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Methodological Toolkit

Conducting a Vertical Analysis for
Research on Education in Emergencies



Partnerships in
Education in Emergencies



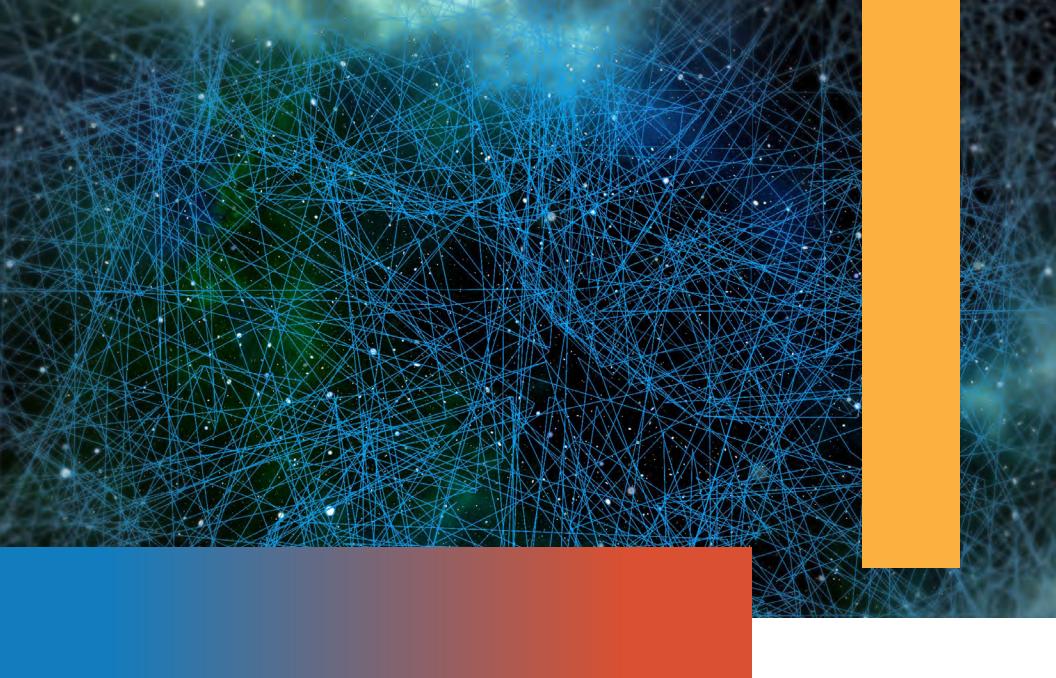
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The ideas expressed are those of the authors.

For more about the research informing this toolkit:
eiepartnerships.org

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Purpose of the Methodological Toolkit

Studies on education in contexts of humanitarian crisis must navigate oftentimes exceptionally challenging research environments, which might change rapidly.

Education in emergencies, moreover, must be considered a component of the larger system of humanitarianism, including global, regional, and national policy, finance, advocacy, program design, and implementation. These systems intersect and influence one another.

The multi-faceted nature of education in emergencies necessitates research that can adequately capture the complexities of such contexts. This research must therefore be methodologically multi-faceted as well.

From 2018 to 2021, we engaged in a large-scale study of partnerships in education in emergencies. We adopted a vertical case study research design that allowed us to uncover multi-scalar processes and overarching themes, along with comparative understandings of different contexts, outcomes, and relationships.

Based on the innovative research methods we used in this study, we developed this methodological toolkit, which we propose is adaptable to researching education in other EiE areas. This toolkit details the research design, data collection and analysis process, offering tips on adapting and applying the methods to answer different research questions in other humanitarian contexts.

ABOUT OUR PROJECT

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES IN EIE

Our study sought to generate evidence on the nature and impact of partnerships in EiE, using the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon as a case study. The study aimed to understand (1) the interaction, relationships, and proliferation of actors over time; (2) the characteristics of their partnerships; (3) the impact of these partnerships on coordination and community participation mechanisms that promote the engagement of localized actors in educational processes and programming; and (4) the impact of partnership practices on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education.



Interaction,
relationships, &
proliferation of
actors over time



Impact on promoting
engagement of
localized actors



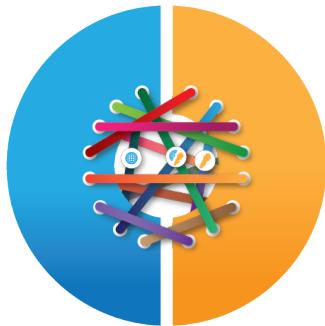
Characteristics of
partnerships



Potential impact on student
retention, progression, and
integration

To achieve these goals, we conducted a three-year (2018–2021) vertical case study, including over 100 interviews, 250 documents, a network analysis of 440 different organizations, and over 30 site visits and observations of partnership activities. These data, moreover, were collected during a time period that saw multiple crises within Lebanon and globally, including political and economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a devastating explosion in Beirut port. The study also coincided with the Black Lives Matter protests and a global reckoning on racism.

CONCEPTUALIZING OUR STUDY

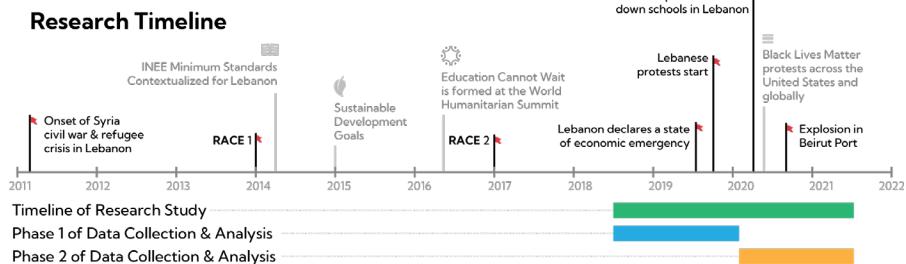


 **Network Analysis**

 **Global Analysis**

 **Country Analysis**

We collected data iteratively over a three-year period in order to understand phenomena at various levels, over time, and within a rapidly changing context. The longitudinal aspect was mapped onto key “policy moments” derived from the global level analysis. We present our process onto the timeline below.



As we explain in this toolkit, while this wide breadth and depth of data collection adds rigor and allows for a nuanced analysis necessary to understand crisis contexts, several important considerations must be made in order to grapple with challenges that such a large scale study might present to researchers.

VERTICAL

Case Study Approach

Vertical case studies are conducted along three axes—vertical, horizontal, and transversal. For our study, we researched at three, as we termed it, “levels”: global, network, and country. This approach let us pay simultaneous attention to and across micro-, meso-, and macro-scales—and the interactions between them—combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. In all studies, researchers must align data collection and analysis to their research questions. For a vertical study, we suggest doing this by level/scale, method, and data source, as presented in the table below.

Example of aligning data collection and analysis with research questions

Research Question	Level / Scale	Methods	Data Sources
1. What is the extent and nature of the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon?	Global Network Country	Interviews, document analysis, network analysis	Websites, public documents, key informants at global and country level
2. To what degree has the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon shifted over time?	Global Network Country	Interviews, document analysis, network analysis	Websites, public documents, key informants at global and country level
3. What are some of the “promising practices” of partnerships that promote the foundational tenets of coordination and community participation?	Global Country	Interviews, document analysis, observations	Key informants at global and country level, organization documents, partnership activities
4. What are the impacts of these partnerships on how coordination and community participation is experienced at the local level and with what effects?	Country	Interviews, document analysis, observations	Key informants at global and country level, organization documents, partnership activities

Because data from different levels are often collected independently from one another, they can be studied simultaneously. One advantage to this process is the ability to capture responses to and findings about current moments from different contexts at the same time. As well, several team members can concurrently work on the project, and with regular communication, build on one another's ideas, allowing an iterative approach to data collection and analysis across the full study. Remember that levels of analysis interact with one another, and so a cross-analysis which uncovers themes and compares all findings is necessary to arrive at robust conclusions.

Issues to consider for designing a vertical study

Each study will differently conceptualize what might constitute “levels.” Take for instance the global level. This level of analysis might be wide-ranging, as in our study, applying to a variety of global organizations, actors, and policies. However, the global level might only apply to the study of international non-governmental organizations, or a single international financial institution. Therefore, how each level is defined depends on the scope of the project and the research questions posed.

Levels might sometimes overlap; remember that they are porous and new levels can emerge as you conduct the study. For example, a regional or municipal level might present itself as significant once you begin data collection.

How you conceptualize a level of analysis may also change over the course of a longer-term research engagement. For example, we had initially conceptualized the network analysis as part of our “global level” analysis, but later understood this as a layer of interaction between our global and country level analyses.

Each level must be considered of equal importance, including equal rigor in data collection and consideration during analysis.

Ethical research practices demand an understanding of context. In EiE, this includes understanding sources of conflict and grievance for research participants, communities, and wider society. These issues may be global in scale, with various manifestations in localized contexts, cutting across different axes of the vertical study. Consider political, economic, social, and historical dimensions of your research contexts when designing and undertaking your study.



● GLOBAL ANALYSIS

A global level of analysis involves examining policies, ideas, and mandates that apply across the world. For instance, our study included documents published by global organizations that discussed EiE partnerships in all crisis contexts and interviews with actors within those organizations. A global analysis may also involve explorations of mandates, policies, and actors within just one global governance organization—including for example international financial institutions, UN agencies, international NGO, foundations, or bilateral donors that fund many recipient countries.

Various data collection strategies and methods can be applied to a global analysis, such as:

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- ✓ **Observations of organizational decision-making**
 - /people/ **Interviews with key informants**
 - /list/ **Organizational and/or policy document analysis**
 - /heart/ **Social media analysis**
 - /chart/ **Analyses of budgets and financing commitments**



Global Analysis

Issues to consider for a global analysis

Global analyses often include key informant interviews with high-level policy actors, sometimes called “elite” interviewing. These respondents tend to be very busy. Give yourself time for scheduling and be open to sending questions in advance.

Key informant interviews are often best elicited through “snowball sampling,” so always remember to end your interview by asking: “Is there someone else you suggest speaking with for this project?”

If the study is longitudinal, be sure to ask respondents if they are open to speaking again at a later date to help you explore changes in the global environment.

When collecting and analyzing documents, remember to either only collect documents of a particular type (policies; annual reports; project documents), or be certain to organize and analyze by type of document.

Documents may need to be translated prior to coding; eliminating documents based on language could reduce the rigor of your findings.



NETWORK ANALYSIS

Given the expanding numbers of organizations and varied relationships in the EiE space, crossing geopolitical borders, we suggest applying a network analysis that can transcend levels to better understand the nature of and interaction between research contexts, bridging global to national to local. A network analysis can extrapolate the nature of relationships between organizations while also possibly determining influence and power.

Network analysis must begin with a dataset. In our study, we sought to understand partnerships in EiE within Lebanon, and this required a laborious effort to compose a comprehensive original database of organizational entities engaged in Syria refugee education and their relationships to one another, resulting in over 400 entries. Although a primary purpose of the database was to inform a network analysis that helped us to understand and analyze relationships between organizations, it also provided us with a very useful and comprehensive list of the organizations and their activities in the sector.

From the dataset, a network analysis can be conducted using software designed to output findings and visualizations. Network analysis commonly elicits information on centrality. Centrality refers to the number of connections—or “ties”—to each actor in the network. Our analysis found the degree centrality of each individual entity and type of organization in our database.

A key benefit of network analysis is the ability to visualize a network structure through sociogram maps or even geographic mapping.

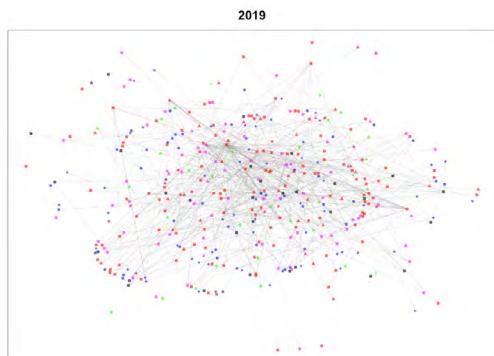
For our study, we used R (a programming language that can be applied to conduct network analysis), from which we found centrality measures and produced visuals, including sociograms and world maps. There are also several software programs, some for no or little cost, that you might use for social network analysis. For example:

SocNetV - <https://socnetv.org/>

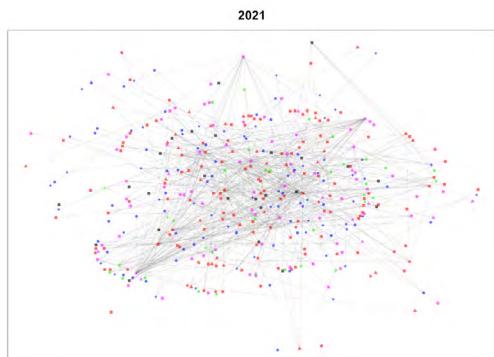
GEPHI - <https://gephi.org/>

UCINET - <http://www.analytictech.com/>

Example of longitudinal network comparison



If you are conducting a longitudinal study, you might conduct two (or more) rounds of data collection and analysis in order to compare time points to better understand changes in the network structure, empirically and visually.



- Private Company
- Academic/Research Institute
- Other
- International NGO
- National NGO
- ▲ National Government
- ◆ Foundation
- ▲ Bilateral Aid Agency
- ◆ Religious Organization
- International Organization

Issues to consider for a network analysis

If you intend to produce an original dataset, data collection for a network analysis can be laborious and lengthy. Factor in ample time for initial collection, cross-checking your findings, and iterative data cleaning. This time will be multiplied if you require more than one round of analysis.

Producing a dataset for network analysis requires strong contextual knowledge and may require contacting individuals to confirm entries and activities.

For our study, a main task in cleaning data was standardizing names, ensuring that names were spelled consistently across two databases for entities and links, particularly when working across languages.

Remember that most software requires that entities are represented with numbers, so you may wish to code links using numbers, rather than names.



COUNTRY-LEVEL ANALYSIS

A country (or national, or local) level analysis produces a micro-lens to explore similar themes as found in other levels of analysis.

The country level tends to offer greater depth and contextualized understandings of macro-processes and how broader trends situate and shift when experienced in practice.

Data collected to inform a country level case study can take a variety of forms. For our study, we included a combination of site visits that allowed us to select the individual cases; interviews; observations; and documents. Where possible, applying an ethnographic lens to country case studies might offer deeper and more rigorous findings.

We conducted a two-tier analysis within our country study, based on semi-structured interviews with a wider set of organizations, and then three separate in depth case studies within Lebanon, each embodying different characteristics, to allow us to cross-compare partnership experiences and outcomes.

As well, our longitudinal analysis meant we collected data from both the wider set of organizations as well and the case study participants at different time points in the study. Given our study encountered challenges due to ongoing crises (see below “Responding to Crisis”), this longitudinal approach was particularly helpful in exposing how crises impacted our case study organizations and actors.



Issues to consider for a country-level analysis

Country selection ought to be based on several factors, including for instance:

- the significance of the country within the wider humanitarian system
- how studying this country's experiences might inform policy and practice both nationally and perhaps in other contexts
- feasibility for conducting research, including funding, logistics, contextual knowledge, and security

Within countries, consider whether to conduct a single case study—including where this case study is situated within the country context, and how it might inform the study—or multiple case studies (if feasible in terms of timeframe, logistics, and cost). Multiple case studies can offer important comparative analyses.

Consider a variety of data collection methods that are sensitive to the country and local-specific contexts and conditions.

Think through plans to conduct research using the language/s of preference of research participants and related issues around transcription and translation, such as how you might capture constructs or terms that emerge from local forms of knowledge production.

In crisis-affected contexts, data collection rarely goes as planned (see below “Responding to Crisis”). Factor in time and costs for unexpected events, including “Plan B” scenarios, contingency plans, and security measures where possible.

As stated earlier, ethical research practices demand an understanding of context. In EiE, this includes understanding sources of conflict and grievance for research participants, communities, and wider society. Consider political, economic, social, and historical dimensions of your research contexts.



RESEARCH COLLABORATION

A large-scale vertical study ideally includes several researchers occupying different roles, taking on different responsibilities, complementing one another's expertise, but with shared spirit to engage collaboratively on a single project. While working in a collaborative manner as a team offers opportunities for expanded knowledge and capacities for all, working together requires much planning and organization. In our case, our team members spanned four world regions and time zones, working in various organizations with different resources and environments.

Research collaborations in an international study should be grounded in a principle of mutual learning and knowledge sharing; as opposed to capacity building. All members of a team bring skills, expertise, and contextual knowledge that can inform the project as a whole. We propose a research team grounded in an ethic of care, in which each member sees one another as a human being, with both professional and personal dimensions. For instance, over the course of our study, every single team member moved either jobs and/or homes, including some to different countries. As we explain below, our study was marked by multiple crises, both local and global, and each member faced enormous challenges in both professional and personal lives, in particular the team members within Lebanon.



Research Collaboration

Issues to consider for research collaborations

Be open to a range of communication strategies, including regular virtual meetings, flexible to work at odd hours to accommodate time zones; chat groups on social media; and document sharing software.

Consider working with emerging researchers, including students, who can contribute to the project while benefiting their studies (including their dissertation/thesis) and expanding their portfolios.

Where possible, consider participatory research methods, which would include study participants, such as refugees, as research team members.

Ground collaborations in trust and respect for all research team members and an ethic of care and self-reflection. This will sustain the work over the long-term, through crises, and ultimately produce stronger research outputs. Consider how this orientation will manifest in your research collaboration with your team, your participants, and your funder.

RESPONDING TO CRISIS

EiE contexts are, by their nature, complex, logistically challenging, and oftentimes volatile. Research within and about education in such settings might face multiple crises, including emergencies that occur unexpectedly during research.

In our study, for instance, we expected to examine partnerships in response to one crisis: Syria refugees within Lebanon. Yet by the end of the three year study, we in fact researched educational partnerships for refugees during a political and economic crisis; a pandemic; and a major disaster. Although unanticipated, our research explored not only how partnerships function in response to a single crisis, but instead how partnerships adapt to and sustain during multiple and ongoing crises. Research in EiE rarely, if ever, follows a straight line. And so as you embark on your research, embrace the need for flexibility and responsiveness to whatever might transpire.

Issues to consider for responding to crisis

Assess your research questions for adaptability depending on unexpected pivots in terms of logistics and timeframe.

Funders of research must also be adaptable to changes in timeline, type of data collected, and budget reallocations.

Many forms of data collection can be conducted by phone or virtually when in-person contact and travel is limited; for example, in our study, we conducted virtual class observations over WhatsApp, when partnership activities were no longer possible in person.

Remember that researchers are affected by crisis, too. Embody an ethic of care, including respect, empathy, flexibility, and trust, with team members experiencing emergencies that impact their daily lives.

In-depth research is important for gaining evidence that can improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response. As with all research, ethical practices must be followed. However, be mindful that those people living in crisis settings may be in particularly vulnerable conditions, and research can inadvertently exploit participants. Prior to embarking on any study on EiE, ask yourself what direct and indirect impacts your data collection, including your presence, might have on human subjects.

Further Reading and Resources

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Partnerships in Education in Emergencies



The Evidence for Education in Emergencies (E-Cubed) Research Fund aims to strengthen the evidence base in EiE, by supporting contextually relevant and usable research, and disseminating global public goods. Dubai Cares partnered with INEE in 2017 to design and manage this research fund.

To learn more, please visit
https://inee.org/evidence/e-cubed_