abdul-Hamid, 2020; Al-Hroub & Jouni, 2023).

The temporal dynamics of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict created particularly compelling conditions for studying educational continuity. The conflict occurred during active academic periods, forcing immediate decisions about educational delivery rather than allowing for planned suspension during academic breaks. This timing created natural transition points that enable examination of how students and institutions navigate sudden shifts from traditional classroom-based learning to technology-mediated education under crisis conditions. Additionally, Lebanese students' limited prior exposure to formal distance learning modalities ensures that their experiences reflect genuine adaptation processes to emergency remote education rather than activation of pre-existing digital learning competencies (Levitt, 2024).

The Purpose of This Study

Given the significant gaps in understanding distance learning's role in maintaining educational continuity during armed conflicts and the limited attention paid to student experiences in emergency education contexts, there is a pressing need to examine these phenomena from the perspectives of those who lived through them. Lebanese students who experienced the transition to distance learning during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict represent a unique population whose voices can illuminate the complex realities of using remote education to maintain learning progress under extraordinary circumstances.

Understanding student experiences with conflict-affected distance learning contributes to advancing knowledge across multiple interconnected domains within educational research and humanitarian studies. This inquiry intersects with growing international discussions about education's role in humanitarian response and recovery (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2024) while contributing to emerging theoretical frameworks around educational resilience and adaptive capacity during crises (Brock, 2017). The urgency of developing this knowledge base is underscored by the escalating frequency of conflicts worldwide and mounting evidence that educational disruption creates cascading effects on individual development, community stability, and long-term societal recovery (Chee, 2025).

This study seeks to address this critical knowledge gap by exploring the lived experiences of Lebanese students impacted by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict as they transitioned to distance learning. By examining their perspectives, this research aims to understand the meaning-making processes through which students experienced remote learning as a tool for educational continuity during crisis. The study focuses specifically on how students navigated the challenges and possibilities that emerged when distance learning served as the primary mechanism for preserving educational engagement while they simultaneously managed the psychological and practical demands of living in a conflict zone.

Research Question: How do Lebanese students experience and make meaning of their transition to distance learning during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict?

Method

Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Lebanese students impacted by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict as they transitioned to distance learning. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to capture the subjective meaning-making processes underlying educational disruption experiences (Love et al., 2020). IPA's dual hermeneutic approach was particularly appropriate for this cross-cultural context involving Arabic-English translation dynamics (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2017).

Participants

Sixteen Lebanese students were purposively recruited to participate in this study (see Table 1 for sample characteristics). The sample comprised 9 high school and 7 university students, ensuring representation across educational levels most affected by crisis-induced disruption. Four inclusion criteria guided participant selection: (1) active enrollment in Lebanese educational institutions at conflict onset; (2) residence in conflict-affected regions; (3) direct experience with the transition from in-person to emergency distance learning; and (4) minimum age of 16 years to ensure sufficient cognitive maturity for phenomenological inquiry. Recruitment was conducted through educational institutions across multiple conflict-affected regions using informational flyers to solicit voluntary participation. This sampling approach ensured participants possessed rich, contextually relevant experiences while maintaining the demographic homogeneity required for rigorous interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics	N	%	M	SD
Gender				
Male	6	37.5		
Female	10	62.5		
Age			18.14	4.16

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely via secure video conferencing platforms, with each session lasting 60-90 minutes and audio-recorded with participant consent. The interview protocol employed a funnel approach, progressing from broad descriptive questions (“Describe your experience when distance learning was announced”) to targeted probes exploring the emotional and psychological dimensions of the educational transition. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred language (Arabic or English), with Arabic interviews professionally translated and verified through back-translation procedures. All recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve authentic participant voices. Field notes captured contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and researcher reflections throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Willig's (2017) systematic IPA framework through six sequential stages: familiarization through repeated transcript reading, line-by-line analysis to identify meaning units, psychological theme development, theme organization into hierarchical structures, cross-case pattern analysis, and narrative integration with supporting quotations. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytical process through regular supervision and peer debriefing sessions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the International Executive School, Strasbourg, France. All participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Data protection protocols included participant pseudonymization, encrypted data storage, and systematic destruction of audio recordings following transcription completion.

Results

The interpretative phenomenological analysis identified four master themes from participants' experiences during their transition to distance learning amid the Israel-Hezbollah conflict (see Table 2 for summary of findings). These themes reveal how students understood and navigated this unprecedented educational disruption during an active conflict.

Table 2
Summary of Findings

Master Theme	Sub-Theme	Participant Distribution
Recognition of Distance Learning as Educational Necessity	Preserving academic continuity and future aspirations	16/16
	Appreciating institutional efforts and educational commitment	16/16
Distance Learning as Protection from Physical Harm	Avoiding dangerous travel and exposure to conflict zones	14/16
	Creating psychological safety within learning environments	15/16
Technological Barriers and Digital Unfamiliarity	Navigating unfamiliar digital platforms and tools	16/16
	Managing equipment limitations and technical failures	14/16
Infrastructure Vulnerabilities and Required Educational Flexibility	Coping with power outages and connectivity disruptions	15/16
	Experiencing educator adaptation and institutional understanding	16/16

Master Theme 1: Recognition of Distance Learning as Educational Necessity

Participants demonstrated a profound understanding of distance learning as an essential response to the conflict situation. They recognized its critical role in maintaining academic progress and preventing educational delays. For participants, distance learning represented more than an alternative educational modality. It emerged as a means of preserving their academic trajectories and future possibilities within a context that threatened to disrupt their educational plans. This recognition involved an active process through which students reframed their educational experience and constructed meaning around educational persistence.

Subtheme 1a: Preserving Academic Continuity and Future Aspirations

Participants consistently articulated their appreciation for the opportunity to continue their studies despite the challenging circumstances. They experienced the announcement of distance learning as a restoration of their ability to pursue their academic goals. Fatima's reflection illustrates this experience:

When the bombing started getting closer to our area, I thought that was it for this semester. But when they announced we could continue online, I felt like someone had given me back my future. I knew it wouldn't be the same, but at least I wouldn't lose a whole year.

Her account reveals how the proximity of violence had initially disrupted her sense of educational continuity, and how distance learning functioned to restore her connection to her academic timeline.

The necessity of distance learning became particularly meaningful when participants considered the alternative of complete educational cessation. Khalil drew upon family experiences to understand his current situation:

My older brother lost almost two years of university during the 2006 war. When I saw what was happening now, I was terrified the same thing would happen to me. Distance style, like e-learning classes meant I could still graduate on time and not fall behind my friends who live in safer areas.

This comparative perspective highlights how students drew upon collective memory of previous conflicts to understand the significance of maintaining educational continuity.

Subtheme 1b: Appreciating Institutional Efforts and Educational Commitment

Students recognized the considerable institutional efforts required to implement distance learning rapidly during the crisis. They interpreted these efforts as evidence of institutional care and commitment to their educational futures. Sara's reflection captures this appreciation:

I realized how much work the professors and administration had to do to set everything up so quickly. They could have just cancelled everything, but they fought to keep our education going. It made me appreciate that someone was thinking about our future even when everything felt so uncertain.

For participants, this institutional response represented more than administrative efficiency. They experienced it as a form of support that validated their educational aspirations during a period of uncertainty. This recognition extended beyond personal benefit to encompass an understanding of education as something worth preserving even under the most challenging circumstances. Students interpreted the institutional commitment to maintain education as evidence that their learning mattered and that their futures remained important despite the conflict.

Master Theme 2: Distance Learning as Protection From Physical Harm

This theme captured participants' awareness of how distance learning functioned as a protective mechanism, reducing their exposure to physical danger by eliminating the need to travel to educational institutions. Participants experienced relief from the elimination of dangerous travel and found that staying home created both physical safety and psychological space for learning. This protection encompassed both immediate safety benefits and broader psychological relief from constant risk assessment.

Subtheme 2a: Avoiding Dangerous Travel and Exposure to Conflict Zones

Participants provided detailed accounts of how distance learning allowed them to avoid dangerous situations. They described the relief experienced by both themselves and their families when travel to school was no longer necessary. Omar's experience illustrates this relief:

Our school is only fifteen minutes away, but to get there you have to pass through three areas that get bombed regularly. My mother was crying every morning worrying about me going to school. When they announced online classes, she was so relieved. She said it was like God had answered her prayers.

His account demonstrates how the threat of travel had created anxiety for entire families, and how distance learning resolved these safety concerns.

The protective aspect of distance learning became particularly significant for students experiencing displacement or living in emergency shelters. Layla described her situation:

At that point, we were sleeping in a shelter for three weeks. Sometimes we have to move to my uncle's house when the bombing gets too close. With online classes, I can study wherever we are. My laptop and books come with me to every shelter. I don't have to choose between being safe and going to class.

Her account reveals how distance learning provided flexibility that enabled educational continuity despite frequent relocation for safety reasons.

Subtheme 2b: Creating Psychological Safety Within Learning Environments

Students described the psychological benefits of feeling protected while learning. They found that being in familiar, safe spaces enabled better concentration and educational engagement. Ahmad's experience demonstrates this connection:

When I'm in class online, I can focus on my studies instead of listening for sirens or worrying about whether it's safe to walk home. At home, even if we hear explosions, I know I'm as safe as I can be while still learning.

His account suggests that traditional classroom attendance had required divided attention between learning and safety concerns, while distance learning allowed for more focused educational engagement.

The psychological dimension of safety extended beyond immediate physical protection to include the comfort of familiar environments. Students experienced their homes and shelters not merely as places of physical refuge but as spaces where they could maintain educational engagement. This transformation of domestic space into learning environments represented a significant shift in how participants understood and inhabited their educational experiences.

Master Theme 3: Technological Barriers and Digital Unfamiliarity

This theme encompassed the significant challenges participants faced due to inadequate technological infrastructure and their limited familiarity with digital learning tools. Students encountered digital learning as unfamiliar territory that required new skills and created unexpected obstacles to educational participation. The theme revealed a substantial gap between the necessity of distance learning and students' preparedness to engage effectively with technology-mediated education.

Subtheme 3a: Navigating Unfamiliar Digital Platforms and Tools

Participants consistently reported struggles with basic technological requirements for distance learning. They described confusion and frustration when encountering multiple platforms and digital tools. Mariam's initial experience illustrates these challenges:

I had never used Zoom before, and suddenly all my classes were on different platforms. One professor used Google Meet, another used Zoom, and my language class was on some platform I'd never heard of. I spent more time figuring out how to join classes than actually learning in the first few weeks.

Her account reveals how the diversity of platforms created additional complexity that interfered with educational focus.

The learning curve for digital tools proved steep and sometimes distressing for participants. Yusef described his experience:

My teacher would share her screen and ask us to work on a document together, but I didn't know how to do that. I felt so stupid because everyone else seemed to understand. I was afraid to ask questions because I thought they would think I'm not smart enough for technology.

His account demonstrates how technological unfamiliarity created anxiety about academic competence and social acceptance within the learning community.

Subtheme 3b: Managing Equipment Limitations and Technical Failures

Infrastructure limitations created additional barriers to effective educational engagement. Students described how equipment problems threatened their academic performance and created stress beyond the original learning content. Nour's experience during an examination illustrates these concerns:

My laptop is old and crashes when I have too many applications open. During one exam, it crashed three times and I thought I was going to fail because I couldn't submit my answers. I had to borrow my cousin's phone to email my professor and explain what happened.

Her account demonstrates how technological limitations created academic vulnerability that extended beyond subject matter knowledge.

Students also struggled with the absence of technical support systems that would typically be available in traditional educational settings. Rana described this challenge:

At school, if the computer doesn't work, you ask the IT person. At home, if something goes wrong with my internet or computer during class, I have no one to help me. My parents don't understand technology, so I have to figure everything out myself while trying not to miss important information.

Her experience highlights the isolation that accompanied technological difficulties and the additional burden of self-reliance in technical problem-solving.

Master Theme 4: Infrastructure Vulnerabilities and Required Educational Flexibility

This theme captured participants' experiences with unreliable electricity and internet services resulting from conflict-related attacks on infrastructure. Students described how these disruptions created constant uncertainty and required both personal adaptation and institutional flexibility. The theme revealed how the material conditions of conflict directly impacted educational processes and necessitated adaptive responses from both students and educators.

Subtheme 4a: Coping With Power Outages and Connectivity Disruptions

Power outages emerged as a persistent and unpredictable challenge that disrupted educational continuity. Students described these interruptions as creating cumulative learning gaps that were difficult to address. Zeinab's typical experience illustrates this challenge:

I was in the middle of an important lecture when the electricity went out. It came back three hours later, but by then the class was over and I had missed all the examples the professor worked through. This happens at least twice a week, and I never know when it will happen.

Her account reveals how unpredictability became a constant feature of the educational experience.

Students developed various coping strategies to manage infrastructure limitations, often requiring creative problem-solving and family support. Dina described her adaptation:

My father bought a generator so we could have electricity for a few hours each day. I had to plan my study schedule around when we run the generator. Sometimes I would wake up at 5 AM to attend a class if that's when we have power. My whole family adjusts their activities around my class schedule.

Her experience demonstrates how educational continuity required household-wide coordination and sacrifice, transforming distance learning into a family endeavor.

Subtheme 4b: Experiencing Educator Adaptation and Institutional Understanding

The unpredictability of infrastructure services required constant flexibility from both students and educators. Students appreciated the growing understanding that educators demonstrated regarding their circumstances. Hassan described this evolution:

My teachers learned to record every class because they know some of us will miss it due to power cuts. They also extend deadlines automatically because they understand we might not have internet when assignments are due. At first, they were strict about attendance, but they realized it wasn't fair when we literally couldn't connect.

Participants experienced educator flexibility as a form of partnership in navigating unprecedented circumstances. Lina reflected on this collaborative adaptation:

My professors had to learn to be flexible just like we had to learn to study in bomb shelters. They started asking at the beginning of each class if anyone had technical problems or missed parts due to power cuts. They would repeat important information and always provided multiple ways to submit assignments. It felt like we were all adapting together.

Her account suggests that the crisis created new forms of educational relationships based on mutual recognition of shared challenges and collaborative problem-solving.

Discussion

This study represents one of the first empirical investigations into student experiences of distance learning during armed conflict, addressing the critical knowledge gap between emergency education and distance learning research identified by Burde et al. (2017). Our findings reveal how Lebanese students constructed meaning around their educational transitions during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict through four interconnected processes that fundamentally challenge existing research assumptions.

The recognition of distance learning as educational necessity demonstrates students' active resistance to educational marginalization during crisis. Participants reframed distance learning not as a temporary substitute but as essential infrastructure for preserving academic identity and future aspirations. This finding directly contradicts Dryden-Peterson's (2016) "care and maintenance" paradigm, which positions learning as secondary to survival needs in emergency contexts. Students' explicit concerns about academic delays reveal that educational continuity serves dual functions of academic progress and psychological

protection, extending beyond the preparedness-focused framework outlined by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2024). This suggests that current emergency education policies may fundamentally misunderstand the centrality of learning to student wellbeing during conflict.

The experience of protection through distance learning illuminates a previously undocumented paradox in conflict-affected education. Students transformed domestic spaces into secure learning environments, enabling focused academic engagement by eliminating the cognitive burden of safety monitoring required in traditional classroom settings. This challenges Save the Children's (2013) emphasis on physical access to educational institutions as the primary barrier to learning during conflict. However, this spatial transformation created new inequities based on household resources and stability, corroborating Menashy and Zakharia's (2017) concerns about how emergency interventions may reproduce existing disadvantages through different mechanisms.

Technological barriers revealed fundamental disconnects between distance learning theory and crisis implementation. The emotional distress students experienced when encountering unfamiliar digital platforms demonstrates how technological incompetence threatened their academic identities. This finding exposes limitations in distance learning research conducted in stable environments (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Moore & Kearsley, 2012), which assumes basic digital literacy and technical support availability. Students were compelled to simultaneously develop technological competencies while maintaining academic progress under extraordinary circumstances, creating a dual learning burden absent from existing distance education frameworks.

Infrastructure vulnerabilities emerged as defining features of conflict-affected distance learning, distinguishing it from other crisis education contexts, including pandemic responses. Unlike COVID-19 disruptions that occurred within maintained infrastructure systems, these students navigated chronic service interruptions that created cumulative learning gaps. The sophisticated adaptation strategies families developed demonstrate remarkable resilience but also reveal the substantial household resources required for educational continuity during infrastructure attacks. This finding challenges assumptions about distance learning accessibility during crisis and suggests that emergency education planning must account for infrastructure vulnerability as a primary barrier rather than a secondary consideration.

The collaborative pedagogical relationships that emerged represent a significant departure from both traditional classroom hierarchies and established distance learning models. Educators evolved from maintaining strict attendance policies to automatically accommodating infrastructure limitations, creating partnerships based on mutual recognition of shared challenges. This collaborative approach contradicts the assumptions underlying prior distance learning research (Bernard et al., 2014; Thompson, 2023), which presumes consistent resource access and institutional support. The pedagogical flexibility that emerged from necessity suggests that crisis conditions may catalyze more responsive educational practices than those observed in stable contexts.

These findings demonstrate that conflict-affected distance learning constitutes a distinct educational phenomenon requiring further empirical investigation. Students exhibited remarkable agency in constructing educational meaning under extreme conditions, actively negotiating the intersection of academic aspirations, technological limitations, and material

constraints. Their meaning-making processes encompassed identity preservation, future orientation, and psychological resilience alongside academic progress, revealing the multidimensional nature of educational continuity during crisis.

The implications for emergency education policy are substantial. Current approaches prioritizing basic access provision are insufficient for addressing the complex adaptive processes students engage in during educational transitions. Emergency interventions must recognize students as sophisticated meaning-makers capable of educational agency under extraordinary circumstances while providing comprehensive support addressing technological, infrastructural, and pedagogical challenges. Distance learning research must also reconsider foundational assumptions when examining technology-mediated education under extreme conditions, moving beyond research conducted in stable environments to account for the dynamic interplay between crisis conditions and educational processes.

Limitations and Future Research

This study's focus on Lebanese student experiences provides rich phenomenological insights but limits transferability across different conflict contexts. Future research should examine distance learning experiences across diverse conflict settings to distinguish universal challenges from context-specific adaptations. Comparative studies would enhance understanding of how infrastructure conditions, conflict characteristics, and educational policies influence emergency distance learning outcomes.

The exclusive focus on student perspectives leaves educator, family, and institutional experiences unexplored. Multi-stakeholder research would provide fuller understanding of crisis education implementation across different actors. Investigation of technical and pedagogical support systems enabling effective emergency distance learning would contribute practical knowledge for humanitarian education programming.

Conclusion

This research fundamentally advances understanding of distance learning as a tool for educational continuity during armed conflict by revealing the complex processes through which students navigate technology-mediated education under extreme circumstances. The findings demonstrate that effective crisis education requires comprehensive approaches addressing technological access, digital literacy support, infrastructure reliability, pedagogical flexibility, and recognition of student agency in constructing educational meaning during trauma. These insights provide essential evidence for developing sophisticated emergency education responses that move beyond basic service provision to support meaningful learning engagement during humanitarian crises, ultimately informing more resilient educational systems capable of maintaining quality education under the most challenging circumstances while honoring both the educational aspirations and lived realities of conflict-affected learners.

References

- Abdul-Hamid, H. (2020). *Political economy of education in Lebanon* (Research for Results Program). World Bank Publications.
- Al-Hroub, A., & Jouni, N. (2023). *School inclusion in Lebanon: Integrating research on students with giftedness and learning disabilities into practice*. Springer International Publishing.
- Anderson, T., & Dron, J. (2011). Three generations of distance education pedagogy. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 12(3), 80–97.
- Bernard, R. M., Borokhovski, E., Schmid, R. F., Tamim, R. M., & Abrami, P. C. (2014). A meta-analysis of blended learning and technology use in higher education: From the general to the applied. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 26(1), 87–122.
- Brock, C. (2017). *Education in the Arab world*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Burde, D., Kapit, A., Wahl, R. L., Guven, O., & Skarpeteig, M. I. (2017). Education in emergencies: A review of theory and research. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(3), 619–658.
- Chee, K. N. (2025). *Pedagogical approaches to bridging emotional and cognitive learning*. IGI Global.
- Davey, C. P., Toffolo, C., & Unigarro Alba, M. P. (2023). *Teaching peace amidst conflict and postcolonialism*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Dhawan, S. (2020). *Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis*. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1), 5–22.
- Dickson-Deane, C., Ifenthaler, D., Richardson, J. C., Murthy, S., Dennen, V., & Ge, X. (Eds.). (2022). *Global perspectives on educational innovations for emergency situations*. Springer International Publishing.
- Docherty, N. (2018). *Flooding South Lebanon: Israel's Use of Cluster Munitions in Lebanon in July and August 2006*. Human Rights Watch.
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2016). Refugee education: The crossroads of globalization. *Educational Researcher*, 45(9), 473–482.
- Education Cannot Wait. (2022). *Global estimates: Number of crisis-affected children and adolescents in need of education support*. Education Cannot Wait.
- Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. (2024). *INEE minimum standards for education: Preparedness, response, recovery*. INEE.
- Jundi, S. (2024). *The impact of armed conflict on community social fabric in Upper Nile State: Case study Malakal*. IPR Journals and Book Publishers.

- Kayyali, M. (2024). *Rebuilding higher education systems impacted by crises: Navigating traumatic events, disasters, and more*. IGI Global.
- Komatsu, T. (2024). *Education and social cohesion in a post-conflict and divided nation: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Springer Nature Singapore.
- König, J., Jäger-Biela, D. J., & Glutsch, N. (2020). Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: Teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 608–622.
- Kureethara, J., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (2025). *Education and pedagogical experiences: Coping with human emergencies and exploring resilience strategies*. Taylor & Francis.
- Levitt, M. (2024). *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*. Updated edition. Hurst Publishers.
- Love, B., Vetere, A., & Davis, P. (2020). Should Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) be Used With Focus Groups? Navigating the Bumpy Road of “Iterative Loops,” Idiographic Journeys, and “Phenomenological Bridges.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19(1), 19.
- Menashy, F., & Zakharia, Z. (2017). *Investing in the crisis: Private participation in the education of Syrian refugees*. Education International.
- Moore, M. G., & Kearsley, G. (2012). *Distance education: A systems view of online learning*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Save the Children. (2013). *The hidden crisis: Education and armed conflict*. Save the Children.
- Thompson, K. (2023). *The Sage handbook of online higher education*. SAGE Publications.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2023). *263 million children and youth are out of school*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
- Willig, C., & Stainton Rogers, W. (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. SAGE Publications.
- Wilmer, F. (2021). *Breaking Cycles of Violence in Israel and Palestine: Empathy and Peacemaking in the Middle East*. Lexington Books.
- Zembylas, M., Charalambous, C., & Charalambous, P. (2016). *Peace education in a conflict-affected society: An ethnographic journey*. Cambridge University Press.